A GUIDE TO
GREAT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Depending on your industry and business model, your team might only briefly interact with a customer when they make a purchase. In some cases, like that of an ecommerce retailer, you may never actually speak with the customer at all, unless they reach out for assistance.

But that doesn't mean that you can't play a role in shaping their experience with your brand earlier in the process.

In fact, it's essential that you consider their journey towards becoming a customer all the way from their first impression of your brand, through the decision-making and purchasing processes, and including any post-purchase experiences and interactions.

When you're aware of each of these touchpoints, you can work towards creating a customer experience that not only drives conversions, but compels your audience to become loyal, long-term customers and clients for your business.

If you're new to customer experience (or looking to improve your strategy for better results), it can be challenging to figure out how to best approach this goal.

That's why in this guide, you'll learn what customer experience is, why delivering a great customer experience is essential for success, and six tips you can use to improve your company's approach today.

WHAT IS
CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE ?

Customer experience is a relatively new concept for many brands. Up until recently, most businesses only thought about shaping the customer journey during the sales process and with customer service interactions.

And even today, many marketers still mistakenly use the term interchangeably with "customer service."

But these two parts of a strategy play very different roles in a customer's relationship with your brand.
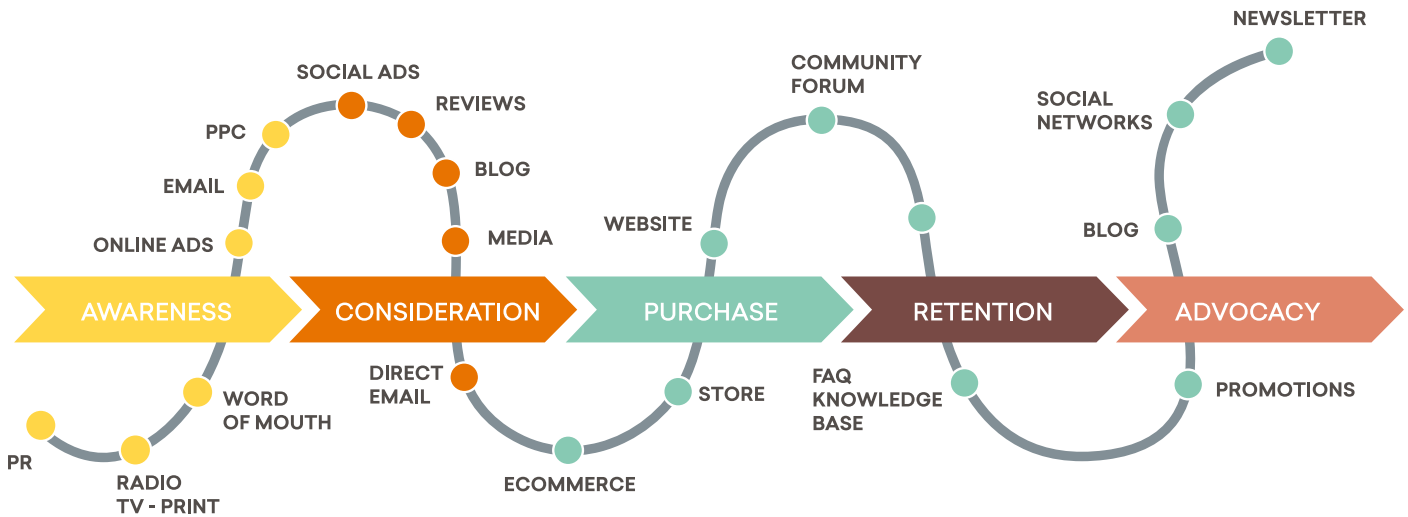
They have different purposes and impacts, are managed by different people, and are measured by different sets of performance metrics.

	Customer Experience (CX)	Customer Service (CS)
Purpose	To create a seamless experience for the customer at every stage	To resolve customer issues and offer instant solutions
Role in customer journey	The whole customer journey	Comes under retention
Related with	Feelings	Problems
Responsible team	The whole organization	Customer service team
Area of improvement	Brand value among customers	Customer retention
Performance metrics	NPS*	CSAT*

While customer service is designed to resolve customer issues after they arise, customer experience includes every interaction a customer has with your brand and employees from the time they first hear of your company, all through the buying process, and including any repeat purchases.

And depending on your business model, that can include a lot of touchpoints at various stages.

For example, the customer journey for an ecommerce store shopper might look something like this:

The customer journey diagram: AWARENESS (PR, RADIO TV - PRINT, ONLINE ADS, EMAIL, PPC, SOCIAL ADS, WORD OF MOUTH) → CONSIDERATION (REVIEWS, BLOG, MEDIA, DIRECT EMAIL) → PURCHASE (WEBSITE, ECOMMERCE, STORE, COMMUNITY FORUM) → RETENTION (FAQ KNOWLEDGE BASE) → ADVOCACY (SOCIAL NETWORKS, NEWSLETTER, BLOG, PROMOTIONS)

At the start, the customer's awareness of the brand develops through advertisements on several channels. Then, they rely on more in-depth content during the consideration stage to help them make an informed decision. And from there, the brand's store is the catalyst for their purchase.

But the customer journey doesn't end there. After their purchase, the shopper might consult the company's online resources and support staff for assistance — and the information they receive can be the deciding factor in whether they become a repeat customer.

Finally, additional content and promotions can drive them to the advocacy stage, where they tell friends and family about the brand, and encourage them to make purchases of their own.

As you can see, customer service does play a role in this process (especially during the retention stage). But it's only one of many pieces of the puzzle that make up the entire customer experience.

Plus, your efforts in these two areas impact your audience in different ways. While your customer service strategy enables you to solve problems for customers, your customer experience approach allows you to shape how they feel about your brand overall.

This helps you go beyond customer retention and build your brand's value among both current and potential customers.

So while a strong approach to customer service is essential to your company's success, it won't accomplish the same goals as a customer experience strategy — and it simply can't match the impact you can have with the latter.

WHY IS **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE** SO IMPORTANT?

As you've likely gathered, the scope of a customer experience strategy is fairly large. As a result, you might be wondering whether the time and investment it will take to create a comprehensive approach is really worth it.

In short, the answer is yes.

But if you're looking for a more thorough explanation, you can look to how today's consumers behave after faced with a sub-par customer experience.

Dissatisfied customers will typically tell an average of **nine to 15 people** about the negative experience they have with a company. Some will even tell 20 or more.

This means that if you fail to deliver the experience a potential customer expects, it can not only harm your chances of converting that particular lead, but also up to 20 additional people.

Plus, if a customer is unhappy with the experience they have with a company, there's a **91% chance** they won't do business with that company ever again, meaning that poor customer experiences can drastically reduce your retention rates.

But great customer experiences can have the opposite impact.

In fact, a positive customer experience leads **42% of consumers** to purchase from a brand again in the future. So if you're able to deliver the experiences your customers want, you have the potential to see your retention rates skyrocket.

And as an increasing number of businesses realize this potential, customer experience has become a core part of many brands' marketing strategies and brand identities.

After all, if great customer experiences can reduce abandonment and improve retention, there's no reason not to make it a priority.

But considering that **81% of businesses** say they expect to be competing mostly or completely on the basis of customer experience by 2020, simply meeting expectations is no longer enough.

Instead, the brands who succeed in this competition will be those that have a clear strategy for delivering top-notch experiences.

Unfortunately, many companies today are nowhere near achieving this.

According to Forrester's **US 2018 Customer Experience Index (CX Index)** report, just 15% of brands provide a "good" customer experience in 2018. That's down one percent from 2017.

And although the report also included an "excellent" score for high-performing companies, not a single brand achieved this benchmark.

The Distribution Of US CX Index Scores, 2017 & 2018
The US Customer Experience Index, 2018
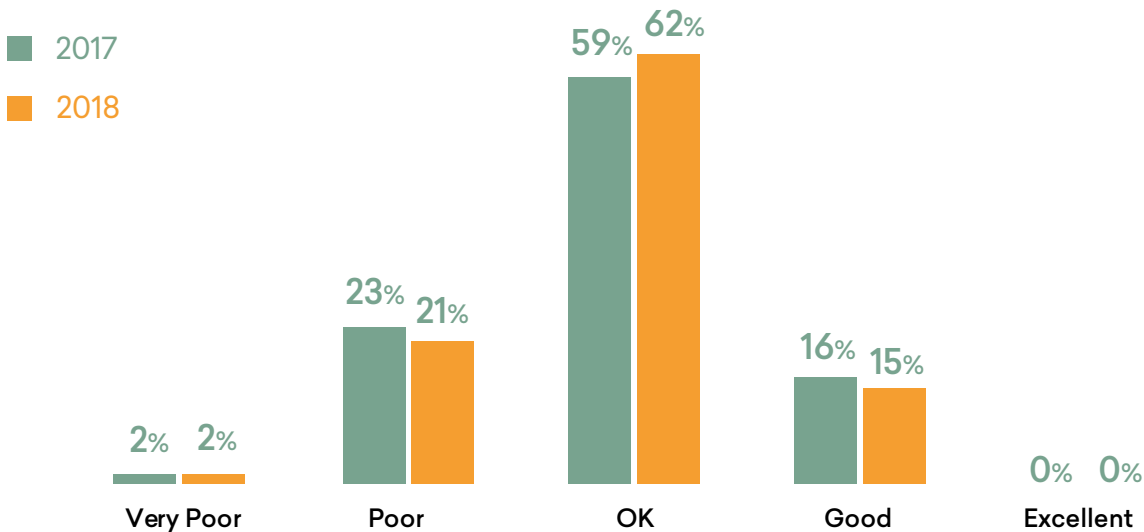
Base: 110,828 US online consumers (18+) who interacted with a specific brand within the past 12 months
Source: Forrrester Analytics Customer Experience Index Online Survey, US Consumers 2018

This indicates that companies have a lot of work to do in order to satisfy their customers. But on the bright side, it also means that brands who are willing to put in the effort have plenty of room to stand out from the competition.

And standing out can help shape customer behavior in ways that directly impact your revenue. The clearest example of this is how better customer experiences translate to customer loyalty.

Forrester's CX Index score measures how successfully a company delivers customer experiences that create and sustain loyalty.

CX QUALITY	CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Effectiveness
The experience delivers value to customers.

Ease
It's not difficult to get value from the experience.

Emotion
Customers feel good about their experience.

CX INDEX SCORE

Retention
Likelihood of keeping existing business.

Enrichment
Likelihood of buying additional products and services.

Advocacy
Likelihood of recommending to others.

142377   Source: Forrester Research, Inc. Unauthorized reproduction, citation, or distribution prohibited.

In their CX Index report, Forrester measures the quality of a company's customer experience based on three factors: effectiveness, ease, and emotion.

Within this context, effectiveness refers to how well the overall experience delivers value to customers. Ease describes the difficulty (or lack thereof) of getting that value. And emotion indicates how customers feel about the overall experience and value.

If a brand performs well in all three of these areas, the resulting reward is customer loyalty in the form of retention, enrichment, and advocacy.

The clearest of these is retention, or the likelihood of keeping existing customers. Enrichment, then, refers to each customer's likelihood of buying additional products or services, and advocacy indicates how likely they are to recommend the brand or products to others.

And each of these can make a significant difference in a company's success.

After all, long-term customer relationships, repeat purchases, and new customers all have a direct impact on revenue.

So with that in mind, there's no reason not to invest in improving the customer experience your company provides.

And to help you reach this goal, we've compiled six tips you can use to deliver positive experiences, and develop a long-term customer experience approach that works for your brand and goals.

CHAPTER 1

EXERCISE
EMPATHY

When looking for ways to improve customer experience, many companies jump straight to new technology and advanced strategies.

While these things can certainly make an impact, they require significant investments of time and budget to get up and running. And they aren't necessarily the steps that will have the biggest impact on your customers.

In fact, one of the highest-impact shifts you can make will cost you nothing at all in terms of budget: exercising empathy.

Now, if you're inclined to jump straight to bigger changes, changing how your employees approach customer interactions may seem too small to make a real difference.

But that's not necessarily the case. In fact, one of the top differentiators between high-performing and low-performing brands in the Forrester **Customer Experience Index** is the emotional responses customers have to their interactions with each one.

Their research found that top-performing brands delivered an average of **22 emotionally positive experiences** for each negative experience.

The lowest-performing brands, on the other hand, only provided two positive experience for each negative experience.

And within the context of this study, all customer emotions were broken down into either "positive" or "negative."

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Appreciated

Confident

Grateful

Happy

Respected

Valued

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Annoyed

Disappointed

Frustrated

When customers felt appreciated, confident, grateful, happy, respected, or valued, their experience added to the positive side. When they felt annoyed, disappointed, or frustrated, it added to the negative.

Top-performing brands were able to deliver twenty times more experiences that fell into the positive category than the negative — and you should aim to do the same if you're looking to stand out from your competitors.

Empathy is an essential part of reaching this goal.

It enables your team to see situations and challenges from the customer's point of view. This way, they can not only offer resolutions, but ensure that the entire issue is handled with an appropriate amount of care.

As Arke Co-Founder and CMTO **Chris Spears explains,** "You have to walk in your customers' shoes and feel what they experience. Technology just enables your strategy. It's not a silver bullet."

He continues by stressing that if he were trying to convey the importance of empathy to a customer-facing employee, he'd, "... start by asking them to think about the last time they were wildly frustrated. Was that when they were sitting on a call with the cable company? Was it working with a car dealership or automotive service center? Could it have been at the kids' school?"

By keeping these experiences in mind, employees can get a deeper understanding of the frustration a customer might be feeling when they reach out for assistance of any kind.

Plus, each employee's ability to quickly call to mind a frustrating experience underscores the importance of creating positive interactions.

Negative encounters tend to stick in consumers' minds longer than positive ones, and can easily ruin long-term relationships in a matter of minutes.

Using this understanding, your team can respond in a way that's satisfactory (at the bare minimum!) to each customer they interact with.

Of course, that's not to say that establishing empathy as the core of your approach to customer interactions is a shift you should expect to see overnight.

Instead, you need to be willing to take the time to explain the value of this shift to all customer-facing employees, then make sure that they're on board with it — and check in with their progress over time.

But as exercising empathy becomes a natural part of their interactions, the payoff can be well worth it.

As **Warren Buffet** explains, "Any business with delighted customers has a sales force they won't have to pay; You don't see them, but they are talking to people all the time."

And that's exactly what you can work towards building when you treat all of your customers with the understanding they're looking for from your team.

CHAPTER 2

TAKE AN OMNICHANNEL
APPROACH TO CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

In the past, the average retail store customer's entire buying journey might take place during the time they spent in a physical store location.

They might walk into the store to browse, check out the selection of products, and make a purchase all within the span of under an hour.

Today, that's rarely ever the case. Consumers have a wealth of resources at their disposal to help make sure they're making smart buying decisions — and they make use of those resources.

This means that before ever setting foot in a retail store, they may have spent an extensive amount of time browsing multiple brands' websites, comparing products, pricing, and reviews.

And this research is even more intensive for the average B2B customer, or the customers of any lead-based business. In these situations, prospective leads and clients may take days or even weeks to research their options.

Then, once they do decide to become a lead and speak with your sales team, the buying process can span much longer than the average B2C interaction.

And regardless of your business model, it's essential to think about the interactions your audience might have with your brand along every step of the way — along with the channels on which these interactions might take place.

This way, you can take all of the touchpoints someone might have during the customer experience into consideration, and connect each of these channels for a seamless experience.

For example, it's in your best interest to make sure that customers can always get the information and assistance they need on whichever channel they prefer.

And today, that's not limited to your company's website and physical store locations.

In fact, **65% of adults in the U.S.** use smartphones and other mobile devices for customer support at least a few times per month, with 24% saying they do so "a few times per week."
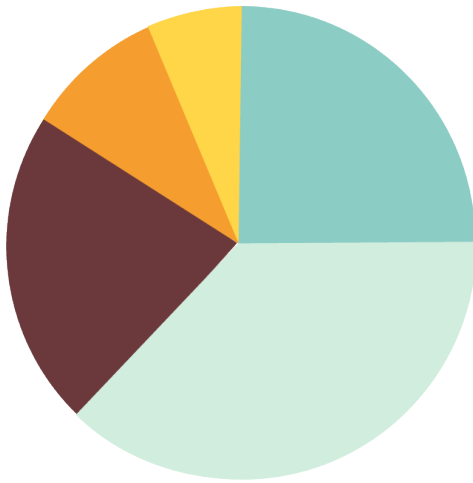
24%	A few times per week
39%	A few times per month
19%	A few times per year
11%	Never use phone for this
8%	Phone cannot do this

And while this survey refers specifically to support interactions, it's a trend that holds true at all points of the customer journey — and it indicates that you can't rely on one or two core channels to do all of the work of converting your audience into leads.

In fact, customer touchpoints can happen on a variety of channels, whether your brand plays an active role in them or not.

These channels include both mobile and desktop browsing, along with print media, third-party resources, marketing campaigns, interactions with your products, and engagements with your customer service and sales staff.
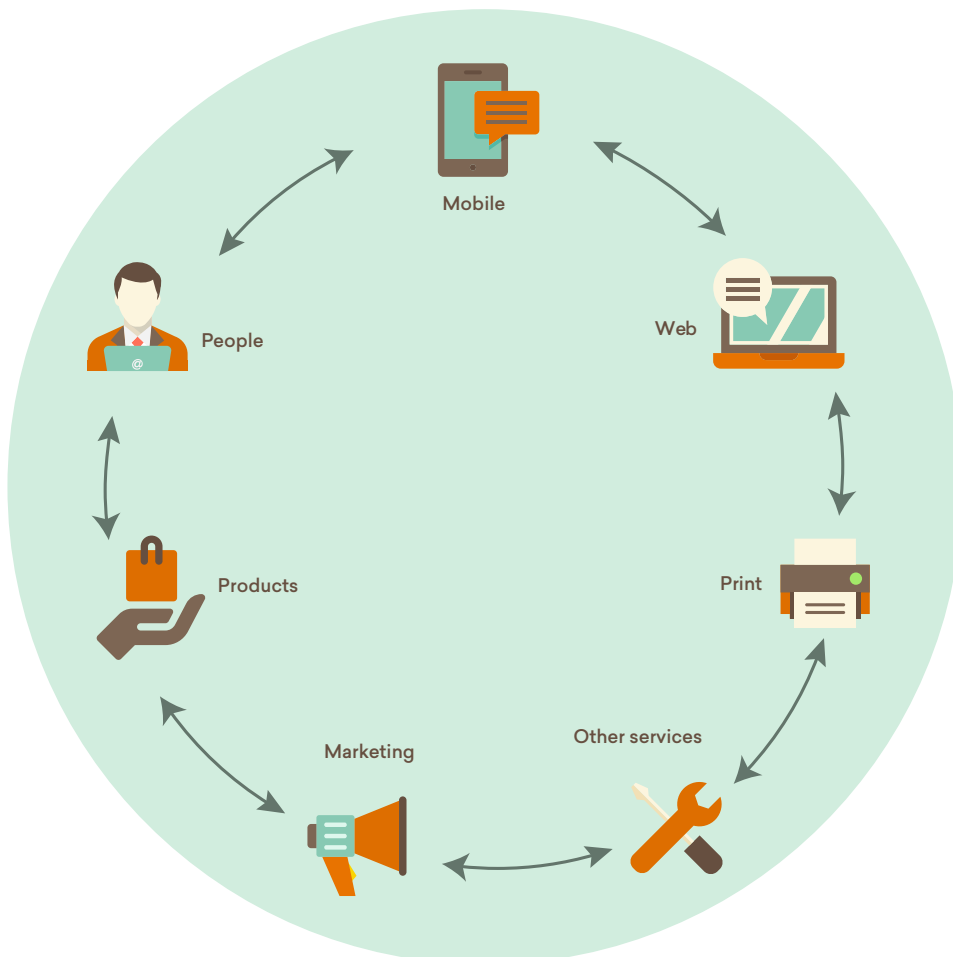
For the best results, you should aim to deliver the same experience and information regardless of the channel a customer uses to learn more about your brand and what you have to offer.

And this requires taking an omnichannel approach. Your strategy needs to not only include a variety of channels, but connect each of those channels to create a cohesive experience across each.

Fortunately, top support tools now make it easier than ever to keep all parts of the customer experience connected.

At Freshdesk, for example, our helpdesk platform enables businesses to bring all interactions into a single dashboard. This way, teams can assist customers from a central location, regardless of the channel each one uses to reach out.

Plus, when all interactions are accessible from a single platform, teams can easily collaborate to find resolutions and deliver assistance as quickly and efficiently as possible.

This way, you can be confident that your audience is always having the kinds of interactions with your brand that you want — on every channel, and during every stage of the customer journey.

PERSONALIZE THE EXPERIENCE
TO INDIVIDUAL CUSTOMERS

Although your entire target audience likely has a few basic characteristics in common, each potential customer and client ultimately has their own unique set of interests and needs.

And your customer experience strategy needs to take these differences into account. You can't take a one-size-fits-all
approach and expect it to work for your entire audience.

Instead, your goal should be to deliver experiences tailored to each customer's interests and needs.

This way, you can not only show them that you care about their needs (and see them as more than a revenue source), but can also deliver information and support in a way that's more effective in moving them towards conversions and purchases.

For example, if your company offers services for both residential and commercial customers, these two subsets of your audience have very different priorities and needs.

To meet those different needs, you might opt to create content, resources, and campaigns that are aimed specifically at each of these segments, then deliver the appropriate ones through advanced targeting on ad platforms like Google AdWords and Facebook Ads.

This way, you can be confident that each of your potential leads is receiving content that's relevant to their decision-making process.

But in order to do this, you need to have a deep understanding of not only your audience personas but also which of your individual audience members and leads falls under each of those personas.

In the past, this may have seemed like a virtually impossible task. But thanks to advances in marketing automation and support platforms, that's fortunately no longer the case.

For example, if you've ever browsed an ecommerce website and looked at a specific product, then seen ads for that product on other websites in the following days or weeks, this is the result of cookie-based targeting.

And this can be an extremely effective form of personalization. But it's only one example of the many ways in which brands can tailor the customer experience to individual members of their audiences.

In addition to on-site actions, it's also possible to personalize the experience based on behavior and interactions on all of the channels where your brand has a presence.

Plus, if you take an omnichannel approach to customer experience, all of this information can be stored in a central location, simplifying the process of delivering personalized messaging and experiences.

For example, with Freshdesk's Customer 360, each customer's purchase activity and interactions with your support team are logged in their customer profile.

Teams can also add notes about their interactions, including any past issues, specific preferences a customer expressed at some point in the buying process, or any ongoing activities that may require follow-up communication.

This way, if that same customer reaches out later and their ticket is assigned to a different agent, that agent will immediately have access to information they can use to tailor their communication right from the start.

Lead-based businesses can also use Customer 360 for B2B clients. In this context, each "customer's" profile shows the company's name, a brief description, their location, site domain, customer satisfaction score, and account tier if relevant.

Your staff can also upload any additional information like their contract or the details of their service plan with you.

Although the exact approach for these two business models is slightly different, the end result is the same: highly personalized communication that's not only tailored to the customer, but can be designed to move them through the sales process (and future purchases or partnerships) even more effectively.

MONITOR CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION LEVELS REGULARLY

As you develop your approach to improving the customer experience, it's essential to have a process in place for monitoring your progress.

After all, if you're investing time and budget into any strategy, you need to be able to determine the impact it's making on your overarching business goals.

And within the context of customer experience, there are two key metrics you can use to gauge your success: CSAT and NPS.

If your business already has a comprehensive customer service reporting strategy in place, you may be familiar with CSAT, or customer satisfaction rating.

This rating is typically calculated based on responses to the question, "How would you rate your overall satisfaction with X?," where "X" can either refer to a specific product, service, or support interaction, or to your brand as a whole.

Then, customers can choose from at least three different responses to indicate a positive, negative, or neutral reaction.

For example, within the Freshdesk platform, our users can collect CSAT ratings on a scale of five different responses: very good, good, neutral, bad, and very bad.
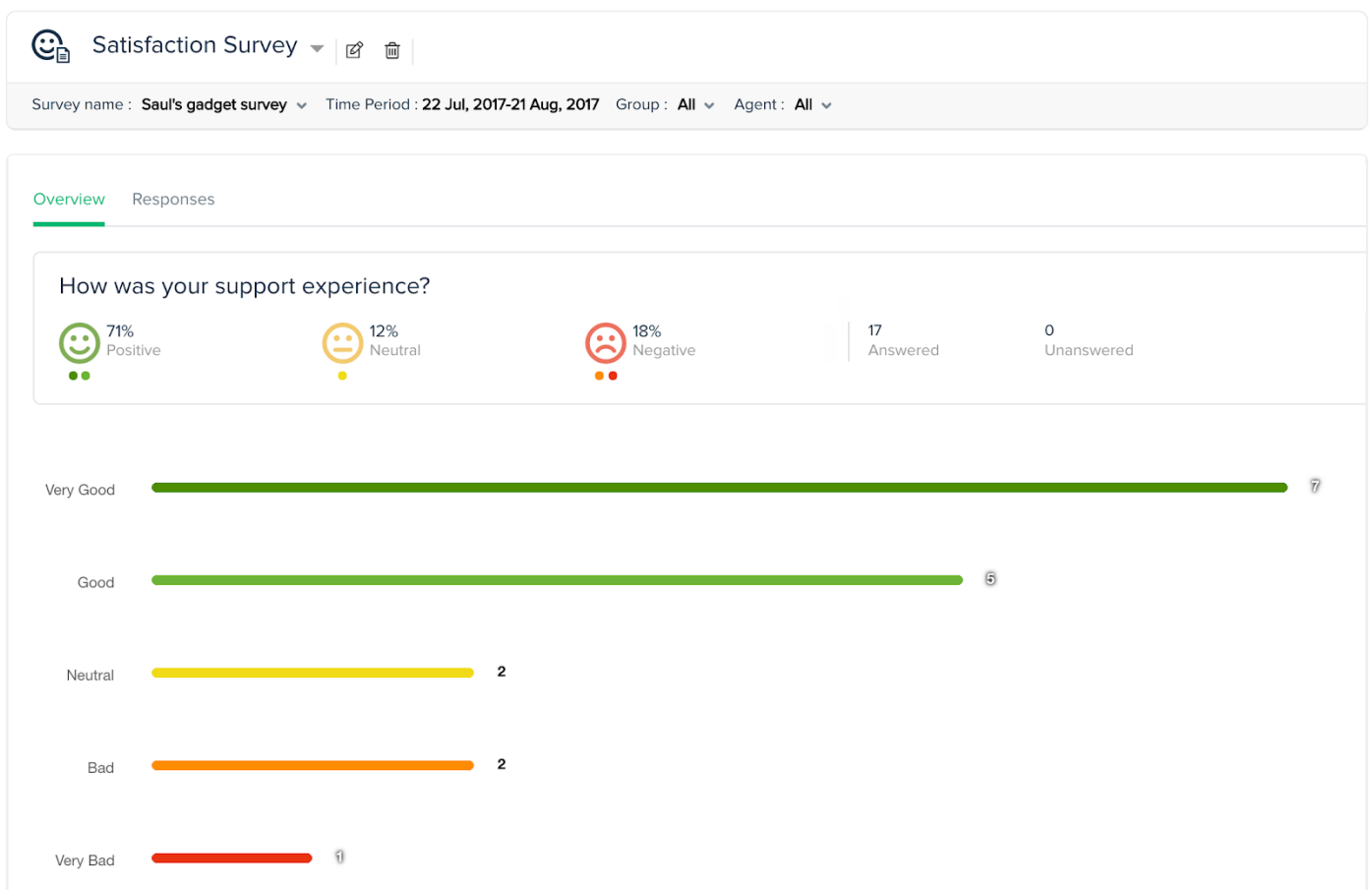
Then, each of these ratings is taken into account to calculate the overall score, which is expressed as a percentage ranging from zero to 100.

And the biggest benefit of using this approach to monitor your progress is that you can use it to individually measure different parts of your strategy.

For example, if you send CSAT surveys immediately following customer support interactions, the results can tell you how satisfied your customers are with this particular area of their experience with your brand.

Then, if you take a similar approach to other areas of the customer journey, like the experience a user has while browsing your site or speaking with a member of your sales team, you can determine which areas your customers are most satisfied with — and which have room for improvement.

And while your scores may vary for different parts of the experience, most companies aim to keep CSAT between 80-90%. So if you notice any scores below this level, this can indicate parts of your strategy that could use improvement.

From there, Net Promoter Score, or NPS, is an excellent way to gauge how satisfied your customers are with the customer experience as a whole.

Unlike CSAT, this metric is designed to reflect overall satisfaction with your brand. To calculate it, customers are asked, "How likely are you to recommend this company?," and required to answer with a number on a scale from zero to 10.

This way, you can not only gauge how satisfied your customers are with your products or services, but also how likely they are to move into the advocacy stage and share positive opinions of your brand with others in your target audience.

Based on their answers, respondents are classified as either detractors (rating 0-6), passives (rating 7 or 8), or promoters (rating 9 or 10).

Then, the overall score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters.

This means that the resulting score is not a percentage. Instead, scores can range anywhere from -100 to 100.

And according to CustomerGauge's 2016 NPS Benchmarks Report, **the average NPS is 44.** That being said, this isn't to say that if your score is higher than this, you don't have any work left to do.

Instead, make it a priority to calculate your NPS on a regular basis, and use any changes to monitor your success in working towards better customer satisfaction.

COLLECT (AND USE!)
CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Customer satisfaction ratings and customer feedback are often lumped into the same "survey" umbrella.

And while it's true that standard satisfaction
surveys can include fields for feedback, it's important to recognize that these two types of questions should play very distinct roles in approach to delivering great customer experiences.

Multiple-choice and rating-style questions are useful for gauging how satisfied your audience is with the strategy you're already using, and the level of service you're currently providing.

And that's great! At least for measurement purposes. And at best, they can tell you which parts of your strategy need work.

But these types of responses don't tell you much about what, exactly, you can do to improve. So while a low score might be the push you need to take action, it can't tell you what kind of action that should be.

And that's where customer feedback becomes extremely valuable.

When you give your audience the chance to write their own, open-ended responses, you have the chance to uncover new opportunities and ideas you may not have even considered without their input.

Plus, as easy as multiple-choice questions make the analysis process, they don't give your audience the chance to express opinions outside of your pre-written scale or responses.

And considering that the ultimate goal is to make the experience better **for your customers,** the benefit of using their suggestions to shape your approach is clear.

Fortunately, collecting useful feedback doesn't have to be a complicated process.

If you're already sending CSAT surveys, for example, you might opt to add an open-ended question after the basic rating, asking the customer to either explain the reason for their score, give suggestions as to what you could do to improve it.

This way, if you notice low scores for specific areas of your business, you can focus specifically on suggestions that will help you improve that area.

Beyond that, you can also send dedicated survey emails that specifically ask customers for feedback. For example, travel insurance brand Allianz sends the following email after a customer's short-term policy with the brand ends.

Tell us what you think.

Your feedback is important to us.

Dear ███████,

At Allianz Global Assistance, it's important to ensure our products and services go beyond just meeting your needs — they should exceed them. To help achieve that goal, we're asking you, our valued customer, to participate in a brief survey.

You can begin the survey here. It only takes about 10 minutes, and responses will remain confidential. If you have questions regarding the survey, please email us at customersurvey@allianzassistance.com.

Remember, your feedback makes us better.

It reminds the recipient that their responses are confidential, and reminds them that the purpose is to deliver even better products and services in the future.

You can use a similar approach with your survey email campaign to collect feedback that helps you continuously improve the experience you deliver to your customers.

And if you're looking for a way to jump-start the process of collecting actionable input, you may even consider running a raffle or giveaway for all participants. This way, your audience has a clear incentive to express their opinions — in addition to better service the next time they interact with your company.

CHAPTER 6

LOOK FOR WAYS TO
GO ABOVE AND BEYOND

Today's consumers have high expectations. And while meeting this expectations is certainly an important first step in the process of delivering positive customer experiences, it's best to view this as your baseline goal.

After all, if a customer is already expecting you to provide comprehensive, in-depth information on each of your products and services, along with fast, efficient support whenever they need it, they'll view your ability to meet these criteria as a given.

And, of course, it's worth your time to work towards reaching this level.

But once you've reached it, and are consistently meeting customer expectations, you'll need to shift gears if you want to continue improving.

After all, the ultimate goal of creating a customer experience strategy is to not only measure up to a baseline, but to deliver on a level that helps you stand out from your competitors, and use the experience you provide as a key differentiator.

And that requires looking for opportunities to go above and beyond.

That's because, using the Kano Model, you can only improve satisfaction by meeting basic needs and expectations to a certain extent.
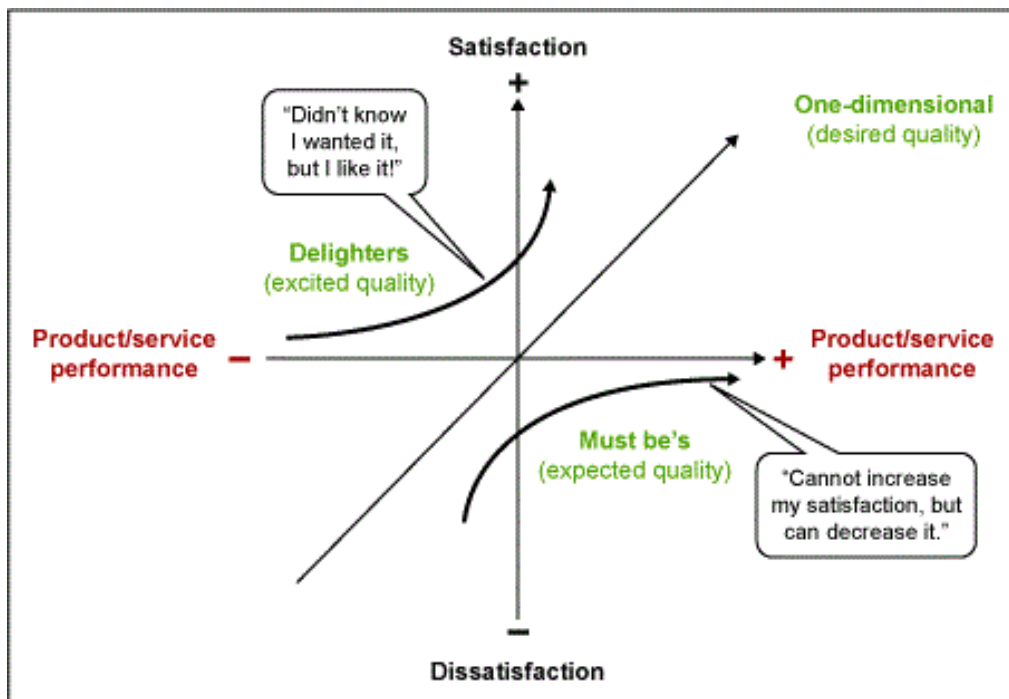
Essentially, performing below a customer's desired level of quality can decrease satisfaction — but once you've reached their expectations, the amount to which you can impress levels off.

Once you've reached those basic needs, the best way to achieve even higher customer satisfaction is to add unexpected qualities that move customers from satisfied to delighted.

As this model illustrates, improving satisfaction beyond the baseline often means offering things that a customer didn't even know they wanted or needed.

This way, one the customer's basic needs are met (in ways that your competitors can also meet them), you can begin adding to the experience in ways that are unique and memorable.

For example, when a customer reached out to the **M&S Bank Twitter** account asking whether there were coin machines located in two specific branches, the employee monitoring this account didn't have an immediate answer (and it wasn't available online).

In this case, the employee's only responsibility was to tell this customer to call those branches and ask. And this response likely wouldn't have come as a surprise to the user.

But instead of using this standard responses, the employee took the additional step and made the phone call on the behalf of this user.

Then, he delivered the answer and simplified the process for this customer. And while this is a relatively simple example, it goes to show that "going above and beyond" doesn't have to involve crazy PR stunts or anything of that nature.

Delivering memorable customer experiences simply requires training your team to look for ways to simplify the process for both current and potential customers, then follow through on those ideas.

Of course, that's not to say that every interaction needs to involve elaborate plans or additional steps. Many inquiries your team receives, especially relatively straightforward ones, simply won't present opportunities for this.

Instead, your focus should be on illustrating the value of delighting your customers to your team and encouraging them to aim for that end result.

This way, you can make the "unexpected" part of the customer experience, and establish a reputation as a brand that's willing to go above and beyond for your audience.

And if you're able to reach this goal, you're well on your way to not only retaining the customers you've already earned, but also using your reputation to earn new customers that are ready for a better experience.

IMPROVE YOUR COMPANY'S
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE APPROACH
TODAY!

Delivering excellent customer experiences is no longer optional. It's an essential part of earning and keeping loyal customers, and can make all the difference in whether your brand is able to establish the revenue and growth you need to reach your business goals.

Plus, today's consumers expect top-notch experiences from the companies they purchase from and partner with.

Delivering on this expectation requires a strategy — and after reading this resource, you should have the foundation you need to develop one that works for your business.

First and foremost, train everyone who interacts with your customers in any way to exercise empathy and view situations from the customer's point of view.

Next, if you haven't done so already, shift to an omnichannel approach to better manage the experience your audience has on all of the channels you use to reach and engage with them.

From there, look for ways to personalize the entire experience to individual customers at all stages of the buying process.

Then, monitor customer satisfaction levels on a regular basis, and collect and utilize customer feedback to improve all areas of the experience they have with your brand.

Finally, encourage your team to look for opportunities to go above and beyond to deliver excellent experiences when they can.

With this approach, you can improve the customer journey each member of your audience has, from start to finish.

And with each improvement you make, you can work towards building the kind of loyal, long-term customer base you need to boost your revenue and reach your most important business goals.

Looking for a helpdesk software that's a right fit for your business?

freshdesk
by freshworks