
FOCUS ON CORONAVIRUS

Empathy: The CX Tipping Point

We are living in extraordinary times. And during a crisis like this, we can choose to respond in one of three ways: keep doing what we used to do, adjust only when we have to, or get in front of the change.

For CX leaders looking to get in front of the change, the rising importance of empathy may be among your biggest opportunities.

If you had asked a CX leader about their goals two weeks ago, you would've heard about creating differentiated experiences to gain share of wallet, increase product penetration, attract new customers, and so on. Today, you'll hear something very different. CX leaders are focused on taking care of, and keeping, the customers they have. This requires making empathy the new cornerstone of CX strategy.

Based on a recent study, the level of anxiety customers are feeling has **doubled in the last week**. People are afraid they'll lose their jobs, their homes or even their loved ones. The companies who are able to truly listen and respond empathetically with solutions that ease this anxiety will undoubtedly become the most successful brands in our new world.

Many companies have taken the lead over the past few days – and can offer valuable lessons on re-thinking the role of empathy in your CX strategy.

1

Don't stop listening.

How can you effectively empathize if you're not asking customers what they need? Turning off your Voice of the Customer program isn't the right strategy for most organizations – and in fact, customers don't seem to want that either.

Most survey response rates are remaining strong and steady, with customers providing insightful guidance on how they are looking for companies to react. We've even chatted with several leaders of large Financial Institutions, who have made very deliberate decisions to keep their Voice of the Customer programs running despite internal swirl about the topic.

2

Change your tune.

Surveys shouldn't be "business as usual." Leaders are using their existing surveys to not only collect feedback, but to calm anxieties. For example, a Healthcare Insurer now routes customers to a webpage with COVID-19 FAQs after customers have completed a survey.

3

Mix it up.

If you're asking the same survey questions you were two weeks ago, it might be time to re-evaluate. We're living in a completely different world. Your survey should reflect that. Are you gauging perceptions of empathy? Examples may include asking questions about the trustworthiness of your brand and employee soft skills.

We're also seeing companies add "hot topic" questions to ensure their response strategies are in alignment with what their customers want. For example, an automotive financing company is adding questions about deferred payments, trying to determine if this is the most helpful and empathetic solution for customers.

4

Prioritize your people.

Studies have shown a long-term decline in empathy levels amongst college students of nearly 50% in the past three decades. That means many of your customer-facing employees naturally struggle to showcase this critical skill. New types of training will be necessary.

You also need to check on the wellbeing of your employees more frequently. Conduct ongoing pulse surveys to get a sense of their attitudes, needs and concerns as they learn to navigate remote work environments. If employees don't feel you're empathetic to their needs, it will be difficult for them to express empathy to customers.

5

Push the boundaries.

Customer feedback is telling, especially in open-ended chatter. Use it to determine if there are additional solutions you can put in place to be increasingly empathetic. Yes, you're taking action, but is it enough? For example, many Banks are waiving ATM fees. While that's generous, customers are asking for much more. They're asking to have their checks cleared faster, interest rates reduced, and so on.

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented solutions. As CX leaders, you must push the boundaries of what's possible.

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