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## Leveraging tech to improve CX can build brand loyalty

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*For most consumers, customer service is an important consideration when shopping, second only to price. Image credit: Kustomer*

By KATIE TAMOLA

Brands are being urged to prioritize excellent customer service and safety procedures to ensure continued sales and consumer loyalty.

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During a webinar on Feb. 10, an executive from Forrester discussed how improvements in customer experience encourage consumers to purchase more from competent brands. As purchasing methods installed during COVID-19 become more commonplace, brands are being urged to note what works and to continue innovating to ensure continued consumer satisfaction.

"Building competencies really is a kind of systemic change that lasts, and we believe those brands that have been doing that will continue to win loyalty in 2021," said David Truog, vice president/research director for CX/UX at [Forrester](#). "High-quality customer experience drives customer loyalty."

"This is not just sort of a belief we have, we have the data around this," he said. "We find a very high correlation between the quality of the customer experience and the intent to remain loyal to purchase again and purchase more and be an advocate."

### What consumers want

A litany of factors impacts customer experience. Consumers want to feel heard, feel safe and feel as though their needs are being addressed and met.

To provide the best CX, brands should consider three areas. According to Mr. Truog, brands must strengthen design, earn the trust of the consumers and innovate for safety.

He also explained six competencies brands need to address: research, prioritize, design, enablement, measurement and culture. Essentially, brands must learn and prioritize consumers' needs and implement changes to meet these concerns in a measurable way.



*Mr. Truog spoke about the importance of strengthening design, establishing trust and innovating for safety. Image credit: Forrester*

For instance, Mr. Truog noted that design is not limited to the aesthetics of a brand's landing page. Design includes customer interactions, services and workflows, structure and organizational charts, disparate forms of communication including email and chatbots and other realms.

Connection and transparency are also important to consumers. This ranges from being forthcoming about sustainability practices to being transparent about safety measures in place to protect both employees and consumers during the pandemic.

Consumers are making it clear that safety is a paramount priority, and brands are listening. Even as lockdown restrictions lift as the pandemic situation evolves, a significant amount of consumers remain wary about in-store shopping ([see story](#)).

Findings from Forrester indicate that technology practices that consumers may have experimented with before the pandemic have become permanent parts of some consumers' routines.

For instance, consumers are seeking buying options where they can avoid contact with other people or items that others have touched to ensure their health and safety during the pandemic.



*Neiman Marcus was one of a number of retailers to introduce contactless curbside pickup during the pandemic. Image credit: Neiman Marcus*

Brands have adopted different technology features, including voice dictation or touch-free payment methods using smart devices, so consumers feel able to participate safely in a public setting by avoiding communal items.

Mr. Truog cited commercial airline JetBlue as one brand that introduced a feature allowing travelers to use their personal devices to circumvent use of touchscreens found on the back of plane seats.

"Now [JetBlue] enables you to pair your phone with the seatback screen, so that you can control it using your phone," Mr. Truog said. "So you don't have to touch the screen that somebody else may have touched just before you, and that makes a big difference in user confidence, and therefore in trust."

Businesses will continue to be called on to innovate for safety, strengthening a relationship that will be beneficial for both the brands and consumers. The most successful brands will see increased sales while consumers will see their demands met.

#### Luxury applications

High-touch and relationship-driven businesses have an opportunity to test self-serve, touchless or unattended

operations as consumers seek brands that best prioritize safety while minimizing changes in shopping patterns ([see story](#)).

Luxury fashion brands are offering more services that let consumers try products without consumers having to leave their homes. New technology often implemented to help those interacting with the brand feel connected without having to compromise safety.

Italian fashion label Gucci took its augmented reality service to Snapchat to let customers and prospects virtually try on its footwear and buy the merchandise if they choose. The AR technology will allow users to explore how different models of Gucci shoes look on their feet ([see story](#)).

Some brands are even implementing strategies for their own employees.

German automaker Audi has launched a virtual space to enable employees to learn and work in a digital setting during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The automaker developed the virtual 3D world, branded as "Audi Spaces," to better allow employees to learn and collaborate remotely ([see story](#)).

"It's one of those instances where a crisis begets a need for which there is a solution for which there's been a little bit of demand, and suddenly there's real demand," Mr. Truog said. "And that accelerates innovation and accelerates opportunity and it also accelerates differentiation between the winners and losers in any given market, in any given vertical."

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