

"Customer experience is the next competitive battlefield"

 By Leigh Andrews

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CX, CEM and CRM are everything in business today. Hopefully, you're not scratching your head in confusion, as I have another acronym to share with you: As #WomensMonth gets underway, I chat to CCXP or 'certified customer experience professional' Julia Ahlfeldt about the Customer Experience Management (CEM) Africa 2018 Summit, kicking off tomorrow.



Julia Ahlfeldt, certified customer experience professional (CCXP).

Ahlfeldt has helped with the Customer Experience Professionals' Organisation or CXPA's contributions to the conference and is on the leadership council for the event.

But hers is not a behind-the-scenes role – far from it. You're bound to hear from Ahlfeldt herself at the CEM Summit, as she's set to present a workshop on how to drive CX change and will also be participating in several panel discussions.

She confirms that the organisers have successfully run the event for many years as the longest standing CX conference in SA, with excellent networking opportunities where CX practitioners can meet and share ideas.



CEM Africa kicks off this week!

27 Jul 2018



As a result of this, she says while the event team has established an impressive knowledge of the CX industry, it's great to see that they still take a collaborative approach to develop the topics and structure of CEM and that it's been great to participate in these discussions, and exciting to see the 2018 CEM Summit take shape.

“ For example, the speakers' topics are applicable to CX practitioners across the spectrum of experience levels and as the CX industry grows and matures in South Africa, the CEM organisers have defined various workshop tracks for CX professionals at different levels of experience. Someone who is new to CX will be looking for different workshop content

from someone who has been working in the field for years, and there are options for all. ”

Here, Ahlfeldt talks us through the importance of CX across all industries, the value of attending CEM Africa and how CX is set to change as we reach the tail-end of 2018...

■ **Let's start with a brief overview of the importance of CX across all industries.**

Customer experience has truly become the next competitive battlefield. We live in an age of informed and connected consumers. As a result, consumers are much more empowered when making decisions about when and where they spend their money.

This means that any business with a customer – which is pretty much every business out there – must at least live up to the expectations set through its brand promise.



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That's the new “bare minimum”: To attract and retain customers, brands must deliver compelling customer experiences that keep consumers coming back for more.

The **impact of digitally empowered consumers affects brands across industries**. For marketing teams, this means they need to up the ante in terms of understanding their customers' wants/needs and then driving accountability for delivering customer experience across the organisation. For an organisation that doesn't have a dedicated CX team, this means additional responsibility on the shoulders of the marketing team.

■ **For sure. It's still seen as a 'trendy tech-based buzzword' by some but CX has a strong human element, too...**

It's definitely not all tech. Yes, there have been some amazing tech innovations that help companies understand customer feedback, manage customer interactions, and the like, but ultimately there are humans behind every customer experience.



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“ Whether that's a teller at a check-out till or someone writing code for an app, there are still humans defining and managing the customer experience. If you want customer experiences to be great, then these contributing team members need to have the right attitude and a clear understanding of their company's objectives with delivering great customer

experience. ”

This goes far beyond training. It's about fostering buy-in across the business, setting the right tone for team culture and helping all employees establish empathy for their customers.

■ **You've already touched on this, but share the business value of customer experience and why it's important to get C-suite buy-in.**

Defining the value of customer experience is key to getting C-suite buy-in. Executives have to answer to shareholders. Shareholders want to see returns, so it should be no surprise that executives are motivated to continually create value for the business.

Executives' support is crucial to the success of any CX strategy. Change must be driven from the top, and often CX transformation requires some form of investment via resources or tech solutions. Therefore, CX leaders need to demonstrate the business value of CX.



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Improved customer experience drives loyalty.

“ Happy, loyal customers are likely to spend more, recommend a brand's product or service to others, and for each customer a brand keeps, the business saves the cost of new customer acquisition. It is 6-7 times more expensive to attract a new customer than it is to keep an existing one, so it can really add up. ”

CX leaders can demonstrate the value of CX by tracking customer lifetime value or CLV and change, hopefully in the form of growth, in the customer base.



#CEMAfrica2017: "Be an experience business or be out of business" - Adobe

Leigh Andrews 17 Aug 2017



The main challenge here is that customer loyalty and CLV don't change overnight. It might take months or even years to yield the full results from the improved customer experience. Since the timelines for CX ROI are much longer than marketing ROI, for example, CX leaders need to help executives craft the messaging for shareholders.

■ **Definitely. Why is it important for corporates to put action into customer insights?**

Insights are the key to continually improving customer experience. Businesses are getting better about listening to customers and understanding their wants/needs, but this information is only valuable if the company *does something* about it.

Ideas about better customer experience won't improve loyalty or drive business value, only actual experiences will do this.

■ **Lastly, how is CX set to change as we reach the tail-end of 2018?**

In general, I think we'll continue to see more and more businesses focusing on CX. Leaders are highly aware of the potential impact of digital disruption. Last year's festive season was a turning point for e-commerce in South Africa.



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Julia Ahlfeldt 26 Jan 2017



It's a powerful example of the impact of informed and connected consumers.

I anticipate that online shopping will take a larger bite of the total retail market share this year, and as leaders in retail and other industries take note, we'll see more brands focusing on CX.



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In terms of how CX will evolve through this year, I think we'll see a steady increase in the digitisation of experiences. AI will continue to become a larger part of customer experience, and so we'll see more blending of the digital and traditional customer experiences.

Consider yourself warned! Ahlfeldt shares global CX best practices in the video interview with CEM Africa Summit content producer, Juan Mouton, below:

You can read up on more from [Ahlfeldt](#), more on [#CEMAfrica](#), follow the CEM Africa Summit 2018 updates on [Twitter](#) and watch for our coverage of the two-day conference...

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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