

# HOW TO CREATE THE UNIFIED EXPERIENCES YOUR BUYERS CRAVE

Making every moment count in the customer journey



# The buying process is continually evolving

When most marketers envision the customer journey, it's in the form of a funnel – an upside-down triangle that creates a fairly straightforward path for converting browsers to buyers.

But now, that path is constantly changing.

Today's purchase process is no longer linear: Customers are moving in a complicated path that touches the internet, email, mobile, social media, direct mail, and brick-and-mortar locations before they decide to complete a purchase. Even then, their journey isn't over, as customers continue to engage with brands and other shoppers long after the purchase has been made.

The customer journey now resembles an hourglass. Conversion is no longer the sole desired outcome and the end of the funnel; instead, it is now the center point of it all. The journey may start on the path to purchase, but once a conversion occurs, marketers flip the hourglass over to transition customers into engagement and loyalty programs designed to build delight and brand evangelism. The result is an increasingly complex digital experience for the customer.

## Defining the customer journey

**Customers generally progress through five distinct stages as they work their way through the buying journey.**

**Awareness.** Here, the customer is just starting out on the buying journey. Something has inspired the customer to change or has made the customer aware of a need – and the customer is hungry to learn more.

**Interest.** After becoming aware of a need, the customer continues to gather information and weigh the options. This may include browsing online content, reading reviews, or browsing different brands or product configurations. As the customer becomes more educated, the research becomes more targeted – moving from “I've heard of this brand” to “I'm interested in this brand.”

**Intent.** Once the customer recognizes an alignment between their needs and a specific brand, the journey shifts from a vague interest to a true intention to make a purchase. At this stage, the customer has recognized the value of a specific brand or product and is actively turning toward it.

**Conversion.** Finally, the customer is informed, enticed, excited – and ready to convert from a browser to a buyer. It's incumbent upon the merchant to make the conversion process as frictionless as possible, to prevent any last-minute obstacles from scuttling the impending purchase.

**Nurture.** Even though a purchase has been made, the brand experience is not yet over. The marketer's role now is to nurture this new customer relationship and develop not just a loyal, longtime buyer, but also a delighted brand advocate.

## Analyzing the customer journey

An objective analysis is a good place to start. By looking at data on your current performance and competitive market position, you can begin to identify any gaps where your brand experience could be strengthened – which will enable you to prioritize your time and resources on the areas where you'll see the biggest gains.

### Analyze your performance

Before you can make changes to your strategy, you should understand what's working and what isn't. Performance benchmarks are invaluable to this process.

There are a plethora of potential customer- and purchase-related metrics that digital marketers might want to measure. However, not all of them will produce the helpful insights you're looking for. Choosing metrics that align to each stage of the customer journey will give helpful structure to your benchmarking process.

### Assess your market position

Take a step back and see where you stand in the market. This doesn't need to be a complex or drawn-out process. Start by reviewing what you already know (or what you can easily find out) about your top three to five competitors. What are their strengths? Weaknesses? What features and capabilities do they offer? Where are they growing? Where are they divesting? Read some of their customer reviews and see what their shoppers like or dislike.

Create a simple checklist of these questions and compare each top competitor against your own brand. Where are you doing well? What areas stand out that should be on the top of your priority list moving forward?

Armed with this data on both your own performance and your relative standing in your market, your next step is to translate this information into actionable insights.

# Optimizing the customer journey

Take control of these five things

## 1 Strengthen your content strategy

Build up your SEO strategy by asking yourself:

- Will awareness-stage customers who are just starting their journey find our brand?
- As customers transition into intent, will customers find our products?
- Will our content build the trust that's necessary to encourage them to buy?

Developing and executing a solid SEO strategy helps ensure that once your customers are ready to buy, your content will help facilitate the purchase decision.

## 2 Strengthen your focus on the customer

If you don't fully understand your customer's intent and motivations, you can't solve for their needs. Look at how your customers are moving from one platform and digital touchpoint to another. Can you create more seamless transitions and connected experiences? If so, how?

Review your overarching design system across touch points and ensure it enhances consistency and usability. And finally, each call to action should effectively guide users to the next step of their journey.

## 3 Strengthen your digital experience

When customers go online to shop for a product, they want to be able to quickly and easily find the information they need. And once they find that product, make it easy for them to get it – and even personalize it – wherever they are.

Offer product configurators and guided selling solutions that enable customers to explore new options on their own. Let customers order online and pick up the product in your brick-and-mortar location. Or if they're shopping in-store and the desired product isn't in stock, have it shipped at no charge to their home.

## 4 Strengthen your customer messaging

Throughout the customer journey, consider your unique points of messaging and find ways to build out triggered sends and asks targeted to meet their needs and add value at each stage in the journey. This might include:

- Welcome emails that introduce your brand and help acclimate the customer to your unique experience
- Cart abandonment emails that gently nudge customers who may have navigated away
- Post-purchase follow-ups that offer helpful tips and content
- Re-engagement/reactivation emails that help remind customers of the needs you can help them meet
- Loyalty rewards to recognize your strongest relationships and incentivize people.

## 5 Strengthen your approach to staffing

None of this hard work can take place in a vacuum. The most successful eCommerce operations have internal staff – often product owners or someone with a design skillset – who focus exclusively on identifying and refining the customer journey.

Design-centric organizations are adding the position of Chief Customer Experience Officer. This role focuses almost exclusively on spearheading the customer experience and driving the omnichannel strategies that result in seamless buying experiences. They also collaborate closely with channel-specific subject-matter experts to optimize the customer journey – not just across channels, but also across products.





No matter where the customer journey starts or how it flows, every touchpoint is critical. To maximize revenue, you must be able to measure and define success at each stage. That means more than having a great website, outstanding content, and an engaging social media presence. Customers aren't just buying your products or services. They're buying a positive, engaging experience.

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