



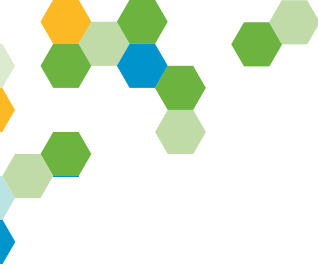
SPECIAL REPORT

Conversation and Conversion: Customer Experience Challenges in B2B

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INTRODUCTION

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We often talk about how the digital disruption is transforming the panorama of B2C (business to client) companies, but what about B2B enterprise, and what challenges are facing customer experience in this sector as technology transforms commercial relationships? According to a Gallup report, just 41 percent of B2B customers strongly agree their companies are perfect for people like them, and 49 percent do not feel proud to be a company customer.

Many challenges B2C has recently confronted in the areas of communications, branding and marketing also affect the B2B customer experience. Therefore, rather than mere conversion, it is the challenge of winning customer loyalty that becomes paramount. This is where the need to establish relationships based on ongoing, valuable contributions and coherence across all points of contact becomes critical.

Little is said regarding the key role communication plays in the customer journey, much less how it is increasingly used as a basic tool to create a coherent, satisfying experience. We have identified four critical challenges for the future of B2B companies, based on valuable conversations and a conversion strategy closely associated with communication.



“All new developments in the business-customer relationship are based on one thing: being able to speak to and interact with customers as if we were lifelong friends”

1. THE CHALLENGE OF PERSONALIZATION

All new developments in the business-customer relationship (blockchain, Internet of Things, augmented and virtual reality, data analytics, etc.) are based on one thing: being able to speak to and interact with customers as if we were lifelong friends.

Although it may seem a little obvious, a new world opens up when we consider the two ideas revolving around this goal:

- If I understand my customer's fears and concerns, I can anticipate them to show empathy, increasing effective communications and interactions and ameliorating the bounce rate.
- If I understand my customer's motivations, desires and interests, focusing on those that drive their actions, I can fine-tune my content and interactions to point people toward my product or service.

With all of this in mind, we strive to achieve hyper-personalization/integration (referring to grouping similar behavioral archetypes, also known as [buyer personas](#)), offering more and more unique, tailored products. Hyper-personalizing customer experience is an issue companies must work on, because they currently confuse the three types of experience management:

1. **Delivered experience:** The customer's ultimate reality, one which, unfortunately, often

differs from the experience the company *believes* it is delivering. Customer feedback techniques gauge the degree of satisfaction, net promoter score, etc. as a means of measuring the delivered experience and obtaining information to move it closer to hyper-personalization.

2. **Desired experience:** This type of experience is designed so all points of contact and brand interactions with users create positive, memorable impressions. The biggest problem companies are facing is confusing personalized interactions with offering a painless experience. They fail to realize that, in order to positively build effective and memorable experiences, discomfort is necessary. It generates user satisfaction after they move to your brand.

Living perfect experiences is tedious; we fall in love with the imperfections that make us feel understood and require some economic and emotional effort. For example, the line at Starbucks, carrying home furniture from Ikea, waiting for acceptance to enter a gated community, etc.

3. **Effective experience:** Manage your delivered experience and combine it with desired experience, and that's where you'll find hyper-personalization. Identify its differentiating possibilities before rivals with greater



“The fact is, marketing heads at B2B companies are turning to brands to increase preference, purchase capacity and price premiums”

resources by “thinking more and spending less,” a core principle of marketers.

This new focus on hyper-personalization takes the “customer-centric” mantra a step further, and it will be key to creating memorable experiences for B2B companies.

2. THE CHALLENGE OF BRANDING

Let’s say there are two types of brands: those that use emotion to drive purchases, and all the others. If we define brand role to be the part of a purchase decision that can be directly attributed to a brand (excluding other factors, such as prices or intrinsic product characteristics), then historically, the role of emotion has been vitally important for luxury items, beverages, fashion and hospitality, and less so in industrial services, financial services, pharma and logistics.

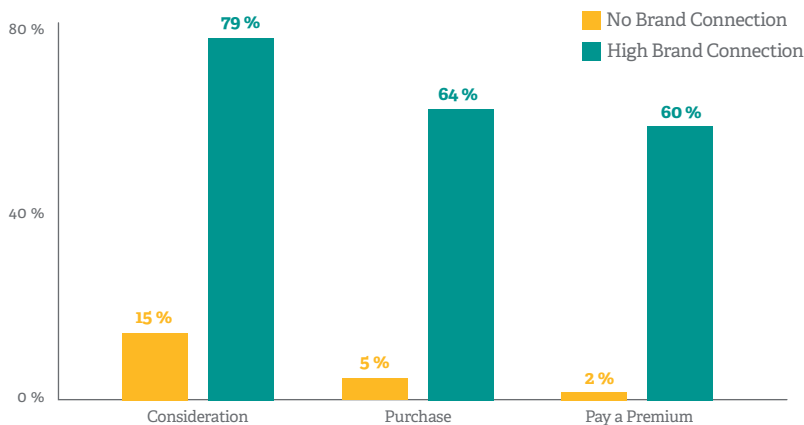
But things have changed. The amount of demand a branded product or service obtains over that of the same unbranded product or service grows every year in all the aforementioned sectors. This tells us that branding and identity, linked in the service of **emotion**, are now an indispensable part of any purchase process.

The fact is, marketing heads at B2B companies are turning to brands to increase preference, purchase capacity and price premiums. A Gartner survey suggests that brand is the second-highest priority for marketing executives.

The B2B environment, like so many others crowded with rivals, suffers from an increase in commoditization that makes us fight against prices as the sole driver of purchases. B2B professionals are realizing that increasing **brand awareness** among customers leads to broader margins, generating loyalty that can protect them against even competitors with lower prices. Making a sale in the professional environment is more difficult than in others due to demand complexity and delays in closing commercial agreements.

In addition, someone purchasing professional services is better prepared and more experienced than consumers in B2C environments, creating a more deliberate experience that requires brands to more heavily rely on their identities as a means of signaling confidence and reliability. Conversely, earning a certain amount of trust results in

Figure 1. Impact of B2B Brand Connections



n= 3 000
Source: “From Promotion to Emotion,” a CEB/Motista survey

“Brand development reduces commercial risk, insulates companies in times of crisis and provides a common purpose to connect all the company’s stakeholders”

greater loyalty. When the brand journey is sophisticated and decentralized (multi-contact), brand identity must be coherent, firm and well-established so the company can create many stories inspired by a single purpose.

In the difficult task of converting a stranger into a loyal customer, identity acts as an effective and necessary integrator for the experience. Brand development reduces commercial risk, insulates companies in times of crisis and provides a common purpose to connect all the company’s stakeholders.

3. THE CHALLENGE OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Looking beyond conversion, conversation is a top-drawer tool, to be used not only when drawing the attention of potential customers, but also when developing richer relationships with existing customers to foster their loyalty. In recent years, [thought leadership](#) has become a powerful solution that adds value to B2B commercial relationships and allows companies to become leaders in all conversations relevant to their reputations and businesses.

The key to a coherent, effective strategy lies first in identifying the conversation areas that can add value to commercial relationships. Understanding the communities already discussing these topics and the foci of their conversations is necessary to add value and help share the company’s perspective. From that point onward, the company should spread an

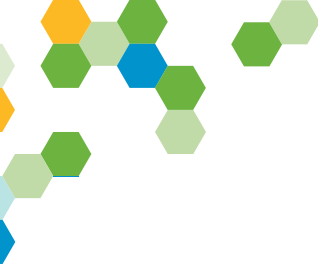
optimized thought-leadership strategy throughout its entire value chain, including commercial models, employees and all points of customer contact. In some cases, this has been considered merely a helpful tool for use in attraction strategies, but it is even more valuable when working to gain the loyalty from customers in later stages of the marketing funnel.

It’s time for B2B companies to start sharing their specialists’ knowledge with the world and offering their top executives a chance to be opinion leaders, thus strengthening relationships with customers promoting themselves in society.

4. THE CHALLENGE OF EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY

Humans can fall in love with other humans, certain ideas, good stories or aspirational images that invite us to think and dream big. These emotional ties are what move the world, driving us to make all kinds of decisions—including purchase decisions, of course. This engagement usually comes from our direct experiences with people, places, emotions and brands, creating an undeniably human scenario. However, it forms a maze-like challenge for B2B companies, which have historically ignored this valuable resource, thus missing out on an important method of directly addressing end consumers.

We humans prefer to put our trust (more generally) in “someone like me,” or, when it comes to companies, in normal employees. It turns out that, for years, B2B companies have been looking



outside for ways to excite end-users, but they are increasingly coming to the realization that they have always had the secret weapon they needed for success: their own professionals.

A committed professional is the most powerful and effective tool for forging sincere, profound and lasting bonds with consumers. Employee advocacy—a new term for the age-old idea of relying on employees to be ambassadors for their brand—is an essential part of customer conversion and loyalty in the B2B ecosystem. The potentially unlimited scope

of social networks has given this indispensable practice a new dimension for companies willing to differentiate themselves, both now and in the future.

The cases of pioneering B2B companies (Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Salesforce and FedEx, for examples) obtaining impressive reputational results in this area are significant. In any event, there are no simple “copy-and-paste” recipes. Although the trend is universal, each company must study the issue from its own unique perspective. Ultimately, there is no other way to find one’s own voice.

Three types of experience management



DELIVERED EXPERIENCE

The customer’s ultimate reality. Customer feedback techniques gauge the degree of satisfaction, net promoter score, etc. as a means of measuring the delivered experience and obtaining information to move it closer to hyper-personalization.



DESIRED EXPERIENCE

This type of experience is designed so all points of contact and brand interactions with users create positive, memorable impressions. The biggest problem companies are facing is failing to realize that, in order to positively build effective and memorable experiences, discomfort is necessary. It generates user satisfaction after they move to your brand. For example, the line at Starbucks and carrying home furniture from Ikea.



EFFECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Combine delivered and desired experience, and you get hyper-personalization. Identify possibilities before major rivals do by “thinking more and spending less,” a core principle of marketers.

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