The Customer Experience - The New Competitive Battleground

Why It’s Important to Map the Customer Experience if You Want to be a Winner in Today’s Marketplace
Introduction

According to research conducted by Gartner, the world’s leading information technology research company, 64% of consumers indicate that the customer experience is more important than price when it comes to the brand they choose. Hence the quote from Jerry Gregoire of Dell that says, “The customer experience is the next competitive battleground.” To further drive home the point that it’s the customer experience, not the tangibles of the offering, that provide brands a competitive advantage is data from another Gartner study conducted in 2016 that shows 87% of firms in the future expect to compete on the basis of the customer experience. None other than Steve Jobs, whose Apple empire was fostered by building an engaging customer experience, noted that “You’ve got to start with the customer experience and work back toward the technology, not the other way around.”

What is the Customer Experience?

A customer’s experience, notice we refer to a singular customer, not an average or typical customer, represents the blending of every interaction a customer has with your brand. This customer experience can be a onetime occurrence, such as a visit to your website or personal training session, or it can be an accumulation of engagements with your brand, such as 100 visits over the past year. It is essential to understand that for the vast majority of customers, if not all, an experience is an emotional or intangible outcome from what is often a very tangible set of interactions or touchpoints (e.g., booking a reservation online, taking a group exercise class or waiting to use a treadmill). Seth Godin was clear about the value of creating memorable customer experiences in driving sustainable business growth when he said, “People do not buy goods and services. They buy relations, stories and magic.”

Experiences can generate a gamut of emotions, ranging from sheer exhilaration to memorable to joyful to boring to disappointing to rage inducing. From a business perspective, we want our customers to have experiences that are favorable and memorable, such that they generate love,
loyalty, worship and spend; not experiences that create unengaged and disappointed customers, and a dwindling supply of clients.

Delivering, or staging, club or studio experiences that generate the emotional outcomes that lead to love, loyalty and spend are not unlike the experiences that occur organically when you visit let’s say the Grand Canyon or Paris, or are staged such as those in Las Vegas or Disneyland. What we do know is that these memory-making experiences, in particular those that are staged, have several elements in common, those being:

- **They are perceived as authentic and real, not fabricated.** Organic experiences such as those that emerge from a vacation in Paris or hiking the Grand Canyon with a friend are authentic. Three days in Vegas, three days at Disney, or a day at Build a Bear Workshop may not seem organic or authentic at the surface, but research has shown that many consumers perceive them as authentic. Being perceived as authentic requires a commitment on the part of the organization to stage the experience in a manner that consumers internalize as authentic. Not as easy as it sounds. In the fitness industry, the experiences fostered by Ecofit in Brazil or Crossfit and SoulCycle in the U.S. are perceived by their customers as authentic.

- **They have a specific theme that binds everything together.** Go to Vegas and visit the Venetian or New York New York and you get the value of a theme. Everything that occurs within those environments is tied to a theme. The same can be said of Disneyland, there is a theme that connects every element of the environment. In the fitness industry, brands such as Crossfit and SoulCycle have themes, as do international brands such as Ecofit in Brazil or Gymbox in the U.K.

- **They build a stage and use props and actors to bring it to life.** To stage an experience, you need to create an environment that generates emotions around the theme you are staging. This requires thinking theatrically, in the sense you have to build an environment (facility, equipment, programs, messaging and staff) that fosters memorable moments of truth (e.g., magic moments) where customers connect their
emotions with the theme they are living at the moment. Ultimately, you want those emotions to accumulate into a singular magical memory. Think of Disneyland and how each building, every piece of equipment, and even the staff are supportive of a particular theme. At Ecofit in Brazil they’ve designed their facility, and specific points of interaction, to revolve around their theme of being immersed in nature.

Creating and then delivering customer experiences is not something that happens by accident; it requires a plan and that plan is called a customer experience map.

What is a Customer Experience Map and how do you create one?
As noted above, delivering memorable customer experiences doesn’t happen by accident; it requires a plan or map that empowers employees and systems to align each customer’s journey with the brand such that they result in the emotional outcomes that define the desired customer experience. The key ingredients in the recipe for building out a customer experience map (CEM) that fosters and delivers memorable customer experiences, not disconnected collisions between your customers and the club’s tangible goods and services, include:

- **Have a brand purpose that is experience driven.** Your brand purpose is the “why” of your brand. Your “why” provides a framework for the experience. Think about it, without an answer to why, how can you define the experience? A great example of this would be the purpose behind the Lego brand. At Lego, their purpose is to inspire tomorrow’s builder. It’s not to create unique block toys; it’s not to sell interchangeable blocks or make movies; it’s about inspiring tomorrow’s builders. This purpose serves as the foundation for the company’s customer experience maps. As you can imagine, a map designed to chart this course would be dramatically different than one intended to deliver on a purpose of building great block toys.
• **Have a brand promise that speaks to the experience you expect to deliver.** A brand promise is the promise of value or the experience you say you will deliver and the experience that your customers will come to expect based on their own value set. Going back to Lego, their customer promise is “the joy of building and the pride of creation”. Talk about an experiential-drive promise. Lego isn’t focused on the tangibles of building great blocks, creating interesting block models or making movies. Instead they are promising an experience that across every touch point of a customer’s journey should generate joy and pride, two incredibly powerful emotions.

• **Have a profile of who your customers are.** Every business has more than “one customer type” or what one might call customer tribe. If we were to use Lego as an example, it is clear that their customers run the gamut from two year olds to adults who continue to engage in the construction of Lego creations, or the construction of their own creations using Legos. In the fitness club business, we typically have multiple customer tribes, such as the serious group exercise fanatic, the casual fitness persona who visits the club once or twice a month, or the family that is interested in sports activities for their child. Knowing the profile of your customer requires more than intuition or exploring facility usage numbers. It requires a deep dive into their experience built on interviews, focus group sessions, surveys and data analysis. The point of all this is to understand that the customer experience journey will be different for each of these groups, and if you don’t have it mapped out, it’s likely you won’t be able to deliver on it.

• **Have an understanding of the realms in which customers engage with your brand.** Today’s consumers, your customers, may engage with your brand across multiple realms. These realms may involve the “brick and mortar” space of your club, but it may also involve numerous virtual worlds such as your website and social media
outlets. For example, if you are a club or studio that uses MindBody software, consumers may be engaging with you via Google Reserve. If you are enrolled in ClassPass or FitReserve, then consumers are engaging with you in that realm. If you have a large Millennial population, then your experience on social media needs to be focused on delivering memorable experiential outcomes just as much as the experience within the brick and mortar environment. Understanding what realms exist for your various customer tribes requires open-minded exploration and listening, something that is often challenging to accomplish when you are sitting in the middle of the forest.

- **Have an understanding what each of those customer tribes defines as a memorable and delightful experience.** In other words, understand the underlying emotions that the customer defines as memorable. This requires understanding how each tribe or clan defines it cumulatively and across the various touch points of their interaction with the brand. For example, a particular consumer group might define memorable as no hassles; they are able to book their favorite bike for class and not have to wait in line hoping they get the bike, or not having to wait for five minutes while someone performs three sets on the chest press machine. Another might define the emotional outcome they seek as inspiration. Another may define it as having achieved what they came in to do (e.g., goal achievement). The point is the customer, not the business, defines what outcomes, tangible and intangible, speak to a memorable experience. A serious Millennial group exercise participant will define their memorable experience with the club differently than the Baby Boomer who is a casual fitness user.

- **Have an understanding of the customer steps or touch points.** Dr. Seuss, who authored more memorable experiences for children than nearly anyone else, said, “Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory.” If your goal is
to deliver memorable customer experiences, then it requires understanding the value of every moment between your customers and your brand. While many of the touch points for customer tribes are the same, there are instances where they can be considerably different. For example, the Millennial group exercise fanatic may have numerous touch points with you in both the virtual and real world. A Baby Boomer who is a casual user may have no virtual touch points but considerably more and different real-time touch points within the club. The point is, as a business you have to know what those key touch points are across every realm. Once you know what these are, then you can define what should happen to elicit a favorable personalized emotion that generates a favorable memory.

- **Have an understanding of the customer pain points.** Nearly every customer has specific touch points that tend to be more rage or hassle inducing than others. Having an understanding of where those “pain points” occur, are critical to staging memorable customer experiences. For example, some people hate to wait, and if any touch points with a provider cause them to wait, it generates very unfavorable emotions which ultimately lessens the favorable memories of any experience they might have, including those at Disneyland. Other individuals don’t have such negative emotions to waiting, so for them having a touch point that elicits waiting is not a pain point, but others are. It is essential to comprehend these pain points or hassle junctions. When you know what these pain points are and where they occur then you can do everything within your power to eliminate them.

As evidenced by the discussion, creating a CEM that your business can use to foster memorable experiences requires considerable thought and effort, not to mention commitment.
Pulling it All Together

The operators of club and fitness businesses, no different than operators of retail, hospitality or even tech industries, now find themselves entrenched in a competitive environment where consumers desire unique, relevant, and most of all memorable experiences. The Millennials, more than any other generation, and the industry’s bread and butter, treasure experiences over things. They more than any other generation seek out brands that are passionate about staging experiences that allow them to create memories with those closest to them. These young consumers are prepared to pay more for experiences, and in doing so, they are influencing other consumers to do the same. As club and studio operators, the days of offering the biggest facility, having the latest and most equipment or newest hottest programs at the lowest price are coming to an end. The time has arrived where being able to deliver relevant, unique and most of all memorable customer experiences is the path to a sustainable competitive advantage.

Let Us Help You Master the Art and Science of Customer Experience Mapping

At ClubIntel, we pride ourselves on assisting clients with the CEM process. Some of the solution-driven services we bring to bear for our clients in helping them build a personalized CEM for their business include:

- *Facilitating qualitative research with customers.* We use in-depth interviews, focus group ideation, clue scanning and anthropological observation to help understand the emotional responses and the tangible elements of their experience that trigger them.

- *Conducting quantitative research such as surveys and data analytics.* We use surveys to provide quantitative and qualitative understanding of the emotional consequences of the member journey and data analytics to understand the corresponding behaviors. Together it helps us map out key touch points of the member journey that are emotionally charged.

- *Leading constructive ideation sessions with teams to flush out a brand’s purpose, promise and voice.* We take what we’ve learned from our research and assist operators
flush out their brand purpose, brand promise, brand personality and voice. This work forms the foundation for creating a CEM and the marketing and operational standards to support it.

- Guiding the construction of a CEM. Using the insights gained from our research and the brand platform constructed through ideation sessions, we help operators pull together a CEM that can guide every member of their team and thereby provide the stage for fostering memorable, unique and relevant experiences for their members.

For more information on developing a customized Customer Experience Map for your club or studio, visit our website at [www.club-intel.com](http://www.club-intel.com) or email SteveT@club-intel.com or MarkW@club-intel.com.
ClubIntel is the club industry’s leading consumer, member and brand insights firm. Using a unique approach to understanding the club consumer, we help associations; clubs and equipment manufacturers understand, appreciate and leverage consumers’ needs, wants, and personal journeys, leading to a more loyal member base, happier employees, and long-lasting profitability. Everything we do is driven by our belief that human connections are the longest lasting and most profitable. Our services are designed to help you uncover and capitalize on the most powerful drivers of brand loyalty and the member experience. Our approach, which is uniquely human-focused are built around:

**Insight**
Data can tell you a lot, but it can’t speak to you. We have the instinct and experience to decode the numbers and tell you what your members and employees are saying.

**Inspiration**
Finding the intangible qualities that turn members into brand fanatics, and employees into apostles, takes an empathy and passion you can only find here.

**Impact**
Our unique, human-focused approach has helped clubs and manufacturers across the globe reap the benefits of increased member loyalty, higher employee retention and productivity and greater business profitability.