ACQUIRE

Whitepaper

The Definitive

Guide to E-commerce Customer Experience

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1.

A brave new world

From the advert that first piqued their interest, to the initial website visit, on to purchase, and all the way through to post-purchase – every stage of the customer journey contributes to their overall experience. When customers interact with companies, they don't see them in terms of departmental silos. They see them as a coherent whole.

A company's customer experience is therefore created from a holistic perception of all the services it provides. The way customers research, think about, and carry out their purchases, have all changed forever. With so many options available at their fingertips 24/7, customers find themselves firmly in the driving seat of their brand relationships. If companies want to build loyal customer bases, then they need to deliver quality customer experience. Modern CEOs are aware of this fact, with 39 percent saying customer experience is the most effective method of creating a competitive advantage — the most common answer in the study[2].

A massive 86 percent of consumers receiving a good customer experience said they would buy from that company again, compared to just 13 percent who received a very poor customer experience.[1]

Thanks to a constant flow of technological advances, the past ten years have seen a complete revolution in e-commerce. Connectivity has extended the customer experience far beyond TV adverts, in-store experiences, and even conventional desktop. With a rich tapestry of online touchpoints available on the go, customers are easily able to reach companies any time and any place.

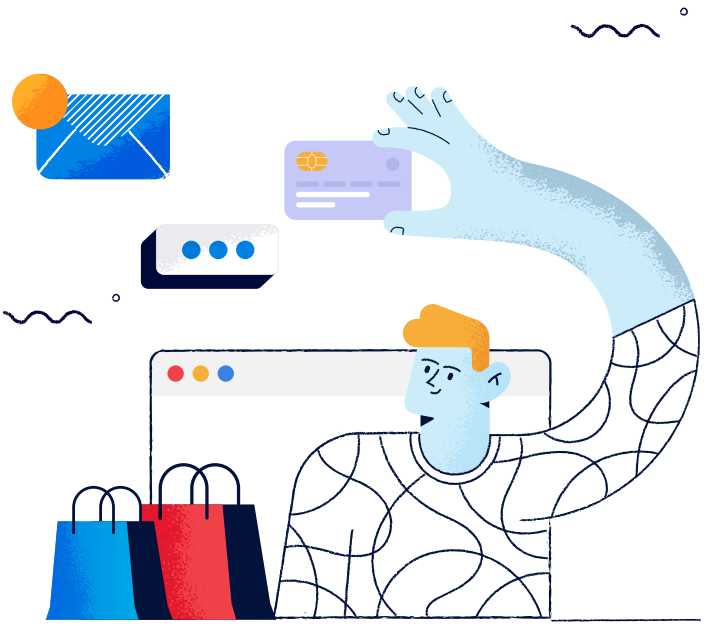
"The reality is that, if businesses aren't able to meet their customers' expectations, there is always another company waiting in the wings that will - and it's only one click away."

2.

What is e-commerce customer experience (CX)?

E-commerce customer experience is the quality of the sum total of interactions formed throughout the customer journey. From first becoming aware of a brand, to navigating its website, all the way through to checkout, delivery, and far beyond, each part contributes to the overall brand impression created in customers' minds.

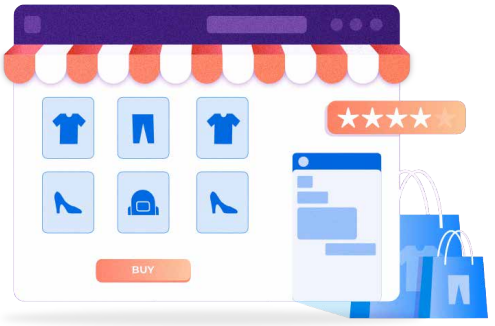
In the case of e-commerce, this places emphasis on technology and in particular the website user experience. But e-commerce businesses are much more than the technology they utilize. How orders are fulfilled, the way in which customers are dealt with when problems occur, and even the tone in communications and advertising material, all play a role. As such, every employee in an e-commerce company has a valuable contribution to make when it comes to shaping the customer experience.



3.

Common e-commerce CX challenges and solutions

With changing customer expectations comes inevitable challenges. The good news is, there are ways to tackle these issues, and even turn them into advantages by applying the right kind of solutions. At Acquire, we've listened to a range of e-commerce businesses and compiled this list to help companies rise to the challenges.



Challenge:

01 Increasing sales and qualified leads

Companies often find it difficult to understand which leads represent potentially valuable prospects and which don't. This has a negative impact when it comes to transforming leads into revenue effectively. In fact, just 56 percent of B2B organizations verify valid business leads before they are passed to sales teams[3].

Solutions:

- Segment data based on behavior and pages visited to qualify leads
- Harness lead scoring systems to prioritize lead re-engagement
- Connect CRM systems to live chat and support systems
- Use live chat to proactively reach out to site visitors and better understand their intentions

Challenge:

02 Reducing cart abandonment rates

Customers may abandon their cart for all sorts of reasons. Perhaps the payment process is difficult, unexpected shipping charges have popped up, or they simply don't trust the site they are dealing with enough. Whatever the issues, addressing them is crucial, as checkout optimization can increase conversion rates by 35 percent, and help recover lost sales amounting to $260 billion[4].

Solutions:

- Streamline the design of your checkout process by minimizing the steps and fields required
- Create a guest checkout option for speedy purchasing
- Use live chat and visual tools like cobrowsing to help confused and uncertain shoppers
- Display trust and security seals prominently to alleviate any customer concerns

Challenge:

03 Providing responsive support

Interacting with brands online can be a daunting prospect. With so many products and menus to navigate through, it's easy for customers to feel lost. Now, with the rise of always-on connectivity, they may come to a brand for support at any given time of day. This creates a challenge in providing the level of support required.

Solutions:

- Use live chat technology to allow agents to help more customers simultaneously
- Integrate chatbots to answer simple and out-of-hours queries, easing the burden on agents
- Think carefully about staffing levels and spread out working hours as needed
- Create comprehensive knowledge base solutions for customers to help themselves

Challenge:

04 Sending promotional offers

Although companies are often actively trying to provide customers with special promotion offers, they may struggle with getting them seen, or they may simply be irrelevant. Yet these offers have the power to create a tangible emotional impact on customers: 40 percent of them feel smart when they find the best deals[5].

Solutions:

- Use app push notications to get offers in front of eyeballs
- Write great email copy to help promotions stand out
- Utilize customer data to personalize offers to customers
- Display promotional codes prominently across all channels

Challenge:

05 Supply tracking & shipment info

Eighteen percent of survey respondents now cite shipping costs as their least favorite aspect of online shopping, second only to an inability to touch or try on an item before purchase (27 percent), with another 15 percent identifying waiting for the shipment to arrive as the worst part of the online shopping process[6]. Customers see the whole shipment process as a black box. Through providing transparency into shipping, companies help to build understanding and trust.

Solutions:

- Collaborate with fulfillment providers such as Amazon
- Clearly set expectations before shipping
- Inform customers of any fulfillment issues as they arise
- Configure chatbots to inform customers of delivery progression in real time

4.

Top 5 priorities for e-commerce CX

As technology improves, customer expectations rise. The parameters within which e-commerce companies must operate to succeed depends on living up to these expectations by delivering a truly modern and connected experience. Here are five things companies must prioritize to create better e-commerce customer experiences:

1. Listen to your customers

Fifty-two percent of people around the globe believe that companies need to take action on feedback provided by their customers[7].

Customer feedback is gold, containing all the information needed to provide the products and services they really want. Giving customers the opportunity to voice their opinions even helps empower them, giving them a voice, and showing they truly matter. Ultimately, listening to customers leads to a customer-centric culture, and creates happy customers. That means increased retention, more sales, more revenue, and a successful, growing business.

Some ways to listen to customers:

- Use post-interaction and real time feedback surveys
- Use sentiment analysis to gauge what is being said about you on social media
- Send regular customer satisfaction surveys
- Analyze live chat conversations with customers to see the themes that arise

2. Provide a seamless omnichannel customer journey

Nine in 10 consumers want absolute omnichannel service – they expect a seamless experience when moving from one communication method to another[8].

Today, customers can reach out through any number of touchpoints. They may visit a website, contact an agent, leave a message on social media, shop from a store, or make contact through a live chat or messaging platform. There are so many potential channels to interact with, it's easy to lose any sense of coherence. Yet customers expect companies to acknowledge and reflect prior conversations and don't appreciate having to go back to square one on every interaction. Companies therefore need to ensure consistency regardless of device or channel.

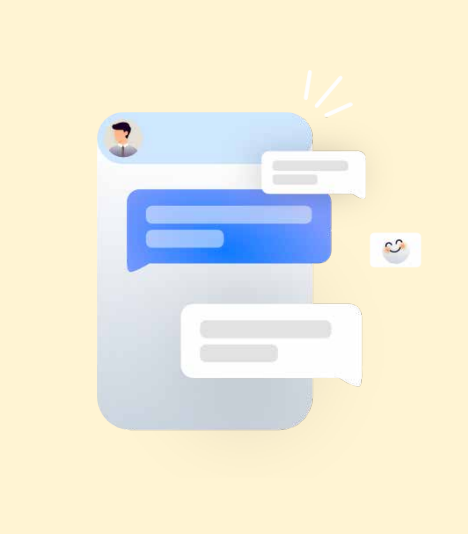
Some ways to listen to customers:

- Centralize data in one system to deliver a holistic customer experience
- Use technology to serve customers across all touchpoints, channels, and journeys
- Create mobile-friendly design and apps
- Track conversations using customer profiles to maintain context

3. Create real time conversations with customers

More than half of consumers expect a response from customer service within an hour, even on weekends[9].

Conversations are key to building strong customer relationships. In this fast-paced world, customers are unwilling to spend their time waiting around for a response, or they will take their business elsewhere. Through conversations, brands show they care and can establish a rapport, allowing them to present a human side of the business. Collaboration is much easier with two-way interactions, and issues are solved more quickly.



Some ways to listen to customers:

- Use live chat proactively to offer help and advice to customers visiting your site
- Interact with customers through social media
- Enhance conversations with visual tools such as cobrowsing
- Integrate chatbots for out-of-hours support and to quickly deal with routine inquiries

4. Employ a personalized approach

Eighty percent of customers are more likely to purchase a product or service from a brand that provides personalized experiences[10].

Customers are all individuals and expect to be treated as such. Everyone has their own set of preferences. Companies now have the data available reflect this, creating dynamic and unique experiences that are far more engaging than ever before. These unique experiences are a sure-fire way of making customers feel truly valued.

Some ways to employ a personalized approach:

- Provide coupons for a customer's favorite product
- Change UI content based on customer preferences
- Use data segmentation to tailor email and other content
- Write a hand-written thank you note

5. Collaborate internally

Thirty-nine percent of surveyed employees believe that people in their own organization don't collaborate enough[11].

The very nature of customer experience means it relies on successful input from multiple business areas. Although they may otherwise consider themselves disparate factions, a united front needs to be established if a truly omnichannel and personalized customer experience is to be delivered. The customer acts as a fulcrum around which the company can pull together.

Some ways to employ a personalized approach:

- Make sure the whole company understands customer pain points
- Embed customer experience into everything the company does
- Use a centralized framework in which content updates can be made efficiently
- Use technology to create connections, such as integrating CRM with live chat

5.

3 companies getting e-commerce right

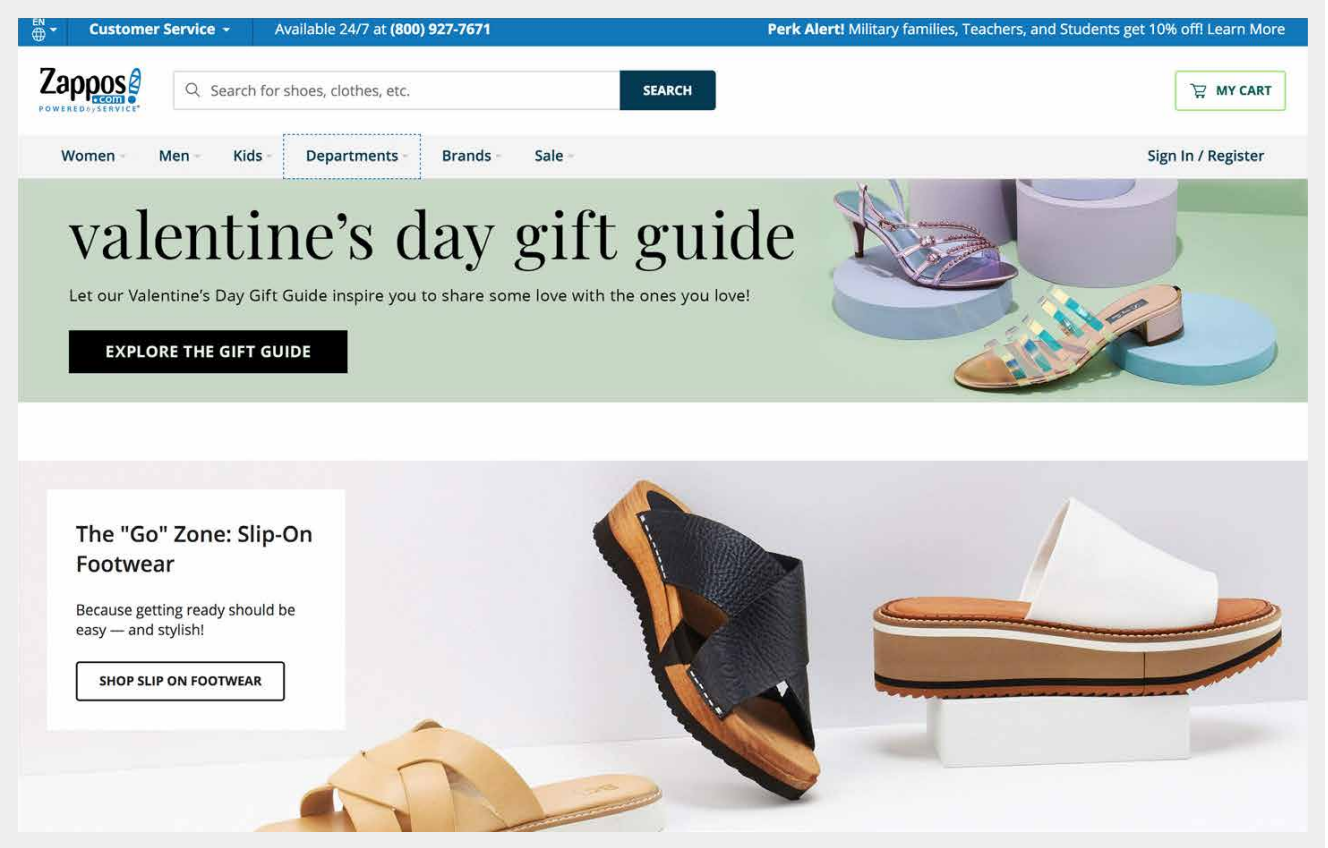
Zappos: The human touch

Zappos focuses on a return on relationship instead of the more conventional return on investment.

Taking an innovative approach to maintaining a loyal customer base, Zappos does everything it can to stand out from the rest, even going as far as happily directing customers to competitor websites when the product they are after is out of stock. This demonstrates a focus on what's best for the customer rather than on maximizing profits.

Zappos are always looking to create "WOW" experiences, surprising customers with shipping upgrades just because.

If a customer places an order before midnight, they see the product on their doorstep the next morning[12]. Zappos prides itself on the human touch, actively encouraging phone calls by placing their phone number at the top left hand corner of their homepage. The customer conversations that come out of this are a perfect opportunity to learn and improve and they have even been known to spend hours on the phone with customers to make sure they deliver a truly personal experience. Creating a customer experience this good means the company has an extremely loyal customer base, creating 75 percent of its business from repeat customers[13], despite lacking low price points.



Source: Zappos.com

Sephora: Unrivaled omnichannel personalization

Popular beauty brand Sephora understands how to harness the power of technology to produce an omnichannel, personalized experience. The retailer combines an array of tools to create a truly holistic brand experience for their customers, making their lives that little bit easier.

The company has created the ultimate try-before-you-buy experience. Customers don't even need to be in store. The Virtual Artist app allows photos to be uploaded so customers can "try on" eye, lip, and cheek makeup in a virtual space, and even play with looks created by Sephora experts. The app is also full of beauty tips and video tutorials.

Drawing on the importance of social connections, Sephora's Beauty Insider loyalty program creates conversations within a digital community where customers can have questions answered and even receive recommendations from other members. Sephora has made particular efforts to stitch together the online and offline experience. The mobile app transforms into the Store Companion tool. It comes to life as users approach a store, providing information about products and items users have previously looked at.

Sephora's customer experience program furthers the company's focus on personalization by asking for information about a shopper's skin, hair, and eyes, and then analyzes the data to offer curated product recommendations. This emphasis on creating a personalized experience is working; 80 percent of sales comes through its loyalty program[14].

Source: Sephoravisualartist.com

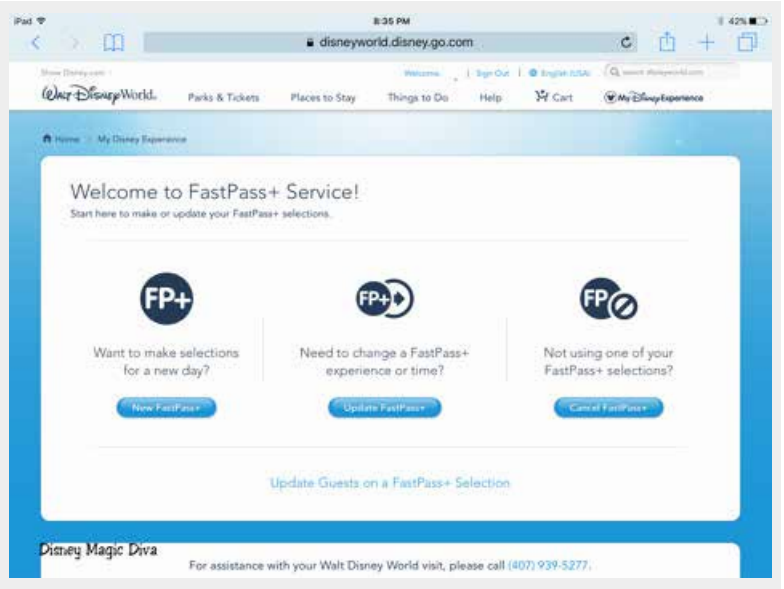
Disney: A seamless end-to-end experience

Disney completely understands the omnichannel experience, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the Disney World customer journey.

Tickets to Disney World are safely secured through the brilliantly designed mobile-responsive website. From where to dine, to securing a Fast Pass, the whole trip-planning process can even be done on the go.

Prior to arriving at Disney World, customers are sent wristbands through the mail. These bands are far from ordinary. 'Magic Bands' are unique to each person, offering customers an unparalleled experience by unlocking a whole world of personalized fun. The bands serve as hotel room keys, ride reservers, and even a way to pay in the park.

All the while the My Disney Experience mobile app helps customers locate attractions they want to see. With the estimated wait time available to view, customers are able to plan their movements with precision.



Source: Tipsfromthedisneydiva.com

Source: Disneyways.com

6.

Summary

More than two-thirds of companies now compete primarily on the basis of customer experience – in 2010 this was only 36 percent[15].

The battle for future e-commerce sales will continue to take place in the arena of customer experience. As technology presses forward at break-neck speed, the opportunities for savvy businesses to harness new tools and deliver fantastic customer experiences are limited only by the creativity of those delivering them.

The coming years promise an era of unparalleled frictionless interactions, where the behavior and preferences of one individual shape their own unique experiences. For brands to stay relevant, they must embrace these new parameters and create strategies and goals that reflect them, or they run the risk of being left behind for good.

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