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The Customer Focus Myth

Most large organisations boast major initiatives around “customer centricity” and “Putting Customers at the Heart”. But the reality is often very different. David Williams of How to Experience explores why so many Customer Focus programmes simply pay lip service to satisfying customer needs – and considers what’s needed to define and deliver meaningful customer benefit.



By David Williams, CEO How to Experience

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H2 Experience Limited, Amber House, Heathlands Drive, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 4NF, UK

T: +44 (0) 1628 777945

E: info@h2x.biz

www.h2x.biz

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'F' for Focus. And Fail.

Customer Focus is all about understanding prospects and customers better. It's about formulating compelling propositions and deploying them effectively.

It's not something large PLCs do well.

CMAT™, from QCi, measures how well large organisations score in an evidence-based way. It's the world's largest benchmarking database in this area. The average score? A paltry 35%. That's an F.

'Well meaning' is not a quick fix.

The last 10 years have convinced me virtually all organisations could do "customer focus" better. Of the hundreds of initiatives I've reviewed, the same issues recur. Basically, quick surface-deep initiatives don't cut it.

The internal "stickers and brochures" campaigns, the new bold talking PowerPoint are harmless and well meaning. But they change nothing and challenge no-one.

At worst, they are divisive - with unclear objectives that distract the organisation from its core objective. It's usually a great leadership team that transforms a businesses approach, not a customer focus programme. But why?

Make money from customers. Reward investors.

The first thing to understand is that organisations make money from customers to give to investors. However, they can only do this if there is a value exchange with their customers.

Traditionally value has been created from economies of scale. Doing more at a better quality and cheaper price has delivered value to customers. The most recent phase has involved off shoring and outsourcing. In manufacturing everyone talks about the "China Price". In Contact Centres (the modern factory) it's the 10% labour rates in India and Eastern Europe.

Unsurprisingly, many organisations pursue the efficiency of outsourcing. Increasing revenue per customer is another way of driving efficiency.

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“Computer says ‘No’”

It may be good for the books...but is it good for the customer? Often, the answer is an overwhelming ‘no’. Increasingly, cash rich and time poor customers value quality of service and convenience just as much as keen pricing. When “Computer Says No” to customers, the standard operating model starts to rub.

Yet if organisations can find a way to integrate efficiency with added customer value, everyone can win.

Virgin says ‘Yes’.

One of the best examples is Virgin Atlantic.

Virgin recognised that getting to an airport represents hassle. They could have done the quick, incremental fixes: better signage; wider parking bays, improved check-in and so on. But they didn’t.

Instead they looked at changing the whole customer experience. The result: “Don’t worry: we’ll pick you up and we can check you and your bags in on the way”. They were brave enough to invest in things around the customer’s real needs.

The veneer of ‘better for customers’. Or what Customer Focus really means.

If you get money from customers to give to investors you want to do this as efficiently as possible. It’s this ‘process optimisation’ that so many corporations now cloak under the “customer focus” initiative banner.

I mentioned how the best programmes have great leadership. CEOs are generally decent people, who believe in a reasonable level of service. Yet they also face a dilemma. On the one hand, the shareholders demand returns. On the other, customers expect attention.

Often, CEOs are too far removed from the service reality. A middle management layer protects the status quo. In one PLC, it emerged the service director used the engaged tone on one of its call answering lines....because calls lost in this manner didn’t affect the headline call answering metrics. Good customer focus initiatives change the metrics and understand the business impact of actions.

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To help well-intentioned but misguided CEOs, senior marketers must bring the real customer's needs into the organisation - bring the real experience to life. Honesty about what needs fixing and clarity about real intent and objectives are pre-requisites. By changing the metrics behind these goals, we can pinpoint the difference made to customers and the business.

The H2X Experience – We think big, but we also think Real

H2X is an experience consultancy. We open up organisations so they know where, and how, to deliver the intentional experiences that will make a lasting difference to customers, channels, and employees.

We provide the experience to add value and build revenue. We think Big - but also think Real.

Our business creates relationships: relationships that build loyalty, increase profits and reduce churn.

H2X compares what your customers **expect** with what your employees actually **deliver**. Then, we help to make the practical and cultural changes needed to close the gap. We help you create a blueprint, pinpointing the changes that will deliver the most return.

By cascading and licensing our tools internally, organisations can change rapidly, without needing constant external help.

And, unlike some Experience consultancies, H2X only provides people who have actually delivered experience programmes in scale organisations.

The difference is experience...experience the difference.