

Customer experience F-Words

 By [Chantel Botha](#)

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When customer experience is introduced into a corporate strategy or dusted off, when it has been there all along, as a part of a strategy review, it can be a daunting task...

Customer experience is not a neatly scoped project that involves only a technology implementation or people transformation or process optimisation ? not that in anyone's experience any of those can be called neatly scoped. Customer experience per definition deals with consumer expectations and emotions and those are ever changing and very messy for a typical A-type strategist or leader.

In an attempt to simplify Customer Experience (CX) in a humorous but practical manner, let me take you through the CX f-words:

Functional

When doing a Customer Experience discovery process, I often find that how we think the experience is functioning and how it really is functioning are worlds apart. An experience being functional means a consumer is achieving his objective. During a CX audit, when the experience is dysfunctional, it must go into a fix-it-now project stream and be addressed immediately.



Image via [123RF](#)

An example of an experience not working, which I recently discovered with a group of leaders, is that the signage to the customer service centre was obscured by a tree and most customers would use another entrance to the building. The reception staff at the other entrance would get very frustrated but never stopped to ask why so many people were using the wrong entrance to the building.

The untold secret that all customer experience consultants and professionals use, is they ask "why?" a lot, until they get to the real answer.

Frictionless

Consumers have so many choices and so little time, so they choose the competitive option that takes the least effort. They choose the quote from the company that responded quickest and answered all the questions they had asked compared to the company that sent them web links to a complex comparison tool.

Frictionless interactions that are highly functional are the next competitive battleground for companies.

Fantastic

In order for a customer to comment on an experience he had, it would have had to have some emotional peak. This peak could be positive or negative. I refer to the work of Barbara Fredrickson and Daniel Kahneman related to the end-peak rule, which says that negative occurrences in any consumer interaction can be counteracted by establishing ["a firmly positive peak and end"](#).

The amazing potential of this research is that if we design an experience deliberately, we can design it to have the appropriate peaks, evoking the emotions that we know drive loyalty and long-term spend. (I had to add the last bit just to satisfy the business case for the CFOs.)

Fail

Over the past eight years I have collected numerous experience artifacts and examples of a failed experience. In a lot of the work I have done with complaints teams in large organisations, I often ask these teams how many brand-new, never-before-encountered problems they have had in the previous six months. Usually they whisper "mostly the same old sh*t". The problem is that most of these teams never pause to ask how they can deal better with the same old problems. I acknowledge the operational pressures of making service level agreements, not paying administration penalties and producing scorecards that show how much they have done.

What I am making an appeal for is that we create space, without judgment and blame, for people to ask "why" more often in search of better solutions and prevention of issues that escalate into problems or complaints. I lobby for designing responses from complaints teams that show real empathy and compassion rather than make the customer feel like a freak of nature that dared demand respect and stood up for his rights.

My husband often says, "Please don't make a scene" when we go to a restaurant, implying that I am wrong for complaining about bad service. There should be no shame in speaking up about service and product failures.

If design is applied to the typical failures any organisation experiences, because we know they will happen, and people are trained to not be surprised by the failures and to handle them in a sophisticated, elegant manner, there should be no reason to "make a scene".

In conclusion, if your experiences are functional and frictionless, you aim for their being fantastic to some extent, and you deliberately manage any failures, you will get ahead and stay ahead and also be very difficult to imitate.

ABOUT CHANTEL BOTHA

I'm Chantel Botha, the author of "The Customer Journey Mapping Field Guide" and the founder of BrandLove.
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