

How important is the first touchpoint in the customer journey?

First impressions count for customers, so it's vital brands offer great interactions at the first touchpoint to set the bar for future engagement.



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Customers are emotional. A bad experience can leave a sour taste, and conversely, an excellent experience can leave them singing your praises. Perfecting customer interaction is an iterative process with a number of touchpoints. Each could prove critical to a customer's perception of your organisation but it's the first that sets the tone of the relationship. All future interactions will be magnified by what happens first. It's the simple principle of confirmation bias.

The first impression

This is known in psychology as the law of primacy. The first thing that happens shapes our view of what happens next – the process of priming. If the initial experience is outstanding it is like placing a large deposit in an emotional bank account. If what happens next is positive, it benefits from confirmation bias. Alternatively, if what happens next is negative, the customer will be more forgiving. However, if the initial experience is poor, the reverse is true.

In a well-publicised experiment, a supermarket played German music near the wine aisle and saw German wine outsell French wine by two bottles to one, with a similar phenomenon happening when French music was played – with French wine outselling German wine by five bottles to one. Much of the process of priming happens subliminally [1].

By designing and controlling the first experience your customers have, you can help to ensure your brand promise is carried out consistently. The challenge is getting it right across the different channels your customers use and ensuring that it's a win-win situation for both sides.

Excerpt from Making Memories 2016 UK Customer Experience Excellence Analysis

Delivering a 'loud' online experience

The percentage of sales made online continues to grow [2] and we are seeing many brands leverage their websites to be more than transactional or functional hubs. They are extensions of the brand's personality and seek to engage in a more personal way through the customer journey to leave a lasting first impression.

The average person spends 30 seconds on a homepage and it takes even less time for them to form an opinion about your brand. With an expanding portfolio of products, [Marshall Headphones](#) set out to overhaul their website to simplify the purchase process. Using customer insights they rebuilt their site to make it easy for consumers to see the whole range and make their shopping experience simple. At the same time, the site stays true to the brand approach of being 'loud'. The site brings the rock and roll experience to life in an engaging way with visuals and content whilst providing clear messages for their consumers at each point.

Autonomy for telephone operators at First Direct provide a warm welcome on the phone

In banking customers still prefer traditional communication channels to build relationships and resolve queries. Just under a third of consumers [3] still prefer to talk to someone face to face or on the phone. In our own research [4] we found [First Direct](#) to be an exceptional example of how this first touchpoint can result positively for both sides. It's a warm friendly voice.

The bank spends a great deal of time with employees - but before they join - so they can be sure they are the right fit for the culture. This permeates through all levels of their business. In the feedback received via our KPMG Nunwood research, all their people are perceived to be passionate about maintaining a 'customer first' culture and this is particularly evident in their contact centres.

Employees receive comprehensive training to be able to handle problems on the spot, without having to pass the person through a myriad of different departments. Employees have autonomy. They can make judgement calls without having to seek authorisation from a line manager or a different department. This not only saves time for both parties but leads to a more seamless and positive customer experience touchpoint. More importantly, it helps to transform the customer into a 'promoter.'

Apple provides a memorable unboxing experience

With many ecommerce sites, the first customer touch point is often when the product is delivered to their home. Initially, brands packed to simply protect the product through the process of posting and delivering. But as customer expectations have shifted and indeed with the rise of social media sharing, unboxing is a big point of differentiation. Last year videos of users unboxing items on YouTube grew by 57% to 1.6million videos, and 62% of those watching were doing so with a view to buying the product[5].

Apple's philosophy demonstrates this well. For them, design is not how it looks but how it works. This carries through into their packaging and unboxing experience. Planning starts in an 'unboxing room' where designers experiment to create the perfect emotional response when the box is opened. Unlike other phones or technology products, where the first thing you see is power cables and instruction booklets, Apple gives you what you have paid for. Your new iPhone or iPad. The process is quick and seamless and each unravel creates anticipation.

Trunkclub have taken this touchpoint even more seriously and creatively. Instead of a standard, brown box sealed with packaging tape, they have designed a custom printed box with a handle that looks like a trunk, closely matching and mirroring their brand. Inside the trunk, the contents are thoughtfully laid with a handwritten card from a personal stylist explaining the items chosen. The anticipation created is heightened by the feeling of being part of something special and exclusive.

The examples above demonstrate just some of the benefits to advocacy that can be gained. Taking some time out with your key department heads, to actually walk through the customer journey and interactions, will help you understand more fully how your processes affect them from start to finish. 'Listening' to their spontaneous feedback on social media, watching unboxing videos or reviewing feedback and complaints received will help you see the emotional connections you are creating or wanting to create.

Regardless of whether the first experience is online, over the phone or in the comfort of a customer's home unravelling a parcel, it's critical to the way your customers continue to engage with you and talk about your brand, or indeed choose not to engage at all.

What are the first impressions that your business could provide to customers? How do these set your brand apart and drive value?

[1] North, Hargreaves and McKendrick, 1997

[2] Mintel UK Retail briefing Feb 2016

[3] Mintel: Loyalty in FS 2016

[4] KPMG Nunwood UK Customer Experience Excellence Analysis 2015

[5] <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/articles/youtube-insights-stats-data-trends-vol7.html>