

How to Create the Customer Experience

by Pamela Fay

What is the customer experience? It is everything your customer sees, touches, feels or interacts with on your Web site and through all your customer touch points. This includes the seamless interaction through phone and mail contact, as well as the face-to-face experience with your frontline employees.

The customer experience is intended to lead, rather than follow technology. In other words, the customer experience is not merely a by-product of the system's functional capabilities or its distribution capabilities. Whiz-bang technology alone does not create the customer experience. And the customer experience is not a tactical solution.

Rather, it is a blend of marketing savvy and operational excellence. It is a vision executed throughout the organization by a customer-centered system of people, processes and technology. Properly conceived, the customer experience is a framework that provides structure to support your value proposition and drive competitive advantage.

How do you create the customer experience? Start with the basics: The customer experience comprises 5 key components that are holistically developed to provide a consistent and common look and feel across all delivery channels. For an e-business, i.e., a business that is significantly enabled through the Internet, the customer experience is grounded in the Web-based business then extends across the entire enterprise. Its key components include:

1. **Business Goals:** Define the objectives of the Web site vis-à-vis the overall business strategy.
2. **Merchandising:** Define the products and services offered on the site and through other distribution channels
3. **Messaging:** Define standards for site wording and customer communications and integrate these standards across other communication channels.
4. **Features:** Define the Web-centered attributes and functionality to offer (or not) and how these features are supported throughout the organization.
5. **Value-added Processes:** Define and aid continuous improvement of the site to cater to customer needs and deliver value.

To truly become a customer-focused organization, the customer experience must be championed firm-wide. This requires a shift in organization focus, buy-in and participation at all levels – and a comprehensive plan.