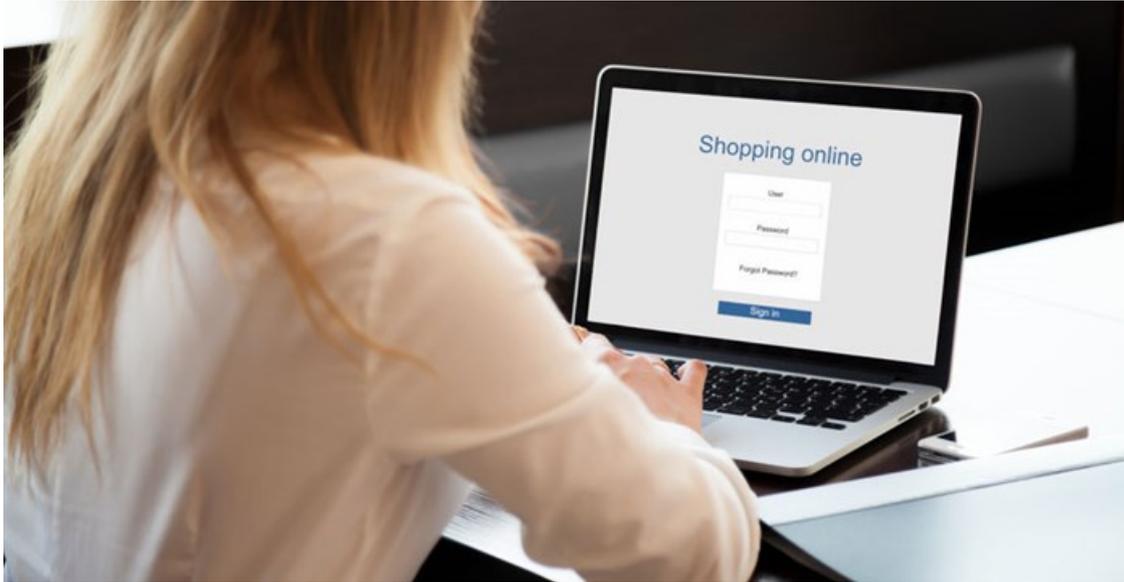


Customers will share a good story, use technology to drive this

By  Chantel Nimb

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My husband and I were dining out recently. When I returned to the table after visiting the ladies room, the waitress asked where my handbag was, as she had noticed I took it with me, but had not returned with it. She immediately went to the ladies room to fetch my bag and was so attentive to our needs the entire night that I walked away thinking I could not have asked for better service.



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On the other end of the spectrum, I had a painful experience with one of our local telecommunication companies that incorrectly recorded my title and name on my billing invoice. Instead of Mrs Chantel Troskie (nee Nimb) I had become Prof Christiana Nimb. Despite providing all my identity documentation and making several attempts to have it changed, the company finally corrected my title to Mrs but kept my name as Christiana Nimb. I have since given up on them.

Positive stories travel fast and far

Every customer interaction breeds a story and most of us feel inclined to share our experience whether it is good or bad. In a society where word-of-mouth is arguably the most effective form of marketing, businesses should do their best to ensure each customer walks away with an experience worthy of sharing, for the right reasons.

Stories spread just as fast when they are negative. A bad experience is hard to forget and, when things go wrong, many of us feel even more motivated to vent our frustrations.

Communication is key. In the case of my forgotten handbag, what the waiter did extremely well was to alert and assist me proactively in solving my problem. Customers understand that things do not always go according to plan but they do want to be kept posted on the status of their issue until it has been settled.

Delight customers to create advocates

The world's most successful brands consistently differentiate themselves by building a loyal customer base. How have they done this? By making point of delivering a positive customer experience, like the restaurant I dined at. The simple act of

giving each person a personalised service has allowed leading brands to build large networks of advocates who are happy to spread the good work on their behalf.

Get smart with technology

Proactivity and responsiveness are cornerstones of an excellent customer experience. This is the motivation behind virtual assistants, which are designed so shoppers have an instant resource to turn to while browsing a company's website. An increasing number of businesses are already starting to see the benefits of delivering 24/7 sales and service with a more personal touch.

Virtual assistants are now being linked into the company's data collection and analytics system. Armed with a wealth of customer data, these bots can help each shopper with a growing range of requests more quickly and with guidance that is more relevant. They can also make accurate predictions about a customers' future needs and be programmed to upsell products and services based on these.

Remember, it all comes down to culture

We are seeing the first iterations of true artificial intelligence in the CX space. The prospects are exciting indeed, but a poorly programmed virtual assistant can still miss the mark on customer service. If a sales team is not wired to deliver a personalised and proactive service at its core, the customer experience it delivers will reflect this, no matter how many bells and whistles it has.

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