Customer Service Is The New Marketing

Reggie Bradford, Senior Vice President of Product Development, Oracle

It's referred to as CX, one of those insider-y near-acronyms meant to convey significance through brevity.

CX is shorthand for "customer experience," the significance of which cannot be underestimated in today's dynamic, real-time business environment, especially to the marketing organizations that are the logical inheritors of the CX imperative.
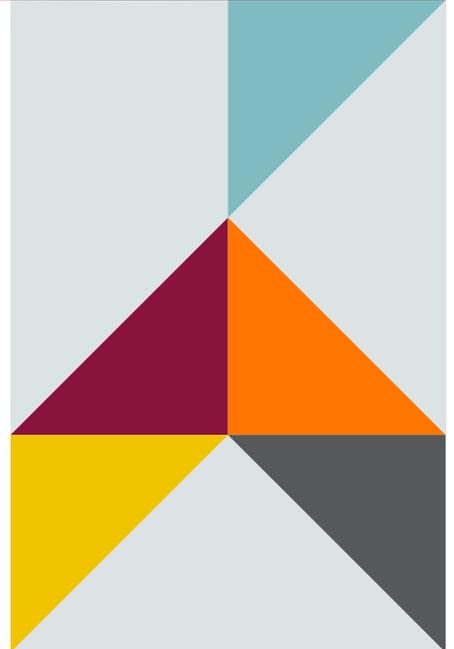
First, CX is a serious change agent. Within three years, more than half of organizations will implement significant business model changes in their efforts to improve customer experience, research firm Gartner predicts. And marketing is ground zero. "Customer experience is the new marketing," Steve Cannon, CEO of Mercedes Benz USA, told a webinar audience last year.

I'm tempted to edit Cannon's statement just a bit, like this: Customer service is the new marketing. And marketers need CX strategies and supporting technologies that tie traditional customer service functions together with new social network management operations. Here's why:

Customer experience is increasingly defined through online social interaction with companies. Consumers carry in their pockets powerful computers, which they use to do research, shop, and communicate their experiences with suppliers and their products to an online community of family, friends, colleagues, and others.

Whether companies realize it or not, the role customer service plays in this online real-time customer experience is critical. Twitter says the number of tweets to brands and their customer service usernames has increased two-and-a-half times in the past two years. A third of the social networkers surveyed by Nielsen said they prefer online customer service to telephone service, not to mention the evolution of mobile messaging apps and their potential for one-to-one customer service.

And everybody knows that social networkers are an impatient lot. One study says that more than half (53%) of Twitter users who tweet about a brand expect the company to respond within an hour—almost three quarters (72%) if it's a complaint. That's why the expectations for the contributions of customer service to the customer experience equation are high.

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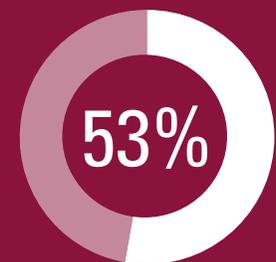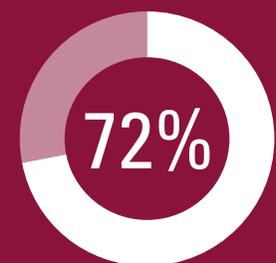
A disgruntled traveler is sending tweets reporting that the flight she's on has been delayed for six hours, causing her to miss her connecting flight. What if this tweet blast were routed to an airline customer service representative who is able to look up the customer's profile and find out that she's a member of the airline's frequent flyer club and likes to relax with a drink between flights? Perhaps a text-message apology along with a coupon or two for free drinks at the airline club might help ameliorate the situation.

An angry young man is tweeting about the fact that he can't get the tent he just bought assembled correctly and it's getting cold and dark as night falls in the woods. The tent's brand name triggers an alert that's routed to a customer service rep who's able to pull up the sales transaction, including the product's model number. The rep sends a text message to the angry young man with a link to a video on how to put together that particular tent.

What these scenarios have in common is the use of traditional customer service information—loyalty cards, transaction records—combined with data, interactions, and metrics gleaned from the social network. Such effective omnichannel integration, resulting in targeted, real-time communication and problem solving, will be what vaults customer service to the forefront of marketing in the social environment.

In a recent column I described how the role of the chief marketing officer is evolving. For instance, today's tech-savvy CMOs are hip to the cloud, which affords them direct access to powerful customer care applications. But that's led to problems with "siloed" data stores that are isolated within specific applications and/or across different departments, effectively blocking omnichannel integration.

Recognizing the importance of CX, and well acquainted with the problem of siloed data, Oracle has expanded its partnership with Twitter to incorporate enriched Twitter insights and metrics into its Oracle Social Cloud applications.

Recently, Oracle talked about new integration capabilities between its Oracle Social Cloud and Oracle Service Cloud. That integration allows effective workflows and enables more contextual data between business users who are monitoring the social environment and customer service agents.

Another way CMOs have evolved is in their orientation around profit and loss—with an emphasis on profit. That's why, when a Twitter survey suggests that it costs as little as $1 to resolve a customer issue on social media, or around a sixth of what many call center interactions cost, CMOs should pay attention.

In today's connected digital environment, effective customer service is critical—and marketing's new priority. It's all in service of the new business imperative that goes by the signifier "CX."

Reggie Bradford is Senior Vice President of Product Development for Oracle.

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