



BRAND SPOTLIGHT

Walmart

Inside Walmart's Ecosystem-First Approach to Driver Experience



Discover how Walmart transforms gig driver support through proactive automation, real-time data, and a platform-wide empathy mindset.

Rafi Barragan is a strategic technology executive passionate about solving complex challenges through AI, automation, and real-time data intelligence. As Director of Driver Experience & Strategy at Walmart, he leads the development of the Driver experience roadmap and proactive interventional capabilities designed to proactively detect and resolve platform instability before it impacts operations—enhancing resilience, reducing MTTD, and minimizing disruptions. Outside of Walmart, Rafi is the CEO of Second Chance Hero, where he applies his leadership to improving the lives of congenital patients navigating heart transplants. His dual expertise in engineering robust digital platforms and building supportive human networks underscores his commitment to making both technology and life experiences more seamless.



Walmart 

Rafi Barragan
Director of Driver
Experience & Strategy

Execs In The Know (EITK): Your role at Walmart focuses on enhancing the driver experience within the Spark Driver platform. Can you share how your team approaches creating intuitive and defect-free driver experiences, and what impact that has on Walmart's broader logistics strategy?

Rafi Barragan: Our Team's core mission is to deliver a defect-free and intuitive experience across our last-mile delivery ecosystem for our users. We do this by thinking beyond isolated features or defects and their fixes. We've embraced what we call an ecosystem empathy mindset: a design and operating principle that centers the full lifecycle of the user journey, accounting for the invisible forces behind every click, delay, and support need of our users.

We first bring this to life by shifting the culture – influencing our innovation partners to think like platform stewards, not just product builders. In a platform-based organization, what matters most isn't just how well one product or system performs but how each system change impacts the broader ecosystem. This mindset helps us design for interconnected health, not just individual feature/enhancement success.

Second, we invest in upstream detection. When we think like an ecosystem, we move from reactive issue detection to more proactive capabilities, enabling us to identify and triage defects earlier in the lifecycle – compressing the time from issue detection to resolution. By embedding ourselves in real-time feedback loops and pairing data with human insights, we can uncover root causes faster, mitigate risk before scale, and reduce the volume of production defects that impact our users.

Ultimately, our approach enables more than stability—it creates a more scalable and resilient logistics network, where human experience isn't an afterthought but the system's most valuable input.

EITK: One of your core strategic pillars is "One-Call Resolution & Driver-Led Support Optimization." In an industry where efficiency is key, how are you leveraging automation and proactive interventions to improve driver support and reduce contact rates?

Rafi: I believe that the best support is one a user never needs—and when they do, it should resolve their issue the first time, without friction. Our approach to "One-Call Resolution" is grounded in ecosystem awareness and empathy—we don't just reduce contact volume; we reduce the need for contact by eliminating root causes upstream.

We've built proactive systems that do two things exceptionally well. First, we use machine learning agents to detect and confirm platform defects in real-time. These agents review logs across our back-end systems to flag when a contact may have been driven by a true production defect—not just a misunderstanding.



While we haven't yet embraced agentic AI, multi-turn autonomous support agents that resolve low-complexity issues without human escalation, we have built generative AI experiences paired with contextually relevant in-app help that surfaces personalized guidance based on where the user is in their journey. Studies show that drivers who engage with content when experiencing user friction are over 80 percent less likely to contact a call center at all.

What's powerful is that these solutions aren't just efficient but deeply human when done right. By understanding the journey, anticipating needs (not just reacting to them), and responding with empathy at scale, CX leaders can create a support experience that feels less like a transaction and more of a partnership with users while accelerating efficiency. A one-call or one-content view solves it all support design.

EITK: Walmart's Spark Driver Platform aims to be the largest and most trusted gig-economy delivery provider. In your experience, what are the key ingredients to building trust and transparency into a platform at this scale?



Rafi: Our team views trust at scale, and trust at scale isn't built through one-off interactions that go well. It's more about how your platform behaves over time. That's why I encourage teams to view trust as an outcome of operational integrity, where every experience is designed to reduce surprises, expose relevant context, and keep users in control of their journey.

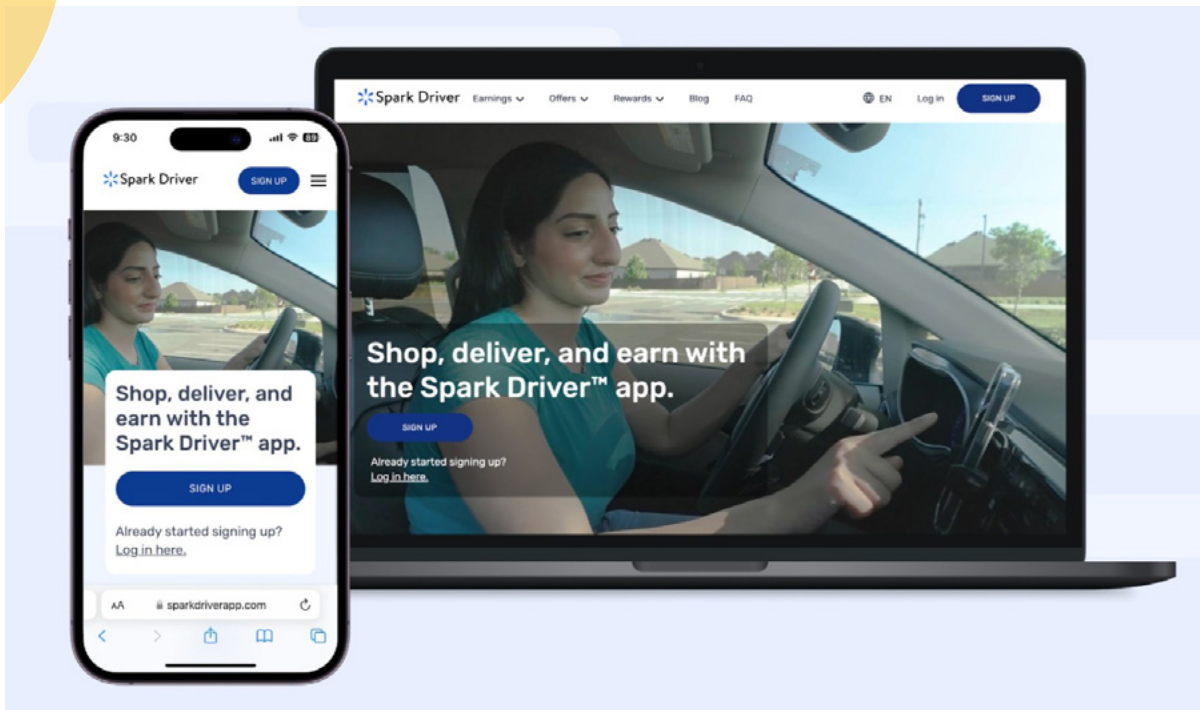
In platform environments like last-mile delivery (LMD), it's tempting to focus on metrics alone, but metrics without meaning don't inspire loyalty from users. You must design for ecosystem health, ensuring that every change enhances the entire journey, not just a single touchpoint. That includes leveraging real-time monitoring and upstream defect detection to identify friction early, intervene proactively, and maintain the stability our users rely on.

To me, transparency means surfacing just enough context at the right moment to empower action—not overwhelm or user decision paralysis. Whether that's in-app feedback, clear escalation paths, or journey-aware guidance, teams should work to reduce the ambiguity that erodes trust. When a user knows why something happened and what to do next, it builds confidence, and confidence is what scales trust.

Ultimately, a trusted platform is one where users feel seen, informed, and in control. That's the bar CX leaders and their teams across product and operations should hold themselves to every day.

EITK: Gig workers have unique challenges compared to traditional employees. What are some of the biggest pain points you've identified for Spark drivers, and how has Walmart worked to address them?

Rafi: Supporting gig-earners starts with understanding that their motivations are diverse and that a one-size-fits-all experience won't build trust or loyalty. Through research and real-time behavioral insights, most CX leaders in this space have, in my experience, identified three core gig-earner mindsets: goal-driven earners, income bridgers, and flexibility seekers. Each requires a distinct design and operational response.



For short-term earners, quickly and with minimal friction, surfacing high-value opportunities works best. For those seeking earnings stability, we focus on platform reliability – reducing defects that could impact their ability to earn consistently, ensuring a dependable earnings experience. And, for gig users prioritizing their personal autonomy, we explore demand strategies that align with their preferred working hours, allowing them to earn on their terms. These are the strategies I'd recommend to anyone in this space.

But even great personalization won't succeed without a stable foundation. Find the issues that impede your experience before they affect users at scale and combine that with operational rigor and human-centered design to reduce discovered pain points—you create a platform gig-earners trust, return to, and recommend.

EITK: With your global experience launching call centers and leading operational scaling across multiple markets, how do you see the evolution of CX in the gig economy? What trends should brands be paying attention to?

Rafi: Having scaled support operations globally, I've seen firsthand how different the gig economy is from traditional CX models. Gig Platforms aren't selling products; they manage real-time

ecosystems with high variability and ultra-dynamic supply. Because of this, the evolution of CX in the gig space will hinge on how well you hold on to your users – at least in my view.

Most gig platforms underinvest in retention, treating churn as a background constant – but the truth is, gig churn is often 10-20 times worse than traditional jobs, and that's just not sustainable. The leaders in the gig space of tomorrow will focus on retention by design. I'm seeing a slow but necessary shift from short-term thinking to long-game design, where platforms embrace a human-centered approach where trust is built through transparency, predictability and intuitive experience. CX in this space involves evolution from reactionary cost center management to a predictive layer of the business, one that understands driver motivations, designs with empathy, and measures success not just by revenue or resolution metrics but by how long users stay. In this space, retention is just an outcome, a signal that you've earned the right to keep serving your users.

EITK: The intersection of technology and human experience is critical in customer and driver engagement. How do you balance automation and personalization to create meaningful interactions at scale?

Rafi: The question isn't how to balance automation and personalization. It's how to blend them to amplify the human touch, not replace it. The evolution of Agentic AI shows that when automation is designed with intention, it can enhance empathy by extending the reach of human agents and enabling real-time, emotionally intelligent support responses.

While Agentic AI is in the early stages for us, my approach to it would be not operating in isolation—it co-pilots with a human facilitator. That synergy allows us to create conversational experiences that feel personal and responsive while scaling efficiently across millions of interactions. It's not just about faster resolution—it's about making every interaction feel like it was designed just for that user at that moment.

When automation is orchestrated by humans and guided by ecosystem-level insights, we move beyond scripted flows into meaningful engagement. That's where trust is built. And in the gig economy, where trust drives loyalty, that blend becomes a strategic differentiator.

When automation is orchestrated by humans and guided by ecosystem-level insights, we move beyond scripted flows into meaningful engagement. That's where trust is built. And in the gig economy, where trust drives loyalty, that blend becomes a strategic differentiator.

EITK: The gig economy is evolving rapidly, and competition among delivery platforms is fierce. What do you think differentiates Walmart's Spark Driver Platform from other gig-delivery services, and how do you ensure drivers continue choosing Spark?

Rafi: What differentiates Spark? I can't really speak for the platform. What I can say is that what differentiates my team is our belief that personalization at scale isn't a feature—it's a platform philosophy. We've continued to encourage building a gig experience flexible enough to support the full spectrum of gig-earner motivations, from goal-driven earners looking to maximize high-yield trips to

income-bridgers needing reliable, consistent work to flexibility seekers prioritizing working-hour autonomy.

Gig platforms should go beyond single-order-type fulfillment. At Spark, drivers can shop, deliver, and serve high-verticals like pharmacy and time-sensitive essentials. That diversification isn't just operational—it's strategic. It broadens earning possibilities for gig-earners, supports more sustainable engagement, and allows us to better serve our customers through dynamic fulfillment options.

Behind all of this is my passion for blending human empathy with intelligent systems and design concepts. Our teams ensure that the platform adapts to users and customers, not the other way around.

EITK: You've successfully led teams through major launches and operational scaling across global markets. What advice would you give to leaders trying to drive large-scale CX transformation while maintaining a customer- and employee-first mindset?



Rafi: My biggest piece of advice? Don't get so focused on the outcome that you forget who you're building for. In large-scale CX transformation, narrowing in on top-line metrics—revenue, adoption, and contact deflection is easy. But those are lagging indicators, outputs, not inputs. Real transformation happens when you center the experience itself.


Remember—your "customer" isn't just your user. It's your revenue-driving customer, your gig-delivery driver, your support agent, and your dispatch planner. Build for everyone in the system. When you create intuitive, defect-free experiences that just work—ones that deliver the right information at the right time—you unlock the full potential of users on your platform. When that happens, growth and retention follow as a natural consequence.

Lead with empathy. Design for clarity. Measure by trust and churn. The rest will take care of itself.

EITK: You've had a dynamic career across multiple industries and global markets. What's one leadership lesson that has stuck with you throughout your journey, and how does it shape the way you approach CX today?

Rafi: You can build the most brilliant strategy in the world, but if it doesn't resonate with users – especially in the gig space – it won't matter. Empathy isn't a leadership buzzword or some fluffy concept in this context; it's survival. A platform's greatest risk in a world where drivers have endless choices is irrelevance.

That's why I immerse myself directly in the experience. I deliver on multiple platforms, intentionally stepping into the shoes of our users to feel the friction, the trade-offs, and the moments of delight. I ask myself: Does this help me earn more? Does it respect my time? Does it give me what I need when I need it?

Mentors have shaped me, teaching me that enthusiasm and empathy are choices—and if you lead with both, you'll never lose your connection to the people you serve. Staying relevant requires constant curiosity, humility, and the willingness to evolve as far as your users do. 



Execs In The Know

Execs In The Know partners with brands that provide outstanding customer service (CX) experiences. The Brand Spotlight Series showcases innovations and solutions to CX challenges today's leading brands face.

Thank you to Rafi Barragan and the Walmart team for contributing to the Execs In The Know Brand Spotlight.

Interested in participating in a future Brand Spotlight feature and sharing your story? Contact us at info@execsintheknow.com.

[Go back to all articles.](#)