



A few tips on...

COMMUNICATING YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE INITIATIVE

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Getting level-set

You're absolutely clear about your brand promise, what it stands for and the value it delivers.

You've defined the customer experience and you know what your people need to do to deliver it.

The next challenge is to communicate it.

And here's the challenge...

- How do you get people behind your initiative?
- How do you get all your different departments, locations and project teams working together in the same direction?
- How do you get them clear as to what will happen, why it's happening, when, who will be affected and what they will be expected to do?
- How do you ensure they have all the knowledge, resources and support to enable them to do this?

One of our clients has a great term for this, making sure everyone is 'level-set'.

A good communication plan is critical. Although all organisations realise this, there's a few simple basics that we see ignored time after time.

So here's our list of the top nine things to watch out for – and our tips for protecting your initiative from becoming a washout.

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Nine Common mistakes

Not planning early enough

We've seen people put so much effort in planning the external communication that they often forget to plan the internal communication. This leads to confusion and uncertainty about who's doing what when and why. So draft your communication plan as early as possible, align it with the implementation project plan, and focus on the following:

AUDIENCE - who needs to know
MESSAGE – what they need to know
TIMING – when they need to know
MESSENGER – who will communicate it
MEDIA - how they communicate it



Not aligning communication with other initiatives

Employees are often bombarded with new initiatives from corporate, HR, Marketing and finance. It's no surprise that people find themselves constantly jumping from one initiative to another, with little understanding of how everything fits together. So often, a new customer experience initiative can just add to the noise. There are a couple of things that can help to prevent this:

Set customer experience in the context of where you have been as a company and where you are going. If people see this as evolutionary rather than revolutionary, they'll attach more credibility to it rather than just thinking of it as another short term project.

Create a unique umbrella brand for your customer experience project, consistent with the style of your master brand. This creates consistency and continuity as new elements are introduced and flags a clear thread that runs through all of the individual initiatives. Regulate and integrate all future communication activity - communication then reinforces each other rather than battles for attention.

Simple messages should focus on the vision behind the customer experience initiative, the strategy of getting there, the benefits, the actions expected of your people and, in turn, what support they can expect from you.

Making the plan too complex

How you communicate the plan is important. If it looks complex, people won't read it. We've seen communication plans that extend over ten pages of A4.

Don't make it too ambitious - it's great to have lots of ideas and creative approaches, but you'll find that complexity quickly swallows up precious resource and time. Focus on the few key things that will have the greatest impact.

Make it easy to read - a one-page summary works best.

Capture attention – ensure the style of it reflects the image and tone of voice of that you're trying to communicate.

Focus on a few simple messages and keep repeating them. A good internal communications campaign is like a great advertising campaign that runs and runs.

Not clarifying communication roles

Be clear about who has responsibility for communicating what. Sometimes it's assumed that it will be the project manager, sometimes HR, and sometimes marketing. The consequence is, it doesn't get done.

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Not including the voice of the customer

Nothing is stronger than what customers say about you. It grabs attention and makes it real. It's a very powerful motivating force to do a better job. Pepper your communication with lots of examples and 'vox pop' interviews – good and bad – to add strength to your own message – why you're doing this and why it's important.

Not cascading it from the top

Customer experience implementation works when the CEO is seen to be the force behind it and stamps their name on it. Get your CEO and senior directors participating as much as possible – not up there on stage, but walking, talking, demonstrating and listening. Ideally, get a member of the Board to champion the project. Ensure that management participation is put into the diary each month so that there is a regular time when they talk to people on the ground. Agree the communication plan with senior executives to ensure that they are prepared to give the commitment needed to support the initiative.

Not building it from the bottom

We've seen communication departments rule with an iron fist, trying to control every single message. This rarely works. Use your CEO to announce the initiative and keep actively involved throughout, but beware of letting HQ dictate and dominate the communication. HQ is often regarded as being distant, with little real understanding of what it's like on the front-line. Instead, get your local managers involved in helping you frame your communication and delivering it. They are best suited to link the message to people's own needs, to inject enthusiasm, to handle objections and to collect feedback. A great way of helping managers communicate it to their teams is to provide them with briefing packs, which should include a list of answers to possible objections and difficult questions. Build as many opportunities as possible in the plan to create discussion, rather than simply having managers present the case. Get your front-line to create videos, posters and stories that articulate how they see the initiative and share these widely.

Making it oh-so dull

On the whole, corporate communication is pretty tedious stuff, normally full of the usual anodyne jargon of mission statements, company values, increasing shareholder value and driving EBITDA.

Keep it simple Develop one core message that is easy to remember and ensure this gets replayed in every communication. Use plain language not corporate jargon and keep it short.

Be innovative If you want people to take notice, ditch the conventional way of doing things and think of new ways to package the message. To bring your message and content to life, you've got to get passion behind it. Really bring out your vision and your sense of purpose. Be bold with your language. Nike's vision statement in 1960 was '*Crush Adidas*'. Honda's 1970's vision was '*We will destroy Yamaha*'. The Geeks Squad's vision is '*World-wide domination*'. They get attention.

Communicating it externally before you've communicated it internally and built the capability to deliver it

Marketing is always eager to run with an exciting proposition before it's been fully implemented and absorbed within the organisation. Setting customer expectations before you've built the capability to deliver, will set your efforts back considerably. Don't assume once training has been completed, you're ready to go.

Allow time for the change to kick in. Deliver it first **then** advertise it.

