

Customer experience in a time of uncertainty

By [Barbara Cador](#), issued by [Kantar](#)

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We are facing disruption of a gigantic proportion: This time marks an inflection point - which brands and whole industries will look back upon as a period of major transformation, creating a 'new' normal. Among all the uncertainty, one thing is certain: Any experiences that require physical interaction won't be an option for brands and marketers in the foreseeable future. Coronavirus is threatening to dramatically alter the way people experience things in 2020 and beyond.

There are already important learnings we can draw from what people are doing and saying, which can help brands and companies frame a new kind of customer experience. In a world where for 60% of millennials the 'experience is king', brands reacting to this new normal and delivering an optimised CX (customer experience) may well gain strength and loyalty.

So how do you approach a new form of customer experience? Here are four practical reminders for brands.

1. Acknowledge emotions

It is now vital to not only manage the customer relationship from a functional perspective (troubleshooting shortages in services and goods), but also understand customers' emotions. We know from our Global CX+ Data that only about 18% of consumers are delighted about their last experience with a brand. Now is the time

to suspend your own viewpoint and get into your customer's shoes, because companies that respond to the current crisis with compassion will be rewarded by audiences. How do they feel? What do they expect from you? What is the most important information for the specific audience in question?



Barbara Cador

According to our CX+ global survey, approximately 46% of customers globally expect their bank to use their data to provide a personalised experience: Starling Bank, for example, does a good job of doing exactly this and connects with the deep underlying emotions of their customers with their digital blog around coronavirus. One week they looked at customers' questions on travel. The next they published advice on how to stay safe from fraudsters who are using the coronavirus outbreak to scam people. They are creating frequent virtual interactions and a sense of reliability and safety that is very much needed in these uncertain times.



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2. Humanise technology

Understand how your systems and technology can assist your customer care centres (and customers) in these uncertain times. As a result of the coronavirus outbreak, contact centres are faced with a double issue: unpredictable call volumes and agents not fully able to work. Using cloud technology or chatbot technology to help field simple queries can help companies focus on human intervention for more emotional or complex matters. A simple but reliable callback service to satisfy demand rather than keeping customers in a waiting loop is another way of reassuring them while avoiding servicing

bottlenecks.

In a country like Spain where only 10% of customers find the omnichannel experience enjoyable, Movistar did a great job at satisfying the sudden increase in customer requests without relying on their stores following the Spanish lockdown. They successfully diversified and strengthened their multichannel customer care strategy across Facebook, Instagram, call centres and their website.

3. Be transparent and true to yourself

It is fundamental to align any response to your brand promise or it will come across as inauthentic. Be aware of what's going on, and how it's impacting your customers, collaborators and community. In times of crisis, people will be increasingly sensitive about those brands who might appear to profit from this crisis or over-communicate. Listening and connecting will, therefore, go a long way with your customers.

Some brands will gain followers and long-term loyalty because of their donation towards the fight against the coronavirus, while others will, despite adversities, continue to offer the same high level of service/products under this extremely challenging circumstance. Your response will depend on who you were **before** the global pandemic. Think about McDonald's, which had Happy Meal Play Zones in many restaurants, and is now encouraging parents to visit happymeal.com to take the family time online with downloadable colouring pages, activities and interactive games. It's possible to take this venture further, connecting families, and offering more valuable content.



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4. Now is not the time to be reactive

There is a big chance that your customers would welcome reassurance or additional information. This is a unique opportunity to be proactive, to step up to keep your clients moving forward and make a contribution when it is needed most. Don't wait for them to call for help. Proactivity will promote brand loyalty and preference for the future.

Look to niche booking platform esquiades.com who, when the lockdown began in Spain and slopes and hotels shut down, proactively contacted all their customers who had booked a holiday announcing that they would provide a 100% automatic refund within the next four weeks.

There's uncertainty as to when the virus pandemic will subside. What we know is that there is always space for growth in crisis. New ways to drive multichannel engagement are needed when physical interaction is banned... but BrandZ research tells us that strong brands recover quicker than weak ones in times of turmoil. Ultimately, it is about how your brand can improve its relevance in a time of need. Those who come through for customers now are brands that will be remembered and create loyalty in the long run.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara Cador is the Global Head of CX+ at Kantar.

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