

# This is Your Opportunity

## Capitalize on an exceptional customer experience

by: Brian Suerth, Technology Assurance Group (TAG)

**C**OVID-19 pandemic-driven challenges like inflation and labor shortages have resulted in poor customer experiences across the board. Everywhere you turn — restaurants, grocery stores, auto-body shops and even your vendors — the norm of quality service and experience is not what it used to be. When you do have an outstanding experience today, it is more impactful and memorable than ever. It is time to seize this opportunity.

I am going to begin with a personal experience I had at a shoeshine stand in the Denver, Colorado, airport. As I approached the stand, I made eye contact with the woman working there. She lit up immediately. We started talking and she made me feel welcome; it felt like we were old college friends catching up. I habitually get a shoeshine when I travel, but unlike most shoeshiners who typically work in silence, Linda kept asking me questions about my business, where I lived and even my kids.

After rolling up my pant leg (which is the norm for a shoeshine), she tucked a little plastic sheet into the front and back of my shoe. I asked why she did it and she answered, “It protects your socks from being stained by the leather polish.” I nodded quietly and thought to myself, “Oh, that would explain all of those mysterious little black marks that keep showing up!”

Things got really interesting when she pulled out what looked to be a blowtorch. She ignited it and fired it off a couple of times. As my eyes bulged, she pointed it at my feet.

“Now I’ve got to know,” I said. “What is THAT thing for?!”

She promised she was not going to turn my oxfords into crème brûlée and explained how the heat would open up the leather so the polish could penetrate more deeply into my shoes. This would make her shoeshine last much longer than any other shoeshine I’d had before.

I thought back to the dozens of shoeshines I’d had, but all



I could think in that moment was, “Why haven’t any other shoeshiners used the blowtorch?! I want the blowtorch!”

When she finished up, I asked, “So, what do I owe you?”

“Pay whatever you feel this was worth to you,” she replied.

I was so delighted by the entire experience that I paid her three times more than I have paid anyone else.

As I boarded my flight, I opened my laptop to edit my presentation on what differentiates truly exceptional companies from mediocre ones and realized that Linda delivered a better customer experience process than 90% of the small to mid-sized businesses across this country. She stood out because she delivered a memorable experience.

### Is a Shoeshiner’s Customer Experience Better Than Your Company’s?

As business owners, it is natural to assume that our customers love us — especially if we have managed to successfully keep our doors open for many years. And even though most business owners assume they deliver a superior customer

experience, let's check that against your own interactions.

Out of the last five companies you have purchased something from, how many delivered a truly exceptional customer experience — one that you shared with others and made you want to go back? Two of them? One of them? None?

While we may, in fact, be doing many things right to grow our businesses, what separates the truly exceptional companies from the mediocre is the experience they deliver. With the right customer experience, everything can change.

What would happen if you could comfortably charge three times more than your current prices for all of your products/services and still have clients raving about their experience with you? How might that alter the trajectory of your business? How might that affect your life?

According to PwC, 73% of customers agree that the customer experience helps to drive their buying decisions and 86% of buyers are willing to pay more for a great customer experience. This is huge, especially when poor experience is the post-pandemic norm.

### Your Company is Being Compared to the Big Guys, Not Your Local Competitors

Amazon has taught customers that it is reasonable to click a button and, within a few hours, have the exact products they ordered arrive at their doorsteps. Apple has taught customers that it is normal to expect all of the world's information to be instantly accessible in the palms of their hands. Costco has taught customers that literally everything should be cheap if they are willing to buy it in bulk.

If you want to make an impression that leads to brand loyalty, word of mouth and free publicity that extends beyond the normal response, you have to “wow” customers at a level that goes beyond what your competitors are willing to do. Linda wowed me with her genuine interest in our conversation, protecting my clothes from polish and heating up my shoes with a blowtorch.

It is easy to dismiss “wow” moments like these, but did you know that you can utilize tools that analyze your prospects' networks to already understand their vulnerabilities before you even meet with them? Imagine if you sat down with a customer for the first time and started your conversation with, “By the way, yesterday afternoon as we were preparing for our meeting, we researched your network and identified employee names, email addresses and passwords that have already been compromised by hackers. Would you like to know which employees have compromised company passwords they are still using?” How

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might that “wow” change the trajectory of their customer experience?

### Six Steps to Revitalizing Your Customer Experience & Dominating Your Competitors

Evaluating your existing customer experience, understanding its impact on those you serve and making little tweaks will lead to enhanced loyalty, greater opportunities to cross-sell/upsell, and

place your company on a different pedestal than your competitors. Here is what I recommend to get started:

■ **Step 1 — Take your own customer journey.** Pretend you are the customer and experience the touchpoints (calls, emails, quotes, website, interactions with your sales and technicians, etc.) that your new or existing customers receive. If you want to mix it up, ask a fellow business owner to take your customer journey. There is a reason big companies still use “secret shoppers.” They work.

■ **Step 2 — Ask your customers to describe their experiences with you.** When was the last time you asked your customers about their experiences with your business? Ask questions like, “What do you like about doing business with us? What don't you like? How was your experience with [insert name here] or [insert specific product they are using]?” No matter what they say, just listen. Do not defend yourself by interrupting. We want to excavate their perception, not reinforce ours.

■ **Step 3 — Define every point of contact with your customer and what you want the outcome to be.** Gather insights from your team members to design a total customer experience. Each point of contact should have a purpose or it should be eliminated.

By the way, a point of contact can be a human or non-human interaction. A small change could be having all of your employees thank your customers for their business. Simply saying “thank you” shows respect for your customers' money and their time. Is anyone in your company doing this consistently? Isn't it a nice feeling when the owner of a restaurant calls you by your first name and thanks you for dining at his (or her) establishment?

■ **Step 4 — Get back to basics.** Define how you want everyone to do the basics (answering the phone, responding to emails, etc.). Reinforce the brand you stand for. Reinforce the experience you want your people to deliver and reward them for doing it. Live up to your promises with SLAs and be intentional with your brand image (on apparel, vehicles, etc.). Also, occasionally record and listen to calls by techs, sales team members and accounting team members.

■ **Step 5 — Take your own customer journey (again).**

After you have made the necessary changes to define your customer experience, take your own customer journey again.

■ **Step 6 — Deliver consistent customer experiences.** Human beings like consistency. We like predictability. That is why you go to your favorite restaurant. Why do you think Starbucks is so successful? It is because you receive the same experience whether you are in New York City or San Diego. Doing the little things all of the time has a huge impact — like fixing a problem in your customer's network and updating him along the way, rather than keeping him in the dark (which many IT companies do, by the way).

### **Nothing Changes Until It Is a Priority**

There are countless ways to revitalize your customer experience. (Hint: Your employees and your customers already have plenty of ideas; just ask them.) Make it a priority and reap the rewards. I hope this article has helped you see how ripe of

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an opportunity you have in the most exciting industry of all — office technology. ■

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