In 1992, HBR published a seminal business process reengineering paper that urged executives to “staple” themselves to a customer order to identify broken links in the backoffice and the supply chain. The authors argued that an order is essentially a surrogate for the customer, and by following it from placement to fulfillment (i.e., by stapling themselves to it), executives would see the disconnects that conspire to ruin the order-to-fulfillment process, and ultimately the customer experience. This can, in fact, be a low-hanging fruit to spur business growth.

The same stapling approach can be used to find and fix roadblocks to good shopper experiences in the retail sector. You can staple yourself to shoppers’ customer service queries by recording and analyzing them, and even by simply observing the stakeholders involved—the shopper, and the customer service agent or store associate—as they interact. Here’s how to in four steps.

1. **Staple yourself to the shopper**

Customers go through a lifecycle across research, buy, use, and love (or not) stages. Each stage is typically composed of one or more journeys. Together, the journeys constitute the customer experience (CX). Stapling yourself to the shopper along these journeys is a great way to identify CX bottlenecks. But before you get going, you need to prioritize. What are the most common shopper journeys that are also of the highest value to you (“value volume” analysis)? You need to address these journeys first.

The good news is we are in 2018 and not in 1992 when the HBR article was originally published. Customer journey analytics can make it easy for you to virtually staple yourself to shoppers by tracking and analyzing their journeys. Call recording, quality monitoring, desktop analytics, and voice analytics solutions can help do the same on the voice channel. You could also visit retail stores and observe the experience of shoppers, including their interactions with retail associates.
2. Staple yourself to the agent

When you have weak links in the experience chain, the whole chain will break. If contact center agents have a lousy experience (known as agent experience or AX), shoppers will, too. But the life of an agent, never easy to begin with, is getting even harder as routine questions get handled through customer self-service! Agents need to juggle multiple applications, and decipher entitlement, policy, and process documents on the fly amidst customer data clutter on their desktop—all when the shopper is on the line. Moreover, today’s agents (younger millennials, and increasingly, Gen Z) do not like to remember information, preferring instead to simply “look it up” for answers and guidance. For example, they might have never used a map for driving, GPS guidance being the default. The result? They often wind up staring at the desktop rather than solving the customer problem.

To understand AX, jack yourself into phone calls and floor-walk in a non-threatening manner. Are they finding different answers in siloed systems for interaction and knowledge management (KM)? Are they at a loss for how to resolve a problem? Do they have to constantly “alt-tab” across multiple application windows? Are they poring over contracts and flow charts as they converse? Do your retail store associates fare any better?

3. Staple yourself with no staples!

What if you become the customer and mystery-shop your own website, contact center, and retail store for customer service? What if you handle calls or chats or retail interactions yourself for a few hours? That way, you can gain first-hand experience on CX and AX, with no staples needed!

Mystery-shop to cover multiple scenarios to get a 360-degree view of CX:
- Single channel
- Omnichannel
- Queries of varying complexity
- Competitor sites

This is a great way to develop empathy for customers and your own agents, and to understand what kind of competition you are up against.

4. Beyond stapling: Fixing

Stapling enables you to find what CX and AX issues to fix. The question, then, is how! Technology can help here as well.

AI AND KNOWLEDGE GUIDANCE

We stapled ourselves to 5,000 consumers indirectly by asking them what their top hassles were in their CX journeys. The lack of and inconsistency in agent knowledge turned out to be the biggest culprit, followed by the difficulty of finding answers on company websites. Likewise, we asked 500 agents what their biggest hurdles were in delivering customer service when the customer was on the line. Not so surprisingly, their struggles virtually mirrored those of consumers. Not finding the right answers to customer questions.
DIFFERENT SYSTEMS/INFORMATION SOURCES PROVIDING DIFFERENT ANSWERS, AND KEEPING UP WITH NEW INFORMATION/CHANGES WERE AMONG THEIR TOP CHALLENGES, dwarfing everything else.

The good news is these challenges can be addressed with robust AI and KM systems. They guide shoppers and agents to answers, through a problem resolution, or through advice or a process that is compliant with regulations and best practice.

Any CX or AX initiative that does not include robust knowledge and AI guidance will have limited success at best. On the flip side, it has the potential of elevating CX and AX to unprecedented new levels.

OMNICHANNEL SHOPPER ENGAGEMENT HUB

According to CEB (now Gartner), HAVING TO REPEAT INFORMATION WHEN THE CUSTOMER IS FORCED TO SWITCH CHANNELS, OR GETS TRANSFERRED TO ANOTHER AGENT IN THE SAME CHANNEL, INCREASES CUSTOMER EFFORT BY 60%. The solution? Say no to customer engagement silos and go with an omnichannel shopper engagement platform that unifies customer interactions across all touchpoints so that customers do not have to repeat context across their journeys.

CONNECTED ANALYTICS

Recording and analyzing journeys allows retailers to IDENTIFY BOTTLENECKS IN SHOPPER JOURNEYS. HOWEVER, ANALYSIS WITHOUT INTERVENTION IS NOT VERY USEFUL. Operational analytics, connected with customer journey analytics, can help optimize contact center operations in a way that reduces both CX and AX friction.

Final word

There is one more aspect of experiences that is critical to any transformation initiative: the business experience (BX) of measuring, monitoring, and optimizing customer service. BX also includes the experience of a business in adopting and creating value from technologies. Questions to ask: Does your technology partner put its own skin in the game by eliminating adoption risk? Does it offer domain expertise? Does it have a track record of fast value creation through agile sprints?

Happy stapling, fixing, and winning in 2018!

About eGain

eGain customer engagement solutions power digital transformation for leading brands. Our top-rated cloud applications for social, mobile, web, and contact centers help clients deliver connected customer journeys in an omnichannel world. To find out more about eGain, visit http://www.egain.com/.