

2012: Customer Experience is the New Brand

Lessons for financial institutions to increase brand impact



Most companies spend a lot of time defining their brand – the values they want people to associate with their business – and market to promote that perception. But these days, companies face challenges in controlling how their brand is perceived, because customers have the tools to broadcast their experiences with the business on a mass scale. A “brand” is now less about brand promises, and more about how companies *deliver* on those promises.

- **How customer experience is becoming the brand.**

While many consumers may not know a company’s official brand story, it’s a good bet they have impressions about the brand, based on their experience across various touch points, as well as influence from friends, family, media, and the general public. Consider the recent public outcry about proposed debit card fees, which led banks to reverse decisions to charge fees for debit card use. Even the anticipation of a negative experience led customers nationwide to express negative perceptions about “big banks.” As a result, though banks may not have lost a significant amount of customers, the value of their brand and customer loyalty may have suffered.

Bank of America’s brand message claims, “We anticipate your financial needs and create opportunity.” Yet, recent negative sentiment over fees and other issues indicates the customer experience may be redefining how people perceive the BofA brand.

- **Social media is evolving how we experience brands.**

Consumers are increasingly turning to social media to express service complaints, and how/when/if a company responds may influence their perception of the brand. Additionally, social networks like Twitter and Facebook make it easy for passionate consumers to voice their perceptions about a business (good or bad), potentially influencing millions of people. In other words, “word of mouth” has gone viral. To maintain control of their brand, businesses need to ensure the customer experience aligns with their brand promises.

78% of consumers believe that having a great experience makes them loyal – according to a recent Loyalty 360 survey.

Understanding how to monitor customer experience

To strengthen a brand, you need to deliver the experience customers want. That starts with effective listening and engagement, combined with agility to keep up with changing expectations.

- **Gain a holistic view of the customer experience with analytics.**

If you have a Voice of the Customer program, make sure you’re **monitoring across all channels** and touch points. For example, the rise of digital banking means new challenges in ensuring a smooth experience across online and mobile access, ATMs, and automated phone services. For a richer perspective on the customer experience, consider using **text mining of unstructured data** (e.g., social media comments) to complement structured data (such as profiles and transaction histories).





- **Measure emotional connection to your brand.**

A strong brand is one that resonates with people, so it's vital to track how customers and the public feel about your company. [Sentiment analysis](#) can help you effectively spot trends and emerging issues. When sentiment is positive, you can engage champions to increase brand awareness. When the tide turns negative, you'll be better prepared to address problems early and [offer special attention to improve brand perception](#).

A recent Temkin Group report cited that less than 25% of businesses measure the emotional reaction of their customers. "Companies need to integrate customer experience metrics into the rhythm of how they run their business and link those measures to their brand strategy."

Increasing brand impact with customer experience insights

As people and technologies evolve, so does the customer experience. Your brand needs to evolve along with it. Effective analysis of feedback across all touch points gives you a clear picture of the customer experience, and guides you in engaging with customers in ways that strengthen your brand.

Here are a few examples of financial services companies doing it well:

- **American Express® – Maximizing engagement on Facebook**

The company is successfully using social media to reinforce positive feelings about the brand and drive customer acquisition. On Facebook they ask questions that tie a customer's personal experiences with Amex products, such as, "*What summer memories did your Amex Card make possible?*" [Our analysis](#) of 5,300 Facebook comments over two months helped target which efforts worked best to engage customers. And their [Link-Like-Love program](#) takes engagement to the next level by rewarding existing and new customers based on what they "like" on Facebook.



- **Experian™ – Using analytics to increase loyalty and drive new business**

As part of their customer-centric daily workflow, [Experian Credit Services](#) uses data analytics to monitor feedback, and delivers it to sales and service teams who can take action quickly. The company also shares feedback across the organization, categorized for client segments to help lines of business understand unique needs and concerns. In this way, Experian stays prepared to meet and exceed client expectations, which helps enhance brand perception and increase the likelihood of recommendations.



- **California Coast Credit Union – Leveraging YouTube to promote the brand**

To attract new business and strengthen perceptions of their brand, [the credit union](#) encourages members to share entertaining video clips that celebrate the brand and generate enthusiasm with young audiences. It effectively builds loyalty into the customer experience, while promoting the brand as a welcoming community.

Brand is about more than goodwill; it's a valuable company asset that's beginning to appear on balance sheets at [significant valuations](#). And customer experience is about more than meeting basic needs; it's about making people feel great –trust, ease, convenience, delight. Companies that deliver on their brand promises –by systematically aligning their customers' experience with their brand vision– will be positioned to win for the long term.

Let's Talk

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