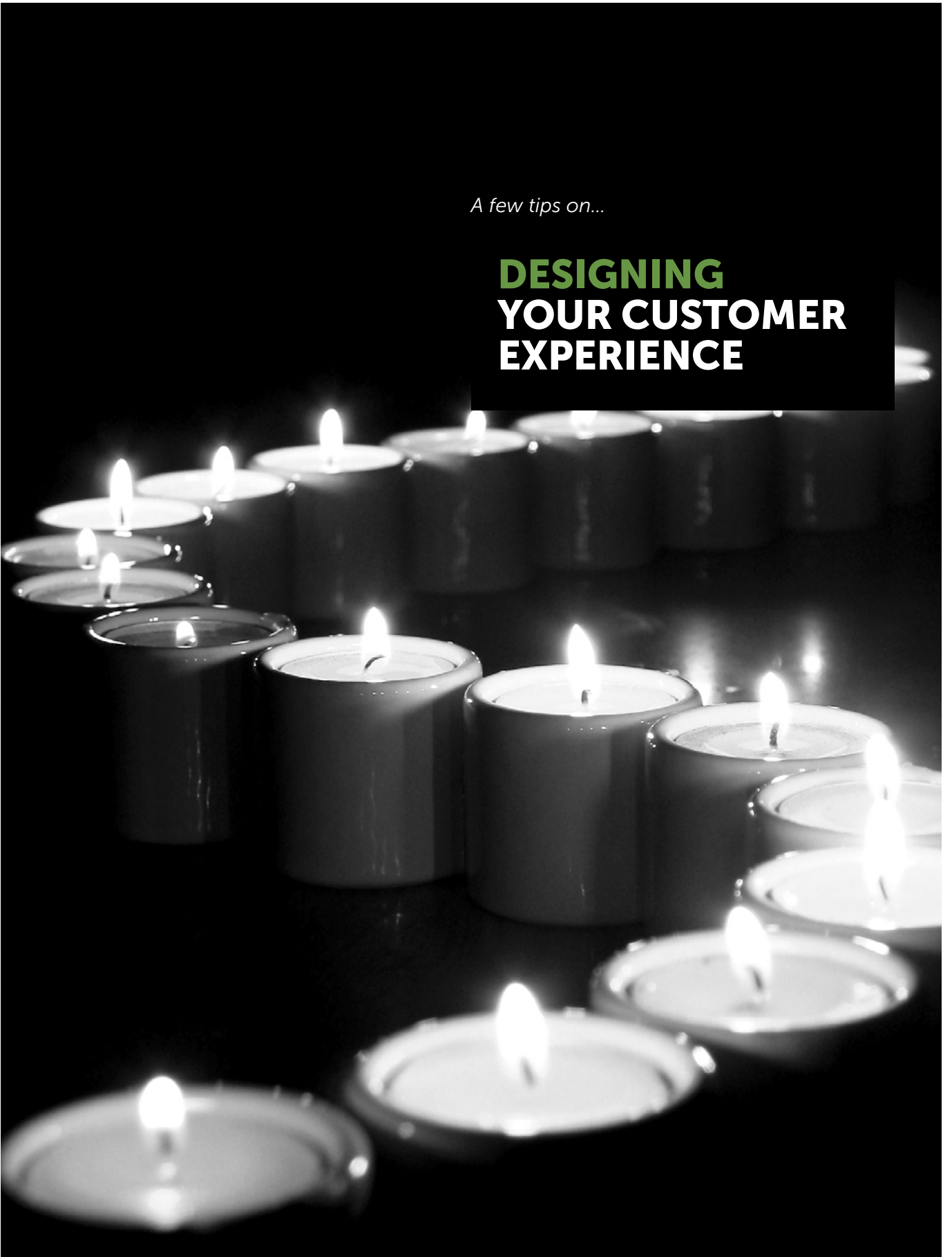smith+co
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A few tips on...

DESIGNING
YOUR CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE

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"

We lay the stage for each guest's own piece of interactive theatre. It's about creating an environment and atmosphere that is quite special and then acting as facilitators for our guests' own out-of-the-ordinary experience

Ho Kwon Ping
Chairman
Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts

Customer experience design is not about scripting your people, or prescribing exact behaviours at every point.

It's about creating the right environment, with the right 'back-stage' support and technology and then enabling your people to facilitate an experience that will be valued by your customers.

We advocate a concept called 'Loose/Tight'. Most organisations are very 'loose' when it comes to what their brand stands for and the kind of experience they wish customers to have, but very 'tight' when it comes to telling employees how to behave.

Brands that deliver great experiences usually reverse these two, being very 'tight' about what the brands stands for and the experience they wish to create but quite 'loose' in allowing their people freedom in how they satisfy their customers.

But how can you design a customer experience that achieves this? Can customer experience even be designed?

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DESIGNING YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

> ❝
> **You cannot design a customer experience because it is whatever the customer perceives it to be**

This quote by Geek Squad founder, Robert Stephens, raises a good question. If you can't design your customer experience, what can you do to influence it? For Stephens, it's all about hiring the right people. But it's also about being intentional about HOW those people deliver that experience so it differentiates your brand, is consistent and delivers value to your target customers.

So when we talk about 'designing' customer experience, we refer to designing a framework that enables organisations to do this. This framework details the touch-points where you need to differentiate and the ways in which your products, processes and behaviours must be distinctive to deliver value to your target customers.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach as to how you do this, but here we offer a few tips to help you on your way.

Before you begin, start with the right foundation

Many organisations begin to think about customer experience improvements without first creating the right context for doing so.

So before you begin, be clear on the following three things:

- What your target customers expect and how you are performing against these expectations.
- The customer values that drive retention and advocacy.
- A clearly articulated brand promise that will deliver this value and differentiate you from your competitors.

If you don't have this degree of clarity, take a look at our guides to customer experience research and brand promise definition.
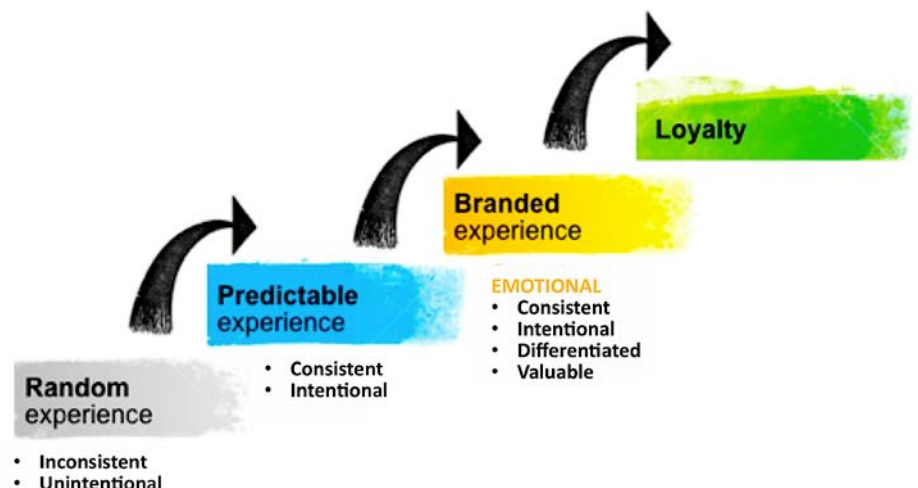
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> **"**
>
> ## Don't judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins
>
> Native American proverb

The experience you deliver to your customers every day, through every transaction, direct and indirect either builds value for your brand or destroys it.

The sum of all these touch-points is the customer experience that defines your organisation.

DESIGNING YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Until you've experienced the actual 'journey' your customer takes, you can't begin to empathise with what he or she goes through. So think of the journey from the customer's perspective, not the organisation's

Map the experience from beginning to end including social media engagement and digital interactions. If possible map one touchline covering the entire experience but if this is too complex (as in the case of some b2b businesses), map a touchline for each key customer interaction. As a rule, we rarely work with more than eight to twelve major touch-points. If you have a lot more than this you are probably mapping your organisational processes rather than the customer experience.

Think also beyond the accepted beginning and past the perceived end. We often define the customer journey too narrowly because we think of it in functional terms. This is a journey so it's not just the sales experience that counts. For many brands, the customer journey is on-going, with after-sales care and loyalty efforts to foster and build the relationship.

Identify the pain or stress points
Note inefficiencies, redundancies or inconsistencies in how customers experience your brand. Consider your brand promise and how well you deliver it at each point in the touchline. Ensure you think about your most valuable customers and their top expectations – and what they will be experiencing and feeling at each touch-point.

Identify opportunities
In order to streamline and improve the experience, look also for the 'cracks' or hand-offs between existing touch-points e.g. the interval between making a purchase on-line and the actual delivery of the goods. Also look 'up-stream' and 'down-stream' along the customer journey for those touch-points that are ignored by your competitors.

Often, the biggest opportunity to differentiate is on those touch-points that are not even on the radar screen of your competitors.

Identify your 'hallmark' touch-points
These are the ones that will really distinguish your brand and emotionally engage your customers. They are the touch-points that you need to 'over-index'.

One mistake brands often make is thinking that they need to focus on delivering a great experience at every touch-point. Unless you are a Ritz-Carlton and can price accordingly – don't. So 'dial-up' the experience only at those touch-points where you choose to differentiate and are willing to invest the resources to create a 'wow' experience.

Outline what you want to happen at each touch-point
Clarify what you want your customers to experience and feel. What does this look like in terms of how you want your people to interact with them? How do they need to behave in order to reduce the pain, increase the pleasure and deliver your brand promise? The pleasure peaks should align with the hallmarks that you have chosen.
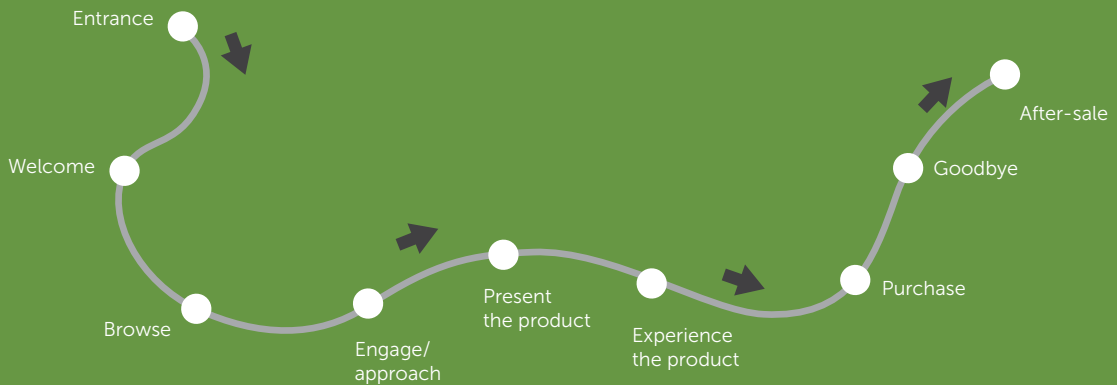
Implications for process product and people
Designing your experience is one thing; implementing it is another. The next step to think about is the implication for your people, processes and products – and how you align these to deliver the experience. Get your HR and Operations people involved as part of the design process. They need to understand it, commit to it and be given the resources to do it.

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DESIGNING YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

MAPPING THE TOUCH-POINTS

Let's take a look at a couple of ways you could map the journey.....

Luxury retail store - physical touchpoints

- Entrance
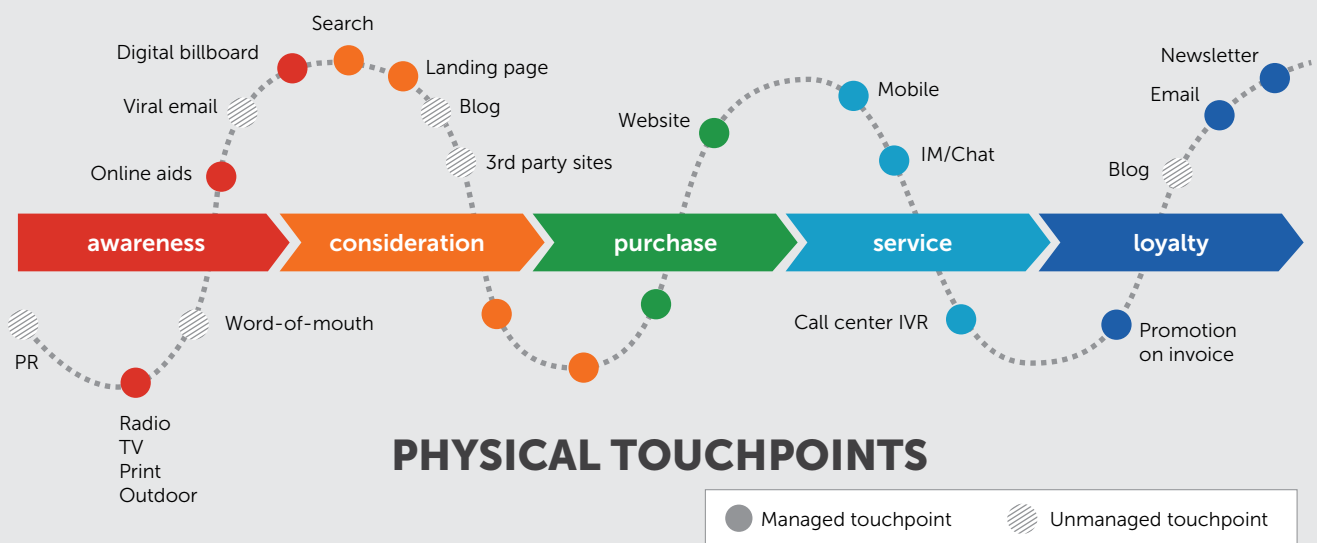- Welcome
- Browse
- Engage/approach
- Present the product
- Experience the product
- Purchase
- Goodbye
- After-sale

DIGITAL TOUCHPOINTS

Search
Digital billboard
Viral email
Landing page
Blog
Online aids
3rd party sites
Website
Mobile
IM/Chat
Newsletter
Email
Blog

awareness	consideration	purchase	service	loyalty

PR
Word-of-mouth
Radio
TV
Print
Outdoor
Call center IVR
Promotion on invoice

PHYSICAL TOUCHPOINTS

● Managed touchpoint   ▨ Unmanaged touchpoint

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CASE STUDY

virgin atlantic

VISION
TO BE THE
PEOPLE'S CHAMPION

MISSION
BUSTING CARTELS
AND SUPPORTING
THE UNDERDOG

VALUES
FUN, ENTERTAINMENT,
IRREVERENECE,
INNOVATION

JOURNEY-MAPPING IN ACTION

Let's take the experience of a typical airline passenger.
We start by showing the customer touch-points and the
typical sort of pressures that many of us face when flying.

Now let's look at how Virgin Atlantic has looked up-stream and down-stream
along the journey to re-design the 'Upper-Class' customer experience in order
to increase the pleasure, decrease the pain and differentiate from competitors.

'Notice the design features (highlighted in bold) at the bottom. These are the
brand hallmarks where Virgin chooses to 'over-index' to deliver their promise.

Needless to say, we've greatly simplified it to bring out the learning and
protect the confidentiality of Virgin Atlantic!

Customer touch-points	Getting to airport	Check-in	Comfort until flight	In-flight comfort	Arrival	Getting to destination
Customer experience issues	Stressful Parking Luggage	Long, frustrating lines Unnecesasary (Only necessary to airline)	Want to work Want to relax	Planes are uncomfortable Long time in seat Boredom	Unkempt Un-showered Clothes a mess	Traffic Unfamiliar place

Customer experience

Design features	Getting to airport	Check-in	Comfort until flight	In-flight comfort	Arrival	Getting to destination
	Transport to airport provided **Driver handles luggage**	**Drive-through check-in** Airline knows where you are	Clubhouse with Wi-Fi **Massage/spa** **Sound room** **Driving range** **Skiing Machine**	Full sleeper seats Mood lighting Gradual dawn Bar You decide meals	**Arrival valet** **18 showers** **Makeup/shave** **Heated floors** **Clothes pressed** **Hot & cold breakfast**	**Chauffeured delivery to destination** **Comfortable ride door-to-door** **Knowledgeable local driver**

A few other things to think about...

Don't gold-plate your customer experience

Customer experience is a neutral term and does not imply gold-plated service. Ritz-Carlton offers a great customer experience but so too does Premier Inn. Yet their business models and price points are very different and delivered in distinctive ways. Be careful not to upgrade your customer experience beyond the point that target customers want and are willing to pay for, simply because it is what you value.

Focus on the dollars, not the dimes

There is a saying in the US: "Don't nickel and dime me", which means to accumulate money in small amounts. There are examples of this in many areas of customer service and it is one of the practices that drives many consumers crazy. A classic example is when you pay mega dollars to stay in a luxurious 5-star hotel and yet still have to pay your $12 a day for internet access. What behavioural science tells us is that the customer's memory of an experience is formed at every touch-point with a brand. Generally speaking, the greater the number of pleasurable or 'branded' touch-points, the more positive the experience is. When you 'nickel and dime' customers you create little moments of pain that jar with the customer and remind them how much this is costing, and if these happen at the end of the experience that is what they will likely remember. Don't surprise your customer with add-on costs.

Feedback is a touchpoint

How, and when you ask customers for feedback – and respond to it – are important touch-points. Whether it's through a survey, or a review on Trip Advisor or a comment within social media, make sure you create a touch-point that enables you to influence that experience of your brand, but without it being onerous for the customer.

And five further 'rules' for creating a great experience

Behavioural scientists Richard Chase and Sriram Dasu identified five rules to ensure that customers focus on the high points of their experience and overlook the low points. In our summary below, for simplicity we've focused on the hotel industry. With a bit of creative, bold thinking, the same principles can be applied effectively to any sector.

Finish strong
Finish on a high – do something unexpected at the end of the experience. For example, a small gift given at the point of check-out. This helps to create a positive moment at the very point you are asking the customer to part with their cash.

Get bad experiences over with early
If customers have to do something onerous, get it out of the way as quickly as possible. In the case of hotels, pre-register guests online so that their first experience of the hotel is not one of lining up at the front desk and filling in a registration form with exactly the same information they provided when they booked or stayed last time.

Segment pleasure, combine the pain
Spread the pleasure along the touch-line. So provide those little touches of fresh cookies served with coffee, cold face towels on the beach etc. They cost very little but create little 'spikes' of pleasure. Combine the 'pain' by bundling internet and other facility charges into the room rate so that you experience them in one step rather than every time you wish to use them.

Build customer commitment through choice
Give guests full information about your charges (like water-sports) on your web site so they are transparent and expected. Guests can then make informed choices about the package they need and, most importantly, wont be surprised by them.

Stick to rituals
Create on-brand rituals that customers associate with their stay with you. For example, a trait of the Banyan Tree Resorts each evening is to leave a little locally made, handcrafted gift as part of the turn-down service rather than the ubiquitous chocolate. Not only does this create a little moment of pleasure but also serves to highlight their support for the local community.

> " It is often the little things that your customers remember - especially how you made them feel. And that more often comes from your people rather than your product

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One final note

Search the internet on the 'how to' of customer experience design, and you will find hundreds of methodologies, models, academic papers, theories and frameworks.

There is however nothing like your own experience as a customer to draw on when thinking about the experience you want to create for your customers. As you interact with brands every day, in whatever format, be conscious of what you are experiencing - good or bad. Once you and your team start opening yourself up to experience in this way, experience design becomes much more insightful, intuitive, instinctive and far more exciting.

Customer experience design is part science and part art. The important thing is to apply rigour to how you design, but be bold enough to let your instinct guide your creativity. So don't let your agency design the experience alone, (nor your product engineers) otherwise you will only get – and create - half the story.

Customer experience design requires both sides of the brain to be engaged.