Customer Rage & Customer Experience ROI – How An Infatuation With Insincere Customer Experience Metrics Destroys Brands

Customer Rage - Many companies don't really understand it and are impotent to manage it because they are infatuated with insincere customer experience metrics and narrowly focused on optimizing a transaction.

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Consider these disquieting facts from the 2015 National Customer Rage survey:

- Customers are experiencing an ever-increasing level of problems with products and services; 54% of households reported a problem in 2015 – up from 32% in 1976.
- Two-thirds (66%) of customers reported experiencing customer rage (being extremely or very upset) in association with their most serious problem. On the whole (putting aside a handful of companies that are spectacular and another bushel basket that are just OK), corporate responsiveness to customer complaints is horrid.
- Nearly one-half (49%) of customers report that the time spent complaining to a company (about their most serious problem) was *not worthwhile.*
- About two-thirds of complainants report that they got "nothing" when they complained to a company (about their most serious problem).
- Only 17% of complainants indicate that they were satisfied with the action taken by a company that they complained to (about their most serious problem). In *1976*, 23% of complainants were fully satisfied!

What gives? Companies have put an overwhelming emphasis and invested meaningful resources in the customer experience. Yet, today's customers are experiencing more problems than ever before, are less satisfied with corporate responsiveness than ever before, and get very little in return for their effort. In fact, the results of our study show that the vast majority of complaint handling experiences are extraordinarily bad for an overwhelming majority of customers. You have to ask: 'Why are *so many* companies *so incompetent* at resolving customer problems?' Our research and experience working with various companies, suggests that this low-level of complainant satisfaction is an unintended consequence of two corporate customer experience vices.

First, and foremost, too many companies are infatuated with insincere customer experience metrics. Second, all too many companies build their customer care foundation on executing *their* transaction rather than on diagnosing and responding to what *customers want*.

Infatuation With Insincere Customer Experience Metrics

When we launched the National Customer Rage survey 13 years ago, I think the only people who truly appreciated the freshness of the perspective and the implications of "customer rage" were the business press corps and John Q. Public.

My encounters with many a corporate audience were remarkably different. Some leaders (responsible for contact centers, company-wide customer experience strategies or corporate customer satisfaction programs) would shake their heads in mild disbelief. Others would speculate about the relevance of these data about a few "wacky," "unreasonable" and complaining customers. It often seemed that companies didn't "get it" or were somewhat smug about the imperative of customer problem handling.

Why might customers and businesses be so polarized in their views regarding the relevance and impact of complaint handling satisfaction? My own view is that most companies are not *knowingly* providing mediocre service. Virtually no company would be willing to accept the levels of non-performance that have been uncovered in the National Customer Rage survey. Rather, too many companies today don't truly know how unexceptional their service is. They are all too often lulled into a sense of self-satisfaction by their use of tepid, ineffectual metrics. As a result, companies are awash in data, but achieve a lower ROI for the significant time and money that they spend collecting data. Why? Because those data do not offer valuable insights needed to operationalize meaningful and customer-driven change in the way that the company does business.

Take, for example, your typical contact center (nearly three-quarters of customers identify the telephone as their primary channel for solving their most serious problems). In most companies, contact centers may possess the richest source of customer data. Yet I would argue that many contact centers lack a reliable, unvarnished point of view about the customer experiences that they are creating.

Instead of measuring a customer's ROI for the contact experience, far too many contact centers are reliant on weak, statistically unreliable and non-actionable voice of the customer (VOC) surrogates, such as:

- IVR surveys with 3 to 5 questions that only address the representative's demeanor and yield low response rates
- text analytics tools that are useful for data mining purposes but offer no more than anecdotal data about the actual outcomes

- call quality monitoring scores that are more telling about compliance with silly standards – think "said customer's name twice"

What are some alternative metrics that matter when it comes to complainant satisfaction (or any customer contact for that matter)? Here are three metrics with teeth from the National Customer Rage survey:

- What percentage of the customers contacting your customer care center would rate their experience of seeking help as "worthwhile?"
- What are the specific types of remedies or outcomes that your customers seek most, when reaching out to your company with a problem? Which of these remedies do they get/not get?
- What percentage of customers with a problem would say that they got "nothing" in return for getting in touch with your corporate contact center?

In more than one-quarter century of consulting with companies worldwide, I've yet to see these sorts of data appear with regularity on a corporate dashboard of contact center performance. Yet, data from these telling questions – focused on the *customer's* return on investment (ROI) – are essential to understanding a *true* level of contact center performance and are indispensable when it comes to achieving a better contact center ROI.

Instead, there's plenty of call volume, occupancy rate, ASA, mystery shopper, IVR survey, call quality monitoring and assorted myopic, internal and boring data. But tough-love, customer-point-of-view data is a rarity. Moreover, it's not uncommon for insincere customer experience metrics in contact centers to portray the customer experience as genuinely OK (how typical is it for IVR-type surveys or call quality monitoring results to exhibit scores in the high 90's?).

In my opinion, establishing and leveraging a more thoughtful and authentic set of customer experience metrics is a lynchpin to improved insights and performance when it comes to customer problem handling specifically, as well as to the customer experience overall.

The Optimized Transaction As A Paper Tiger

A second reason for the levels of complainant satisfaction uncovered in the National Customer Rage Survey is the focus that companies place on the "transaction". It is frequently done to the exclusion of what customers really want when they reach out for help with a question or problem.

So often, when calling a company for help with a problem, the call can be pure drudgery as one is dragged through a sequence of company-centric transactional requirements, including:

- The automated telephone sub-transaction complete with a series of disclaimers, warnings and other compliance-related messages
- The gatekeeper sub-transaction featuring an initial "hello" from a live agent (maybe) followed by a host of more "qualification" and "security" questions (often some of the same ones you endured on the automated telephone path)
- The "I've met all the criteria in my quality monitoring requirements" sub-transaction featuring selected phrases such as "I can help you with that" or "Have I met all of your needs today?" or making sure that your name is uttered a minimum of two or three times during the call.

You get the idea. This transactional-minded focus, coupled with the real pressure for agents to hit a magic talk time target, yields what might be called the optimized transaction strategy. In this model of service, the aim is to complete the transaction in the amount of time permitted; there isn't time for a more genuine conversation, discovery of what the customer wants and consideration of how to deliver to expectations. And while such a strategy can and often does result in satisfying the company's budget targets, it can also be at odds with fulfilling customer needs.

What is it that customers *really* want when they contact a company for help with a problem?

The National Customer Rage Survey results, coupled with our proprietary research with hundreds of companies over the past four decades, has convincingly shown that the number one key driver of contactor satisfaction (i.e., among customers contacting a company with a question or problem) is "getting what you wanted." Not surprisingly, most companies don't measure this attribute and many are dismissive of it because they assume that they will get low scores (i.e., "we can't give customers what they want because they're unreasonable and all they want is free product and money."). Yet most customers – facing a serious product or service problem – are quite reasonable, motivated to be civil and want to get through the call as quickly as possible. As

suggested by the National Customer Rage Survey, most customers desire simple, non-monetary remedies. They want to be treated with dignity, get a thank you for their business, an explanation, reassurance and the like.

Satisfaction with "getting what you wanted" typically accounts for 40% to 50% (or more) of the overall satisfaction with the contact center interaction. Not measuring it is reckless. Data from these telling questions – focused on the *customer's* return on investment (ROI) – are essential to understanding a *true* level of contact center performance and are indispensable when it comes to achieving a better contact center ROI.

Where To From Here?

I keep seeing and hearing advertising campaigns that suggest I *should be* a happier customer. I *should be* ecstatic because companies are professing a dedication to customer delight. I *should be* experiencing only the best service because every company seems to be #1 in some sub-segment of a segment of a sector in the JD Power ratings. I *should be* feeling extra-special and empowered because so many companies are inviting me to share the bliss by giving them a "10" on a follow-up survey or writing a Yelp review for them to sing their praises.

By all indications, I *should be* much happier than my grandparents were when contacting a company for help with a problem. Companies have spent billions, value service as a competitive advantage and have so many more customer response tools available to them today than they did a generation ago.

So why so often is it that I dread the experience of asking companies for help with a problem? Maybe the National Customer Rage Survey can serve as a starting point for an enlightened dialogue about overcoming a transactional approach to complaint handling and the use of a more sincere set of metrics. Such metrics can help companies discern what customers really want and focus the company's efforts to meet those needs.

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