

What is a customer centric business?

How can organisations start recognising the need to think and act around their customers whilst driving economic value?



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From creating fierce competition to challenging organisational models, a new kind of customer centric thinking has started to disrupt the business landscape at an accelerating pace.

Customers expect constant flexibility and high-quality personalised experiences. Digital technologies have disrupted markets and fundamentally changed the way businesses can interact with their customers. Mobiles have put customers firmly in control, driving 24/7 services, support and spending. Consumers are spending more than US\$900billion through mobile phones and tablets and this figure is set to approach nearly \$2trillion by 2020^[1]. So expectations for seamless experiences across different channels is higher than ever before.

This landscape may be daunting but provides an exceptional opportunity for differentiation. By transforming your business around your customers, delivering in an agile way and continually looking to improve, you can start to drive better customer and economic value.

A new way of thinking

The world is seeing a constantly changing level of complexity and ambiguous challenges. Best practice is being redefined and there is a new way of thinking focused on outcomes and interactions rather than kicking off with problems and issues.

It is called 'design thinking' and asks in detail how customers are interacting with your organisation. What are their motivations and desires? What are their pain points?

Customers' thought processes and behaviours are not always rational, logical or linear. By understanding their perspectives and input you can start to connect the dots and find the disconnects between your business goals and their reality.

By discovering what people actually do, rather than what they say, you can understand and anticipate future, unarticulated needs and align these to your business. This helps to identify real issues you never knew existed and leads to solutions completely centred around your customer. And because these solutions are defined by how they impact the people who matter, they are the key to profitable growth.

By looking at human elements and translating the 'fuzziness' of people into actual insights, organisations can avoid previous blind spots that may have appeared with their customers.

Design for customers not processes

When faced with countless challenges and potential solutions, it is easy to be diverted from your customer focus strategy. However, designing solutions that offer true value to customers by connecting to their world's needs is critical.

It's about understanding their journey with your brand and how they interact with the different parts of your organisation; how their actions with your brand fit into their life and most importantly why they act in the way that they do.

Identifying customer motivations takes thorough research across a variety of locations to understand the full spectrum of touch points. This 'journey mapping' process can give you clear insights into all of the above - the rational and sometimes irrational ways that people interact with their surroundings and your brand.

Armed with these insights, you can define customer engagement, map out future states and design solutions that align customer desires and motivations with your business strategy. Building solutions around real behaviours that are desirable and intuitive can deliver real business returns.

You can design anything, but if you don't make that connection to people you will miss out on economic benefits across your organisation. By keeping people at the core and understanding how they behave, you can bring to life ideas that nobody has thought

of before and really stand out amongst your competitors.

Seek out continuous improvements

As the pace of change accelerates, so do customer expectations and so business transformation is not just a box to be checked. It's a continuous process of discovery, development and improvement driven by evolving and demanding customer expectations.

Through ongoing questioning, research and robust analytics, you can keep making relevant, continuous improvements towards a more customer centric approach. What's important is to keep these focussed around what your customers' need and not your perceptions of what they need.

As well as existing customers, think about potential customers. This will make sure the external view of your company is holistically positive.

Continuous improvement initiatives encourage enhancement of products, processes and services. They can help to create an environment where teams stay focused on the customer and providing quality service delivery.

Deliver small, fast and often

In this new, fast-moving reality, organisations face some of their biggest operational and technical challenges just to remain competitive. They can no longer afford to take months, let alone years, to implement major business changes. Learning to approach problem solving quickly to meet the constantly evolving needs of a restless market has become a key differentiator. Creating new mind-sets over new technologies and having the confidence to start small and learn as you go is as important as learning to adapt quickly and being prepared to fail.

Identify small wins that meet customer expectations and connect to business outcomes, and then build on them. What defines these wins is that they are developed with a customer focus.

Through prototyping and customer feedback you can progress in small steps that build on each other to develop an optimal customer-centric strategy. This encourages design thinking and experimentation and can lead to high-value outcomes that directly deliver value.

The pace of change makes it nearly impossible for organisations to keep up. They need the ability to deliver at pace and react to changes in the marketplace in a nimbler, more agile way.

[1] Source: Euromonitor: Digital Consumer in 2016: Mobility Moves Mainstream