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Common-Sense CX Is More Than DX

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The myth: DX and CX are synonymous

I am bemused by the current crop of customer experience (CX) and digital experience (DX) imperatives. Judging from my news feeds, we seem to be about where we were when I stepped off the X track some years ago. To be fair, there have been huge improvements in a number of the underpinning digital functionalities that make customer experience seamless (a term first introduced in the early 2000s).

Digitalization, however, has overtaken CX as the trend du jour. In fact, CX and DX are often conflated, as though digitalizing an interaction automatically makes it a great experience.

The reality is that while self-service innovation vastly improved efficiency for customers, not all interactions are, or can be, fully digital.

The first rule of CX is that it is the sum of the customer's journey—not its touchpoints—that forms their impression of a company. Customer experience encompasses *all* of the brand, product, pricing, and service, taken together. Any one of the four gone wrong can overshadow the other three. Yet, we don't organize around this vital truth.

Organizing for CX would mean that digitization of elements of the journey must neatly and reliably interconnect with the analog parts of the journey—because when they don't, it spells misery for customers and employees.

DX + analog = CX

Organizations undertake customer experience initiatives to make the experience of buying a product or service seamless, effortless, and enjoyable. But in practice, the funding for CX initiatives comes via *cost to serve* reductions in addition to increased revenue. That's why we tend to privilege the buying experience over the use and support journeys of overall customer experience.

And in general, the use and support elements are not a consideration for buyer or seller, *unless something goes wrong*. And go wrong they do because customers are more often than not analog



creatures. Indeed, we humans are primarily analog—even the digital natives among us—and it is a mistake to treat humanity as a whole, absent that important characteristic.

When a journey falters or fails, customer response does vary. Many a digital native will correct the problem with ease (for example, a password reset, payment details update, and so on). But I was not surprised to know all generations find themselves in need of human assistance to solve issues. Issues, by the way, are in the eye of the beholder, not the web designer or the payment platform.

Common sense isn't common

The cruise I took recently harshly exposed the limitations of the digital elements of the guest experience. A very impressive Guest Folio Management System tracked guest activities, instantly processed their purchases, and enabled seamless movement onboard the ship. Guests and crew used smart devices to go about their business.

Smart devices, however, rely heavily on connectivity. No surprise there, however the fallback position of manual order-taking offers none. And wobbly network connection ensures manual order-taking to be far more frequent, causing more—and more complex—problems.

The cruise industry is recovering from a pandemic-induced meltdown, largely fueled by rapid recruitment. People are a vital component of the guest experience, despite advances in digitization. What we called “moments of truth” in the 1990s are still critical to experience. Employee training may be enabled by new digital tools, but spotty connectivity rendered the reality of the beverage-ordering experience excruciating for all involved. The digital order-to-analog bartender broke down. Guests became so frustrated with the time it took to get a drink that they too went analog and took to the bar to place their order—again. Utter chaos ensued: bartenders overwhelmed with duplicate order volumes, guest experience shredded, wait staff under siege, and digital data devalued.

Author David Sax wrote *The Future is Analog*, based on his belief we've already hit peak digital experience. He argues for a return to *human-centered customer experiences*. Nowhere is that more in evidence than on a cruise. Customers are stubbornly analog, especially given the demographics of the typical cruiser. But digital natives can be derailed by last-mile problems, too. Take online holiday shopping. The

Christmas season introduces volume spikes and time constraints to shopping that can inflame the retail experience. Customers expect this to some degree and unless you are a last-minute Christmas Eve type, plan for it.

One of my favorite retailers, a go-to for gifts, made buying the goods a breeze and I knew the products would be terrific quality. I even thrilled to the discounted prices and happily agreed to free standard shipping. It was after all, December 4th, with plenty of time before Christmas.

My order was acknowledged, picked, and forwarded to the third-party shipper by December 8th. I knew this because I had a very helpful delivery tracker link, courtesy of the retailer. It was crystal clear, though, that accountability for physical delivery belonged to the shipper, not the seller. I'd outsource delivery too, if it were my gift store, but I would not absolve myself of *accountability* for the last mile of the fulfillment process. It would not make sense to the customer, and therefore to the customer experience.

I was digitally informed, though. Order number? Check. Tracking number? Check. Easy access to the status of my package? Check.

But nothing happened. For days. Until the delivery date. My tracking number status changed to “Out

for Delivery.” Sweet. I arranged my day accordingly. At 5:30 pm, I checked the order status again and Out for Delivery had disappeared. *As though it had never been there at all.*

I swung into escalation mode. Spoke to the *night shift* service desk agent—couldn’t help. Called the warehouse the following morning and spoke to the *day shift* service desk agent—also couldn’t help. I filed a trouble ticket online, twice.

Then I really warmed to the task and called the retailer head office, twice. Once for the COO, the other for the CEO. By my count I filed six trouble tickets for the same issue, all for the want of a straight answer, let alone an explanation of the whereabouts of my package.

You might think this is excessive, but I was responsible for customer service on three continents and willingly took calls from customers who regularly did the same thing. It made me very skeptical of the operational data my operation reported to me and taught me that digital data is gold dust but not the whole treasure chest. Context matters. And so do eyewitness reports.

Happily, my shipment arrived just one day late. Two hours later, I got a survey from the retailer.

This is where DX is exposed as an element, not the entirety, of CX. Nowhere in the survey allowed for my tale of woe unless I was to write free form in the comments section. And I am old enough to know that few people read those comments.

Digitally captured information, taken out of context, loses a lot in translation. Without a thorough account of the customer reality, we squander so much insight that could be applied to the actual customer journey. Overreliance on the magic of digital CX can blind us to how onerous the *end-to-end journey* really is, threatening to alienate even the most determined of customers.

Common sense is not optional

The next generation of CX and DX can handily overcome the analog to digital to analog problem. For a start, let’s stop introducing digitization piecemeal, based on a positive ROI that is driven by cost reduction. Let’s elevate the operating model to C-Suite status so that no one is deluded by fixing potholes instead of building on and off ramps. Let’s act in accordance with the principle of keeping the customers we have as a priority, while we find new ones. Let’s be honest about the brand promise, the product, and our pricing algorithms to lessen the burden on customer service.

Most important of all? Let’s use the digital intelligence we do have for the benefit of the customer. And that means knowing where DX works and where—and when—it doesn’t.