

Three practical ramifications of overlap of marketing and customer service

Sometime back, we hosted a customer experience management summit in Delhi. We called some of the senior most leaders in customer service and marketing. One of the most keenly debated topics was the overlap of marketing, PR and customer service. While everyone seemed to agree that these three distinct fields were overlapping more and more, especially with the growth of internet, most people were generally short of ideas on how this would impact them at a practical level.

So, here are the three practical ramifications of this overlap:

1. Marketing professionals will own customer service to a large extent

Reading this may annoy the customer service leaders, as the implication would be that their functions would end up reporting to marketing.

Online customer traffic and interactions with brands is only going to increase exponentially in the next few years - a YouTube video, a campaign on Facebook or Twitter or also possibly WhatsApp. The target audience consuming this content, in all likelihood, will use the same channels to get back or get in touch with the brand. The marketing team for most organizations owns this funnel of communication with the customer, and, logically, should serve as the unified front to customers on it. Routing them to customer service and expecting them to pick up the threads from there can cause time lapses, duplication and possibly miscommunication.

Brands might adapt to this by ensuring that customer service reports to the marketing function. Instead of having a divisive strategy to tackle customer interactions or a clash between two functions with overlaps, convergence is the practical solution where one entity takes the overriding ownership.

An outcome of the above would be that Net Promoter Score (NPS), declared as the single best predictor of future customer loyalty behavior, will also come under the marketing function. People who don't even use a brand's customer service constitute a bigger chunk determining its NPS, but the few who haven't had a good experience are the ones who are much more vocal. Having one owner would make it possible to spot imbalances and biases, and provide a more holistic view.

Another outcome of two functions merging is that common skills and objectives will need to be picked up and embraced by respective employees, for them to work on the ground.

For instance, customer service executives will need to be more creative and out-of-the-box in their thinking, and not confine their interactions with customers based on a rule book. Marketers on their part will have to build a more analytical and result-oriented view of how customer service works. Thinking in a notional, warm and fuzzy marketing sense, that customers should feel nice, is easy. But, when it comes to the real brass tacks of serving him on the phone or otherwise, it is very difficult - creating new employee incentive models, identifying the right metrics, managing the daily challenges of running customer service etc.

2. Marketers need to think of CRM differently

Marketers have traditionally thought of consumer research differently - let's do a survey and find out what the customer wants; the CRM is for resolving customer service issues. Of course, there are nuances for every sector (example: in FMCG and retail, any rudimentary CRM serves the main purpose for marketing to sell more). CRM software has been developed to serve both customer service and marketing functions, but, in reality, it is hardly ever used by marketers. Seldom do they log into their CRM databases to do a pulse check of customer satisfaction, let alone draw insightful customer statistics. It is perceived and used as a tactical customer service or complaint tool to monitor and manage efficiencies, response times and gauge other controls.

With the overlap, this attitude towards CRM will change and they will get more involved with CRM software, even as early as at the procurement stage of CRM software.

This is when they can ask for their wish-list of data points about the customer and the software they want to capture. For example, pulling in customers' LinkedIn profiles to complement customers' profiles and thereby creating more attractive marketing outreach and customised campaigns.

3. The equivalent of GRP will emerge for customer service

Marketers are, and correctly so, tuned to ROI on every marketing dollar spent. Gross Rating Points (GRP) is one such model that's used for justifying mass media spends, because, somewhere, it is

believed that 1\$ spent on GRPs will lead to x\$ of incremental sales. While not exactly scientifically provable, most marketers are comfortable with GRPs as an ROI indicator.

Today, it is very difficult to link the money spent on customer experience with the ROI - does it directly impact sales, does it add to my brand equity? I believe, over time, marketing folks will develop ROI models for customer experience spends as well. So, in 2017, brands will have a fair idea that 150 Customer Experience Points (to coin a new term) will lead to x\$ increase in their sales.

Conclusion

The next few years are going to be very exciting for both customer service and marketing professionals. The age-old skill of unlearning and learning new things will hold the ambitious in good stead.