

Changing Channels!

Tune into your Customers before they turn you off

3 Key Elements for a Successful Multi-Channel Customer Engagement



A Customer Lifeguard White Paper

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Email: gerry-brown@customerlifeguard.com

Web: www.customerlifeguard.com



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Executive Summary

Today's customers are impatient, fickle, have much higher expectations and are increasingly vocal about being forgotten in long phone queues, let down by poor web sites, and misunderstood by uninterested or seemingly powerless customer service agents.

We're going through a game changing social customer revolution that's impacting all businesses across all market segments, but despite this many companies still have customers that are drowning in a sea of indifference or being washed up on the shores of corporate infidelity. They are frustrated about the poor quality and inconsistency of service they experience across a broad range of contact channels and company touch points. Social media is dramatically changing the landscape and increasing numbers of customers – not just Millennials, Digital Natives or Generation Y – are using social media as their first point of contact for customer service, bypassing more traditional methods such as contact centres, on-line help centres and FAQs.

“Whatever we call it, and wherever a business is on this new journey, it will be vital for them to have much deeper, broader understanding of customer behaviour and the strategic and operational tools to adapt to it. Otherwise they'll be the one that need rescuing.”

They're doing it whenever and wherever they want—on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, discussion groups, forums, and blogs. The volume of information is increasing daily, and in a variety of structured and unstructured formats. For companies already awash in an ocean of data, this can be challenging to track and even more difficult to action. However, it can contain a rich harvest of market intelligence and, more frequently, desperate cries for help in resolving customer service issues.

There's a new story every day, and classic YouTube videos such as **United Breaks Guitars** and the butt clenching **Comcast** recording, ensure that millions of people get to hear about both good and bad news instantly.

As a result of this fast changing customer landscape, some companies are trying to integrate their systems, improve their processes and educate their people to adopt a customer-centric approach to address this. However, many haven't yet reached the stage where they have properly managed to harness these important but different elements, in a way that allows for a truly joined up or “holistic” view of the customer.

Even the terms are changing faster than most companies can keep up. Many pundits declaring that “multi-channel” is dead and that “omni-channel” is the new black. Digital marketing is also getting into the mix and there's no doubt that seamless alignment of physical and digital experiences must become a high priority for any business, regardless of their operational provenance.

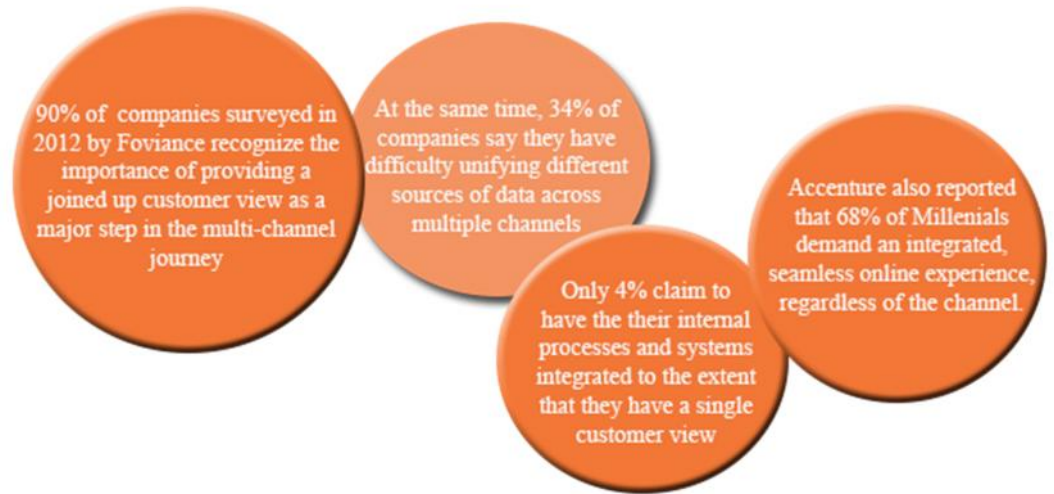
Whatever we call it, and wherever a business is on this new journey, it will be vital for them to have much deeper, broader understanding of customer behaviour and the strategic and operational tools to adapt to it. Otherwise they'll be the one that need rescuing.





The Numbers

In amongst all of the statistics in the spotlight, some numbers really stand out.



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While the vast majority of companies understand the positive effect of a truly joined up view of customer performance, very few organisations, despite their pronouncements, have integrated, multi-channel processes and systems in place, or a strategy to help them to achieve this. In order to become part of the connected customer world, you need to transform how you listen so you can separate clear signals of customer opinion from the increasingly irritating trolls, and act on it in a timely fashion, through the most appropriate channel and with the right people.

How Should Companies Approach This?

There are **three key elements** critical to success in a multi-channel world.

- 1. Establish a customer experience strategic framework**
- 2. Implement an evolving, cloud based, technology road map**
- 3. Develop an innovative corporate culture, built on a multi-talented, trusted and empowered work-force**

While these are organization-wide elements, many companies still take a silo based approach in dealing with them. It’s absolutely vital that these are part of coordinated, top-down strategy, involving the key stakeholders across the business in all of the decisions, and the implementation of the elements involved.





1. Establish a customer experience strategic framework

So what is this customer experience strategic framework and why is important?

As a fundamental premise, customer experience defines a customer's perception of your company throughout the complete interaction life-cycle and must be deeply ingrained and executed throughout the entire company. By getting senior management aligned in this initiative you have taken the first giant step in eliminating one of the major barriers to a successful multi-channel customer service program, namely dealing with the silos and departmental turf wars that exist in many businesses.

This framework is a major foundation in the building of a multi-channel operation. The importance of this is borne out by another survey by **eConsultancy** which showed that 42% of companies said that the major challenge to achieving alignment on a company-wide multi-channel strategy is organisational structure, which is a nice way of saying that silos still have a strong hold in many companies.

This concept is still aspirational for many companies and although the development of a customer experience strategy has increased in importance, according to 80% of the executives surveyed recently by **Strativity Group**, this still hasn't necessarily turned into action for many businesses

In addition, social media is having a huge impact and there's been a lot written lately about who "owns" social media and whether it should be marketing, customer service, sales etc. The question should be – Why does anyone own it? No one department owns telecoms, email or other channels. All of these may be utilized in different ways by each group, but clearly defined and guided by the customer experience strategy governing the organization and the impact it has on the customer and the brand.

A customer experience framework tackles these challenges head on by seeking to align the organization as one of its first steps and has some key components that enable employees to deliver a superior customer experience that we'll explore in more detail.

Listening, understanding and taking action on what customers and employees are saying about the brand and their experiences with the overall company

Some organizations believe that they know best what's good for their customers, but more often than not it turns out to be what's best for the *company*. While yearly surveys can provide some insight into customer needs and wants, a more frequent, inclusive and actionable Voice of the Customer (VOC) program that measures attitudinal, transactional and

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emotional experiences, will give you a truer and more complete picture of customer expectations and how well you are meeting them.

In addition to customer feedback, many leading organizations such as **Four Seasons**, also utilize regular employee surveys and feedback sessions to ensure that their voice is also heard, valued and used prominently in the development of the customer experience strategy.

As this information is collected and aggregated, it's as important to let your customers know via regular updates that you have not only listened to what they are saying, but also understand what it means to them and how you will improve and enhance their experience.

Complement VOC information by effectively modelling & measuring current customer interactions to evaluate channel traffic, options and priorities

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While there is clear anecdotal and statistical evidence that customers want to interact via the channel of their choosing, it's still vital to understand what is currently working, what isn't and what changes are needed in the multi-channel operation. Otherwise organizations may find themselves making unnecessary investments in one channel while ignoring another that is more effective, cost efficient, time saving and, importantly, more popular with customers.

This approach uses customer datasets to provide a very detailed analysis of what touchpoints are currently being utilized and how. This spans all products, all channels and all stages of the customer lifecycle to give a very clear picture of customer behaviours by product, channel and stage, and the costs associated with them.

Then it allows a degree of 'what if' scenario planning, and models out the impacts on interaction volumes and costs based on strategic and operational changes incorporated into the customer experience framework.

The VOC feedback and key interaction data are used to creatively design an organizationally aligned experience that ensures the whole company understands the role they must play in delivering the customer experience

This valuable information is another building block along the way to enhancing a company's knowledge about their customer and, in particular, how and where, they want to interact. It can now be used to as a key directional element to align the various stakeholders in a common understanding of customer expectations, and be incorporated into the overall customer experience framework.





To successfully build this framework, it's important that an individual and/or team take responsibility for the overall customer experience within the business. When companies have someone responsible for customer experience at the top level, there is far less likelihood of these inter-departmental disputes negatively affecting the customer.

A dedicated individual, especially one with a seat at the top table such as a Chief Customer Officer, and a cross-functional team, can help the company cut through the silos and map the customer journey across the entire customer life cycle by sharing a common, clear set of insights and values across diverse groups. The centralized customer experience team must include key stakeholders in every stage of the transformation to make sure that the whole company understands their respective roles in delivering the customer experience and supporting the multi-channel program.

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Empowering employees with the tools, information and authority to deliver a great customer experience across multiple channels and touch points

Employee empowerment is frequently highlighted as an important initiative at many companies, but quite often there is a significant disconnect between the employee's and the manager's view of empowerment.

True empowerment means building a culture where employees are free to make the right decisions - *for the customer* - and where they are encouraged to collaborate and play a key role in defining customer service policies and procedures that they can implement without retribution. At **Ritz-Carlton** each and every employee can spend up to \$2000, per guest, per day, to either enhance the guest experience or to immediately resolve a problem.

Another example of the power of true company collaboration and alignment is **Zappos**, whose 10 Core Company Values underpin everything the company does, and, in particular, defines the culture. As CEO Tony Hsieh says in his book *Delivering Happiness*: “At Zappos, our belief is that if you get the culture right, most of the other stuff — like great customer service, or building a great long-term brand, or passionate employees and customers — will happen naturally on its own.”

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This experience is embedded into the corporate culture, hiring criteria, education programs, objectives, compensation plans and incentive programs

As the customer experience framework is developed and documented it must be reflected as an integral part of the human resources program within the company. **Zappos** have established innovative guidelines for ensuring that the employee fits the culture by incorporating the core values and emotional commitment in the earliest stages of the employee induction program. As an example they offer the prospective employee \$4000 to withdraw if they feel that Zappos isn't the right place for them. This ensures that employees believe in Zappos long term vision and want to be a part of their culture.

Ritz-Carlton prefers to use the word *select* rather than hire and make sure that they have the processes in place to study the commitments and strengths of prospective employees.

In doing this they take their time and recognize that this will increase the probability that the new hire will be a success and add value to the customer experience.

Many more organizations are now looking beyond sales numbers to drive compensation and recognition and are using customer satisfaction measures such as Net Promoter Score (NPS) or Customer Effort Scores (CES) to reward employees for delivering an exceptional and profitable customer experience.

2. Implement an evolving cloud based technology road map

We've discussed the importance of a customer experience strategy in supporting the deployment of a multi-channel customer service program. The next stage in that journey is the enabling technology that can make this a reality across your business. As a backdrop to that let's look at some more telling statistics:





Businesses are recognizing that social media is both good news and bad news for customer service operations, and while there is very little IT investment needed to establish a corporate presence on social networking sites, effectively monitoring, aggregating and integrating the data is a whole new and potentially expensive ball game.

Consequently many organizations are looking to “The Cloud” as a route for adding in new 'transformational' applications, especially in the contact centre, over and above existing legacy systems, which can allow them to migrate old systems into The Cloud in stages, developing new requirements within The Cloud layer rather than the legacy layer.

Cloud computing offers lower start-up costs, shorter implementation times, less dependence on IT and free trials.

There is no single journey map to cloud adoption, but rather a wide variety of on-ramps and paths. Organizations have different starting points, goals and available resources. Consequently an amalgamation of traditional IT solutions and methodologies that provide an evolution *rather* than a revolution is the way that many companies are building cost effective, multi-channel, technology capabilities.

Many cloud solutions offer low cost, or no cost, trial periods which allow organizations to test the applications in a real world or test environment, before deciding to proceed. As a subscription model, companies can also manage their investment carefully, and users can be brought on as required with flexibility in both data and capability, and with a minimum of IT involvement.

Many organizations are now looking at implementing cloud based model offices as a way to fast track strategic, procedural and operational developments. This enables them to trial them in “what if” scenarios” that can mirror customer behavior and determine acceptance of the proposed changes or any obstacles to their introduction.

It can seamlessly revitalize existing legacy systems through proven pre-built links and can make this available across the enterprise

The challenge that most businesses face is that information and customer data all reside in different places and in different forms, and often in legacy systems that can be expensive to replace or modify. The Cloud provides a perfect way to synchronize or normalize all this so called “Big Data” across these different locations and systems, to move closer to the single view of the customer without significantly adding to your existing IT infrastructure.



These applications usually feature more open “Application Programming Interfaces” (API) that can make system integration easier, quicker and much less expensive. Companies will find that, even with older legacy systems, they can still use the cloud to push and pull data to and from the right places, thereby increasing their ability to provide a total view of the customer and deliver a great customer experience.

Customers reach out from many places and the most effective of these solutions typically provide immediate and visual access to customer history, regardless of channel, and are integrated within a single window, making it easy-to-use and faster to respond without having to switch applications.

The Cloud provides accelerated performance, innovative applications and links to other cloud applications, especially social media

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While noting earlier that Social Media is having a major impact on customer service delivery, it’s still just one of many channels, albeit an ever increasing one, that customers are using. Consequently it must have a major presence within the contact centre infrastructure, because it needs the link to the customer database, CRM and case management systems, that can escalate issues to the right people as they arise.

Cloud based solutions of all types are exploding onto the market and customer service applications, including integrated suites with real time analytics and action engines to monitor and alert key staff to on-going Social Media activities, are a big part of this.

End users can access the service “anytime, anywhere”, share data and collaborate more quickly and easily, making both logic and data far more portable and available to everyone in the enterprise. This provides the capability for greater flexibility and capacity, especially for deploying home based workers and adding staff quickly and cost effectively when customer demand increases.

This also means that smaller and mid-sized companies can now compete with larger business, especially on responsiveness and agility, which are becoming more and more important to today’s customers.

By working through the cloud, businesses can democratize technology and have it serve as a powerful enabler to all stakeholders - customers, staff, and partners - to truly bring about a multi-channel revolution.

3. Develop an innovative corporate culture, built on a multi-talented, trusted and empowered work-force

It’s not just customers that are changing and becoming more demanding. Companies and employees are also recognizing that in a fast developing,





multi-channel customer communications world, they need to be part of culture of excellence, that will not only delight customers, but will result in enhanced employee engagement, increased job satisfaction and reduced staff turnover.

Alison Maitland and **Peter Thomson** in their book: *of Future Work: How Businesses Can Adapt and Thrive in the New World of Work*, note that:

“This change, fuelled by the explosion in communications technology, will be the result of business needs - a desire to cut real estate costs, a drive to improve customer service or enter a new market faster, or an effort to reduce high rates of employee turn-over.”

“Younger generations increasingly will enter the workplace totally connected, expecting to use the latest technology and do their jobs the way *they* work best.”

Let’s look at some other areas that will affect the multi-channel work place of the future:

Reevaluate the hiring or selection criteria based on your core values and establish the cultural “fit” that goes beyond functional experience and skills match

At **Zappos**, they actually do two different sets of interviews. The hiring manager and his/her team will do the standard set of interviews looking for relevant experience, technical ability, fit within the team, etc. Then the HR department does a separate set of interviews, looking purely for culture fit. Candidates have to pass both sets of interviews in order to be hired.

In order for employees to consistently perform in ways that not only satisfies but delights customers, companies must recognize the value and importance of identifying raw talent and the methodology for selection.

At **Ritz-Carlton** interviews not only involve managers, but also frontline staff who have been certified as interviewers. This not only imbues an even greater sense of responsibility and trust in existing employees, but provides an instant source of pride for the new employee knowing they were selected after such a rigorous interviewing process.

At **Metro Bank**, the first new high street bank in the UK for over 100 years, their mantra is “Hire for attitude – Train for skill.” This has been a major reason for their success in not only attracting new customers, but in finding the right people that can focus on the things that make a difference in the customer service experience.



Introduce and involve employees as major contributors to a clearly defined, customer experience strategic framework

Ensure employees, especially those on the front line, feel that they are part of the bigger picture beyond their individual roles, by including them in the discussions about the company's overall mission, vision, and strategic plans. They then will become willing and active participants in the development of the customer experience framework and will share in the responsibility of what is a successful and inspiring deliverable.

People that feel that they have had a stake in the decisions that are made are likely to be far more dynamic and impactful in their interactions with customers as they will truly feel that this is "their" company as well and will want that to reflect positively on them. Creating an environment in which people have input on decisions and actions that affect their roles results in empowered employees who can then chart their course without close supervision.

As noted earlier, model offices are becoming *de rigeur* in many organizations. These can provide a tremendous opportunity to increase employee responsibility and accountability by having them design, develop and deploy potential new multi-channel solutions based on their real world knowledge of customer needs and behaviours.

Encourage and reward participation in a stimulating and innovative working environment that leads to more engaged and motivated employees

Four Seasons, Virgin Atlantic and Zappos, are companies that are consistent symbols of great customer service and having engaged employees. They know that the employee involvement processes and the development of relevant and achievable reward and recognition systems are crucial to their continued success.

The Ritz Carlton Five Star recognition program occurs on quarterly basis at each property, where employees are nominated by their peer group and is based on the company's Gold Standard (Service Values, Credo, Employee Promise etc.) that define the company and differentiate it from the competition.

While some employee recognition programs are relatively narrow in scope, and perceived as unattainable by many employees, a program such as this clearly identifies employee recognition opportunities and aligns them with clearly stated and understood corporate objectives. In addition by publicly acknowledging these employees it can motivate others to emulate those behaviours thus sustaining the company's culture of excellence.

"The challenge for many businesses is the inconsistency of customer service delivery that occurs within an organisation. Too often customer service quality can fluctuate across channels due to a lack of innovation in technology that can support engaged employees."





As part of the hiring process, demonstrate your company's commitment to a "smart" technology roadmap as a key component in knowledge worker environment

The challenge for many businesses is the inconsistency of customer service delivery that occurs within an organisation. Too often customer service quality can fluctuate across channels due to a lack of innovation in technology that can support engaged employees. Leading companies recognize that they need a new breed of reenergized, multi-skilled knowledge workers and not just call centre agents tethered to a desk.

Today's more technology savvy prospective employees need to know that their best efforts won't be compromised by slow, outdated or miss-firing systems, especially within the area of social media monitoring and instant messaging, as this can create real challenges in maintaining a reputation for excellence.

Once again the implementation of a technology model office shows its stripes, especially one with significant Cloud components. This is a critical step for the on-going enhancement of the multi-channel program. This can also be used to great effect to demonstrate your company's commitment to a flexible, agile technology roadmap that will show prospective employees that they can connect more frequently and effectively with customers and have more fulfilling and energizing work environment.

Introduce a truly collaborative, progressive process improvement model that is customer not company focused

In addition to outdated technology challenges, many employees cite difficult or embarrassing policies and procedures as major impediments to delivering a great customer experience. One of the major reasons that the **United Airlines** employees in Dave Carroll's now famous video were less than helpful is that he was probably the one hundredth person that day that they had complained about lost or broken baggage and they simply had to recite the same tired, unhelpful excuse that the previous ninety nine had received.

While clearly you can't change every policy or procedure that customers don't like (well you can, but for some companies that would take a lifetime), your front line employees, along with your customers, are best placed to provide feedback on what does and doesn't work.

Enlightened companies such as **Metro Bank** are actively encouraging their employees to come up with innovative ways to improve the customer experience by regularly financially rewarding them for identifying dumb or outmoded policies and procedures that frustrate and anger customers and do nothing but harm to the bottom line.



Virgin Media use their *Twteam* to interact with customers in a responsive, creative and unshackled environment, using social media, to resolve issues, collaborate and to democratize process improvement. They're also empowered to use Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) to surprise and delight customers with small, but meaningful and memorable customer service treats.

The Benefits of Success and the Costs of Failure

For an increasing number of companies, multi-channel customer contact is a way of life. However for them, and for those who have not yet crossed the divide, there needs to be compelling reasons in the form of increased business, enhanced customer loyalty and additional and sustainable profit, to make it all worthwhile. To illustrate the potential benefits and calculate the potential costs, here are two personal examples.

I've long been a fan of **Charles Tyrwhitt** and have purchased shirts and other menswear both in store and on-line. I recently received a new mailing that promised free shipping, along with their customary quality products and competitive pricing, and wasted no time in placing my on-line order. Unfortunately, at check out, the free shipping coupon failed to work, but I placed my order anyway and hoped that I could resolve it with them directly.

I called the contact centre; the number is *clearly* and *frequently* visible on both their catalogue and web pages. Although I knew their people and systems were good, I was expecting that I might get a "we only deal with telephone orders" response. But it was quite the opposite. The advisor apologized for the problem, was able to view the order herself (not always the case with some companies) and promised to apply the discount and email to let me know it was done. In 30 minutes I received the email confirmation. It was a job well done and made easier by her recognizing the importance of the issue, having access to multiple systems and having the empowerment to make the change in a timely way.

The result: More orders and revenue to follow and an increasingly positive brand image

Compare that to my recent experience in buying a new computer. I did my research and placed the order with a reputable and well-known on-line UK retailer. After a two week wait the retailer told me that they weren't able to fill the order due to the product being discontinued, but they had not been advised in a timely way by the manufacturer. I then placed another order for a similar, but newer model from the same manufacturer, with another retailer and, after another prolonged wait, exactly the same thing happened.





I recognized that the fault lay primarily with the computer manufacturer and proceeded to register my dissatisfaction with their customer service team. Failing to get a response, I wrote to the UK CEO. He was equally unmoved, and so I posted some polite, but direct, comments on both their Facebook page (twice) and through Twitter, but not a peep. Consequently I purchased another brand of computer and am now finalizing a purchase of a competitor's TV based on this experience.

This is a company that has a very broad and leading range of electronic products, but the silence suggests that their systems and/or people are not sufficiently tuned in, or turned on, for a timely and empathetic customer service response!

The result: Immediate, and potentially, sustained revenue loss and damage to the brand





Conclusions

Challenging times demand change and innovation. Customers have more options than ever, they are pickier, more knowledgeable, more impatient, and more vocal and the list will go on. Now is the time to give them a reason to be loyal and more profitable to you. Convince the customer that you care by being decidedly different with every customer, every time, and at every touchpoint.

Make sure that you understand what is working well now and what needs replacing, updating or enhancing. Blindly diving into the multi-channel pool without doing a detailed analysis of current traffic, costs and the effective on customers of your current multi-channel strategy is counter-productive and may make the wrong kind of splash.

Consistency across channels has never been more important. This doesn't mean that the experience must be the same, because customers recognize that different channels will provide them with a different experience. But the feeling and the emotions that go with it, need to be at the same high level and so that there is no discernible difference in outcome. As an example, it's important that whether a customer has an on-line, in store or contact centre interaction, that the historic information available to the employee, or to the system is complete, current and allow for a satisfying, first time, positive outcome for the customer.

Social Media has elevated the need for a holistic, multi-channel world. The whole company needs to be empowered beyond traditional contact centre capabilities and all customer interactions should be visible in real time across all channels. These channels will continue to evolve and both your people, and the underlying technology, need to keep pace by anticipating customers' needs and ensuring they are in the right place with the right answers at the right time.

The concept of work, and the new breed of employee's attitudes to it, is changing rapidly. Businesses that want to thrive and survive are realizing how important it is to attract, acquire and retain talented and career minded young people. Whether you call them Millennials, Digital Natives or Gen Y, they all come pre-wired with tech savvy capabilities, inquiring minds and a desire to make a difference, and can bring innovation, enthusiasm and a positive attitude that can flourish in this new reality.

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Successful Companies need to go where their customers are. Do you know where yours are?





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The New Gold Standard

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of Future Work: How Businesses Can Adapt and Thrive in the New World of Work,





Gerry Brown

About the author

Gerry Brown aka The Customer Lifeguard is on a mission to rid the world of bad customer service. He helps businesses save customers at risk and breathe life into their customer service operations and customer experience strategy.

Gerry has spent over 35 years in key management roles in the UK and Canada and has worked with some of the largest companies in Canada, the UK and EMEA, including O2, SONY, Sage, BSKyB, Bell Canada, TELUS, and CP Hotels

Gerry takes a unique approach that eschews the newest shiny technology toys as normal starting points and focuses on getting back to basics with four fundamental principles that must underpin a successful customer experience strategy, Culture, Commitment, Communication and Community.

Building on three decades of business experience, he provides strategic, operational and educational support through keynote presentations, workshops, seminars and consultancy engagements based on the four principles. He specializes in helping businesses to understand and utilize these key principles by aligning them with human interactions, process reinvention and operational improvements, to overcome the barriers to delivering a great customer experience.

He typically supports customer service directors, customer experiences leaders and MDs to develop actionable insights drive value and improve profitable customer retention by:

- Evaluating what customers really think of them & why
- Quantifying how much bad service really costs them
- Identifying & addressing areas for improvement
- Engaging, involving and inspiring their employees to find their inner customer
- Introducing & integrating the right technology at the right time for the right reasons
- Measuring what matters – to customers

Gerry is a member of the Professional Speaking Association (PSA) and the Global Speakers Federation (GSF) and speaks authoritatively and passionately about the practical, proven, customer service strategies that produce lasting, memorable and measurable results.