

How hard do you make it for customers to deal with you?

I wrote here recently about my savvy neighbourhood shop guy, the one who's had a turbocharged pandemic. He's gone from being just the milk 'n' bread kiosk to a shop supplying a wide range of groceries to the hood. How did he do that? Just by making the lives of his customers easier. You call in or WhatsApp your order; 30 minutes later, a bicycle brings it to your doorstep.

Many of you asked: how do I think about this for a large organisation, though? Is there a framework that helps me think about customer convenience systematically, so that my business can achieve it consistently?

First, please understand how powerful this force is. Research repeatedly shows that customers do not want to expend any unnecessary effort in dealing with businesses. The easier you make it for them to buy from you, the more loyal they become – and the more they are likely to spend on you.

Customer ease

So do you address customer effort and friction systematically? The folks at the UK's Henley Business School have thought of an easy-to-use framework for you. To answer the question "how easy are we to do business with?" they ask you to focus on customer ease – but in two ways. First, there is the objective time and energy customers spend on any encounter with your brand or organisation; but also, there is the intangible perception customers hold about how easy you are to deal with.

Customers interact with organisations in many ways: they try to get information from them; they buy their stuff; they use what they buy; and they deal with issues that arise after buying. If they feel that they have to expend too much energy in some or all of those encounters, their perception of value dissipates. You cost them too much in extra effort to be worth their while.

Henley's Centre for Customer Management has found four types of energy customers ex-

Most of your customers are busy, stressed-out people. They face many frictions



Sunny Bindra | Sunny Day

pend in dealing with you, using the acronym CEPT (pronounced "kept" for ease of recall). First, there's cognitive energy – the mental effort of figuring out your offerings or making decisions. Next, think about emotional energy, which is the anxiety or stress or frustration they might experience in encounters with your organisation. Thirdly, physical energy: travelling to get to you, or carrying heavy loads. And lastly, time energy: how long it takes to wait, or transact, or consume.

So, if your company befuddles customers with complicated information; if it annoys or vexes them; if it makes them come long distances and expend much time in dealing with you; then guess what? You score very poorly on customer ease. And this will cost you.

Henley's research suggests that rather than making too much effort "delighting" or "wowing" your customers, you should first just make sure you don't overburden or annoy them! Use CEPT when mapping the journeys customers make in dealing with you, to see where you have unnecessary pain points.

This applies equally to those businesses who sell to other businesses – B2B companies. You have to first and foremost be easy to deal with,

across all departments.

Most of your customers, whatever you sell, are busy, stressed-out people. They face many frictions and challenges in their daily lives. They will, therefore, react very negatively to any business that makes them waste even more mental, emotional, physical, or time energy. On the other hand, businesses that are easy to deal with are favoured greatly because they make life a little easier. Those services and products that provide great customer ease become habits – they are purchased as a matter of course, without too much thought. They just work.

Predict needs

Some of the greatest thinkers around customer experience have known this fact, instinctively. Apple's Steve Jobs made simplicity and ease of use core features of all his offerings – as important as the "wow" side of surprisingly great functionality. Jeff Bezos knew that the easier he made it for his customers, the more likely they were to use Amazon as a default.

My neighbourhood shop guy knows it too. Give customers fewer things to think about. Predict their needs by studying their lives. Make it easy by taking the goods to them, quickly. Oh, and don't annoy them. Smile and be friendly, a lot. They will like all of that. Kaching!

So what stops you, big-firm bosses? Why do you find every reason to not make your organisations easier to deal with – it costs too much, I don't have the right people, my customers are too annoying, it's the regulator's fault, etc? Why don't you sit down tomorrow with your team, map out some typical customer journeys and use the CEPT framework to find the pain points?

I guarantee you will find some big, glaring, unnecessary ways in which you are making the customer do too much work.

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CLIMATE ACTION

Global water forum to be held in Dakar next month

BY PAULINE ONGAJI

The ninth edition of the World Water Forum is scheduled to take place in March in Dakar, Senegal.

Since its debut back in 1997, it is the first time the event will be held in Sub-Saharan Africa and according to Mr Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council, it couldn't have come at a better time.

"Africa faces many challenges around water, as well as rapid population increase, and the timing is perfect. It not only highlights the continent's efforts in resolving water issues, but also creates a platform for the rest of the world water community to step in and offer a hand," he told the *Sunday Nation*.

One of the council's 2019-2021 priorities is water security; to ensure the availability of an adequate quantity and quality of water through storage space, desalination, water reuse and digital innovation.

According to Mr Fauchon, the biggest challenge to achieving this, not just in Africa but the world at large, is the ability to produce more water and consume less.

"This means technical and digital evolution to use water economically, and also to change the compartments of rations mostly in big cities, where everybody, be they rich or poor, can access it," he said.

Another priority for the council during this period has been to study the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on access to water for all.

Mr Fauchon added that the pandemic could have a ripple effect especially in Africa.

"One of the main effects of the pandemic on the continent has been to close the borders, and this had a negative impact on African countries with no access to the sea. The pandemic has decreased international trade while increasing the need mostly for food. Perhaps the biggest impact of the pandemic in Africa is the food crisis that has arisen from all this."

Other than that, he explained, finding concrete solutions to water investment issues and bringing the water community and financiers together has been one of the strong pillars of the council, which is working mostly around the hybrid financing.

But even as the council works towards solving water issues across the globe, Mr Fauchon noted that their effort can only be realised with the help of leaders across the globe.

"We might have the technical, technological, governance and innovative solutions, but we need the political will to make water a main priority."

During the summit, various stakeholders will be part of the roundtables – political actors, private sector, civil society and academia.

According to Mr Fauchon, the forum will create a conducive atmosphere for voices of the water community from the grassroots level.

"This is because people on the ground know (more than the bureaucrats, and sometimes more than the politicians) how to explain and to bring about their solutions, and that's the reason this ninth forum in Senegal is called the forum of responses."

During the event, the 7th edition of the Hassan II Great World Water Prize will also be launched under the theme "Water security in the territories for sustainable development and food security", where unlike in the past six editions, the value of the prize has been increased from US\$100,000 to US\$500,000.

Full interview available at www.Nation.Africa

Digital dementia: How we're losing our minds

The emergence of digital technology is one of the greatest advancements in modern society. People born before computers and cell phones ruled the world often wonder how they ever made do without them. However, digital technology is fraught with potential pitfalls.

In some cases, its use – especially its overuse – can negatively impact mental health in many ways. It can be addictive and add to depression, anxiety and feelings of isolation. Although teens bear the brunt of the negative effects, adults are not immune to them.

According to a 2018 British study, social media use contributes to sleep disruption, academic decline, and general low productivity. Moreover, this study is far from isolated; there is an abundance of research validating it, all concluding the same thing – that unmeted use of social media can become harmful to our brains.

The fact that younger people aren't getting enough sleep due to digital distractions may also contribute to the fact that mental health concerns are on the rise. Suicide rates are also on the rise. According to a few studies, people who spend long hours online may be at high-

er risk of suicide, but there may be other reasons as well.

It's time to rethink our approach to social media. In the absence of mitigation, we face a bleak future where mental illness will become a pandemic worse than Covid-19.

What makes it worse is that mental health is poorly understood. Future research will provide new insight into the ills of social media and treatment options. However, the problem we face today cannot wait for these studies to be conceived and conducted.

In the wake of these ominous signs, what's required is nothing short of digital detox on a societal scale. In its basic form, detox can be in the form of deliberate and regular breaks from smartphones. Study after study has shown that taking such breaks boosts productivity, lifts moods, and allows people to spend more time with their loved ones.

In primary and high schools, digital detox should be a required class to equip children with the skills to make the most of tech and avoid the drawbacks. We should equip our society to assist those who are drifting toward addiction.

A good way to confront the dangers of over-

... mental illness will become a pandemic



Sam Wambugu | Technology

using social media is to advocate social media giants to carry cautionary messages on their platforms that too much use of social media can be harmful to one's health, especially teens and adolescents.

Be your brother's keeper. Say something when we see signs of addiction. You can start by turning off your phone's alerts for at least a few hours each day, or by putting it in "Airplane" or "Do Not Disturb" mode and taking that time to enjoy some quiet.

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