



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

OPERATIONAL
EXCELLENCE:
HOLDS THE KEY TO
EXCEPTIONAL
CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE

This article was written by Roger Camrass, Director of Research for CIONET International, and is based on the conversations during a virtual event on 7th June 2021, sponsored by ADOBE on the relationship between operational excellence and customer experience.

As is often quoted about the effects of the pandemic, “we have witnessed twenty years of change in just twelve months”. Nothing has been more visible here than the impact that the pandemic has had on the customer experience both in the public and private sectors. The discussions during our virtual event revealed some remarkable successes in how organisations have responded to crisis conditions. In doing so, they have set new performance benchmarks that prepare us better for a digital future.

Transforming the way we engage with our customers

The sudden physical disconnects between vendors and customers in March 2020 produced some extraordinary consequences according to delegates around our virtual round table. The NHS spoke about the immediate move to video consultations as well as the advances made by online start-up Babylon in relieving hard pressed GPs of routine consultations. It is now planning to shift further workload from GPs to pharmacists to relieve patient backlog.

Tate & Lyle described the move to virtual tasting labs to enable their business customers to continue testing of food ingredients. This has enabled the firm to retain and expand customer relationships at global levels. BAE spoke about the need to provide defence customers with virtual tours of their products in place of physical demonstrations. Anglia Ruskin University described the need to offer their students online learning and the impact that this has had on the very nature of education for the future.

Knowing more about your customer

The sudden adoption of ‘online everything’ by business and domestic customers has produced a tsunami of data about the way we buy and use products and services, ranging from medical supplies to education and finance. According to delegates, success in this new digital era is all about using data to generate vital customer insights. For example, the NHS has demonstrated a remarkable ability to leverage patient information to anticipate demands on its staff and facilities as waves of COVID-19 swept through the UK population over twelve or more months.

New techniques such as chatbots and data lakes have been introduced to automate and document customer interactions. Data analytic tools and expanding teams of data scientists have been introduced to cope with a fully digital environment. This has been the experience of the Care Quality Commission who regulates a complex health service with a multiplicity of agencies.

One point of broad agreement was that a single source of citizen data could be vastly important in improving the coordination and effectiveness of all Blue Light services.

Greater visibility across the supply chain

According to all delegates providing exceptional customer service is only possible if there is greater transparency across the entire supply chain – what some referred to as the 'digital twin'. This is true in the public sector, for example the NHS, as it is for private sector companies such as Tate & Lyle and BAE. The CIO of ConvaTech, a medical supplies company, described the need to gain a better understanding of how its products were being used in real life situations. This requires a direct b2b2c link across the supply chain.

BAE Systems has embedded sensors into its products to detect points of failure. This enables the firm to apply predictive maintenance, thus saving warranty costs and customer down-time. Pharmaceutical companies are using digital techniques to assure the efficacy of their drugs from raw materials through to end products. Regardless of where a company is in the supply chain, visibility of the end customer is becoming an essential competitive factor.

Transformation of service delivery

The acute need during the pandemic to transform the ways in which customer services were provided in areas such as health, financial services and education have produced some remarkable breakthroughs in organisational performance.

- Drug companies such as Pfizer and Astra Zeneca were able to shorten development and approval cycles from a decade down to a year
- The NHS was able to launch a universal vaccination programme in months, covering today over 50 million people
- Lloyds Bank was able to launch a 'bounce back' scheme in weeks rather than months, with business loans being approved in days

This required an entirely different approach to decision making, supported in many cases by rapid data analysis and deeper customer insights. Many of the delegates commented that decisions that would normally take months to navigate through complex layers of management had to be made in days and even hours. This has caused a comprehensive re-evaluation of core processes many of which are now being automated transform speed, cost and quality.

And what about employees as customers?

The sudden move to home working has created a new awareness of employee needs for services of all kinds. Organisations have learnt to operate in a virtual world over many months, introducing new operating procedures to facilitate home working. For example:

- Recruiting and onboarding new staff using digital documentation as in the case of Sarasin & Partners
- Providing the necessary security to conduct complex financial tasks from the home as in the case of Bloomberg and Close Brothers
- Mitigating against cyber attacks that have increased dramatically during the pandemic

The roll-out of Office, Teams, Zoom, digital signage and other productivity tools has been accelerated through the onset of hybrid working. All delegates agreed that employees are just as important as end customers in the race to modernise organisations towards a digital future.

Maintaining momentum around customer experience

The pandemic has provided a powerful catalyst to help transform many key aspects of the customer experience. At the same time, it has revealed gaps in operational processes that need to be addressed as we move into the 'New Norm'. Such gaps include:

- Simplifying customer interactions using robotic process automation and chatbots
- Gaining greater insights into customer experiences by applying data-driven insights and associated tooling
- Supporting employees more effectively in the emerging 'hybrid' work environment.



About CIONET

CIONET is the leading community of more than 10,000 digital leaders in 20+ countries across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Through this global presence CIONET orchestrates peer-to-peer interactions focused on the most important business and technology issues of the day. CIONET members join over a thousand international and regional live and virtual events annually, ranging from roundtables, programs for peer-to-peer exchange of expertise, community networking events, to large international gatherings. Its members testify that CIONET is an impartial and value adding platform that helps them use the wisdom of the (IT) crowd, to acquire expertise, advance their professional development, analyse and solve IT issues, and accelerate beneficial outcomes within their organisation.

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