Points of view & Insights

Customer Experience in the B2B sector, let's start !

1,700,000 Facebook fans on the page of Maerks Line, Danish shipping company, 200,000 fans on Caterpillar's Facebook page, 12,000 Twitter fans for AGCO specializing in agricultural equipment, 212,000 fans on Schneider Electric's Facebook page ... All these companies invest in social networks, and yet they are aimed at ... other companies! Following the economic crisis of 2008, the maritime freight sector found itself in overcapacity and entered a price war. A company like Maerks Line has seen in the improvement of the customer experience and the digitization of its processes a way out of this situation by differentiating itself from its competitors. Following a program to improve its Net Promoter Score (NPS), the brand also realized that a 4-point increase in the NPS resulted in a 1% increase in volumes charged by customers. [1]

Why are B2B companies interested in the customer experience? The concept may seem reserved for B2C activities, whose customers are considered more emotional. But in the age of digital and big data, the points of contact with the brand are multiplied and B2B companies, who did not know enough their direct customers and even less the end users of their products, now have the great opportunity to fill this gap and customize their offer.

1. The B2B sector ; a complex, heterogeneous environment, historically centered around the role of salesman

A heterogeneous environment according to the sectors...

B2B gathers a variety of realities, depending on the number of customers and their relationships.

We thus generally distinguish the *large-scale B2B* where the direct customer will most often be a distributor (ex: office supplies), *the recurring B2B* that is characterized by a continuous and often contractualized customer relationship (eg equipment manufacturer and car manufacturer) and *project B2B*, where the customer relationship is often punctual and characterized by a call for tenders (eg communication agencies).

It is also necessary to distinguish the sectors where it is possible to identify the end user, whether external to the client company (the B2B2C, eg building equipment), or an employee of this company (B2B2E; ex : business catering).

Characterized by often complex and long decision processes

In B2B, decision-making processes are often long and involve multiple decision-makers at multiple levels or even multiple functions.

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[1] Source: case study, www.beyondphilosophy.com

Decision-making is more rational than in B2C, essentially based on the issues of "quality, cost, time", even though in many cases emotion is also to be considered.

And historically centered around the role of the salesman, main lever of the Customer Experience

Traditionally, the salesman plays a central role in B2B, often combining the activities of prospecting, supply construction, negotiation, sales and after-sales.

2. Digital has multiplied points of contact with the customer and transformed the role of the salesman

Thanks to the development of digital, the B2B customer now has access to more information upstream of the act of purchase, or even before contact with a salesperson.

In many sectors, he can learn about the product, rely on testimonials left by other users, compare other offers or simply make his purchase decision without going through a salesperson.

Today, nearly 60% of B2B buyers have already made their decision before seeing a salesperson[2], this phenomenon is particularly marked for relatively simple products, for example in the B2B mass-market.

The experience of the B2B customer, historically very polarized by the contacts with the salesperson, has thus become more complex and diversified, the points of contact being multiplied on the physical and digital channels.

How to take into account this new reality ?

First by **adapting its web content and its presence on social networks!**

A company like GE is very present on social networks (2 million "likes" for its Facebook page, 300,000 "subscribers" on Instagram). It offers a fluid and customer-oriented website (welcome on a search bar "What can we help you to find?") And videos on Youtube for its business customers, describing its technical solutions (eg: tutorial on gas turbines).

Then, as in B2C, using Big Data tools to structure and better share customer knowledge.

The challenge here is not so much the effectiveness of mass marketing as the personalization of the customer-supplier relationship.

For example, Bouygues Telecom's B2B teams rely on LinkedIn Sales Navigator, Bypass, etc. to better target their prospects and contact them at the best time with a tailor-made speech. These tools even deliver "stories to tell" the customer by relying on its news, on social networks (articles where the prospect is quoted, latest tweets, pages followed on LinkedIn,...). Telemarketing and cold calling

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[2] Source: Forrester Internet Retailer Q1 2015 US B2B Buyer Channel Preferences Online Survey, The B2B Sales Force Digital Reboot, 2015

approaches are complemented by targeted and personalized contact on a new channel. This allowed Bouygues Telecom to increase the number of appointments made for sales representatives by 20%.[3]

In some sectors, B2B teams use recent tools like augmented reality! This is for example the case at L'Oréal Professionnel: sales representatives can demonstrate live the merchandising offered in the hair salon environment.

Finally, by training its sales teams on an ongoing basis with these new tools.

If the role of the salesperson will decrease on some of the simple products, it remains decisive on complex products or requiring additional services (installation, maintenance, training, ...).

The salesperson is becoming one of the main users of lead management tools, customer customization, live simulation, … And even: Xerox offers its customers' sales forces tools and training to adopt the approach of social selling.

3. Improving the Customer Experience in B2B sector always goes through the analysis of the customer journey

As in B2C, many B2B customers are now following a multi-channel journey that multiplies and diversifies potential points of contact with the brand. The new points of contact certainly represent an additional risk for the brand, but above all they offer as many opportunities for improvement and differentiation of the customer relationship.

A company like Tarkett understands the importance of understanding the customer's needs in order to offer them the right services and journey. On his new 2017 Website, Tarkett offers the professional to navigate as a B2C customer including filters to facilitate his research, the ability to download visuals and simulation modules or the opportunity to obtain samples in a click. The customer area also allows the brand to identify its customers and customize its offer.

The customer journey approach, by identifying, analyzing and improving the points of contact, can **therefore be particularly relevant, at the cost of some adaptations.**

In particular, it is necessary to identify and target the interlocutor whose experience we wish to improve with the brand. The influencer, the direct customer, the end-user: each of themhave their own experience.

This choice has an impact on the approach. For example, for end-user analysis, data collection may be more complex than in B2C: user information is often more widely disseminated or viewed through the lens of one or more several intermediaries. It will sometimes be necessary to collect them yourself (surveys, focus groups etc.) or in partnership with his client who has better control over the data concerning the end-user.

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[3] Source: Interview of Souphaphone ORTEGA, B2B market director at Bouygues Telecom, from 2/12/2016

4. How to significantly improve the B2B Customer Experience

The process of understanding and improving the Customer Experience is done in several steps. These steps are the same in the case of the BtoB as in that of the BtoC, however the importance and achievement of each step will be impacted by the elements mentioned above.

Step 1 : Understand your customer environment

The B2B environment can be quite complex: several typologies of customers, interlocutors and many decision-makers, sometimes difficult to identify. It is therefore necessary to make an inventory by identifying:

- The first customers
- The decisions-makers
- The influencers
- The end-users (in the case of B2B2C and B2B2E), etc.

The approach must focus on the critical interlocutors. The main criteria of choice are:

1. *The objective of the approach: is the main objective to better value its offer to influencers, to better personalize the relationship with its customer first, or to strengthen the brand vs. the end user to better sell to his customer first?*
2. *The closeness to the customer first, who holds a significant part of the information about the end-user and his background*
3. *The available and accessible levers to improve the end-user experience*
4. *The ability to collect data at the end-customer level*

Thus, by analyzing the experience not of its primary customers but of the end-users, Veolia knew how to differentiate itself from its primary customers (water and energy operators, town halls, habitat managers, communities of municipalities). The company realized that end-consumers were looking for ease of use and customer support. It has developed the HomeFriend application that allows easy access to contracts and invoices, monitoring and analysis of consumption, the ability to contact a plumber in a few clicks and even the provision of advisors to answer consumer questions! A personalized and improved consumer experience strengthens Veolia's position vs. its direct customers.

Step 2: Customer segmentation and personae

Understanding your customer environment also involves customer segmentation.

For direct customers, we can segment and build the personae according to the sectors, the type of project, the hierarchical level, the function and the behavior of the customers (ex: technician, control of management, buyer, ...).

For users, the logic is similar to B2C: we segment customers according to their behavior (purchase frequency, loyal customer or not, ..), their expectations, their level of requirements, their budget ...

Step 3: Defining one or more customer journeys

This step identifies the points of contact to be improved.

Even for a B2B customer, understanding their interactions with the brand remains essential: interactions with the brand have multiplied and are no longer limited to the relationship of the salesperson with his client.

In the B2B sector, especially for complex products or sold to related services (installation, maintenance, ...), it is important to pay particular attention to post-purchase contacts, which can be much more numerous than in B2C.

Step 4: Listening to the customer and suggestions for improvement

This phase aims to identify gaps between expectations and perception of brand performance. For each point of contact, the level of customer expectation and satisfaction should be assessed. Just like a B2C customer, a B2B customer expects easy access to certain information, a website or tools that are easy to use, a level of service once the purchase has been made, or responsiveness in the event of a problem with the service, product or service provided. However, many of these expectations will be specific to the sector, hence the importance of creating customer paths adapted to each type of customer.

Step 5: Identify areas for improvement and implementation

Once identified, the gaps between expectations and perception of its performance, the company will define areas for improvement on the following points:

- Channels: enhanced service offer on digital, distribution networks, CRM and call centers
- Organization: coordination of directions to remove silos
- Employees: involvement of employees in the process, particularly through training
- Sustainability of the approach: by setting up a continuous system for collecting the voice of consumers

Customer experience: a must for B2B marketing

The customer experience is now a key topic for B2B marketing. The development of digital and Big Data has led to a change in the behavior of different B2B customers and provides more opportunities for the company to know their expectations.

The analysis of the customer journey, proven approach for B2C, proves in B2B a particularly effective tool, provided you define the objectives (improvement of the path of my direct client or that of the user?), consider the environment and evaluate the feasibility of using end-user data.

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