

Mobilizing Your Data to Improve Customer Experience

Steve:

I'm doing great, Tim. It's a lovely day here in the New York Metro area.

Tim:

It is a lovely day. We're actually gearing up I think for a rather kind of miserable weekend, but the week has been delightful. So we've been talking, you and I, over the last three, four weeks or so, a lot about customer service, customer experience rather, which is weird for a company that's focused on content and search and things like that.

Steve:

Right.

Tim:

Or is it Steve? Is it weird that we would be talking about customer experience?

Steve:

I disagree. I was in a sales call earlier this week and of course when we really get down a product, we are talking about searchers, we're talking about navigators, we're talking about content engagement, personalization, all those things. But the thing I cautioned the folks I was talking to was let's make sure we're not getting too wrapped up in people are searchers, or people are navigators, or people are doing this or that, because at the end of the day, a person is coming to you because they have some pain in their professional lives. We're talking B2B here. And they want that solved. And they almost don't care whether they're searching or navigating. They just want to find the thing that alleviates the pain, that allows them to progress in their journey and ultimately allows them to be successful.

Steve:

I think that really is the definition of customer experience. If you zoom way out what I think most people think of when they think customer experience, it really is that total perception of the business. It's everything from, I'm in the sales process, to I'm buying, to I'm sold and I'm getting activated, to I'm using, to I'm renewing. It's everything. Support. It's everything kind of end to end. And marketers are increasingly focusing on business. I mean, CEOs are increasingly focusing on it.

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They all want their NPS reports, or their net promoter score reports. It's important because if you do this well, if you have a great customer experience, and for me, when I think great customer experiences, I always kind of think of an Apple unboxing.

Steve:

If you unbox an Apple device, it's just delicious. And by the way, I bought a cable the other day, like a USB-C cable and what I have noticed is that this \$18 cable unboxed just like an Apple. It was in a heavyweight cardboard box, the inside was in a foam wrapper. It was just perfect. And it had little help cards. So everybody is getting religion on this, whether you're selling a \$2,000 computer or an \$18 cable, the customer experience starts with that very first interaction and goes right through. It goes right through to your renewal or your repurchase. And by the way, do all that right and you've got increased loyalty, which in business terms means you're going to renew, or you're going to stay, and you're going keep paying that subscription fee. You're going to review me really well or recommend me, or refer me, so there's more opportunities for growth.

Steve:

All those measurement scores that people use, the customer SAT and all that other stuff, is going to be positive. Customer experience really is a very broad topic and we focus kind of on the digital piece, when people are interacting with folks on websites. But it's something that we talk a lot about because that's really at the end of the day what we're trying to do is when people come to that portion of your customer experience, is it awesome? Is it easy for them to find what they need? Is it easy for them to progress on their journey?

Tim:

I'm trying to remember who said it, but it's that difference between a search engine and a find engine. It's actually giving people the answer to the questions they have so that they're not stumbling about and wondering, "Wait, where is that?"

Steve:

Yeah, exactly.

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Tim:

Very cool. Well, so now you touched upon this a little bit, but how do you know that customer experience works? Are there metrics? Are there things people should pay attention to, and especially on the digital side?

Steve:

Sure. I mean, net promoter score is probably one of the more popular measures these days. I think one challenge of net promoter score is just how actionable is it. It's the big blinking light on the dashboard. So it's either red or it's green and when it's red, armies mobilize to go get this. There's a variety of ways you can do this. It's interesting, I was reading a report for McKinsey earlier today in preparation for this and one of the things that they talked about, they have this kind of customer experience index and the average B2C company, the score is in the 65% to 85% range. Good. Good enough.

Steve:

The average B2B company score is less than 50%. So when you just kind of look at, even though we're all talking about it, we're still not achieving kind of that great experience. There's a lot of reasons for that. I mean, you look at any business experience, even thinking about our technology, the buying process is complex and not because we make it hard, we try to make it very easy for people to give us money, but often the purchase process within an organization requires lots of people to be involved. You got lots of processes, procurement's got to be involved, finance, et cetera, so that makes it difficult. There are lots of users who have to be activated all over the organization, so it's kind of a team sport there, and then support can be very complex because not every user has the same level of knowledge. Not every user has the same level of expectation.

Steve:

It is a very different game for B2B than it is for the B2C world. But to get to your specific question about what are the measures, well certainly again, at the top, we have NPS or customer, kind of traditional... there's still lots of traditional customer satisfaction surveys going on. But the real indicators that you have a great customer experience or you have gaps are what's your churn rate. If you have got business turning over at a pretty high rate, that's probably a pretty good indicator that things are wrong.

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But on the flip side, if you have high renewals, then things are probably better. And so you really have to kind of drill into when you see that NPS score lagging, where in your business are you going to find answers?

Steve:

I know it kind of sounds a little bit simplistic, but you get those answers by listening. And what you're listening for is first, it's the operational data, especially for existing customer relationships. A lot of that comes out of support. Your customer success teams are certainly going to be canaries in the coal mine. Every Monday I attend our customer success team's meeting because I am always listening for those, "Huh, that doesn't sound quite right." Listening to your customer success team, your customer success leaders is going to give you some indications. You can certainly survey them. And any groups that have maybe outside of support communities where people, whether they're your communities or some Reddit forum, or pick your online forum, but where people are discussing your company, that could also be review sites like Captera where people are discussing your products.

Steve:

What are they saying? And that listening is I think probably one of the most important things that leaders can do to really get a sense of how their business is going.

Tim:

What about search data?

Steve:

Yeah. Well, a lot of your web analytics, so I kind of put that in the operational bucket, but a lot of your analytics, whether they're about search or not, can certainly help you out. You mentioned search specifically, which is part of our game, and when-

Tim:

There's a reason I did that.

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Steve:

Yeah. You're very smooth, very smooth. When you look at what people are putting in that search box, you certainly at least, especially early, but I guess also in a support use case, so during the purchasing process, as well as in support, that's part of the data you want to pay attention to. What are people putting in there and especially where are your gaps? What are the things that people can't find? Because if you got support questions going into whatever your support system is, and there are no answers, one, that's definitely going to be frustrating. I saw a measure recently called rage clicks. I don't know what they are, but I understand them intimately.

Steve:

If you see people putting things into your support system that don't have answers, not only does that frustrate the user, but that also increases your costs because now you have to have a human get involved in answering that question. It definitely could put margins under pressure and in site search, you kind of have the same thing going on when you see people entering keywords and not getting successful outcomes. And that's where we refocus on is, you should always be focused on those successful outcomes. Are your measures of search success going up or going down, because, especially when it's top of funnel prospects, you want to yield on those as high as possible. And if they're not finding what they're looking for, you're just wasting marketing dollars.

Tim:

Well, yeah. I mean, you raise a great point there. I mean, we've seen the case a number of times and we highlight this data to varying degrees and I know we're working on highlighting it more. But when there are content gaps, when people are doing a search and there's no result, which happens a lot more than you would like for people when they're first starting with us. Usually that's one of the reasons why they are first starting with us is that they're seeing these gaps that are just lost opportunities to connect with customers. That can also be incredibly valuable data to think about your product focus. Are there things people are asking for that you didn't even know they needed?

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Tim:

A great one that I heard today, literally I was on a Google webinar a little while ago, and this was a B2C instance, but it was fascinating that there was an apparel company who discovered that people were searching for a certain type of pant that they called something. They were called like joggers or something. And literally the people were like, "Well, we make those pants, we just call them something else." And they changed the name of the product in all their merchandising because the customer told us that's what we're looking for. So there's a lot of data there.

Steve:

I used to work for a company that had that problem and they did the exact opposite. They refused to change it. The customer was wrong. Now this was 15 years ago, so the good news is they might have changed their mind since then, but if the customer calls it that, call it that.

Tim:

Right. For sure. That's classic. That's classic. All right. So, you've got these metrics. There's all these things out there from a customer experience perspective that you're measuring. How do you improve these metrics? What can you do to kind of drive these metrics forward?

Steve:

Well, the first thing you do is you set yourself some goals. You figure out where your gaps are and you set yourself some goals. And again, common goals are we want to increase our customer SAT or we want to increase our NPS. What you really need to focus on is what are the levers and what are the business outcomes. Because while I get that folks sitting in a boardroom might be concerned about NPS, what we really concerned is, especially as marketers, leads, conversions, progression. So what are your goals in those very real terms of our trade? And so that's what I would suggest is the first thing.

Steve:

And then the second thing is begin to look at what are the actions you can take basically in three big categories around improvement. The first of course is, it's kind of in the listen category, but it's data. What are the data elements that you want to measure to support that?

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Steve:

So first, setting your goals, deciding the metrics that you want to track, and establish those targets so everybody's clear. That's kind of the first step. The second step is also related to the data, which is, I refer to it as mobilizing your data, but it's figure out how you can take these operational data points off of dashboards and get them into action. Because often you see just such a lagging trend in, "Oh, we see a problem," and then it takes you forever to actually address this problem. Support is again one place where this is apparent. Like, "Oh gee, we got tickets piling up because we don't have enough humans to get the tickets done because the support database doesn't have the information that's necessary for people to self-serve. Oh, okay."

Steve:

But you don't find that out until you have the backlog. So how can you use that data more in real time to enable and empower people? But the ideal situation is automation. How can you use that data, mobilize that data in a way that you can automate the solution? So again, sticking with the support use case, and this isn't our business, so I got nothing to sell here, but sticking with that for a moment. I mean, you probably have content somewhere in your support database that answers the majority of the questions that go unanswered and part of the reason is, like you said, the customer calls it something different. Well, there's got to be ways out there to be able to discern, maybe using something like natural language processing, and there might be vendors that do this, to really extract answers out of all that support data to question.

Steve:

Now we're doing that. We're in a pilot right now. We call it Answer Box. We're in a pilot right now, very early days, but we're also looking at this notion of if someone asks a question in search and we don't have a great answer for it, nine times out of 10 somewhere on the website that answer exists. And so we're actually looking at this kind of question and answer box, but extracting that from content automatically. So not having somebody to think about all the questions that you have to ask and all the answers that have to be created for those questions, but actually mine that information out of the content itself. And that's basically you have a machine reading your website and inferring what question your content answers, and then just creating that Q&A sort of dialogue.

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Steve:

So that's one way you can mobilize your data. This makes search better. This makes searchers more likely to achieve success, find what they're looking for, progress in their journey. So mobilizing the data in some way, and largely automation is the best way to do this, although semi-automated, make people smarter, more agile, could be a way to go. But mobilizing the data is critical.

Steve:

And then the last thing, again it's kind of obvious, but it's invest. We talked earlier, or I mentioned earlier about all these CMO's who, "This is an important topic." Content experience is, 86% of them think it's important and half of them are doing mediocre at it.

Tim:

I saw a stat by the way the other day, just new research, that CMO tenure has reached its lowest level in, I think it's a decade. I'll link to it in the show notes. But there's a reason why that is and what you're just describing is exactly tied to that.

Steve:

Yeah, and I think a lot of that's tied to investment. I mean, when you look at where money is going. Money goes to shiny objects. Core technology and shiny objects. And so how can we make sure that every investment that's being made is actually laser pointed at improving this, at understanding the problem better, gathering better data, mobilizing that data in certain ways, and helping progress the game forward. That kind of gap in investment, or at least alignment of investment, is a key area for folks to focus on.

Tim:

Makes sense. So we're coming up on time, but before we finish up, how do people get started? Where do you recommend they begin as they think about those three broad areas?

Steve:

You start with the data. You start with understanding your problem better. I think that that is kind of the obvious place. If you don't have the right data to really understand your challenges and have the ability to set goals that improve performance over time. I think a lot of companies are getting pretty sophisticated on this.

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So again, if you're not sophisticated on it, that's where you have to start. And then I think the next step is the mobilize stage. So where are your opportunities? Because remember, investment's hard to get, and that is both technology and people, and agency spend and all the other stuff that marketers spend money on.

Steve:

So if you can use the data to kind of automate your way out of some of your problems, that's the best bet and creating feedback loops within your technology stack so that when somebody sees a piece of content or sees a search result that doesn't make sense and there's data that shows it doesn't make sense, maybe you could share with them a sensical or an effective piece of content. And so that mobilization of the data is the next place. And everybody laments investment, but if you feel you're already doing that, then it really does become a money game and that could be an allocation issue that you've got money on the wrong things, or it could just be that everybody in your industry is spending 8% of revenue on marketing and you're spending 2% on marketing. So it almost doesn't matter how you allocate your dollars, you're always going to be behind.

Tim:

No, it makes sense. Well, and I would be remiss in my role here, but I would be remiss if I didn't point out when you talk about aggregating the data and you talk about then mobilizing the data, that is what Solo Segments products are designed to do. Obviously we do it on the user-facing side as opposed the support-facing side, but we do things like take your data from search or take your data from navigation and we actually use that create a better experience for customers. Steve, you want to do a quick little commercial before-

Steve:

You bet. You bet. Yeah. No, but I mean it is fundamental to everything that we do. We are all marketers and marketing technology executives. That was kind of our background. That's why we got into this business because we were so frustrated with the state of affairs. And one of the things that we just believe deeply is, you see it in search box, you see it in guide box, you see it in answer box, which we're working on, you see it in all the products that we do that are focused on better customer experiences, is that whole mobilization of the data.

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Whether its basic analytics, predictive analytics, whether its machine learning and really cool stuff, no matter what it is, when you're able to extract information about behaviors that are successful, whether people are searching or navigating, how do you use that data to increase the likelihood that they're going to achieve their result?

Steve:

And that's exactly what our products do. We certainly have dashboards and all those other things that people can look at because people like to look at them. But there are only so many hours in the day, so many people who work at the companies, so guide box and search box both use their success signals or the behavioral signals that they're getting to improve overall performance and outcomes for our business. And that at the end of the day has to be everyone's goal because more data, more dashboards, more reports is certainly not the way to get a better customer experience.

Tim:

And I think that's a perfect place to wrap up. I would, again, be remiss if I didn't remind people that they can get a copy of Solo Segments new report website, Engagement in a Changed World by going to solosegment.com/website-engagement. And again, that is solosegment.com/website-engagement. Steve, any last parting words of wisdom?

Steve:

Good to go, Tim. You have a great day.

Tim:

All right. You take care now and we'll talk to you soon.

Steve:

Bye-bye.

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