

DO WE EVER PUT OUR CUSTOMER FIRST ?

A recent incident got me thinking. The three mobile phones that I have, I wanted to setup an automatic payment from my credit card so that it saves me the hassle of remembering to pay every month. In addition, I also get discounts for timely payment. The mobile representative, firstly didn't get my home address correctly (how easy would it have been to check my billing records on his system ?) and on top of it he brought the form for Electronic Clearing System (ECS) which is for direct debit from your bank account. I was 'educated' to say that I should have specifically asked for the 'Standing Instructions (SI)' form.

All this got me thinking and to ponder that there is no fundamental difference between the ECS and SI so why create such complexities for the customer ? What emerged was that the mobile phone company was not thinking from the customer's standpoint but from their internal processes standpoint. Yes the ECS and SI may have different internal processes but does the customer have to worry about that ? Why not have a single form with separate boxes for the two ?

QUESTIONS AND MORE QUESTIONS...

Having always worked in client facing environments, the incident further raised a number of questions for me :

- Does anybody in the organization ever ask what this process means to the customer ?
- How can we make it easy for the customer to do business with us ?

Quick Read :

It is natural for personnel of Service providers to think from their organization standpoint i.e. 'Inside Out'. This thinking does not bring in efficiencies and makes it easy for the customer to do business with the service provider. The shift in thinking has to become 'Outside In' which requires developing a different mindset. Doable but will require effort and focus.

- By making it easy for the customer will it make it expensive for us ?
- Aren't organizations expected to hide complexity in their products and services to customers ?
- Can we have people in our organization who will only think the 'customer's world' ?

BUILDING THE CUSTOMER CONTEXT

The challenge for service delivery people is to be able to appreciate the customer/client context. Context typically is understood as the environment or the world in which the customer lives. Each individual's context is different (while they do enjoy some common aspects) and therefore to build customer empathy the context needs to be understood every time. This can be expensive and time consuming.



BUILDING THE CUSTOMER CONTEXT

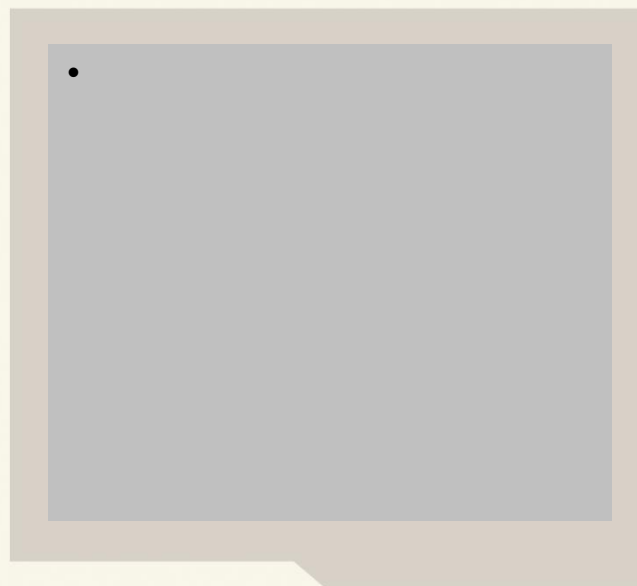
For companies which are in the B2C space, cannot afford the huge overhead and are likely to accept the fact that they will win some customers and lose some.

For B2B providers, building the customer context is critical as the very nature of their business is likely to be complex. Secondly, since their business model is high value and few customers, the cost of acquisition and the cost of retention are high and therefore they cannot afford their customers to switch to other providers.

Building the customer context requires developing a deep understanding of the customer's environment, including their internal culture, their industry drivers and the competitive landscape. Not only is the big picture important but the micro picture needs to be built and continuously refreshed too.

FROM 'INSIDE OUT' TO 'OUTSIDE IN'

Personnel in the provider organization and especially having a customer/client facing role need to shift their thinking to more client focused as opposed to organization focused. This shift in thinking is not easy due to the pulls and pushes of the provider organization to generate higher revenues, margins, customer satisfaction and retention. Provider personnel effectively need to shift their thinking from an 'Inside out' to an 'Outside In' thinking. What this means is that these personnel need to continuously live the client's world in their minds and start becoming the voice of the client within the provider organization.



THINKING OUTSIDE IN

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HOW DO YOU THINK 'OUTSIDE IN' ?

The shift in thinking can happen through a series of steps.

- Expose the personnel to the client environment either by getting them to work in the client offices or else 'shadowing' client personnel during their tasks and jobs
- Soak up information related to the client's business strategy, industry drivers and competitive landscape.
- Interact with client stakeholders in formal as well as informal settings to understand what keeps them 'awake at night'.
- Examine every solution and client touch point to see how it impacts the client. Are there any opportunities to reduce the touch point and bring in efficiencies ?

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