



Driving Success in The Age of The Customer

35 LESSONS for Designing The Next Great Experience

POWERED BY

Z E I T G U I D E



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At GE, we have a core set of cultural beliefs that help orient our actions. Of the **5 cultural beliefs**, the most critical is “Customers determine our success.” That is more true today than ever before in our 129-year history.

With the speed of technical innovation growing faster and new competitors rapidly entering the market, the options available to our customers are expanding—and the difficulties of switching suppliers are diminishing. Simple, fast service is a necessity, not a luxury. Even if GE’s solution is a bit more effective, the edge could go to a competitor that is able to deliver faster with less complexity.

Recognizing this challenge, we set off on a mission last year to provoke everyone’s thinking on how to make the GE customer experience a point of pride and a true competitive advantage.

To this end, GE teamed up with ZEITGUIDE, a firm that specializes in keeping leaders and their teams abreast of the forces changing business and culture. Together we produced a weekly digest called The CX Spotlight. Each edition covered a new trend in experience design, customer satisfaction or even personal shopping behaviors. What we found was a litany of ways to both frustrate and delight customers with how we do business.

Here, we’ve collected 35 lessons gleaned throughout this experience in one place. Reading them anew, we see which trends panned out and which fizzled. More importantly, we hope they continue to educate, provoke and inspire all of you to design a better experience for your customers.

Best,

Steven Pepe

Global Director, Commercial Marketing

steven.pepe@ge.com

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1. Good CX: The Principle Differentiator

In conversations across GE, from sales to marketing to engineers to customer service reps, a similar refrain is consistently heard: it's about time CX became a priority.

Many of you at GE are now seeing in your day-to-day that CX will become the key distinguishing factor between businesses that succeed and those that fall by the wayside. You're not alone. As **Gartner** discovered, 89% of marketers believe CX will become their primary differentiator.

In fact, the overall quality of experience a company can provide is becoming more important to customers than the merits of the individual products they're being sold. A study by Harris Interactive found that 88% of customers prefer companies which offer great service over those with the latest and greatest products. GE's own Steven Pepe covered this idea further on the company's CX platform when he explored how having the best technology is no longer enough.

That's an issue for a company that has long focused on creating the most innovative, advanced technology and selling that tech at high margins at the top of the market. It's especially concerning when, for example, we hear of a major GE Inspection Technologies customer telling a sales rep that "he would rather stab himself with an ice pick" than deal with GE's equipment repair process.

It's easy to imagine the eagerness of a customer feeling that way to search for another company to work with. That's precisely what will happen as barriers to entry for new competitors continue to shrink, giving customers more options than ever before. New competitors are already rapidly entering many of the spaces we work in, creating downward price pressure and winning over customers in the middle and lower ends of our markets. As the pace of innovation increases, no part of this business will remain safe.

2. Defining the Terminology

So how is customer experience different from customer service?

Customer service is part—an important part—of the customer’s overall experience, but it isn’t the only thing that impacts how customers feel about working with any company.

Think of interactions with a company’s customer service representative, maybe to place an order or log a complaint. In those situations, the interactions are direct and transactional, with an employee of that company.

Now think of all the times that company’s product is used outside of that interaction. Does the product perform as advertised? Does using it make the customer’s life easier? Is there information available to help get the most out of it? Is ordering replacement parts or new features quick and seamless?

Every part of the customer journey—from hearing about a product to researching and ordering it to setting it up and using it for maintenance and upgrading—reflects on the overall experience. As [Adam Richardson](#) explains in a piece from Harvard Business Review, CX “is the sum-totality of how customers engage with your company and brand, not just in a snapshot in time, but throughout the entire arc of being a customer.”

Put **even more simply**, CX is “the sum of all interactions a customer has with a company.”

Focusing on experience instead of service expands our thinking. Customer service interactions, after all, are often something customers try to avoid. How can we instead create an all-around great journey for GE’s customers?

3. Who Plays a Role in Customer Experience?

The fact that you are reading a compendium devoted to the customer experience suggests you have an interest in improving CX. But that sentiment may not be shared by everyone in your department.

Some of this resistance is likely rooted in some employees thinking that the customer experience isn't in their job description. Ask those people to tell you who is responsible for customer experience—and you're likely to hear about call centers, customer care teams or maybe sales teams.

While such employees play a pivotal role, they represent just one piece in the entire CX puzzle.

That's why we emphasize customer experience. By communicating our mission in these terms, we broaden the concept of who has a role in CX. It's not just service teams or the salesmen who field questions. It's also the engineer who designs a more efficient engine that will improve the customer's fleet. It's the person in HR identifying candidates who can connect with customers.

So, while your department might only have a few staffers who work in customer service, everyone is involved in the customer experience.

4. Creating an Experience that Matches Customer Expectations

The best approach is to create great customer “experiences”—not simply less painful “transactions.”. That distinction opens the door not only to new possibilities for delighting customers, but also for raising expectations.

Start by thinking of the simplest or most obvious customer service expectations. These are straightforward: the support staff

should understand and care about what the customer wants and needs. That staff should have the knowledge and ability to solve customer problems.

Now, expand on that. Which expectations do customers carry throughout their entire journey with GE? This can seem overwhelming at first—which is why it is crucial to take the time to create a vision for CX excellence and focus on priorities.

Here are some ideas that we brainstormed at the start of this CX initiative to get you under way:

Transparency: Customers want a clear line of communication throughout the relationship, from initial search to negotiation to ordering to delivery, to use and then re-ordering.

Consistency: Customers want to feel they are working with a company that recognizes them at each touch-point as unique individuals.

Accountability: Know what the customer was promised at each stage of the journey and deliver on it.

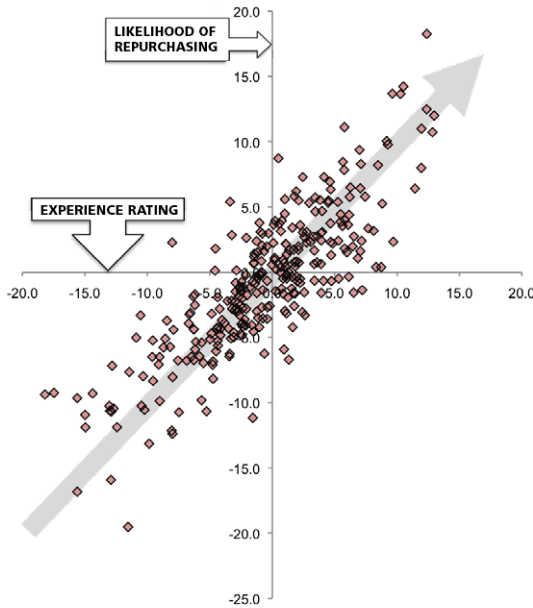
5. Why CX is Key to Future Success

Let's face it: Empathy? Delight? These concepts don't always resonate with bottom-line-focused executives. And it can be worse when the business feels insulated from competition. Anyone who's called their cable provider can attest to that.

And yet maintaining the status quo won't work in today's economy. Startups offering superior service and customer focus can rapidly eat away at market share. Netflix and Hulu are chipping away at cable TV. Uber is dominating the taxi trade. Amazon is upending traditional retailers.

The element that most distinguishes a business and creates loyalty in this atmosphere—especially in B2B—is the customer experience.

Customer Experience Correlates To Future Purchase Intentions
293 Organizations Across 20 industries



Base: 10,000 U.S. consumers
Source: Temkin Group Q1 2015 Consumer Benchmark Study
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A survey of 450 B2B buyers by SiriusDecisions found that only 20% of purchasing decisions are made based principally on the price or the offer. The other 80% are based on personal experiences or the experiences of others as relayed through references or testimonials.

Adding to that, a Forrester study found that emotion is the No. 1 driver of customer loyalty. Forrester also found that CX leaders consistently outpaced CX laggards on growth, leading the firm to say we are in the “Age of the Customer.” A similar report by the Temkin Group showed a correlation between CX ratings and the future purchasing intentions of customers across 20 industries.

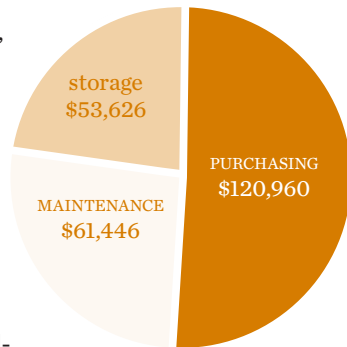
All that adds up to compelling evidence for embracing CX as a core part of business.

6. CX Creates Value for Customers Too

In a **survey of 450 B2B buyers**, only 45% felt they got the value from the product or service they needed or expected. So how can you set up your customer for success after they buy your product?

SUMMARY OF COSTS	EXISTING METHOD	APPLIED SYSTEM	APPLIED SAVINGS
Purchasing	\$161,280	\$40,320	\$120,960
Maintenance	\$100,548	\$39,102	\$61,446
Storage Area	\$71,501	\$17,875	\$53,626
Totals	\$333,329	\$97,297	\$236,032

GE's platform for the Internet of Things, Predix, creates a new opportunity to help customers get the needed value from their purchases. Sensors in GE machines collect data that tell GE and the customer how their machines are performing and send alerts if there are potential problems that need service or repair. But just as important, Predix gives customers real-time performance metrics documenting that the equipment, and ultimately GE, is meeting its value proposition.



Applied Industrial Technologies, a distributor of specialty replacement bearings, power transmission components and fluid power products, is using such reporting both internally and externally. A custom software program tracks the IoT-related cost savings delivered to customers through improved maintenance, inventory management and lower energy consumption.

AIT then rewards its employees who save the most for customers. The company estimates it has delivered more than \$100 million in savings to customers using this approach.

Imagine how those customers must feel when they receive a product—and a document showing they are cost-savings heroes for their organization? That’s an interaction that drives customer loyalty.

7. The Returns on CX Investment

CX is often one of the first areas cut when revenues are down. We’ve seen this reality at GE. In an internal CX survey, many employees pointed to belt-tightening periods in their departments when customer service and support staff were let go.

Further, there can be resistance to investing time and resources in CX in the first place. As one GE employee told us, there’s deep skepticism about the idea that GE can prevail through superior customer experience, and therefore reluctance to aggressively pursue new customer-support initiatives.

Most B2B brands don’t put their heart—or their wallet—into customer experience. They spend just enough to keep pace with a crowded field of competitors that all offer OK-level service. But as this [Accenture study](#) argues, if a B2B company isn’t over-investing to improve both traditional and digital experiences for customers, it might be wasting its money.

It takes time and a major investment to break out of the pack. But as we’re seeing, these efforts are well worth it for the customer, for employees and for the bottom line.

8. What CX Means for the Bottom Line

Delivering a great experience for the customer feels rewarding. Unfortunately, the accompanying warm glow may not convince decision-makers to invest in needed CX improvements. In fact, CX is often one of the first areas cut when revenues are down.

As we explore the latest thinking on CX, it's becoming clear that strong CX can lift revenues. In [an Oracle survey of 1,300 senior executives](#), respondents estimated that failing to offer a consistently positive consumer experience could equal a loss of 20% of annual revenue. That executive hunch is backed up by data from Forrester Research. In [a study from 2015](#), the firm found that CX leaders consistently outpaced CX laggards on growth. One particularly noteworthy example came from airlines, where revenues at the top-rated CX company grew five times faster than those at the most poorly rated company.

Here are two examples we encountered where companies saw enormous financial benefits from investing in CX.

Sometimes spending a little saves a lot. In 2012, Sprint invested in rooting out the most common sources of customer complaints. This led to a lower volume of calls to their customer service lines and fewer credits issued to customers, which the CEO said added up to a savings of \$1.7 billion per year.

Qumulo, a provider of enterprise data storage, assigns each customer a “success team.” Its goal isn't just to raise Net Promoter Scores. The team uses client interactions to gather valuable insight into how Qumulo products are being used, which feeds into decisions on new features and updates.

9. Personalization

Ever feel like a business loses track of who you are?

We've all felt like an account number instead of an individual when dealing with a business. Either that or we've had our service call bounced from department to department, with each new rep having no record of everything that came before.

A 2015 [Altimeter](#) report summed up these frustrations neatly: "Today's customers don't care whether they're talking to the marketing department or the service department. To them, there's only one brand, and they demand to be recognized across the entire company as the same, unique individual."

In the past it may have been difficult to track customer interactions, but today there's no excuse. Cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) programs now easily catalogue interactions across the entire company. Good use of CRM pays dividends. Customers feel recognized and businesses gain a more complete view of each customer. What sort of marketing does he or she respond to? Which products and offers may hold appeal? Which services may be needed soon?

Put another way, looking at customers as more than just numbers in a transaction allows companies to get more transactions out of those customers. [Gartner projects](#) that companies investing in personalization will outsell their competitors by 20% in 2018.

For inspiration, here are two great examples we came across.

EBay's goal is to create a landing page that is completely unique to each user. "What you see won't be the same thing as 160 million other people [see]," CEO Devin Wenig said at [the 2016 Code Conference](#). How does providing such a granular level of personalization in product recommendations serve both the business and the customer?

JM Bruneau, a B2B supplier of office products, **increased conversion rates by 250%** after incorporating an algorithm that predicted the products each customer was most likely to reorder. The company then used this data to create targeted emails for customers.

10. Sucking It Up

In industries with few or no other options for customers, a bad experience can almost be expected. There's just not much incentive for organizations to improve things if poor service isn't costing them business.

Who hasn't encountered businesses that project this "suck-it-up" attitude. Perhaps a vital piece of technology was sold. Or the time and expense of switching providers was substantial. But that mindset is risky today; in most industries, technology is letting new competitors enter the market almost overnight.

But even the most indifferent organizations can affect a mindset change on CX. And if you're looking for inspiration, look no further than those responsible for airport screening lines.

You may recall that last spring the issue of airport security lines was all over the news. American Airlines said some 70,000 of its passengers missed flights because they were stuck in security lines. At Chicago's O'Hare International, the average wait during peak travel times was 104 minutes. The situation got so bad that airlines brought in therapy mini-horses to soothe travelers, and airports were threatening to take over security screening from TSA altogether.

What happened next, however, wasn't the total disaster everyone was anticipating. Over July 4th, the average wait time nationally was just 10 minutes. By August, the **average time at O'Hare fell to just 6 minutes**.

Three things led to this incredible turnaround. For starters, Congress gave more money to the TSA, which enabled it to hire additional screeners and convert some 3,000 part-time screeners to full-time. The agency also encouraged more flyers to sign up for PreCheck, the program that allows travelers to skip the line and keep their shoes on. After a promotional campaign, membership in the program doubled over what it had been in 2015. Finally, airlines deployed employees to tasks that kept security lines moving, such as collecting and restocking the bins.

In short, the TSA showed that it could change by:

- *Projecting that it was aware of the problem.*
- *Committing additional resources to fixing it.*
- *Promoting a program that gave frequent travelers an alternative to the hassle.*
- *Working with its partners, the airlines, to reduce other bottlenecks.*

Awareness, commitment, alternatives, partnerships—all are essential for any business looking to create a CX change.

11. Amplifying Your Advocates

Before customers pull the trigger on an order, they often look for what's called "social proof." What's that? Reassurance from other customers, peers or colleagues that their choice is the correct one.

Social proof comes in many forms, including online product reviews and ratings, customer or expert testimonials and direct referrals. A survey from marketing firm [Demandbase](#) found that when investigating a product or service, B2B buyers turn first to industry experts, then to peers and colleagues and then to web

searches. In another study, Google found that **60% of B2B tech customers** searched for peer reviews online before making purchasing decisions.

As Intuit founder Scott Cook put it in an oft-cited quote: “A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer—it is what consumers tell each other it is.”

Social proof has acquired a major pitfall in the age of social media: It can be bought, manipulated or faked. One marketer we read about created a social proof campaign for a nonexistent product as an experiment. It was so convincing that the imaginary product won a customer experience award.

While this might seem to undermine the value of online ratings and reviews, companies ignore social proof at their peril. Indeed, they often want to amplify the voices of their advocates, especially experts and industry peers whom customers can trust.

Here are two examples we’ve come across for effectively tapping into social proof.

A survey from Nielsen found that **84% of people** find recommendations from friends and relatives the most trustworthy source of information. Not surprising that many services incentivize existing customers to become brand advocates to their friends by offering discounts and other rewards for successful referrals.

Employees are also brand advocates. One of the first search results for any company, for instance, is employee reviews from Glassdoor. What sort of impressions would a prospective customer gain from a review from an ex-employee praising the company for being innovative and customer obsessed?

Reducing Pain & Making Things Simple

12. Keeping Your Promises

13. Response Time

14. Delivery

15. Returns

16. Security

17. Content and Customer Experience

18. Learning from Best Practices

19. Is the Customer Survey Dead?

12. Keeping Your Promises

Is there anything more frustrating than a broken promise? Whether it's due to that no-show friend who was supposed to help you move or a service company that failed to deliver on deadline, situations that are already stressful are made more so when whoever was coming fails to follow through.

And yet we seem to be hardwired to be optimistic with our promises. It's hard to say no to a friend asking for help, or to tell a potential client that you won't be able to meet that timeline. As Clint Eastwood's iconic character Dirty Harry once put it, "A man's got to know his limitations." The same can be said for businesses.

Think of your own role and department. Which systems are in place to keep your team from over-promising? Are staffers straightforward about what they can deliver to clients—and when? Or are they incentivized to set unrealistic schedules?

PROBLEM

You'd expect Silicon Valley to be the last place it'd be difficult to get Internet service, but that's exactly what happened to one startup when signing up for service from Comcast. Not only was Comcast unable to install the service in the first place, but that provider attempted to charge thousands in additional fees once the customer tried to cancel the contract.

SOLUTION?

While this was a major misstep that garnered bad press in a key market, Comcast has more generally been trying to improve accountability in dealing with local service calls. The company tested an Uber-like app in several markets that lets customers geo-track their technician so they can see if he's on his way.

13. Response Time

UBER

Uber manages customer issues through its app. Customers are given a range of problems to leave feedback on, sometimes taking a day or two to respond via email. Would it help Uber to provide more channels for customer feedback, or would this risk overwhelming an already overtaxed support team?

JETBLUE

JetBlue has the highest rated customer satisfaction of any airline, with multiple channels for addressing customer issues, including phone, email and Twitter. Tweets directed to the company's page regularly earn a response within minutes. Not only do they have a reputation for responding quickly, but the company consistently follows up to get to the root of the problem.

It's clear which of the above companies places a higher priority on CX. Which approach is closer to the way your team responds to customer issues?

14. Delivery

What is the usual consumer experience with product delivery? If an order is placed with Amazon or Zappos, several options are offered for delivery speed, with a corresponding cost. After completing the order, an email confirmation with the delivery date arrives. Further messages and package-tracking information are transmitted once the order ships.

The process is seamless and reassuring.

These delivery experiences for personal purchases are changing corporate purchasers' expectations when they place a B2B order.

How are GE's departments rising to meet these expectations?

- *Do customers have an option to pay extra for faster delivery?*
- *Do they know exactly when their orders will arrive?*
- *Is there an ongoing stream of communication through the shipping and delivery process?*

It's not just online retailers who are changing customer expectations around delivery. Ride-share service Uber, with its live map of available drivers, is setting a new standard for how customers expect to track their ride from point A to point B.

Now, startups such as Convoy and Cargomatic are Uber-izing the B2B trucking world. These services enable shippers to find available empty space on trucks; and they are also able to track their shipments throughout the journey to final delivery.

15. Returns

A customer calls to order a needed part. After going over the specifications with a service rep, he or she thinks the issue is solved. But when the box arrives, amid the packing peanuts and bubble wrap is ... the wrong part.

Disappointment is always a bummer. The question is, what happens *after* a customer doesn't get the desired item?

Maybe the shipping center got the wrong part number, or the service rep misunderstood the order. It doesn't matter *why* this happened. The result is hassle. Not only does it lead to unplanned downtime, but the customer must repeat the process of trying to get the needed part, and deal with returning the wrong part.

Higher rates of return are part of doing business remotely. In the B2C world, around 30% of all online orders ultimately get returned. Chances are as a consumer you've had seamless return experiences as well as ones where the company made it harder

than it should have been. How did that color your view of that company?

Now consider the experience GE customers have. How quickly are responses made when customers reach out with a return issue? How easy is it for them to send something back?

The top B2C sites for returns offer free shipping, with no questions asked—and thus minimum hassle. B2B returns are typically more complicated, but even clearly stating your return policy from the start can have a positive impact.

16. Security

What is the right balance between securing customer data and enabling easy transactions?

Credit card companies in particular confront this question. Per the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the second most common complaints about credit cards, behind billing disputes, concern theft and fraud. Clearly, keeping both money and credit rating safe is a top priority for customers. But it's also frustrating when purchases are declined—a problem that is particularly common while traveling.

Then there is the line of questioning customers face when they get the credit card company on the phone.

“Can I have your full name? The last four of your social? Your mother's maiden name? Your pin? Your security code? What is the name of your childhood best friend ...?”

When thinking of the procedures each GE department uses to protect customer data, consideration should be given to how much they enhance security, versus simply creating more hassle for the customer.

DECLINED

Ever have your card declined while picking up the check for a business dinner? How embarrassing! The card companies want to protect you from charges they don't recognize, but shouldn't they check with you before giving you an unpleasant surprise?

JUST CHECKING ...

Mobile text alerts can offer a non-intrusive way to verify purchases; helping to avoid embarrassment and a frustrating call to customer service.

Which tools do you use to communicate potential issues with a customer?

17. Content and Customer Experience

How would you describe GE? As an industrial company? A digital company? A digital-industrial company?

What about describing it as a content company?

Web content is a crucial marketing tool. What's the first thing your customers do when starting to research a new purchasing decision? They go to Google. Marketers know this is a pivotal moment in their customers' decision journey. A survey of marketers discovered that 70% of them are creating more content than ever before.

What exactly are customers finding about GE products? Case studies and customer success stories? Video tutorials on the services the company can deliver?

Content continues to be valuable after the sale is made. In fact, it can help customers learn to get the most from products and services.

Here are two B2B examples we came across of companies using content to engage with customers and position themselves as solution providers.

Lenovo created a series of humorous IT survival guides to engage the professionals they work with. The guides make light of the issues the IT professionals encounter—like spilled coffee and dead mouse batteries—and encouraged sharing more stories using #usershappen. The campaign had the net effect of doubling prospect engagement for Lenovo.

Content isn't always direct marketing. Sometimes just informing customers about topics that are important to them is an effective method of engagement. That's the goal of GE Reports, which since 2008 has highlighted stories about energy, innovation, advanced manufacturing, digital transformation and more. Consider the impression you are left with after seeing a well-researched post or paper on a topical issue that has a direct impact on your business.

18. Learning from Best Practices

Three areas that we know have room for improvement at GE are simple pricing, simple purchase experiences and product education. Below are best practices from some external companies that might inform how these CX facets could be transformed.

Simple Pricing

The most important factor for turning B2B buyers into return purchasers, Forrester found, is transparent pricing.

National Instruments, a distributor of testing equipment, faced the challenge of providing accurate and detailed pricing information. "There are too many navigation options, too many products that are similar, but not the same," said Nathan Schatz, the company's global manager of e-commerce. "It's too difficult to find key product information. There's just too much in general."

To address this challenge, the company created simpler product navigation and standardized the product data on its site. It

started with the products customers searched for most often, making them easier to find. It also clarified descriptions, added images and created a product-comparison feature.

Simple Purchasing

Every B2B customer wants procurement to be as simple as buying on Amazon.com. As Christine Dover, a digital commerce researcher at IDC, told Forbes, “For years I’ve been going to procurement software events hosted by vendors, Amazon is always their reference point for usability. ‘Why can’t buying for my business be as easy as shopping on Amazon?’”

Now that there’s Amazon Business, that wish might come true. “Many B2B sellers are interested in launching their own commerce sites because of the many benefits they provide,” said Jason Daigler, research director for digital commerce at Gartner. “Amazon Business will be a viable service or supplementary offering for many of these sellers.”

In fact, some **92% of B2B buyers** already use Amazon to research purchases for work and **82%** of them make purchases there.

Product Education

Finding information on GE products isn’t easy enough for customers. And even once they’ve bought a GE product, customers don’t always get guidance on new equipment or servicing GE offers.

“There’s a difference between just being able to operate a piece of equipment and understanding that equipment,” one GE healthcare employee explained. “Buyers need the latter if they’re going to excel at serving patients.”

One model for how to improve in this area comes from Indium Corporation, a materials supplier primarily known for selling industrial solder. That company saw enormous sales increases after its sales engineers began blogging to answer customers’ most pressing questions. So, are you having trouble avoiding solder joint voids in robotics soldering? There’s a **video blog post** on exactly that.

19. Is the Customer Survey Dead?

If you so much as opened an Internet browser today, you've probably already been asked to fill out a quick customer survey. Maybe more than once.

These ubiquitous pop-up web questionnaires mean "survey fatigue" has set in for GE customers. So how to get honest, valuable, actionable feedback from those who do business with GE?

Timing matters. Research from survey provider CheckMarket found that the best times for B2B customer surveys are on Mondays before noon. Brevity helps. Data from SurveyMonkey show that the more numerous and open-ended your questions, the lower the completion rate.

But the key ingredient is loyalty. The higher customer loyalty is, the more informative will be the responses. Customers want to feel that their effort to respond will spur actual improvements. So, if they aren't already loyal customers invested in making business improvements, the next best thing may be suggesting that your business is eager to earn their loyalty.

Here are two methods for surveying customers that we found of interest. Would you be more inclined to respond to one method over the other? Why?

More company surveys are beginning to resemble the reaction buttons on Facebook. While lacking depth, these easy to complete surveys do offer a snapshot of the customer's emotion. What does the "Like" button for your business look like?

In another approach, some companies choose to publish all customer feedback publicly online. What does it say about a company that it has the confidence to make customer reviews available for anyone to read?

The Human Side

20. Getting Emotional

21. When Empathy isn't Enough

22. Taking Control in Customer Interactions

23. Engineering a Better Experience

24. Customers Aren't Rational (and Neither are You)

25. Customers are Scared of Losing

26. Minimizing Human Error

20. Getting Emotional

Attending to the emotional side of CX can also contribute to business Growth.

Corporate purchasing can be emotionally charged; the stakes are high for the individuals involved. A bad personal customer experience is frustrating, sure, but a business customer potentially has his or her job on the line when making a major decision.

Unfortunately, because of issues with customer feedback, it can be hard to know what's going through customers' minds. A [Gallup survey](#), for instance, found that only 29% of B2B customers feel engaged with their suppliers or vendors, while 60% are indifferent and 11% are actively disengaged.

So how can you forge an emotional connection?

It helps to have employees who exhibit empathy. For an organization, that also means creating a customer-centric environment—one where decision-making is oriented around customers' needs.

Take it from the head of one of the most successful, customer-centric organizations in the world: Amazon. At the 2016 Code Conference on technology, CEO Jeff Bezos discussed how the customer is at the heart of everything. “We never think of ourselves as tied to any particular technology or skill set. We think of ourselves as tied to our customers and we're trying to work backwards from their needs. And we'll learn whatever skills we need to service our customers.”

Here are two examples we've seen of companies that found creative ways to create customer empathy and use emotional connections to their advantage.

Most of Facebook's employees tote Apple iPhones, but 80% of the world's mobile users are on Android devices. So the company

replaced many of its employees' iPhones with Android devices. On top of that, it reduced its internet connection speeds. The goal? To give those employees the same daily Facebook experience that most mobile users have.

Superior Essex, a manufacturer of copper and fiber communications cables, became the first in its industry to earn a zero-waste to landfill certification. There was no immediate cost savings to the company, but this designation appealed to customers' emotional desire to protect the environment. And that helped boost market share.

21. When Empathy Isn't Enough

It's hard to grasp what "customer success" truly means without having empathy for the customer. But is empathy enough?

Writing in *The New York Times Magazine*, culture expert Amanda Hess explained that empathy is a dispassionate approach to understanding how other people think and feel. In the business arena, she added, "you're not trying to understand other people out of altruism or moral responsibility; you're doing it out of self-interest."

That may work for engineers or product designers (or CEOs). But those who focus on the customer experience—and try to build customer success—may need less psychological insight and vicarious frustration. What's called for instead is genuine concern for the customer.

In fact, what we may really need to improve CX is compassion.

Psychologist Paul Bloom, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, suggests that compassion means "caring about others, valuing their fates." Or, in CX lingo that can be interpreted as being committed to others' success.

Bloom cites psychological research studies that found empathy for suffering is, in fact, difficult and unpleasant and can lead to burnout. By contrast, when staffers were trained to express compassion, the result was kinder behavior toward others. Compassion, Bloom concludes, “has all the benefits of empathy and few of the costs.”

So, when considering customers’ needs, understanding their problems will only produce limited results. What’s called for is moving beyond feeling their pain—and stepping into the space where that pain can be alleviated.

22. Taking Control in Customer Interactions

Personality matters—especially when it comes to dealing effectively with customers’ problems.

Research published in the Harvard Business Review finds that managers aren’t necessarily hiring the personality types CX demands today. A study of 1,440 frontline customer representatives identified 7 unique customer service personalities, each approaching the job differently.

The most common personality type (32%) is the Empathizer—which should not be a surprise to anyone following the CX conversation. Indeed, 42% of hiring managers said they favored this profile. But while Empathizers are best at listening to the problems of their customers, they are not the best at fixing them.

That distinction goes to the Controller personality types. Controllers exert their expertise and offer straightforward solutions. “Not only do they proactively diagnose customer issues, but they also consider the customer’s personality and the context of the call in order to customize a solution and present it effectively,” write Matthew Dixon, Lara Ponomareff and Rick DeLisi of CEB.

The thing is, the problems customers call about have gotten much more complicated in recent years. The easy stuff is now siphoned off by chatbots and online self-service. So no one is calling customer service unless there's a pretty thorny problem. And Controllers excel at solving problems. Yet only 2% of managers said they'd seek out this personality type to hire.

23. Engineering a Better Experience

The goal is always to leave the customer happy—that is, with a solution that requires minimal effort on her or his part. But let's face it: you can't always get what you want. Regulatory or security issues get in the way. Or maybe a different department dropped the ball. What then?

It's time for some experience engineering. That's the best euphemism ever for putting a good spin on a bad situation.

An experiment by CEB's Matthew Dixon **shows how it works, and why it makes a difference to be purposeful with the words you use**. In one example, a customer is faced with a single option—he needs to bring his bike to a particular shop for repairs—but the news is delivered in two different ways.

“You're best off bringing it into the repair shop,” the first rep says.

“I'll pass your feedback on to the engineering department and check the database to see if a simple fix is possible, but I recommend you bring the bicycle to the shop,” says the second rep.

You can probably guess which of these responses earned 67% higher quality and 77% lower customer effort scores.

Here, three things to consider when trying to experience-engineer a less-than-ideal outcome with careful language.

Advocate: Communicate what you're doing to actively support your customer with language that conveys certainty (e.g. "I will take this next step for you ...").

Use positive language: Certain words, such as "can't" or "unable," cause knee-jerk negative reactions. Always try to frame answers in terms like "I can," "you can" and "we are able to ..."

Throw out an anchor: Posing a less desirable option first makes the second choice you offer seem more appealing. (Sales people may know this gambit as "alternative positioning.") This approach is even more effective when options are explained in terms of the potential benefits to the customer.

24. Customers Aren't Rational (and Neither are You)

When envisioning how customers reach decisions, we usually apply a lens of standard economics. We imagine that an individual will seek out options, evaluate the pros and cons of each and make a choice that best meets his needs.

But such logical decision-making is half myth. Decisions are heavily swayed by how options are presented, or how a choice might affect what others think of them, as well as other factors.

As Dan Ariely, professor of psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University and author of "[Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions](#)," explains, "These irrational behaviors of ours are neither random nor senseless. They are systematic, and since we repeat them again and again, predictable."

So there is a method to the madness—and if we understand it, we can use it to lead customers to the best outcome.

In their book "[Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness](#)," Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler

discuss ways to improve an individual's decision by shaping how options are presented to him They break this down into **six principles of good-choice architecture**:

Defaults: Where do customers begin their decision? What is the path of least resistance? What can be made automatic, like renewing monthly subscriptions?

Expect Errors: When you know what the common mistakes are, how can you help customers avoid them? An example in the book is how Gmail would prompt you to make sure you'd attached a document to an email if you mentioned the word "attachment" in the message.

Give Feedback: Can you insert warnings if things are going off the track, for instance, if a product is incompatible with something the customer has bought before?

Understand "Mapping": This means that the way an attribute is described may not be how the customer is going to make sense of it. Ongoing service costs (or savings) are particularly difficult for consumers to compare without clear guidance.

Structure Complex Choices: How are the choices organized for customers, and are they too limiting? Do great products get filtered out by strict price caps? Are there multiple paths to discover, like picking a movie on Netflix by genre, actor or director?

Incentives: Think about how economic incentives are often invisible to the consumer. The authors put it this way: "Suppose the thermostat in your home was programmed to tell you the cost per hour of lowering the temperature a few degrees during a heat wave. This would probably have more effect on your behavior than quietly raising the price of electricity."

For Sunstein and Thaler, these considerations are a valuable tool that public agencies can use to nudge citizens to make better choices, say, for example, about their health care. But companies can do the same, not just pushing for sales, but encouraging clients to make choices that are best for their long-term health and success.

25. Customers are Scared of Losing

CX initiatives often have the goal of delighting customers. But it turns out there's an even more powerful emotion to be cognizant of: **loss aversion**.

Customers—like humans in general—really, really hate losing. This impulse is so powerful that, as a study from Cognitive Brain Research found, “typically, losses have at least twice the impact of equivalent gains.”

Confused? Consider **the following experiment**:

Test subjects are given \$50 and told they can either A) Keep \$30 of it; or B) Gamble it all with a 50/50 chance of keeping or losing the entire amount. In this scenario, only 43% gamble.

Another group of test subjects are given \$50 and told they can either A) Lose \$20 of it; or B) Gamble it all with a 50/50 chance of keeping or losing all \$50. Presented this way, 61% of respondents chose to gamble.

The outcome for option A in both cases is the same—the person has a guaranteed \$30 in his pocket—but it is significantly less appealing when framed as the result of a loss.

The fear of loss can be a powerful motivator, especially when followed up with **examples of how that loss can be avoided**. Giving customers something up front, like store credit—which they then don't want to forfeit—is another way of influencing how they feel about an interaction.

26. Minimizing Human Error

When creating a CX improvement program, or deciding how to implement it, the best laid plans often don't pan out. We try to make things easier for our customers—but wind up adding tedium or having no real impact at all.

Why can't we see the pitfalls before we stumble into them, taking customers with us? Our footing is more solid if we can anticipate some common errors, such as:

The planning fallacy: We tend to underestimate how much time and money a project will require. When dealing with customers, the instinct is to assuage their concerns about costs and effort, but what we're doing is setting ourselves up to fail and for customers to be frustrated by the experience.

Overconfidence: When we're too certain about a solution, we overlook what could go wrong—or fail to consider a different solution that might work better for the customer.

Being egocentric: It can be useful to ask what you would want if you were in the customer's shoes, but the assumptions that grow out of this thinking won't always be correct.

Framing effects: The way options are presented has undue influence on our decisions. In the case of a CX program, framing can cause us to favor options that minimize losses, or that have short-term payoffs but not long-term stability.

So how can a CX team avoid making these mistakes in its thinking? Below are some tips we've come across that can help those leading or contributing to CX programs.

Assign roles

Before discussing the problem at hand, assign all participants the information they should be called on to contribute. For CX, this may mean making each team member responsible for a step in the customer journey or a particular pain point.

Appoint a devil's advocate

What would your most dissatisfied customers say about you? Appointing a single person to voice this role can help vet your way of thinking, removing the pressure your employees might feel to obscure the flaws and failings of your business.

Establish contrarian teams

Assign a group to find mistakes and vulnerabilities within each option or plan—with an eye to pinpointing aspects that might frustrate customers.

Technology of Today & Tomorrow

27. Chatbots

28. Drones

29. Virtual Reality

30. Augmented Reality

31. The Internet of Things

32. Blockchain and CX

27. Chatbots

We've all waited on hold for 20 minutes for a phone representative to make a simple change to an order. Likewise, how much time have we wasted scrolling through “support” web pages looking for a simple solution or bit of information?

Now chatbots—which use artificial intelligence and natural language processing—are taking some of the delay and frustration out of customer service. More and more, chatbots are automating information retrieval and some basic customer service tasks.

Just check out these examples from the hospitality industry.

IVY, a smart texting service for hotels, is designed to be a virtual concierge. It texts a welcome message to guests and provides instant answers to simple questions such as “What’s the Wi-Fi password?”

Hotel Tonight has built a chat-concierge into its app. Called Aces, it helps guests with their booking and provides local recommendations. Using messages, users can ask for late check-out, get a toothbrush or find the nearest tiki bar.

This generation of AI-supported chatbots is reducing the number of rote tasks that demand attention from a human. That frees up customer support reps to go above and beyond, when needed, pushing customer experience beyond mere satisfaction—to delight.

The development of these artificial-intelligence powered systems has exploded. The first big surge, ever since Facebook made it open to chatbot developers, has been within the Messenger app.

But “**conversational commerce**” could also be a staple on WhatsApp and WeChat, or even virtual assistants like Apple’s Siri, Microsoft’s Cortana, Amazon’s Alexa or Google’s Assistant. When all goes right, chatbots can instantly connect customers to the service or information they need on a convenient channel.

MasterCard's KAI, **launched in 2017**, enables cardholders and merchants to access their account right through Facebook Messenger. Beyond looking up basic functions like checking transactions, users can access rewards programs or cardholder benefits, as well as receive personalized information on their spending habits.

eBay is testing its **ShopBot** Beta on Facebook Messenger as well. The more a user interacts with this ShopBot, the better it tailors and filters choices for them. eBay is also striving to make ShopBot capable of receiving requests in the form of images. For example, users could send a picture of shoes they want and ShopBot would suggest a matching item.

But will B2B customers also want to reach out through Facebook Messenger? Many B2B companies have been hesitant to pursue chatbots. But consumer-facing companies' chatbots show that this trend is reshaping how customers interact with businesses. How long until customers come to expect such interaction in the B2B world?

28. Drones

On June 13, 2016, GE launched its second season of Drone Week on Facebook Live. That week showed off the GE technology that powered Rio during the Summer Olympic Games. (In 2015, Drone Week offered a virtual tour of where jet engines, locomotives, wind turbines and industrial machinery are manufactured and put to the test.)

While Drone Week is primarily an example of creating content to engage consumers, it got us thinking about the CX implications of the technology. Drones, in fact, may play an increasing role in resolving a number of CX headaches, from improving delivery times to boosting tracking assets in the field to improving security and much more.

Here's how we've seen some other businesses put drones to work for their customers.

How do you make it quick and easy to inspect a wind turbine (or any other tall structure)? Robotics startup Prenav is using drones to inspect nuts, bolts and cables; record serial numbers and measurements; and assess damage to cell towers and wind turbines. Put that ladder away!

Network Rail, which manages the infrastructure for most of the railways in England, Scotland and Wales, has used drones to survey rail conditions along a stretch of hard-to-access sea wall. The assessment completed in a single day by drone had previously taken 30 days using traditional methods.

29. Virtual Reality

Virtual reality was the talk of every media, tech and innovation festival from SXSW to E3 to Cannes Lions in 2016. Decades after clunky helmets first hinted that VR could be a viable technology, we finally have sleek and (somewhat) affordable VR headsets rolled out from the likes of PlayStation, HTC, Samsung and Oculus (owned by Facebook).

The implications for VR go well beyond gaming and entertainment. In fact, VR has already found unexpected uses in health-care, such as distracting burn victims from the pain of their injuries, or relieving phantom pain in amputees. The aviation world has used VR for years to better train pilots. And on the consumer side, VR is making its way into car dealerships as a way of giving customers a test drive right in the showroom.

As VR technology becomes more accessible and widespread, it will play an increasingly significant role in the customer experience.

Think of engineers “walking through” a factory before it is even built. Or customers being trained how to install, operate or repair equipment on a virtual simulation, helping them get the most value from their assets.

Here are some of the ways companies already are using VR to create better results for their customers.

Ford is designing entire vehicles, from the engine to the seats, in a virtual environment. This lets engineers make important design choices earlier, reducing the number of costly physical models that need to be created and allowing for greater creative freedom.

Unmanned oil and gas platforms can now operate miles under the ocean’s surface, reducing the costs and risks posed by off-shore drilling. To give customers a view of how these hard-to-reach platforms will be built and operated, GE developed a VR simulation which [you can see here](#).

30. Augmented Reality

What’s the difference between virtual reality and augmented reality? VR places its user inside an immersive but fully digital world. AR simply superimposes images or data over reality.

The latter’s capability was most simply shown off by 2016’s most popular app/game, Pokémon GO. It gave players an ability they didn’t even know they wanted: spotting and catching Pokémon characters in the world around them by looking through the screen of their smartphones.

The rapid uptake of the game by millions of users showed off AR’s practical advantages. First, the gear required for AR is less bulky than the headsets needed for VR. And because AR applications can be hosted on something as mobile and ubiquitous as the screen of a smartphone, the experience or information can

be shared almost anywhere. That makes it useful not just for games, but also for consumers and businesses.

“In a VR situation, you’re isolating yourself from everyone around you and entering this completely virtual space. AR is designed to enhance the things you do as a human being,” said John Hanke, CEO of Niantic, the developer behind Pokémon GO.

In fact, many businesses already have considered using AR technology for everything from manufacturing to employee training to sales and marketing demonstrations.

Here’s how AR is already being used by businesses, including by GE.

Colin Parris, vice president of GE Software Research, discussed how customers could use AR devices like Microsoft HoloLens to peer into a digital twin of a physical machine. This technology could help customers predict when parts will need to be serviced and foresee breakdowns without having to take the machinery apart.

Caterpillar is using AR through an iPad app as a major upgrade to printed user manuals for its portable generators. The application has been particularly helpful to those renting generators, who are often new to the machines. The AR app has been shown to be the more effective way of filling in gaps in their knowledge.

31. The Internet of Things

As Internet of Things technologies have transitioned from hype to maturity, GE has been at the forefront with its Predix platform.

As a GE employee, you may already be working with Predix today.

For those less familiar with such systems, terms like the Internet of Things, industrial internet, ambient technology, M2M (machine-to-machine) or “smart” anything refer to more or less the same thing: internet-connected devices that absorb data via sensors and respond accordingly.

GE Digital CEO Bill Ruh estimated Predix will be bringing in **more than \$15 billion a year** by 2020. Thinking even bigger-picture, McKinsey projects that IoT may create more than **\$11 trillion a year** in global economic value by 2025.

But beyond these implications for revenue and productivity, IoT has enormous potential to reshape the overall customer experience.

In the past, the communication between GE and its customers was mostly limited to sales or service interactions. Now, IoT-connected machines stream data that continuously links GE to its customers to monitor potential problems, enable timely repairs, reduce downtime and make performance adjustments to help customers make the most of their industrial machines.

Caterpillar had pushed to have every machine coming off its line functioning as a connected device by the summer of 2016. According to CEO Doug Oberhelman, the company was also testing an iPad/iPhone app with 100 customers, allowing them to track the health, run rate, productivity and any other factor impacting a single machine or entire fleet.

GE’s Asset Performance Management, a suite of cloud-based software and service solutions powered by Predix, is used to monitor wear and tear on industrial equipment. In one example, the service promptly detected irregular performance in a compressor for an oil and gas customer—and this early catch saved the customer approximately \$67,000.

32. Blockchain and CX

Blockchain might be vaguely familiar as the technology behind the digital currency Bitcoin. But experts are forecasting that this digital innovation will have ramifications that extend beyond the financial realm to affect every kind of transaction, whether it's intellectual property or personal data.

In fact, the [World Economic Forum](#) predicted that by 2025, 10% of global GDP will be stored on blockchain-based digital currencies.

So what is blockchain exactly? [Harvard Business Review](#) seems to define blockchain most simply:

“At its most basic, blockchain is a vast, global distributed ledger or database running on millions of devices and open to anyone, where not just information but anything of value—money, titles, deeds, music, art, scientific discoveries, intellectual property and even votes—can be moved and stored securely and privately.”

What may be most exciting about this technology is that it allows two parties to create a transfer of value that does not require a bank, national currency or any institution to ensure its legitimacy.

So what's this got to do with CX?

For starters, blockchain will lead to more seamless payments between parties. It also promises to change how we record and transfer all sorts of information, whether that's a contract or a piece of software. Blockchain may also be the key to making connections secure between assets in the growing Internet of Things.

But don't just take our word for it. Here's how some companies already see this tech improving CX.

The French bank [Crédit Mutuel Arkéa](#) worked with IBM Blockchain to create a new system for verifying customers' identities

and tracking their information. This improved the security of customer data, sped up transactions and made it easier for the company to identify individual customers throughout an interaction.

The US Postal Service is exploring how blockchain could improve service and cut costs. A [USPS report](#) highlighted the potential benefits of using blockchain to expand financial services like international money transfers, manage its supply chain and vehicles, verify employee identities and track and identify packages.

Lessons from GE

33. You Talked, We Listened

34. Click to Chat

35. Orderbot

Seamless Service with GE Healthcare

A Focus on Customer Success

Motivating & Supporting Customer Service Teams

33. You Talked, We Listened

The greatest source of inspiration and ideas during our CX initiative has been GE's employees.

Early on, a survey was sent to thousands of employees throughout the company, asking for their insights into the CX challenges currently being faced. Its results helped in identifying nine key areas that GE needs to focus on.

Timeliness

GE customers now expect immediate responses to their questions and concerns. And yet they sometimes feel as though their inquiries disappear into a "black pit," as one GE Healthcare employee told us. Is this driven by poor or unclear accountability, or is there something deeper going on that needs to be addressed?

Customer Focus

The overarching goal of CX is to instill a customer-centric mindset across GE. "We don't really consider the customer's needs in our daily activities," one Oil & Gas employee reported. A Lighting employee explained that "GE processes are often focused on what is good for GE and not really the customer." It seems plenty of work lies ahead.

Measurement & Data

It's hard to know if the needle on CX has been moved without consistent metrics to refer to. Having a single approach to journey mapping throughout the business can be a helpful first step toward uniform metrics.

Terms & Conditions

One of the most frequently mentioned areas of concern from our survey was the intricacy of Terms & Conditions. Negotiating deals is hard enough before having to worry about the fine print.

Delivery

Missing a delivery date is bad. Frustration compounds, though, when customers are left in the dark as to when their shipment

will in fact arrive. One employee relayed these words from a customer: “I expect the information I see to be 100% accurate, and I also expect the customer to contact me when something goes wrong with my order, not the other way around.”

Simplification

Stop us if you’ve heard this one before: GE has too many internal processes. Its corporate red tape is hard enough for employees to navigate, let alone for any poor customer who gets caught up in it.

Communication

Many respondents pointed out that customers don’t know whom to contact when they have specific issues. How can we ensure a customer always can find and connect with the right person or department when a problem arises?

Website

Customers don’t always try to contact a GE representative to solve a problem. Increasingly, they first try to answer their questions themselves on GE’s websites. But the information customers need isn’t always readily accessible.

Educating the Customer

How thoroughly are customers trained? Every business needs to be careful not to cut the cord with customers prematurely. We want customers to know how get the most out of the products and services they buy from GE.

34. Click to Chat: Making customer service as tech-savvy as GE lightbulbs

When customers have a question about a product, how do they look for the company's contact information? Maybe they have a folder of neatly organized warranties (or more likely a junk drawer stuffed with outdated user manuals) with toll-free phone numbers highlighted. But more likely, they start with Google.

Great, so they're arrived at the company's website. Now what?

Then they see it. A button right there on the homepage that says "Click to Chat." It connects them right away to a customer service rep ready to answer any questions or concerns they have. Instead of waiting on hold or wondering if their email went into a black hole, they're put in touch with someone who can solve their problem immediately.

In 2015, Brant Snead went to his team with the vision outlined just above. A few weeks later, with the help of Salesforce's Service Cloud, the team instituted a prototype on GE Lighting's contact page. Its "Click to Chat" feature has been live on the C by GE app and homepage for GE's smart LED lightbulbs since March 2016.

The feedback was immediately positive. 71% found the chat service excellent and said they would use it again. As one customer put it, "The wait times on the dial-in number are terribly long. Chat was much faster and provided quick resolution."

Over the last six months, more chats have been received than phone calls. And while email is still the predominant method of customer communication, the chat feature is currently responsible for resolving nearly 20% of all customer cases.

For other GE businesses considering click-to-chat features, Current IT analyst Matthew Gugumuck outlined how to think it through.

“First off, you need to know your audience. Design with the customer in mind and make the features user friendly. Then, decide which vendor can deliver based on the requirements you set,” Gugumuck said. “We wanted to lean toward simple and intuitive for the end user. Salesforce’s **Live Agent** proved to be just that, and it didn’t cost extra, since it was part of GE’s existing Service Cloud license.”

Once the technical details are out of the way, Gugumuck continued, the next essential step is to set high expectations of customer service reps. “Chat is a new channel of customer service, so ensuring your agents provide that next level of service is critically important. They’re the face of GE to customers.”

Chat is just one technology strategy Current has to improve service. In the future, service agents may be able to connect directly to their customers’ phone screen, so they can see exactly what the customers are seeing within the app, or tap into their phone camera to get a first-person view of the product.

“You need to look to the future and ask how these capabilities fit in with your overall strategy,” Gugumuck added. “Which technologies do you see your business using with your customers in the future? How does a chat feature fit in with whatever else you’re hoping to provide?”

35. Orderbot: Order Status That’s a Text Away

Delivery timing is a big concern for customers. About 25% of calls to Current’s customer service center are just to check on the status of an order. Whether there’s a shipping issue, a delay on GE’s end, or just a deadline looming, customers just want to know: When is it going to get here?

What if finding out could be as easy as sending a text message?

This idea was the genesis of Orderbot, a feature prototyped by GE Digital with its Current and Transportation businesses. Working first on the bot-building platform [Dexter](#), in a matter of days the team built a system that can respond to straightforward requests about the status of an order. Next, the team will test this feature with customers to see how they respond.

“We’d like to see it roll out to all of Current,” said Nathan Hogge, who is on the GE Digital team responsible for Orderbot. “But we first want to make sure we’re fulfilling a customer need. The end goal is to say it’s alleviating a specific pain point.”

Already the project has encouraged others within GE to consider bots, as well as the artificial intelligence and natural language processing capabilities they offer, as a way of removing frustrating delays from the customer experience.

The GE Digital team is also developing a more advanced bot that can analyze customer interactions for trends and suggest ways of improving its utility. For instance, if a customer asks several times about a particular delivery, the bot would offer to send automatic updates the moment there’s a change in status. The Digital team is now working with another artificial intelligence platform, [msg.ai](#), to develop this more responsive capability.

“It’s an exciting evolution in how we keep customers in the loop,” said Hogge.

“It used to be a one-way communication with notifications,” he added. “Bots are a next step. They allow for something of a conversation with the customer.”

Seamless Service with GE Healthcare



Imagine you're a field engineer who works on MRI machines. You arrive at a hospital for planned maintenance and discover there are several patients booked for scans. You can either wait for the machine to become available or reschedule and come back another day. What's the alternative? Tell the doctors and patients to wait or rebook their appointments?

The situation is lose-lose. The field engineer falls behind on appointments, or the hospital has unplanned downtime that frustrates doctors and patients.

Anastasia Abuya and her team at GE Healthcare are imagining a better way. They believe that better customer communication can save GE 31,000 hours a year in lost productivity.

Her team envisions alerting the hospital about a planned maintenance appointment two weeks ahead. The reminder would enable them to confirm or reschedule, as well as share details on any particular issues with the machine. In addition, an appointment time can be found when the machine typically sees the least use. A second maintenance alert goes out the day before the appointment.

This could save time and headaches for everyone involved by leading to less rescheduling, increased customer readiness and shorter waits on-site for field engineers. The engineers also receive reminders that include customer notes, so they'll arrive with any necessary tools and parts.

Just as important, reducing inconvenience makes it easier for hospitals to improve their customer experience. "Ultimately, it's all about the patient," Abuya told us. "Our whole focus is to add to the patient's overall experience at the hospital." Happier patients, happier doctors and a happier client for GE.

A Focus on Customer Success

CX 1:1 with Dave Kocher, GE Digital



Dave Kocher is a member of GE Digital's Customer Success organization. We talked with him about the team's structure and objectives for helping customers, as well as his personal motivation for serving them.

Dave, tell us about the team's objectives.

Well, we recognize that outcome delivery requires as much focus and rigor as outcome selling. So each team in our Customer Success organization focuses on delivering effortless and predictable experiences by driving ease of outcome execution and time to outcome.

And what is your role on the team?

I lead the Customer Engagement team, which is actually brand new to GE Digital. We're a cross-functional team responsible for providing several things: initial customer onboarding, technology adoption, ensuring customer satisfaction on an ongoing basis, and achieving outcomes throughout the customer lifecycle. All these things serve to increase customer retention, references and expansion.

How did the Customer Success organization begin at GE Digital?

It started when we realized that customers' post-sales experiences were disconnected when viewed holistically. We were delivering great point experiences, like technical support, professional services and training. But the overall customer journey wasn't seamless.

How did you come to that realization?

Through customer feedback, but only after we started gathering input across the lifecycle. We knew we needed to align our post-sale capabilities under one leader. That allows for an enhanced journey and a unified mission—what we call “customer outcomes delivery.”

Can you talk a little bit on how your team is organized?

Sure. Basically we’re organized into two groups. First is the Success Delivery team. Its members come in immediately after a deal is signed. They include Customer Success Managers, who help our key customers adopt technology, achieve promised outcomes, and ultimately be satisfied with their purchase.

Second is the Success Enablement team. It’s focused on listening to the customer, then designing a differentiated customer experience. We collect surveys and other VOC; then we translate those insights into action. This includes a 360-health score for each account. We’re also looking to enhance other key touchpoints across the customer lifecycle.

You mentioned Customer Success Managers. Who are they?

Customer Success Managers, or CSMs, play a key role in the post-sales experience. They’re the glue that binds the organization and camouflages the mess that our large organization can create. CSMs are measured by customer satisfaction scores, end-user technology adoption and utilization and account-specific outcomes attainment.

What specifically do they provide?

Oh, a whole host of things. Let's see. There's account-specific onboarding process, if applicable. Adoption readiness assessment, plan, and tracking. Bi-directional communication and feedback. Timely business reviews. Ongoing activity coordination. Planning and monitoring outcomes attainment. Monitoring and reporting overall account health. Communications for upgrade and release readiness. They have a lot on their plate.

What is your team's approach to customer engagement?

We use a segmented approach to coverage. It provides a differentiated experience based on the current and future value of a customer. It's divided into three levels of engagement with the customer. First is High Touch, for our most valuable customers, involving either dedicated coverage or no more than five accounts per CSM. Second is Low Touch, for our moderate-value customers, with five to 10 accounts per CSM. Finally there's what we call Tech Touch, for lower-value customers, with 10-plus accounts per CSM. This level utilizes technology automation assistance, as well.

Do you think this model is applicable to non-software sales?

Well, the model was developed and refined primarily in software organizations where subscriptions and renewals require dramatically different post-sales experience executions. But I don't think being a software company is a prerequisite for businesses, or customers, to gain value from this model.

So what are the criteria for implementing this customer success model?

If your customers are primarily focused on lowering opex, if they need ongoing assistance with implementation and operation and if they require continual use before reaching breakeven ROI, then you should consider this customer success model to ensure their satisfaction and loyalty.

Last question: Why do customers matter to you?

Customers determine our success. It's that simple. They're the most important. They are not an interruption of our work, they're the purpose of it. They must be satisfied and compelled to continue doing business with us. We're not doing them a favor by serving them, they're doing us a favor by giving us the opportunity to do so. They're the ultimate boss, and can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending their money somewhere else.

Thank you for your time, Dave.

My pleasure.

Motivating & Supporting Customer Service Teams CX 1:1 with Brant Snead



Brant Snead is North American Customer Service Leader at Current & GE Lighting. We talked with him about how setting up his employees to be successful has been key to getting the best results for customers.

What do you see as your main role as a customer service leader?

My main goal is to set up our team members for success by removing roadblocks, focusing on their development and creating a good work environment. I do not believe in a traditional organization chart with regard to who works for whom. A good leader understands that each team member works for the team.

So what in particular are you doing to, as you said, set your team up for success?

One of the first things I'd tell you is to have that open dialogue, whether that's in team meetings or one-on-ones. Most people think of that only in terms of having a question about their day-to-day job, not having concerns about the future of the company or anything that may be perceived as negative. I've always had the approach that I'm willing to talk about anything at all, and for staffers to know that nothing's off the table.

How do you respond when you're told, "well, but we've always done it this way?"

When I joined the team four years ago, I heard comments like that all the time. There's no doubt this mindset has changed.

I've always been very open with my people about how the business is going to change. Which products we offer, how we go to market and the support needed—all that will change. Any research right now would show you that traditional lighting is a market that will continue to dwindle. I think it's roughly 95% of

estimated sales in 2025 that will be LED. That means sharing that information with my staff, helping them see that we need to embrace new products such as Electric Vehicle charging stations. We talk a lot about the future and how we must embrace change and challenges to ensure we continue to add value.

What else comes to mind as far as specific tactics you've used to engage your team?

One that gets a lot of attention is our jerseys. When training is completed, graduates get a GE jersey that goes on their desk chair. On the front is the GE logo, and on the back is their first name or a nickname they like to go by and the year they started with GE. This symbolizes that we're all on one team. It also helps make conversations easier with visitors and other teams. You know instantly when you walk up who the person is and their tenure. We have one team member who is very proud when I point out to guests the 73 on her jersey and explain that it represents her having starting in 1973.

What is your team then doing to help customers be successful?

We are our customer's top advocates. We should be the conduit that carries feedback to other departments. We are also there to be a lever for escalation and urgency, when needed. I cringe when people talk about customer service as just data entry. When you contact our team, you don't get a random person. We try to get you the same assigned person every time as someone who will know you, your recent issues, your customers and the vision you have for your company with GE. And that's helped us really bond with them. For us, it is not about transactions, it's about forming and maintaining strong relationships.

What is the number one thing you would tell anyone at GE, regardless of their department?

Do what you say, say what you do. Our commitment to customers is the number one thing we should be focusing on. If you say the product will be there on this date, you need to honor that by working proactively to ensure it happens. Everything is contingent on that follow-through. Some customers call it your “can-do rate.”

I think it also helps knowing that, no matter which business we’re talking about, we’re in a repeat business. Some companies don’t see the bigger picture. Every order, no matter how small, can make an impact on whether they choose GE going forward and if they tell others about their experience with us, good or bad.

What’s one area where you’ve seen your team improve specifically?

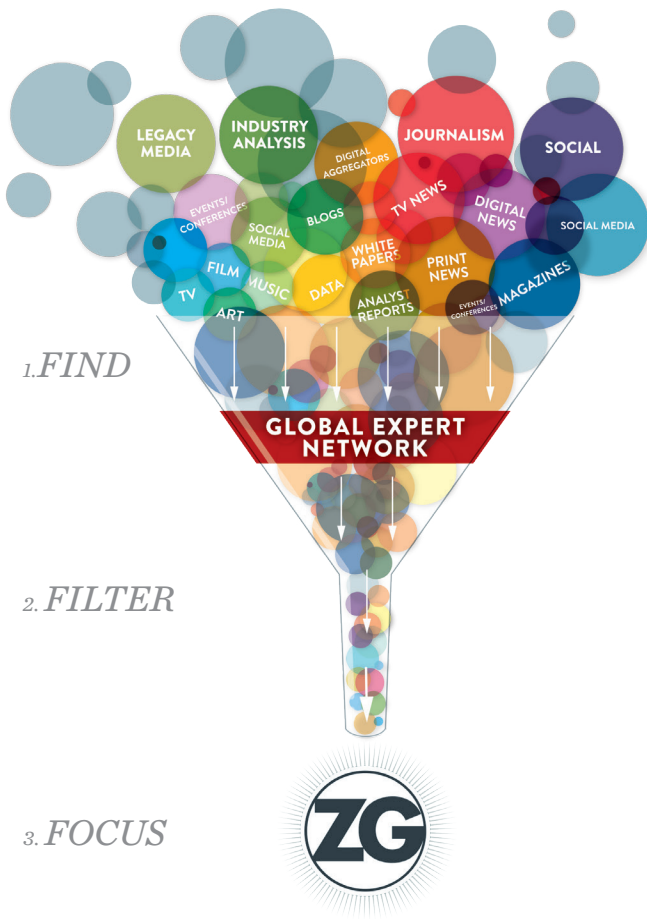
60% of our contacts with customers are via email. We have used many customer feedback tools to gauge their expectations on responsiveness and resolution. When I first started, our resolution time when someone emailed us an issue averaged 23 hours. Now on average we’ll respond within 2 and resolve it within 6. These times includes hours we are not open, such as holidays, weekends and off-hours, as we want to mirror what the customer experiences.

Response time is something you’ll hear many customers talk about. And it has to be not just quick, but thorough. You have to think—if the answer is A, then they’re also going to need to know B and C, so provide them with all that information the first time. Having only one contact resolution is a huge customer satisfier, as time is something we can give them back by doing it right in the first place.

The last question we want to ask is “Why do customers matter to you?”

I have done customer service since I was 14 years old, and I am truly passionate about it. The customer is ultimately the boss. He or she can fire anyone and everyone by choosing to use another company. It's about knowing that the better the experience customers have with us, the more they'll want to use our company for the benefits it offers for everybody.

If you think about the solutions we provide at Current, these truly make the world a better place. When you go to an organization and help it save 50% on energy costs, it can use that savings to reinvest in its people or grow its business. That benefits the company, that benefits the community; it's good for everybody.



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