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As we described in an earlier article, the marketer’s job is a lot more complex today, with customers dictating how, when—and even if—they will engage with your brand. Marketers have less control over brand communications than ever before, yet they’re tasked with creating an exceptional customer experience at every touch point.

What constitutes an exceptional experience these days?

The mind referenced in the article title—the one that needs to shift—is the marketer’s, not the customer’s. The shift is from telling customers what your company wants them to hear to listening to customers and having a conversation on their terms.

The most effective customer experiences:

• **Follow the customer journey, not the sales funnel**—When marketing and sales deliver the right information at the right time, they build relationships and let the customer choose the direction. This includes inbound marketing tactics like offering premium content the customer downloads after submitting profile information, which helps you identify qualified leads and provide more relevant information in subsequent interactions.

• **Are user-driven**—Your marketing content has to be about solving problems, not selling products. Today’s consumers are sophisticated and wary of blatant marketing efforts. Every communication needs to address critical challenges and pain points and answer “what’s in it for me” for every customer. You’ll know your messaging is resonating if people are sharing your content.

• **Happen in real time**—Thanks to marketing automation technology, you actually can deliver a great experience to the prospect who’s comparing products at 3 AM. Give them what they need, when they need it, and structure your digital ecosystem so they can discover more through serendipity, not by you forcing it on them.

• **Are personalized and relevant**—Customers get vocal and often discredit the company and its communication when they encounter marketing and advertising that doesn’t speak to their needs and interests. In one recent example—and there are countless others—a photo service sent out emails congratulating customers on having a baby. Problem was, the email went out to the company’s entire list, which included people who had not welcomed a new bundle of joy and were offended. The secret to delivering a tailored experience is collecting data, using it to show your audience you understand them, looking at analytics to find opportunities for improvement, and optimizing continuously.
• **Are consistent**—Whenever and wherever someone interacts with your brand, the experience needs to build upon everything that came before and flow seamlessly into what they do next. This means defining your brand identity, marketing messages and audience personas, and making sure every person in your organization is working from the same playbook. Marketing and sales need to be more tightly aligned than ever before.

• **Are omni-channel**—Today’s marketing is all about meeting your customers where they are, regardless of channel or platform. If your audience spends time on Pinterest®, so should you. If they’re mostly on tablets and phones, consider a mobile app. But all of this technology needs to work together to avoid mixed or misdirected messages, like the example given.

• **Make good on your promises and demonstrate your values**—You can’t just tell people they’re important to you; you need to show it in everything you do and say. That includes addressing issues and complaints promptly and professionally, as well as asking permission and earning trust at every interaction.

**Crafting an exceptional experience**

Making the mind shift at your company won’t be easy. The first step is to commit to the shift and gather the right team to develop a holistic, long-term strategy; then put those plans into motion. Companies that embrace this reality and turn their focus from campaign-oriented marketing to real-time marketing will be the ones that rise to the top.

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