

2013 customer experience forecast

 By [Chantel Botha](#)

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I take out my crystal ball, as any good consultant is required to do at times, and venture to make some predictions for what customer experience challenges and trends I think brands will face this year.

1. More response-prone and verbal consumers

Never before has it been truer that the consumer is truly king. Consumers are getting more tech savvy and are getting used to using social platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Four Square and Facebook. So next time you check in at a restaurant on Four Square, you may find tips that alert you to bad service or an amazing offering in the menu. That is what is absolutely great about the self-regulation that social media offers. Sometimes not so great for a brand that ignores these listening posts!

I recently had a service problem with a company that dragged on for nearly six months and within 4 days of a very well planned and executed social media campaign I launched against the company (who will not be named), they had resolved the issue and provided me with a fair remedy. It did take a lot of effort, but this would not have been possible without social media. In the past there would have been arbitrators and regulators involved and the process would have taken months if not years to run its course and in the end the result would have been the same.

My advice to brands out there, embrace social media even when consumers complain and call you names. You have never in the past had such an opportunity to converse and to take on a human persona. Appoint someone with emotional intelligence to talk on behalf of your brand and if you dare, take someone in your existing team, who absolutely loves your brand and will run into a burning building for you.

2. Innovation will lead to blurring of value propositions

We have seen unrivalled innovation in banking from First National Bank (FNB) in South Africa. They have even won an award for the most innovative bank in the world! I love them for raising the bar on banking in South Africa! The magic of what they have done is really rooted in the consistency and the brand love they have created for the distinctive blue brand. Whether you are drawing cash at an ATM, or walking into a branch or tweeting @rbjacobs, or receiving an email statement, it feels like you are dealing with the same "person". Through Michael Jordaan's inspirational leadership and @rbjacobs's well designed persona, FNB has become human!

What we have also seen is that FNB is no longer just a bank. I predict that they will become one of the biggest suppliers of technology goods, voice services and bandwidth in South Africa. They are co-branding with brands like Apple, Nokia and

many others - that is just so much cooler than a bank will ever be! They are making devices affordable through the financing options, and consumers are falling in love with FNB because they sent them an iPad. FNB customers go as far as thanking Michael Jordaan on twitter for their brand new iPad!

FNB has broadened their value proposition to extend the banking services, which now includes geo payments, a kick ass mobile app, where you can pay electricity and call your FNB buddies free of charge. Yes who thought someone would ever put a soft phone in a banking app?

With FNB's wide range of offerings, the banks are finally kicking some retail ass, after the retailers have been slowly encroaching on the banks' customers through credit offerings and insurance.

Through innovation, I believe we will see more companies extending and broadening their core offering, some I hope to such an extent and so well executed, that they won't be remembered for their traditional offerings! Let's see what happens!

3. Less employee engagement and loyalty

I facilitate transformational workshops with service staff with the aim of putting them in the shoes of the customer and letting them live the experience from a much more sensory perspective. When I ask the question, "What is your purpose?" or "What is your cause?" "Why do you come to work every day?" Mostly, when people honestly answer the question, work is a means to a living and not a passion or a calling in itself. When I work with younger people, this trend becomes even more prevalent.

I will go as far as predicting that people will in future spend much shorter times working for companies, and potentially hold more than one job at a time depending on the logistics. Traditionally, the way I was brought up, it was proper to work for a company for 20 years and the typical Rolex rewards from that era, indicated how valued you were by a company!

I think the type of innovators that will be entering the market in future will have a much shorter shelf life with a brand. Working for many brands, will be a positive on your resume, and will indicate how great you are at innovation. Multiple jobs, many companies and even gaps in employment will not be perceived as career instability or a lack of commitment!

What does this all mean for service in 2013? Companies are going to have to get more innovative around incentivising their people. And the perception that high turnaround is not a good thing, might just have to change a little. In a call centre environment, would you not rather want to rotate the amazing people that provide a service to customers on the phone, than lose them due to burn-out or boredom? We will see staff attrition increasing in 2013 and beyond and if companies do not respond to this trend, they will face increased training costs and it will impact customer engagement with the brand.

4. Brands will be tested for authenticity

I truly believe that brands that talk the talk and not walk the walk will be opening themselves up for public critique in social media. I have too often seen brilliant campaigns being designed by agencies, but when the rubber hits the road and the consumer engages - either buying the product or asking for service - it breaks. Brands who continue to just talk without defining their desired customer experience, designing the end to end customer journey and delivering on their promises, will see their customers and followers looking for love somewhere else!

These are but a few of my predictions. Remind me of this blog post at the end of 2013 and we can look at what transpired in terms of this customer experience forecast for 2013.

My advice: Be true to your brand promise, be honest, be fair and remember what is at the core of why consumers fall in love with your brand in the first place!

ABOUT CHANTEL BOTHA

I'm Chantel Botha, the author of "The Customer Journey Mapping Field Guide" and the founder of BrandLove.

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