

Chapter 3

Benchmark Academy Study Ties Customer Experience to Emotional Branding: A University of Phoenix Center for Leadership Studies and Educational Research Assessment

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ABSTRACT

How do academies use customer experience (CX) leadership theory? How do they employ and measure it? How is emotional branding related to customer experience? No matter how rigorous higher education programs become, understanding the student and faculty customer experience can have many positive effects. Staff and faculty need to understand how to create meaningful student interactions leading to loyalty that can foster networking opportunities for student success throughout the school's prospective, current, and alumni network. A content analysis and brief survey was employed to examine a University of Phoenix research center Website iteration to define the customer personas of dissertation chairs, its largest customers who utilize the Center for Leadership Studies and Educational Research (CLSER) center for guidance to formulate research studies geared towards publication. These customers (known as affiliates) also were measured whether they believed that implicit promises made were kept, a necessity of purposeful CX strategy and that signifies the degree of emotional connection.

INTRODUCTION

No matter how rigorous higher education programs become, understanding the student and faculty customer experience can have many positive effects. Staff and faculty need to understand how to create meaningful student interactions leading to loyalty that can foster networking opportunities for student

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success throughout the school's prospective, current, and alumni network. With an average of less than 50% of all college students graduating due to several factors including the classroom experience, more competing schools and learning modalities, addressing this challenge should be the number one priority for all institutions.

Companies like Amazon.com, Starbucks, and Square, are innovative leaders and understand how to purposefully implement customer experience (CX). At its core, CX is a unified company commitment to ensure that all promises made, whether implicit or explicit, are kept. When a promise is broken, so too is the customer experience. For example, when an individual calls a bank customer support line and is asked to input a social security or some other identifying number. The customer takes the time to enter data using the telephone keypad. Then, surprisingly, he or she is greeted by the bank's customer service representative. Who asks, "What is your social security number?" Suddenly, what was just a simple acceptable screening technique with a hopeful and memorable positive customer experience now ends in a broken promise, more screening, less connectivity, a repetitive action, a chore whose time has now doubled. This scenario has now become a memorable experience for the wrong reasons, a bad practice. Had the bank purposefully created an extraordinary experience, there would have been no need for the customer to enter the data twice either by keypad or verbally.

Companies that want to differentiate themselves, must do so by doing things better, differently, and more competitively than their competitors. By doing so, they can create an emotional tie about their products and services with their customers. Let there be no mistake, in order to facilitate customer experience, the customer must achieve an emotional tie with the brand. Emotions are regarded as a powerful driving force in consumer decision making (Bagdare, 2015, p. 9). If the promise had been kept and the bank representative had seen the data the customer had entered as requested on the phone keypad, the opportunity to allow for a memorable experience to flourish could have an amazing result, one where a customer loves (the emotional connection) to interact with a company perhaps to the point where he or she is so enamored that the process of engaging is just as desirable or more desirable than the product or service itself.

Regardless of the bells and whistles associated with a product or service, customers have the potential to enjoy the engagement process so much that the focus becomes a Return on Engagement (ROE) and not Return on Investment (ROI) as so many companies inaccurately continue to do in order to measure the customer experience outcome. Indeed, all companies, whether for profit or nonprofit, must make a profit. However, companies that understand customer experience know that ROI may take months or years are prepared for the long run. They know that they must create product or service advocates. The leadership at these companies understands customer experience is not a Band-Aid or panacea that all departments must be on the same page about and that consistency of messages is important.

And while the phenomenon of CX continues to infiltrate in companies the world over, it is only natural to consider the degree to which the academy also employs CX theory. While the number of for-profit and online schools has swelled over the past decade and has now started to shrink, the number of traditional college and university offerings of online degrees and certificates has reached the masses across geographies. No matter whether a school is open-enrollment or competitive, the number of students is shrinking; therefore, it makes sense that the academy too would want a method to engage their customers, students and faculty.

Customer experience is commonly defined as being holistic in nature, involving the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to any direct or indirect contact with the service

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