

## Seducing the Mobile Customer: Mobile CEM is About More Than Transactions

By Becky Bracken

Don't take this the wrong way, but mobile service providers have absolutely zero game when it comes to the art of customer seduction. Sure, we all go through the motions, but where's the spark between customer and brand like they have over there at Apple? Apple's customers appreciate it and can't wait to show it off to all their friends.

Consider how people were willing to learn an entirely new language in order to buy a cup of Starbucks coffee. How can a *grande* size anything be smaller than a *venti*? Whatever, that's not really the point. As you and everyone else knows, these brands take the customer experience very personally. When you're in the loving embrace of an Apple Genius or Starbucks Barrista, you can rest assured your every interaction has been thoughtfully and tenderly considered.

But when it comes to consuming mobile services, customers lack passion. To the customer, all mobile

service providers are essentially interchangeable: all are beleaguered by the same customer experience problems and way too focused on trying to sell end users on techie sounding 4G LTE speed improvements. Customers aren't interested in industry jargon; they build relationships with brands, not download speeds, something a recent survey on wireless customer satisfaction from Oracle aptly calls the "speeds and feeds" arms race. Not really the kind of thing that gets anyone excited about a brand.

Depressingly, as a result, the same Oracle survey finds that 39 percent of subscribers don't bother switching to a new carrier because they don't really think the competition is any better at providing service.

Mobile service providers can't afford to spend even one more second focused on the transactional nature of



their relationships with their customers. In a data-driven environment, mobile service providers are drooling over the prospect of providing an ever-expanding portfolio of digital lifestyle services. The idea that robust mobile coverage at high speeds that needs to be available at all times is no longer a selling point for service; it's a given. It's imperative for service providers to throw on some Barry White, light

some candles and amp up the romance to get to the heart of what their customers want.

Just as 2014 was getting revved up, AT&T announced it would offer T-Mobile customers cash and incentives that could add up to more than \$450 per line to switch to their

service. Here's the pitch from AT&T announced on Jan. 3:

*"In addition to a larger and more reliable 4G LTE network, T-Mobile customers who switch to AT&T will benefit from a superior smartphone line-up and award-winning customer service. With AT&T, customers can take advantage of AT&T's new Mobile Share Value plans, which offer data and unlimited talk and text starting as low as \$45 per month with no annual contract. AT&T Next offers customers the chance to upgrade to a new smartphone every year for \$0 down."*

And while cold, hard cash is certainly one way to acquire a new customer, it's the overall customer experience and relationship that will sustain a customer over time and set the stage for romance to sell them an ever-increasing selection of services. The cash was a great way to get



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attention, but a customer lured by quick cash does not necessarily a lasting relationship make.

Later the same day, T-Mobile USA's CEO John Legere fired back.

"This is a desperate move by AT&T on the heels of what must have been a terrible Q4 and holiday for them," he said in a statement in response to the AT&T offer. "I'm flattered that we have made them so uncomfortable! We used AT&T's cash to build a far superior network and added Un-carrier moves to take tons of their customers - and now they want to bribe them back! Consumers won't be fooled... nothing has changed; customers will still feel the same old pain that AT&T is famous for. Just wait until CES [the International Consumer Electronics Show, which took place January 7-10 in Las Vegas] to hear what pain points we are eliminating next. The competition is going to be toast!"

What appears to be lost in this whole tête-à-tête tete is the customer: a customer so critical, AT&T is willing to fork over \$450 a subscriber to acquire. Granted, these press releases aren't necessarily created for the end customer but rather the industry. However, customers who take advantage of the offer know they're getting a deal because one carrier wants to stick it to another. It's not that they're important or that AT&T can appeal to their sense of value for a service. Forget about making them feel good about the long-term prospects of their relationship with AT&T. Fine. But can you imagine brand powerhouses like Apple or Starbucks putting so little effort into the customer experience? Even over-the-top (OTT) players like Netflix understand the importance of seduction in customer acquisition.

"In order to keep subscribers satisfied, CSP's must ensure their customer experience strategy addresses the fundamental characteristics of the modern digital lifestyle. Data has surpassed traditional voice and text as the service of choice for today's consumers, who now value the reliability of their connected devices above all else," Senior Vice President and General Manager of Oracle Communications Bhaskar Gorti says. "Companies that can build strong foundations with their customer experience will be able to provide users with a more reliable and flexible data service. By outfitting them to enjoy and manage their digital lives with minimal fuss, CSPs can not only regain subscribers' confidence, but also attract new customers seeking a higher quality of service."

But according to a recent Comarch white paper, 43 percent of European mobile operators have no integrated customer experience management (CEM) program in place. Further, the paper adds there are four key elements that need to be in place for a successful customer experience program. First, it must involve upper management identifying the areas that need improvement, the various

customer channels and interactions ripe to provide actionable feedback and precisely measuring customer satisfaction. Second, employees must be the brand's best ambassadors, which means shifting the focus of how the business views employees to see them as internal consumers of the service. Third, service providers need to manage the myriad customer communications channels, address their concerns and try to convert customers into brand ambassadors. And finally, measuring customer satisfaction by gathering information on the customer that helps predict future behavior.

"In order to provide seamless customer experience, operators need to gather and analyze as much information on their customers as possible, and then translate it into visible actions that can directly influence the satisfaction of their clients," Piotr Machnik, VP Product Management and Marketing at Comarch said. "Data such as billing, service call usage, customer behavior and profile are no longer enough to understand what level of customer experience is being delivered to each subscriber, and how to improve it. Today it is clear that without the help of information from network management systems the picture is far from being full."

But none of the data is useful unless mobile service providers use the intelligence gathered on their customers to romance them into a long-term love affair. Besides implementing the technological solutions, service providers need to start embracing ideas that ignite passion in their customers and turn them into the net-promoting, brand ambassadors they could be on your behalf. It might not have been love at first sight; but, when customers give you a second look, show them what they've really been missing.