Delivering integrated customer experiences in an omni-channel world

Waitrose and Google

Prepared by: Charles Brindley and Martin Wright

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With thanks to...

CX professionals from BP Retail, Nationwide, Three, Waitrose, Google, UCAS, HireRight, Bristol Energy, Royal London and Sky joined us for our most recent workshop. It focused on sharing best practice on developing great omni-channel customer experience. We were very grateful for the generosity of our hosts; Waitrose and Google.

Despite the diverse businesses present everyone was struck by how similar the challenges we all face were. This was a hands on session which we kicked off with a guided tour of Waitrose. It provided a great example of the challenges that must be overcome to deliver a distinct and powerful retail experience.

"In a few short years every aspect of retail has been impacted by profound changes in consumer behavior, expectations and use of technology"

Like every industry they face rapid and fundamental change; downward pressure on price, changing buying patterns, channel proliferation. Despite the need to improve efficiency Waitrose have remained committed to making their retail environment an enticing destination. The investment they have made creating new reasons to visit (like click and collect and dry cleaning) and in new services that introduce more colour and theatre to their stores were powerful statements of that commitment.

Of course a rich customer experience needs to be supported by seamless integrated systems. And there was plenty to learn from their challenges around implementing things like the Quick Check-out App and integrating multiple websites and legacy systems and behaviours.

The tour of Waitrose also emphasised how customer expectations are changing rapidly leading to the continuous evolution of the store environment; from the big weekly shop a few years ago to a situation today where, even at 4 o'clock, most people have not decided what they are doing for dinner that evening. Hence, shopping is more impulsive, frequent and immediate.

In our afternoon session six issues quickly rose to the top as areas of greatest effort and challenge.

1. **Functional silos**

By far the most significant was the persistence of silo'd decision-making. Almost all the delegates agreed that they delivered a fragmented omni-channel experience that often appears sub-optimal to employees and customers. Frequently, the lack of a single accountable person with the authority to draw different functions together was highlighted or a failure to have collective

agreement on the issues that need to be fixed to generate the greatest benefit.

So, what is being done? One organisation set aside whole areas - even whole 'collaborative floors' - for sprint reviews on specific areas of the experience. Another focused on holding regular collaborative design workshops; highlighting that 'everyone is a designer' and has a part to play. The key seems to be to take the time to engage with all the organisational functions and to work hard to connect them to the genuine experiences of customers, to produce a clear plan and to make sure everyone is clear on their role in resolving it.

2. Bringing customer insight to life

It was widely felt that generating an emotional connection between the customer and internal teams is crucial. Whilst data analysis and customer journey mapping are invaluable it is easy for them to become too numerical and impersonal. We discussed how to make it more human. One described making a video of customers struggling with a web-page helped build empathy and stimulated an urgent appetite for change in the team. Another spoke of building a house so staff can get inside the practical reality of how a consumer really interacts with the brand at home.

> **" *The customer experience is all about the emotion - so, when you're trying to collaborate you have to find ways of bringing this alive* "**

Bringing the emotion to life seems to engender better working relationships and makes work more outward focused and objective.

One organisation highlighted how they had a minimum requirement of exposure hours with consumers - 2 hours every 6 weeks - to make sure people set aside the time from everything else to connect with customers.

3. Senior stakeholders

The role of **senior management** played a big part in our discussions - how to get them involved and crucially, closer to the customer experience. Failure to do so can result in knee-jerk reactions; for example changes to a process from a single poor experience.

4. A single customer view

Although this has been widely held as the Holy Grail, it was agreed that this still remains elusive for most organisations. Data is in different pots or missing altogether.

The group also questioned what exactly could be achieved by integrating data. Even if the data were already in once place, does that mean it can be read quickly when the customer is front of you, or on the phone? How accurate is the record from the previous adviser? There was broad agreement that most organisations can get more value out of

the data they have. The real costs and risks of chasing the silver bullet (that is 'the single customer view') should be more critically evaluated before committing significant resources.

5. Consistency

This conversation centred on the importance of setting clear expectations and then delivering on them every time. Yet, it exposed a paradox; customers want you to go the extra mile, tailor the service or personalise it which, by definition, makes it inconsistent. There has to be a balance there somewhere.

6. Employee Experience

A few of the participants have launched employee experience programmes. One of the powerful techniques that delegates had used was to understand different employee personas so that communications can be crafted more intelligently. Some staff will love a change, others be more reticent. Understanding the motivations and fears of different groups helps the change team develop tailored approaches and improve engagement.

A last thought.

We have found that these seminars remind people how the issues are similar across sectors. At the heart of it is collaborative customer-centric decision making. What drives this is generating an emotional connection between members of the team and with the customer.

In her recent book, *Beyond Measure*, Margaret Hoffman quotes numerous surveys that demonstrate that effective teams take an interest in each other's personal lives and welfare. So it is with customers. Great customer experiences are generated by changing how you make the customer feel.

"Shared documents aren't shared understanding"

Waitrose illustrated this with the example of a customer who arrived at the till with an important last-minute basket of shopping for her heavily pregnant daughter - then realised she had left her purse at home. Waitrose let the customer pay later. The customer was blown away. The experience went viral on social media and created a great feel good factor internally.

However there is a counter to this; some voiced concern about setting impossible customer expectations. Delegates mentioned a number of ways they try to get this balance right. Waitrose have a policy of 'freedom within a framework', other companies have red lines that for operational, security or compliance reasons cannot be crossed.

One role of Customer Experience is to measure behaviour and expectations and to give staff the tools they need to make difficult decisions easier.