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Customer centricity or eccentricity?

Jean-Luc Ambrosi | 25 February, 2015 08:46 | 2 Comments | Share this post

Have you noticed the number of articles and excruciating LinkedIn updates imparting us with the irrefutable merits of 'customer centricity' and how it will change businesses and the world for the better for ever and ever? They now appear to stand as the new organisational words 'du jour', sitting comfortably alongside other grand terms like big data, content marketing, native advertising and other fashionable poeries of varying worth.

It should be great news to see so much emphasis placed on the customer, but are we really clear about the role that customer centricity plays for organisations and their brands?

In the real world, customer centricity is often relegated to the last components of the food chain. Specifically, it applies to particular areas that can provide a strategic advantage (such as product design), as well as marketing and customer service. It is rarely driven by an all-encompassing objective of turning the organisation towards a customer-centric model. Rather, it is a tactical approach to take customers on a journey by ensuring their needs and wants are taken into account in building strategies and initiatives, and that their shopping, product and service experience is optimised.

For example, when some clever technology providers bring to life thoroughly customer-centric designed products of great appeal, their functionalities often lock customers in a customer eccentric model, whereby customers cannot use associated competitor offerings due to a lack of integration between technologies. The customer centricity has a tactical purpose but the overall strategic model works in an opposite or eccentric direction.

Unless your business is in the not-for-profit category, it is most likely driven by the need to grow and be ever more profitable. This is an important distinction as an organisation dedicated by mission to provide services and products for the unique good of customers can genuinely be tagged as customer centric.

For most organisations, however, customer centricity is mostly a means, a tool to manage customer sentiment. There is nothing wrong with this I must emphasise, because to survive most businesses need to focus on their own needs. Therefore in most instances, customer centricity has a natural limit found somewhere between the objectives of the organisation and the wants of customers. With this constant tension between centricity and eccentricity, the art of business strategy lies in finding the right balance.

This brings us to the role of marketing in helping managing this tension. There is still much work to be done to bring organisations closer to customer-centric models in order to better shape their products and services. This is particularly important from a competitive point of view, because today customer centricity is also about survival. Those who do not optimise their products and customer experience will find it increasingly difficult to remain relevant and competitive as more organisations develop various forms of customer centricity.

Marketing therefore plays a crucial role in transforming organisations to integrate customer centric models in their modus operandi. Ultimately, this is a core function to strengthen the link between brands and their customers, even if it does not change the world for the better for ever and ever...

Tags: customer engagement, customer experience management, marketing strategy

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Simon Arden · 3 months ago
Jean-Luc,
Nice post - quite thought provoking. You mention managing the tension between the objectives of the corporation and the wants of customers. I'm interested in your thoughts on whether educational courses like Wharton's customer centricity short course are helpful for marketing executives seeking to strike the balance or if they risk pushing organisational objectives at the true expense of the customer's best interests. Here's a link to one such course as an example: <http://executiveeducation.whar...>

Simon.
^ | v · Reply · Share

Jean-Luc Ambrosi → Simon Arden · 2 months ago
Simon, interesting question. In my view, building a good understanding of where and why an organisation may push back on customer centricity can help marketing executive better integrate and demonstrate the value of their approach.

Jean-Luc
^ | v · Reply · Share

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