CX, the Pandemic, and the Data Center

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Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled many organizations to manage people and processes differently. Tech organizations in particular are just handling things differently, reinventing, rejiggering, and reshaping along the way. One constant, though, at least among technology-based companies, has been the commitment to the customer experience (CX).

CX for technology companies, including data centers, enables a positive experience that ultimately gives consumers what they want, while the businesses will also grow from that deeper understanding of their customers. This knowledge translates to close relationships of symbiosis. Tech companies gain the advantage of being able to stylize solutions that benefit both the company and its customers.

Changing customer expectations

Against the backdrop of these uncertain times, it is becoming more difficult to gauge customers' expectations and even to instill customer confidence in their products and services, which is key to driving customer loyalty. One of the challenges, according to [Gartner](#), is that customer service strategies at tech companies have always been highly reactive, requiring customers to carry a heavy load to navigate diverse service channels, often without success. Unfortunately, this leads to low self-service containment and customer dissatisfaction.

These negative effects extend well beyond cost and the service experience, impacting the organization's revenue and its ability to cultivate loyalty and gauge overall profitability. [Gartner research](#) also revealed that a "dynamic customer engagement" (DCE) strategy bolsters customer

service and supports tech leaders as they transform their service experience through personalized proactive conversations with customers.

Customer service leaders must implement DCE to overcome the weakness of reactive experiences and move to a proactive service approach. DCE enables organizations to deliver more diverse and differentiated service experiences. It helps service organizations transform data into insights to deliver next best actions to customers and transform the customer experience.

In another [Gartner survey](#) of more than 6,000 customers, only 13 percent of respondents report any type of proactive customer service. However, this same research shows that proactive customer service results in a full percentage point increase in the net promoter score, customer satisfaction score, and customer effort score.

Rethinking the customer experience

As service differentiation becomes more than a competitive advantage, customer service and support leaders need to rethink how they approach the service experience. Customer service expectations are increasing, and every interaction is an opportunity to increase loyalty and quell disloyalty. DCE allows service organizations the flexibility to address increasing service expectations and economic impacts while also increasing overall organizational resiliency.

The leaders at every technology business endeavor know the importance of keeping their customers happy and satisfied, but very few truly understand the value that providing a positive purchase decision-making experience can have on their bottom line—the customer experience value.

Growing customer expectations spur changes in company strategies. In the past years, pre-COVID, companies have begun to create deeper emotional connections with customers. At the same time, customer expectations have risen, and companies prioritize customer satisfaction accordingly, to increase profitability.

Building an effective customer experience is about a lot more than ensuring your customers receive the products and services that they desire in a streamlined fashion. It's also about creating contact and discourse with real people who can spread the word and grow your brand through their social media and offline interactions with family and friends.

Data center customer experience

Let's look at how understanding the intricacies of the customer experience plays out in data centers. Network traffic through the data center is reaching unprecedented levels and the quality of the user experience increasingly depends on the right IT infrastructure, robust peering options and access to high-speed connectivity. Typical customers include a content provider that needs to provide HD on-demand movies to subscribers across the country; a developer or manufacturer

building or leveraging an IoT-capable application in the Google Cloud platform; and an enterprise needing to lower long-distance network costs.

All of these types of customers require peering at the edge, a concept that demands laser focus on the customer experience.

One of the hottest data center trends with customer experience implications that has emerged over the past several years is the rise in colocation or the practice of housing privately owned servers or networking equipment in a data center. While there were fears that at some point colocation might become obsolete due to increased cloud migration, this has turned out not to be the case at all. Major rises in workload demands created by the pandemic have made it necessary for businesses to move operations closer to end users, which can get expensive very quickly. As businesses tapped out their facility's capacity, they turned to colocation to keep close to the customer—and to stay competitive and operational while amassing mass amounts of data to process.

Colocation also decreases the amount of downtime due to potential issues by offering failover support in case of critical issues. As 2020 saw a massive increase to online traffic as everyone shifted their work, school and entertainment to an online platform, minimizing downtime became as critical as ever. This was yet another reason we saw so many businesses and enterprises turn to colocation.

In addition, for years, the data center industry has been buzzing with discussions of the cloud, and 2020 was no different. Just as with colocation, cloud migrations were also undertaken hand-in-hand to create hybrid environments for businesses to carry out their functions. Cloud migrations offer businesses practically limitless scalability opportunities, making it an attractive initiative. And, with the data and Internet usage trends sparked by the pandemic in 2020, the cloud was a viable, customer-friendly solution.

COVID-19 has changed the world in ways we still can't even imagine. With the situation rapidly evolving and no definitive view of what the timeline will be, people are still trying to prepare for the next wave of change. There's just as much uncertainty for brands, but many also have an opportunity to help their consumers as they navigate this global crisis.

Becoming proactive

Businesses within the data center industry—and, more generally, technology companies—need to become more proactive. They need to think about what their business will look like tomorrow, a month from now, or even a year from now. Marketers and business leaders may want to have those conversations to determine how they could prepare for tomorrow and the weeks to come, and how they could adapt to the different scenarios that might play out. The companies need to look beyond the near-term and think about how they can shift from reactive to proactive. What solutions do they need to construct? How can they adapt to prepare for the long-term?

The recent acceleration of digital trends in the data center industry really means that the only constant factor will be the need to continually change. This suggests bringing experiences and interactions online and rapidly creating new ways to reach out to customers.

At the same time, companies in and outside of technology must face the reality that their existing planning teams, cycles, and structures may not be built for adaptability or the scale of work they now face. It's time to consider what changes they need to make. It's time to focus as much on customers' needs as on the bottom line. It's time to find ways to adapt marketing and media plans to add more customer support and, hence, value.

It's time for data center and technology companies to renew focus on the customer experience to fashion a right-minded, collaborative and agile organizational model that will be long-lasting but able to adapt to change. These companies should utilize purpose and customer understanding as a stepping-stone to innovation and in the creation of new businesses and experiences that can plow through these uncertain times. In this uncertainty, companies should make sure that their teams are equipped with the right skills to create customer initiatives and collaboration that endure for the next "new normal" and beyond.