

Getting CX Right with Telia Carrier

By: Scott St. John

Customer experience (CX) is a nebulous term with a whole host of companies paying lip service to it. On the surface, CX is nothing more than the experience your customers have when interacting with your company. Seems simple. But in reality, it's more complicated than that, and it's growing more complex as customers have more options to interface with your company, its services, and its various customer-facing systems. In addition, customers have more provider choices today, and the experience they have with your company may be your greatest competitive advantage.



In this new landscape, it's far easier to get CX wrong than right—which is why when we learn of a company that is getting it right, we feel it's important to showcase them.

Pipeline recently had the opportunity to discuss CX with Andy Haynes, COO of Telia Carrier. Telia Carrier provides connectivity services to more than 2,000 wholesale customers in 120 countries, as well as multinational enterprises whose businesses rely on digital infrastructure. Its global Internet services connect more than 700 cloud, security and content providers with low latency, and its IP customers account for nearly 60 percent of all Internet routes. It has hundreds of diverse employees around the world, and we wanted to find out why and how Telia Carrier's award-winning customer service has become a key corporate pillar internally and a shining example for its customers and the industry. The numbers tell a story of success: 75 percent of customer issues are resolved without escalation—50 percent on first-call resolution—and Telia Carrier saw a 20 percent increase in Net Promoter Score (NPS) in its latest customer survey.



The Customer Service Experience

A good CX strategy is centered on service, from the experience your customers have with ordering your service to the quality of the service itself. If it's difficult for your customer to buy your services, it's probably easier for them to buy from your competition. If you don't meet your customer's quality expectations, it's never been easier for them to churn—especially when your competitors are getting CX right, making it easy for them to buy from them and ensuring their services quality meets their customers' expectations.

“We see the sales, delivery, and incident resolution processes as the primary factors that move the needle when it comes to improving the customer experience,” Andy Haynes told *Pipeline*.

The customer journey, and experience, typically starts with the sales process. Buying from you is the first interaction your customer has with your company, and the impression it creates lasts.

“If a salesperson cannot articulate the service offering and price to a customer within three minutes on an iPad, we’re doing something wrong,” Haynes remarked. “It’s important our salespeople understand the customer’s needs, their desired outcomes, and provide clear communication to the customer—and do so as quickly as possible.”

But customers don’t always want to interface with a salesperson, and organizations need to have easy-to-use omnichannel tools in place.

“It really comes down to choice,” Haynes added. “For customers who want to order service through our website, we’ve made self-service options available to them. However, if they want to engage with an account manager, there are salespeople that would be thrilled to help them too. It’s really a matter of preference versus forcing customers through one channel or the other.”

Delivering CX

The next milestone in the customer journey is the delivery process, and this is often when the customer experience begins to falter. If all you’ve done is make the sales process easy, and you fail to deliver well, all you’ve accomplished is making it easy to take your customers’ money. This is an area that other industries have gotten right: think about the Amazon Prime experience with same-day delivery. But telecom tends to struggle here due to the complex nature of services.

From a customer’s perspective, what you are doing is never more important as what they need or are trying to accomplish. Understanding this is something Telia Carrier calls “customer empathy” and this was a persistent theme throughout our discussion.

“We’re not the ‘main event,’ the customer is,” says Haynes. “It’s important that our entire organization is emotionally aware enough to understand that we’re the tail, not the dog.”

Telia Carrier takes a vested interest in understanding the customer’s needs to recommend the right approach, design and solution. It also ensures that it provides clear communications to its customers to help establish meaningful, trusted relationships between real people.

“The customer is the main event and taking the time to understand what they are trying to accomplish is the foundation for creating a superior customer experience,” Haynes continued. “As we move into delivery, the quality of communication is our primary focus by promptly responding to customer requests and providing the right information quickly, openly, honestly, and transparently.”

Getting Personal

Telia Carrier takes CX a step further by grouping its organization into segment-specific delivery teams. This enables the company to build better relationships with its customers and understand their communication preferences. It also allows customers to build more personal relationships with them. Over the entire relationship, a typical Telia Carrier customer will only interact with two or three delivery coordinators. This fosters a close customer relationship and a level of familiarity customers value.

Telia Carrier also makes a concerted effort to listen to its customers. In addition to routine customer surveys, it embeds customer feedback mechanisms into its customer communications to collect and act upon customer input in real-time.

But, at the heart of Telia Carriers’ CX strategy is a certain level of organizational

humility and seemingly rare recognition of the value of its customers.

“We want our customers to *want* to work with us, and for that you have to be humble and empathetic,” says Haynes. “All business is person-to-person, even if it’s B2B.”

To create a culture that is focused on providing a personal customer experience, Telia Carrier incorporates these company values throughout its business practices. Its CX principles have been distilled into three pillars: Dare, Care, and Simplify. These pillars are routinely reinforced on the walls of its offices, integrated into daily conversations, and are the lens through which it conducts strategic customer discussions. Customer empathy and clear communication are part of the hiring and onboarding evaluation process, customer experience wins are celebrated, and key CX metrics are used to measure individual performance and are tied to compensation. This ensures the entire organization is consistently aligned to its core values and its culture is centered on the customer first. But even the best employees need the right tools.

Empowering CX

Technology can make or break CX. Think of a new chatbot or automatic voice recognition (AVR) system. If it is preferred by customers, easy to use, and provides quick access to the particular information customers are seeking, it can improve your customers’ experience. However, if it’s not a preferred communication channel, isn’t easy to use, or doesn’t provide the information the customer is seeking, it can create negative customer interactions that will dramatically damage the customer experience—particularly if that customer must go through multiple communication channels and levels of escalation and has to reauthenticate every step of the way.

“We’re systematically driving improvements based on customer feedback to make sure we make purchasing as quick and easy as it can be, delivery fast and predictable, and customer support as smooth as possible.” Haynes added. “We regard our people, processes and tools as a core competitive advantage, as much or more than our technology or products.”

To that end, Telia Carrier consciously puts the customer first. In addition to providing well-trained level 1 and 2 support 24/7, it is intentionally empowering its customer service reps (CSRs). Telia Carrier ensures cross pollination of customer resolution techniques by collocating CSRs of various skills levels and expertise side by side. CSRs take the time to evaluate solutions based on the best *and* fastest path to resolution, making sure solutions go beyond simply fixing the issue to exceed customer expectations.

“While card replacement may be one way to fix a customer issue, it may take more time when there may be another solution that solves the issue right now,” Andy Haynes told *Pipeline*. “Our CSRs take pride in finding not just a solution, but the fastest solution for our customers’ specific needs.”

Telia Carrier also empowers CSRs with the right technology and rapid-issue-resolution tools, including a self-learning, AI-based troubleshooting system. This system allows them to quickly identify the cause of issues customers are experiencing and identify the solutions with the highest probability to solve the underlying issue.

“We’re passionate about technology but don’t want to force customers to have to use our tools,” Haynes remarked. “We rather develop tools we can use to enable our support staff to spend more time with customers and quickly resolve any issues that might occur along the customer journey.”

But Telia Carrier is taking its time too, to make sure the tool is providing real value and is being used to get CX right. Its AI-troubleshooting tool was implemented and trained for over a year before it was put into production. Telia Carrier is now experimenting with integrating the tool with network data and alarm flows to make identifying and solving customer issues more predictive and proactive. It is also planning to evolve the tool to take and make autonomous actions, so that it can eventually prevent and resolve customers issues nonstop.

Considering Culture

When you think about communications and connectivity providers, I doubt “superior customer service” is the first thing that comes to mind. But the fact is that customers have more choice now than ever before and choosing a provider that embraces the value of its customers is an increasingly important factor in the selection process.

CX seems simple, but it’s hard to get right. It starts with the humility to understand your customers are more important than you, and then building your business, culture, processes, tools and technology around that. Customers want real relationship with people who value them, understand their needs, are responsive, and communicate quickly and clearly. Companies who embrace that, like Telia Carrier, find that a superior customer experience is the natural outcome. It’s as simple as that.