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The SAC® Release

Businesses Must Adapt to Handle Evolving Customer Expectations

EAST GREENWICH, RI—Many businesses are seeing expectations from their customers change in today's environment, which requires organizations to change their behavior towards customers in many ways, according to The Society for the Advancement of Consulting® (SAC).

Opportunity to Differentiate from Your Competition

Customer expectations often mirror changes in technology, according to Linda Popky, president of Redwood Shores, CA-based strategic marketing firm [Leverage2Market Associates](#), and author of the book [*Marketing Above the Noise: Achieve Strategic Advantage with Marketing That Matters*](#).

She notes that with the advent of nearly ubiquitous always-on communications channels, customer patience has been shortened while expectations have risen, particularly in the area of customer service. "When you post email or twitter accounts for service and support, customers expect those accounts to be continuously monitored, and that those interactions will be taken as seriously as a call to a customer call center.

"Often, what customers are most interested in is being heard. They don't expect you to fix their problem immediately, but they want to know that their requests are being heard and dealt with," she said. "There is a huge opportunity to differentiate your business from competitors by building best practices to offer robust and reliable customer support—regardless of the channel, location, or time when a request comes in."

Give Customers What They Want

Rebecca Morgan, President of Cleveland, Ohio's [Fulcrum ConsultingWorks, Inc.](#), reminds us that customer expectations are always changing. It's important to stay current with them, if not help them be set.

"Two current trends that impact every mid-sized manufacturing business are (1) location independence, and 2) user-controlled pull. Think Sirius satellite radio for the first, and Netflix for the second. But this isn't just about entertainment. Your customers want what they want, when and where they want it. Location independence and user-controlled pull both speak to that expectation. The big change is that they simply won't accept anything else now. The impact on your manufacturing operations strategy is significant," she said.

Innovate in How You Engage Customers

Gayle Lantz, founder of WorkMatters, Inc., (www.workmatters) a leadership consulting firm based in Birmingham, Alabama, says, “companies can get ahead of customer expectations by studying trends and better understanding the demographics of the markets they serve”.

According to Ms. Lantz, “It’s not safe to assume that your market wants to be served in the way you want to serve them. You need a versatile approach.”

She gives the example of a sales person who would like to engage a customer in a phone call, yet the customer prefers texting or email communication. Ms. Lantz advises companies to continue to innovate how they engage their customers. One size does not fit all.

“Leaders must make the issue a priority if they expect to get ahead of customer expectations and stay ahead of the competition,” she said.

Exceed Customer Expectations Through Conversational Intelligence

Dr. Maynard Brusman, a consulting psychologist, executive coach, and emotional intelligence/mindful leadership expert, notes, “You can thank, or blame, technology for elevated customer expectations. The amount of information that’s available on our digital devices makes nearly everyone expect more. It’s ironic that in the online world, in which so many business and personal interactions can be anonymous, customers want very personalized experiences.”

According to Dr. Brusman, “Tracking the metrics behind delivering great customer experiences is critical. I recommend measuring it using a Net Promoter Score or a customer satisfaction tool like Client Heartbeat. You can synch Client Heartbeat up to most CRMs, and measure exactly how happy (or unhappy) your customers are.”

Dr. Brusman advises his clients to “be attuned to evolving customer expectations by creating a positive emotional experience through engaged conversations focusing on the essentials of all connected relationships: intimacy and trust.”

Beware of The Amazon Effect

“The Amazon Effect is the number one concern in manufacturing and supply chain organizations currently,” points out Lisa Anderson, known as The Manufacturing Business TransformerSM and president of LMA Consulting Group, Inc., Claremont, CA. “The Amazon Effect is a metaphor for the aggravated customer expectations across the board – immediate deliveries, 24/7 availability, the expectation of customer knowledge and more.

“Our most successful clients keep a tight pulse on their customers ever-changing requirements. It is no longer good enough to keep up; instead, finding ways to get ahead of what will likely occur and suggest ideas and strategies to succeed is

cornerstone to success,” she said. “Don’t think an automated survey is going to cut it. Customers expect a personalized and conversational approach.”

Don’t Treat All Customer Input Equally

“Comments from customers are always suspect for two reasons,” said SAC CEO Alan Weiss, PhD. “One is that only the very unhappy or very happy tend to respond, and you don’t hear from the great mass who are simply satisfied.

“The second is that all clients are not equal, and you need to listen to your best clients, who are your most profitable. The “pulse” is best kept by management reaching out in a personalized manner, not an automated one,” he said.

About SAC

The Society for the Advancement of Consulting (SAC) is an international association of consulting professionals who subscribe to an industry code of ethics and have provided evidence of significant consulting results among their clients. For more information, please go to <http://www.consultingsociety.com>, write to info@summitconsulting.com, or call 401/886-4097.

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