

7 trends that will change customer experience in India

Some key takeaways from Quest, a recently held customer experience management summit.

Back in 2010, when we started Akosha, we used to get about ten customer service issues a day to resolve. Today we get about 3,000 issues a day on the platform. This number is obviously just the tip of the iceberg that is customer service issues in India.

Over the years, despite the fact that customer experience management (CEM) is spoken about more and more at a brand level, we felt that real debate and insight wouldn't really come out unless we got marketers and customer experience professionals to discuss the issues in the same room. So on a nice, cool winter morning in November, we got 80+ such folks to lock themselves in a room at The Leela, Gurgaon, and discuss all things CEM.

The roundtable format where all delegates became participants was a big hit, with delegates having some serious issues to debate, and mull over for the future.

Here are the seven broad themes that emerged at Quest, our recently held customer experience management summit:

1. Customer service will need to embrace a mobile mindset:

The huge proliferation of smart phones in India is causing scores of people to use their mobiles to get online. Consequently, companies are getting used to engaging with their customers through mobile apps, even if traditionally they've been pure play internet or offline businesses.

A logical extension of this is the evolution of the chat process into a platform for customer and brand interactions. While we've been advocating this for a while, and are already developing Software Development Kits (SDKs) and APIs for brands, we know that there are going to be challenges, like capturing structured information from the chat. Unstructured information makes it difficult for CRM platforms to offer a good level of service.

2. The SaaS model will be the go-to model in CRM too.

With its flexibility and functionality, the SaaS model is here to stay. This trend has been reported by leading research firms like Gartner and Forrester. At Quest, Mohit Bhatnagar, managing

director of Sequoia Capital, referred to the same. The CRM market has witnessed a significant shift on this front; about 45 per cent of this \$40 billion market is moving to the SaaS model, from the traditional CRM network model. Brands are also increasingly relying upon young start-ups to build on their traditional CRM network, and are paying-as-they-go.

3. NPS is being recognised as the key metric for measuring customer experience.

Until three years ago, in my conversations with brands, most of them hadn't heard of Net Promoter Score (NPS). But it was a completely different picture at Quest. Most brands think of NPS as the single best predictor of future customer loyalty behaviour. However, to get actionable insights, brands need to ask additional questions, for example, questions about value, quality, and usability, in order to get to the root cause behind the scores.

4. Companies are using better data analytics to get a more comprehensive understanding of their customers:

Brands are exploring the use of analytics to determine urgency/anxiety levels of customers so as to have the right set of people handle their issues. The use of analytics is only going to be amplified in 2015, with more and more companies/enterprises realising the vast value of the data they hold.

5. Integrating internal CRM with social media conversations:

Though it is a process that requires a high degree of technology intervention, opening up CRM for outcome oriented social media conversations will provide more unified and consistent customer experience, leading to better customer service. If queries on social media remain unanswered or the turn-around-time (TAT) is up to two to three days, then responding thereafter becomes a futile exercise as customer anxiety levels would have escalated and a negative chain may already have started.

Integration with CRM, providing tickets, prioritising certain types of interactions based on keywords, and taking complaints offline can help brands reduce the domino effect of complaints by more than 50 per cent. For agents, they don't need to jump between different channels to find what they need.

With Micromax, one of our flagship clients, this was possibly the strongest suggestion from our end - to open up the information they had inside their CRM and share it with customers. As a

result, this immediately elevated customer service responses to a higher level of personalisation and detailing, which in turn reduced the anxiety levels of customers.

6. Customer service as a function is being seen more and more as a brand building tool rather than a cost centre:

While it is still very premature to expect revenue generation from customer service functions, they are being leveraged as brand ambassadors that potentially lead to further foot falls or sales. Favorable 'word of mouth' mentions are a powerful marketing tool on social media and customer service departments can be important enablers in this regard.

Dell for instance has received online accolades for the prompt response of its customer service team to complaints. The brand has also been recognised as a trailblazer in using social media to generate leads. In sectors like auto, customer service is frequently becoming the decisive factor in purchase decisions!

7. Retailers will integrate proactive outbound communication more and more into customer service solutions:

A proactive approach in communicating with customers is what will create goodwill. Jabong, one of the leading e-tailing companies in the country, demonstrated just this during a problem it had with its courier or logistics partner. Once the team realised they wouldn't be able to service their customers on time, they actively reached out to all the customers who had bought any kind of product from them in Jaipur and informed them that there would be delays. So customers who may have become anxious about their pending deliveries, did not call to complain, and that reduced stress in the system.

Trends in customer experience management suggest that the environment is conducive for this function. Whether it rises to the occasion or not, depends on the vision and application of industry practitioners.