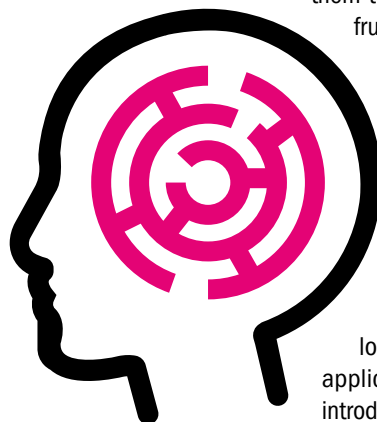


LOST IN THE LABYRINTH... CUSTOMERS WANT OUT!

Isn't making customers weave through the maze of service options just another way of giving them bad service?

BY Kathleen M. Peterson, PowerHouse Consulting



This is my own personal idiom... and it will be the basis of my Idiom Insights for 2018. The contact center industry is facing serious challenges when it comes to the customer experience. Regardless of the amount of customer experience chatter taking place at the executive level, the ability to operationalize the experience continues to be a challenge and customers are often left feeling like they are bumping up against obstacles from flawed processes, procedures, functions and technologies that seem in conflict with stated strategic objectives. I want to share how I have come to view these conditions, and what 21st century leaders need to know and do in this series.

“An awful lot of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion runs deep.”

—SAUL BELLOW

The Enterprise Labyrinth

In ancient Crete, King Minos asked Daedalus to build a complex labyrinth for imprisoning the monstrous half-man, half-bull Minotaur. The Minotaur was given periodic tributes of fair maidens as food. The great warrior Theseus' greatest achievement was to slay the Minotaur deep within the bowels of the laby-

rinth and, with the help of Ariadne's colored thread, find his way out of the labyrinth. Today, excavations of the complex and vast palace of Knossos in Crete substantiate elements of this legend. Elaborate networks of rooms and halls that seem to turn endlessly have been found.

Labyrinthine describes something winding, complicated and intricate. Like language, war and art, labyrinths have always been a part of the human fabric of society. They have been engraved, imprinted and branded on the pottery, coins and fabrics of culture since the beginning of civilization.

Labyrinths are also embossed on the very fabric of today's modern world. They are walked globally every day in our digital society with clicks, touch-tones, windows and menus. As well, there is an extraordinarily extensive and complex labyrinth of copper and fiber carrying the voices of telephone and data networks that continues to grow exponentially.

Business enterprises today have an institutionalized reflection of a labyrinth embedded within them called the Customer Service Maze. Too often, we design technology to create speed, but instead we enable frustration and aggravation. Labyrinthine... this is exactly how some companies treat their customers... with twists, turns, swerves, options, choices and, inevitably, confusion. Isn't making customers jump through these assistance hoops and weaving through the maze of service options just another way of

giving them bad service?

Many customers today feel lost in a maze of options, some that dead-end and others that move them along but do not deliver them to the correct destination. The same frustration felt by the ancients will be set upon our modern-day service environments and your customers will want out!

When we attempt to implement digital age tools with archaic management philosophies that focus on production quotas, operational silos and command/control models, we risk losing our customers within the very application and technical advances we introduce. The dichotomy is that the customer service chain craftsman of the 21st century may be using an archaic toolbox.

Too often, an immense space exists between C-level executives at one end of the customer service chain and customers at the other. There are many islands in the customer service chain and any can be left stranded, high and dry, with no way out of the labyrinth at any time. The labyrinth experience is created and experienced at the enterprise level and then at the customer level.

So... what can be done to create clear paths and remove the labyrinthine obstacles? To maximize and ensure the customer experience, we must look at the customer service chain within the enterprise. Is it a maze or a clear path? To play in the future arena, we must call all our current practices into question. Does what we do enhance or entrap our customers? Are we in fact inviting our customers into a labyrinth of options, none of which ensures a true experience?

First, we must be willing to examine closely the path our customers follow and search for obstacles. In order to remove those obstacles, we may face a stark realization. The obstacles we face may be due to management practices and NOT to frontline performance issues.

What most companies do today for their customers is complex. We have done a pretty good job of automating the simple, routine and mundane transactions. Our customers are increasingly adept in using these tools, as long as we prove them easy and reliable. It is in the handling of complex issues where confusion can arise. Senior management often

becomes confused because it has neglected to see that as routines become more complex and product launches and special campaigns more frequent, the complexities of customer access will increase.

The agent who handles the call must be “smarter” and better trained; this often translates to more expensive. As well, technology must be robust to sustain all the data feeds and transports required for meeting the ever-increasing appetite of our customers. And, as if that were not enough, the customer is now more complex. Today’s consumers demand better service, faster connections, better information and better relationships. They are increasingly demanding more, better... and they want it NOW. Speed and accuracy are no longer enough; partnership and advice are requisites to loyalty.

Your customers may know more about your company, services, products and promotions than the very people they talk to. Knowledgeable customers are demanding customers and organizations must be ready and able to meet the challenge. Where many companies fail is that they mistake technology for solutions and drill bits for holes. They in fact create a labyrinth in which customers feel as though they are bounced and

rebounded from top to bottom. The customers’ virtual experiences may consist of bouncing off studs, corners and bumpers; careening violently at bizarre angles; and ending up in places far from where they wanted to be with solutions useless to them (but expedient for the enterprise).

The flow of information between customer and company too often follows an erratic, random, inefficient and wrong path. In complex business environments, massive amounts of data are transported in seconds. It makes sense that the enterprise is able to figure out how to take some of the cuts, corners and curves out of this inter-enterprise puzzle. It should be a straight shot to direct the agent to the information and the customer to the solution... creating complete relationship satisfaction in every engagement.

We must study the typical flow of customer engagements today. Are we just throwing customer handling over the wall from one department to another? If so, over the wall goes the customer’s intimate information. How other departments feel that day, how well systems and processes transport information, and how well staffed they are to respond to the demands determine what each participant in the chain will do with the information being

passed. That decision ultimately impacts the customer’s experience with both the enterprise and the brand.

We have a definitive responsibility to review the entire customer service chain experience and that labyrinth our enterprise may have become. Only then can we truly evaluate our ability to create a true customer experience. ●

“He, who every morning plans the transactions of the day, and follows that plan, carries a thread that will guide him through a labyrinth of the most busy life.”

—VICTOR HUGO



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