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# Why CX should be your marketing RX

Customer experience can make or break a business

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In 2013, a global study of executives concluded that brands were at risk of losing up to 20 percent of their revenues to poor CX. It brought the financial impact of the customer experience into sharper focus.

For 2018, two major studies among leading marketing groups ranked CX as the No. 1 area of marketing focus. The “Digital Marketing Trends Report” by Econsultancy and Adobe and the “2018 State of Branding Report” by OnBrand and Bynder independently polled

marketers in multiple industries, and both found that CX commanded the top spot on must-do lists.

Does CX have a seat at your marketing table? Is your marketing team passionately pursuing CX to strategically build your business?

## What is CX?

CX stands for customer experience. CX is not a one-time customer service interaction. Rather, it embodies the entire life cycle between a customer and a business, through all phases of the relationship, from initial awareness to discovery, from nurturing to purchase, followed by postservice activity and, hopefully, advocacy.

Previously, marketers focused budgets and strategies on awareness, discovery and nurturing, working to create a buzz, build a sales pipeline and impact the bottom line. Today’s marketers understand that long-term business success is more than focusing on prepurchase efforts. CX now requires a commitment to relationship-building long after the initial transaction.

In 2013, Oracle released the results of a global study that concluded brands were at risk of losing up to 20 percent of their revenues due to poor CX. Oracle’s survey of 1,342 senior-level executives from 18 countries brought the financial impact and importance of CX into sharper focus.

Today, CX has emerged as the most important marketing aspiration for North American businesses. And it’s a hot topic in some marine marketing and leadership circles. “In the marine

business, the experience starts when a consumer aspires to own your brand, and this aspiration is fueled, or suppressed, based on how you present and engage with the customer digitally,” says Steve Pizzolato, founder of Avala Marketing, which focuses on CX in recreational industries. “It moves forward or stalls based on the interaction a consumer has with your dealer, and becomes a short or lifelong experience based on the postpurchase engagement with the customer. A marine purchase is still primarily discretionary, and one negative experience can lead to customer defection not only from the brand and dealer, but also from the lifestyle.”

The Marine Retailers Association of the Americas has invested in outside CX experts to educate dealers. Theresa Syer of Syer Hospitality conducted CX workshops and learning labs at the 2017 Marine Dealer Conference and Expo, and it earned the event’s highest ratings among participants, according to MRAA vice president Liz Walz. The group followed up this year with a Continuous Certification e-learning course taught by Syer.

National Marine Manufacturers Association chief marketing officer and senior vice president Carl Blackwell says Grow Boating is funding a new CX-oriented curriculum to supplement the MRAA Certified Dealer Program and Grow Boating educational efforts. Avala Marketing, in collaboration with Discover Boating, which Blackwell oversees, produced a webinar titled “Landing Pages and How to Convert Discover Boating Traffic Into Prospects on Your Website.” It explores the journey of a new prospect from the Discover Boating website to a manufacturer or retailer site, with plenty of insight as to how to maximize first impressions and collect key data. The webinar is archived on the Grow Boating site, and Pizzolato will present an updated version at the Marketing Summit at this year’s International BoatBuilders’ Exhibition and Conference.

While such industry initiatives are great, real impact comes when boating businesses adopt their own CX strategies. It requires a bone-deep commitment from the C-Suite and a well-defined vision statement communicated and reinforced throughout the organization. Experts recommend developing a customer experience map, a processing tool that employs qualitative research to identify the customer mindset at each intersection.

Mapping allows marketers the ability to leverage specific communication opportunities with timely and relevant messaging based on what the customer is thinking at each touchpoint. The process also identifies which departments interface with the customer. Plotting the big picture reveals gaps in communication and allows your team to develop a multichannel marketing strategy.

If you don’t have the budget or lack the expertise to tackle this exercise, there are simple steps you can take to improve your company’s CX. It begins by recognizing that your prospective and existing customers need to be integral to your strategy. Create a simple matrix to examine marketing activities and address both audiences, with distinctive messaging for each.

Here are my Top 10 actions a company can take to improve its CX.

- 1.** Create a welcoming website. Websites are critical for creating first impressions. Does your content attract first-time buyers and engage existing customers? Is it easy to navigate and mobile-friendly? Create a FAQ page with the most common questions prospects have about your brand and business.

**2. Communicate regularly.** Are you maximizing the power and potential of your customer relationship management? Develop well-executed “automated drip” messaging with prospective and existing customers, and personalize communications. Mapping CX will be instrumental in executing effective messaging.

Parks Marina, a retailer with thousands of customers and a 35-year history of profitability, sends monthly e-newsletters to prospects and customers to share dealership news and special incentives. Debbie Parks says it’s a proven performer.

**3. Survey customers.** Monitor and measure customer performance regularly. Would customers refer your business to others? Ask how you can improve their experiences.

John Kutuk and Danny Goldenberg, owners of Marine Connection, which has five dealerships in South Florida, employ third-party CSI to survey every new-boat customer. Subsequently, team members are recognized for performance, and Kutuk and Goldenberg stay well-informed to respond to customer concerns.

**4. Listen and engage.** If you survey, analyze the results to understand what your customers are saying. Also, “listen” on social spaces, and troll review sites and forums for commentary about your business. Spend time on the social platforms your customers prefer, and experiment with new ways to engage. Develop a social media strategy with scheduled communications and measure your results.

**5. Do you have a hotline?** Establish an online and offline communication process that is easy for customers to use. Create positive emotional connections with customers, and establish and mandate protocols for timely follow-ups.

**6. Host events.** Events are a great way to thank loyal customers. Parks Marina hosts the largest gathering of Crownline boats in the country for a party each year, as well as a winter festival that draws 10,000 customers and prospects. Regal and Nautique of Orlando, Fla., invites owners and prospects to an annual weekend river-rafting party. These types of events generate goodwill, engage customers and promote opportunities for business development.

**7. Invest in training.** Training is paramount to scoring high on the CX scale. Helping customers navigate the buying process and then educating them goes a long way to developing positive CX.

Freedom Boat Club members are required to attend an orientation with classroom and on-water components taught by a Coast Guard-licensed captain. It also provides ongoing free training for members, including a women’s-only session that receives rave reviews.

Regal and Nautique of Orlando hires a local water-sports celebrity to conduct training, which is a big hit with customers. The sales team also helps customers set up their boats for wake sports. Company owner Jeff Husby says his team invests “whatever time is needed in training.”

**8. The element of surprise.** When was the last time you received a thank-you card or a gift from a business you patronize? Steve Sherman is a 30-year sales and marketing pro who handles new-member development for two Freedom Boat Club franchises. Sherman creates customized thank

you cards for \$2 each (including postage) at [trunitednotesandgifts.com](http://trunitednotesandgifts.com). He adds a small gift to accompany the card, and for less than \$10 he scores big CX points. The system also remembers birthdays and anniversaries.

**9.** Improve internal communications. Never let your team be caught unaware about a customer promotion. Make sure everyone on the team knows the details well in advance of the launch date.

**10.** Create advocates. Reward your best customers by promoting advocacy programs. Brand ambassadors are happy to invest in your company.

While these tips and tactics can contribute to CX, perhaps the most succinct advice comes from marine consultant Phil Friedman of the Port Royal Group. "A top-notch buying experience is first and foremost founded on receiving the goods and/or services promised, as represented and in a timely manner," writes Friedman in the blog "Selling Bull Chips in a Brown Paper Bag."

Adds MRAA executive director Matt Gruhn: "Consumers don't choose boating for the boat itself. People choose boating for the experience that they and their family are seeking and dreaming about, whether that is fishing, surfing, cruising or otherwise," he says. "It's our job as an industry, and particularly as retailers, to focus on delivering a memorable purchase and ownership experience. We get so focused on making the transaction that we lose sight of our need to fuel their passion for boating by providing world-class experiences."

Cheers to creating world-class customer experiences!

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