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# Defining the elements of great CX

Seven elements today's leaders should embrace for success

A new approach to CX

Customer experience (CX) has always been an important aspect of an organization's success in the market—and it doesn't show signs of being deprioritized any time soon. Internally, customer experience departments, dedicated CX hires, and Chief Experience Officers are core drivers of growth across leading organizations in every industry. Gartner reported that nearly 90% of companies had a CXO or equivalent executive in 2020[1], compared to only 65% in 2017. These investments are paying off—Twilio recently surveyed over 3,400 decision makers and found that companies investing in digital customer experience saw a 70% increase in revenue on average over the past two years.[2] Making customer experience a strategic priority is no longer a differentiator, but a requirement for success.

In the simplest terms, customer experience can be defined as the totality of all of the experiences that a customer has with an organization. These experiences are a mix of conscious and subconscious reactions to what the organization says or does. It covers touchpoints that are controlled by the organization (such as a television advertisement) as well as those that are outside the control of the organization (such as family member recommendations). And it is shaped by every interaction with the organization, including marketing materials, a physical location, the product's performance, the billing website's flow, and many more.

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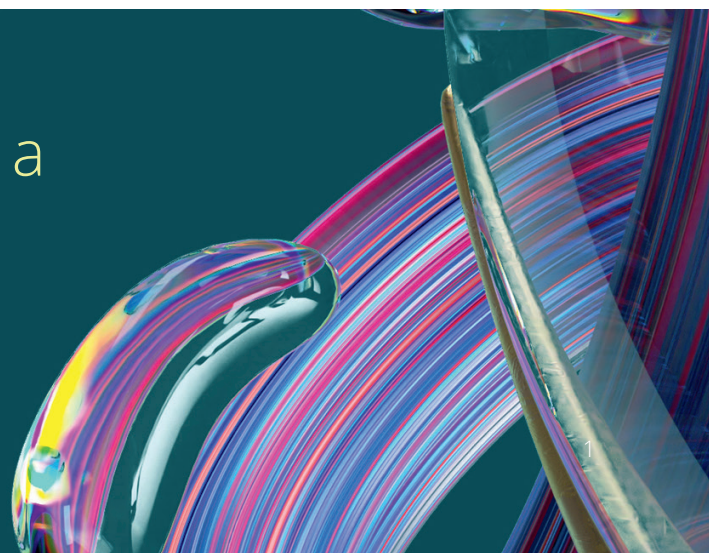
Experience = *reality – expectation*

A customer's experience with an organization is heavily influenced by the context and expectations that the individual brings with them into that journey. If reality is better than expectations, that results in a positive customer experience (and vice versa).

To get the most impact out of their CX investments, organizations need to have a clear idea of what elements *actually influence* the experience of a customer. They also need to make sure that, when they are planning out CX initiatives, they are covering all of the touchpoints where that experience will take shape. Finally, they need to understand the full range of possibilities of their customer experience so that omnichannel coordination can be successfully achieved.

This report lays out the core building blocks—the elements—of a customer's full experience, providing a framework on which to build more robust CX strategies, more comprehensive CX operating models, and more effective CX measurement programs. These elements help define the moments that matter for today's customers and ensure that all of the other moments that make up a customer's journey leave a positive lasting impression.
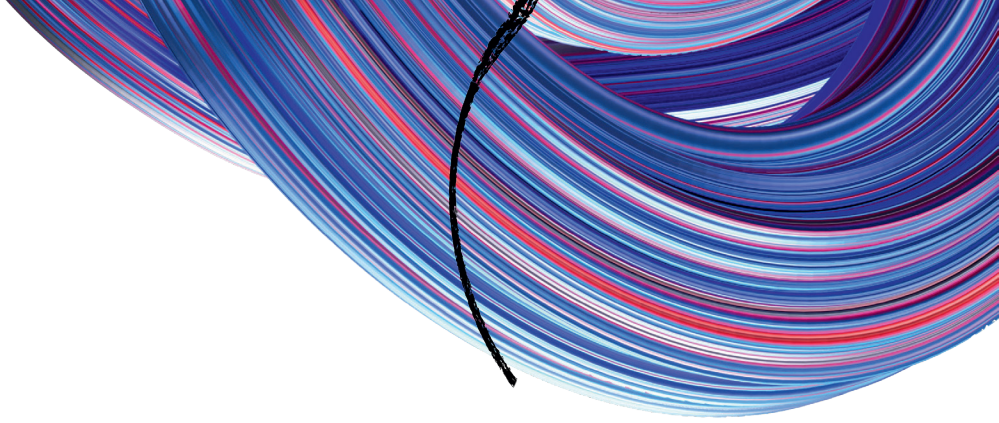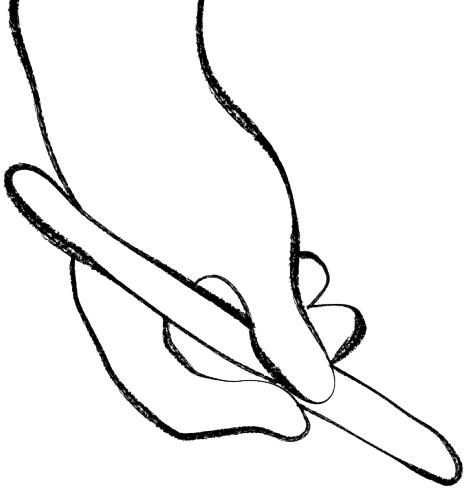
The elements of CX

Value alignment

You only get one chance to make a first impression. Furthermore, in today's market landscape, many organizations may not even get that chance. In the information-rich world we live in, it is not rare for a customer to hear about a company or product through third parties before they see any content created by the actual brand itself.

This initial impression is almost always subjective, qualitative, and set within milliseconds. From the customer's point of view, their first experience with an organization is driven by the values they perceive the organization to embody.

The questions customers ask in order to decide if this first experience is positive or negative can include:

Is this the kind of organization I see myself engaging with?

Do the values and positioning of this organization match my own?

Does the brand match my own self-image of who I am and the kinds of brands I buy from?

How do others I trust feel about the organization?

Organizations have a distinct opportunity to refine and improve their value alignment with their customers, and this is an element that is constantly being calibrated and updated through every interaction with a brand. An organization and all of the investments that go into shaping its image in customers' minds should be primarily focused on influencing the CX element of aligning to a customer's values. By committing to this element, organizations can define what they stand for and help customers self-select into (or out of) their target audiences. When an organization's values & brand align with a customer, that results in a *positive* customer experience, encouraging that customer to continue engaging.

Product value proposition

This element begins with the formal offer from the organization. What will the customer receive in exchange for their time and/or money? While primarily an economic transaction, this element has a strong influence in a customer's experience of your organization because it provides them with hard quantitative data in ways few other elements can. Comparisons with other organizations in your industry happen frequently within this element of CX.

The product value proposition goes beyond the price itself and encompasses the related promises—whether explicit or implicit—your organization is making. These can include the expected performance of the product, the level of service, the transparency of its pricing/cost, and more. Pricing decisions, product warranties, and sales materials highlighting features and benefits also influence this CX Element.

The questions that customers are asking to decide if their experience with your value proposition is a positive or negative one can include:

Does the benefit to me of this product or service match its cost?

Is what they are asking from me in return feel like a fair exchange?

Will the product meet my needs?

Will I get value beyond the cost to me?

Quality of content

This element covers all of the online and offline content that your organization provides to a customer and/or that they interact with. This does not only include promotional material but also the content of your website, the manuals that accompany your product, the communications you send out, the alerts and notifications they receive, and more. The quality and relevance of this content influences the perceived experience with your organization.

A good match between content delivered and a customer's needs can lead to positive customer experience. Content that is poorly made and not targeted or relevant can result in a negative customer experience. Personalization efforts, targeted advertising, thoughtful content creation with compelling visuals are all tactics the business can implement to influence this CX element.

The questions customers ask to decide if their experience with your content is positive or negative can include:

Is the content I'm receiving helpful and relevant?

Does the content meet my needs?

Is the volume, timing, and channel appropriate?

Is it consistent in tone and visuals to other content I've received?

Physical and virtual spaces

This element covers the experience customers have when they step foot into one of your physical locations or visit one of your virtual properties. The layout, aesthetic, staff, and other factors of your locations can have a strong influence over your customers' experiences. This is mirrored online with the way a website is laid out and designed, the ease of customers being able to find what they need, and the consistency of their experiences with other touchpoints all make a meaningful impact.

Across both physical and virtual settings, convenience and accessibility are important factors in influencing the reality of the experience. This is where internal priorities on user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) improvements become critically important to invest in. Benefits such as having convenient hours and ensuring that people of all abilities can access your locations help deliver this CX element.

In many instances, the places that customers visit are opportunities through which relevant content is delivered as well. These two elements of CX have a strong relationship and should be closely coordinated to ensure a consistent experience. For example, when poorly executed, an organization can deliver tailored, personalized content but do so through a clunky web interface or badly-formatted emails that can leave a poor impression.

The questions customers ask to decide if their experience with your physical or virtual locations is positive or negative can include:

What does the location look like?

How comfortable am I being in it?

Is it easy to find what I'm looking for?

Do my virtual experiences match physical ones?

Product performance

This element covers the actual performance of the product or service. The product performance element is directly connected to the product value proposition element, since the former is the realization of the expectations set by the latter. Paying off on promises made during the buying process is key to ensure that this element enhances CX.

Being explicit about what a product needs to achieve or solve for a customer helps focus the level of investment and associated expectations. Organizations that successfully manage expectations through a consistency of experiences across every element will avoid surprises when a customer actually uses the product or service.

The questions customers ask to decide if their experience with your product's performance is positive or negative can include:

Are the outcomes above or below my expectations?

Is it reliable?

Is it meeting my need(s)?

Does it align with the promises I was given before I bought it?

Customer service

This element covers all of the service components that your organization may offer to a customer. Primarily, this goes through formal channels such as a call center, online chat function, in-store support, and staff. But it also encompasses a more informal level of service that organizations don't often control such as hosted support forums, third-party forums, social media influencers, family and friends, and the broader ecosystem around your product or service.

This element's success is one of the most dependent on investment. Organizations that spend resources improving their customer service capabilities often see fairly rapid improvements in common customer experience measures. In fact, through our proprietary TrustID research, we found that existing customers whose product or service issues are resolved frequently or every time have 5.8x more trust than customers whose issues are resolved occasionally, or almost never.[3] Customer service is the element that comes into play when customers have an explicit need for help. This is also one of the elements with the highest degree of control by an organization, since customers often turn to the organization first when they need support.

The questions customers ask to decide if their experience with your customer service is positive or negative can include:

Was the organization able to help solve my issue?

How hard was it to get the help I needed?

What was the staff's behavior and personality like?

Do I get a consistent experience whenever I need assistance?

Extra perks

This element covers all of the customer-facing solutions that an organization can provide outside the product or service that it sells and where no transaction is required. These are often unexpected and offered free of charge, making it more pleasant and convenient to interact with your organization. Examples include a free mortgage calculator on a bank's website, a map when you check in to a hospital, a pre-labeled return envelope, a free coffee at your hairdresser, or an activity table for a child to play with while customers wait to interact with staff.

Extras that are provided by an organization are not necessary for the product or service to function, and yet they are critically important for organizations looking to exceed expectations and deliver an above-and-beyond experience. As a result, this element has an important role to play in influencing a customer's experience—particularly when these extras are genuinely helpful in addressing customer's needs.

The questions customers ask to decide if their experience with your organization's extras is positive or negative can include:

Do the extras that they provide me work on a reliable basis?

Is the functionality easy for me to use?

Can I get my task done more easily because of them?

The elements of CX in practice

Together, the seven elements of CX identify the way a customer's perception of their experience with an organization is influenced. The sum of a customer's experiences across all of these elements ultimately develops the brand of that organization. A customer's perception of your brand will grow or shrink every time they interact with your organization. If reality exceeds expectations, brand perception can positively increase, and vice versa. Whether the actual experience itself is positive or negative for a customer depends on a number of factors:

> **How well does the element meet a customer's need?**
>
> **How aligned is each element with the other elements and with the organization's overall strategy?**
>
> **How do the elements compare with competitors and the customer expectations set by them?**

Continuous measurement and optimization across all of the elements of CX enable organizations to improve their customer experience over time. Developing a CX measurement framework that is informed by the seven elements ensures that the metrics being gathered and assessed can be traced back to specific tactical interventions that will directly impact the experience.
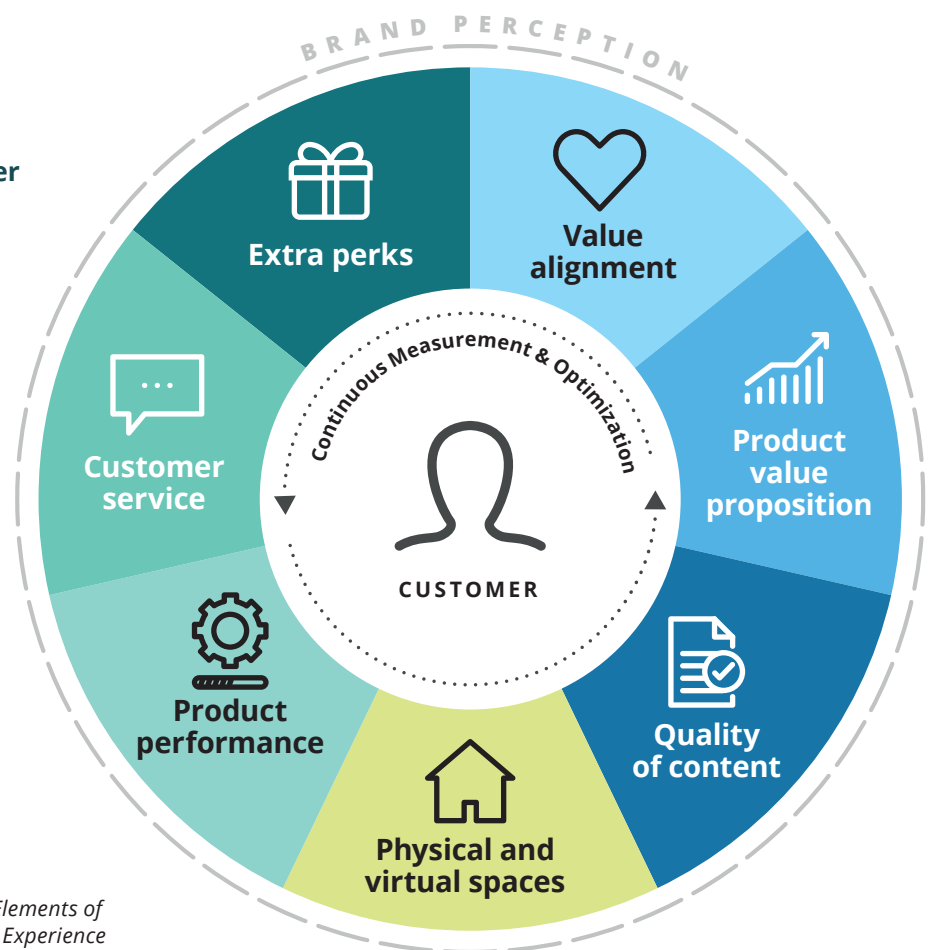

Figure 1. Elements of Customer Experience

There are multiple ways to put the seven elements of CX into practice. Some common approaches include:

Alignment

Organizations can use the elements of CX to check the level of alignment across each element. The greater the consistency, the more powerful the resulting impact of CX efforts will be. For example, is the content provided to customers coordinated with the customer service they receive? Are the physical places in sync with the brand values?

Coverage

This framework can help organizations check that their CX efforts are comprehensive across all the elements that drive the experience. Different functions have scope over some elements and not others, leading to uneven levels of investment and attention that can come across to customers as disjointed, suboptimal experiences. For example, is there a proportionally equal amount of attention placed on the content creation as on the product performance?

Maturity

CX is an ongoing process where expectations from customers can constantly increase while organizations run the risk of staying stagnant. Particularly when standing up dedicated CX functions, it is important to assess the level of maturity across the entire set of elements to inform investment decisions.

Measurement

What gets measured gets managed, and if improving customer experience is a strategic goal for an organization, then measuring that experience correctly is critical. Organizations can use the seven elements of CX to assess their ability to measure performance across each, and then provide the visibility of those measurements to key decision makers within the business.

Coordination

These elements can be the starting point to deliver true omnichannel experiences that improve CX by providing consistency across all the touchpoint areas that need to be considered. Any plans for smooth and seamless customer journeys must provide thorough details regarding the way each element will make itself known to customers.
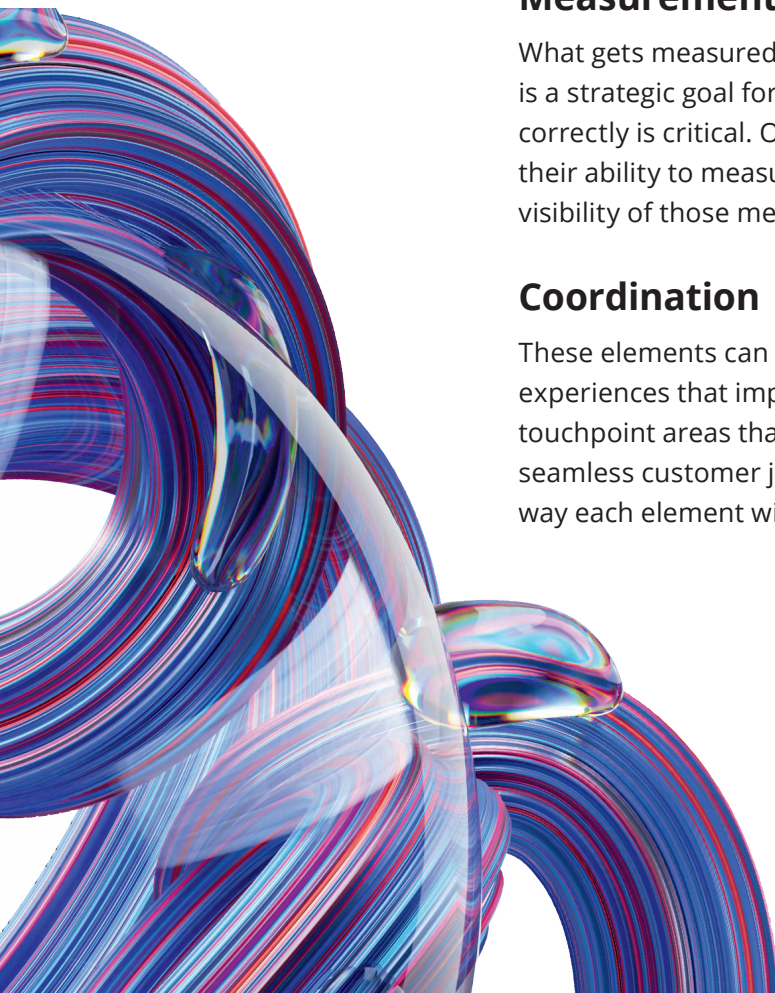
Getting started

Some quick ways to get started harnessing the elements of CX as part of a comprehensive customer experience effort include:

Assess the current state across the seven elements

The goal is to answer a few key questions:

> **Can I clearly define what the organization is doing today to activate each of the seven elements?**
>
> **Which elements are delivering a positive customer experience today? Which elements are delivering a negative customer experience? Which elements are an unknown?**
>
> **How well are the experiences of each element aligned to each other? Which elements are most out of alignment?**

Look inwards to your teams delivering CX

For prioritized CX elements, identify internal teams responsible for their delivery and set up opportunities to better help them deliver optimal experiences. Various levers such as processes, tools, operating models, culture, and more can be examined to identify opportunities for improvement.

Assess maturity

In any organization, there is likely an uneven distribution of progress across each element, and an assessment of the capabilities required to deliver positive experiences across the elements can be a powerful guide to future investment decisions. The questions customers ask in relation to each element can be a helpful guide when constructing an assessment. In relation to the customer service element, for example, a customer's question could be, *"How hard was it to get the help I needed?"* This could be assessed by looking at average call durations and the rate of successful calls fielded.

Final thoughts

Putting the seven elements of CX into practice means that leaders need to take a hands-on approach to their teams' operations – and collaborate across the organization with other departments that have a key role to play. In order to best connect with customers, organizations need to invest across value alignment, the product's value proposition, the content quality, the organization's virtual and physical places, the product's performance, customer service, and extra perks. Each step of the customer journey is a key opportunity to forge trust, harness connection, and leave a lasting positive impression.

FURTHER READING

2023 Connected Consumer Survey: The 2023 Connected consumer survey explores device usage as a gateway to meaningful connections, better health, safer homes, and valued virtual experiences. This year, consumer concerns around digital fatigue, well-being, and data privacy and security persist, while the "just right" balance between virtual and physical worlds remains elusive.
Connected consumer study | Deloitte Insights

Supercharging customer service with AI: Artificial intelligence can integrate two marketing tactics—getting the right offers to customers at the right time and delivering great post-sales service—to make the customer experience even better.
Using AI to improve end-to-end customer experience | Deloitte Insights

The CEO as ultimate end-user ethnographer: Consumer ethnography isn't just for marketing professionals. By striving for a deep, human understanding of the customer experience, CEOs can lead their organizations toward a culture of empathy that can translate insights about people's lives, values, and emotions into greater organizational value.
Value of consumer ethnography for CEOs | Deloitte Insights

The amplification of consumer participation: Increased customer interaction builds competitive advantage and strengthens loyalty. Discover ways in which consumers can generate value across the entire product and customer life cycles.
*Customer participation | Deloitte Insights*

Challenging the orthodoxies of brand trust: Organizations increasingly understand the importance of building trust with their customers, partners, and workforce, but trust can be hard to earn, difficult to measure, and easily lost—and underlying assumptions may be hampering their efforts
https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/leadership/brand-trust-and-challenging-orthodoxies.html

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3. Deloitte TrustID Customer Brand Index October 2022.
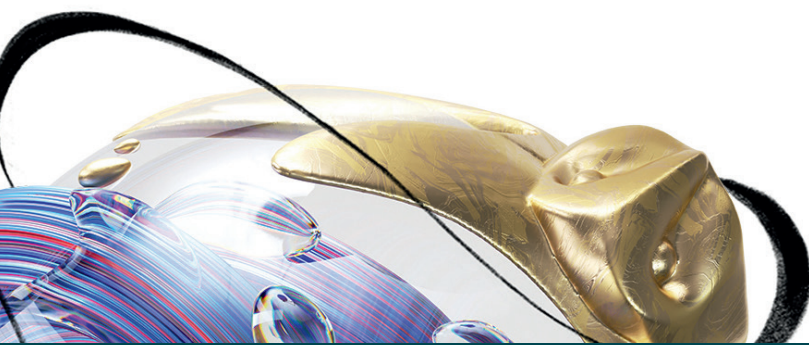
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