

CX BEST PRACTICE IN TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

As we recover from the global pandemic, customer experience will be a vital tool in travel and hospitality brands winning the hearts and minds of customers.

DISCLAIMER:

The information in this piece does not constitute as legal advice and so should not be regarded as such.

Foreword

2020 will forever be remembered for a global event that completely disrupted our way of life. Few industries have been more impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic than that of travel and hospitality. This market was the first to feel the tremors of the pandemic, far before governments all around the world started mandating the closure of businesses.

Travel bans and cancelled services forced masses to surge toward available customer contact channels to cancel prized trips or book emergency transport home to avoid being stranded. Call centers have been overwhelmed with enquiries and at times bent into providing frustrating, indifferent experiences to panicked customers, with customers suffering eye watering hold times only to be cut off by the provider without explanation. This global pandemic has forced brands to deploy strategies that provide the capacity to support customers at this stressful time. This capacity may indeed prove useful when businesses begin the long journey back to resuming normal service and customers reschedule previously cancelled bookings or look to get away as national lockdowns come to an end.

The field is going to become a much more dynamic and unpredictable one. Many businesses will fail, but others will rise from the ashes and thrive. One of the main differentiators between these two fates, we argue, will be customer experience.

In an effort to inspire and motivate the industry in its recovery, CX Network looks at the factors that have led to CX greatness in travel and hospitality amid trying circumstances. These factors include the likes of being agile in a crisis, scaling up cost efficiently and immersion.

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Being agile amid a crisis

Qatar Airways was voted as the airline with the best business class offering in the world by Skytrax voters in 2019. Its QSuite concept offers many luxuries ranging from customizable seats that allow passengers to have on-air business meetings, family mealtimes on demand and the flexibility to transform two adjacent seats as a double bed.

But it would be a mistake to label Qatar Airways as just a luxury airline. During the Covid-19 crisis the airline demonstrated that its customer care goes beyond surface level to a genuine concern for customer welfare. Among several initiatives, one prime crisis management example was seen in the rebranding of the flag carrier's homepage. During the pandemic, the homepage was renamed "Qatar Airways | We Will Get You Home" and prominently offered discounts on one-way fares to help some of the thousands of stranded individuals get home. Reuniting families with great customer care when it is needed most.

On the task of preserving customer experiences without risking financial stability in times of crisis in this market, Scott Carlson, VP of business development, travel and transportation at TaskUs said: "In the face of Covid-19, the travel and hospitality industry has experienced the most adversity of any sector. While mitigating the financial burden, there are a few points of focus for every CX leader.

"It's important to **remember that no crisis lasts forever**. Panic pricing may attract some demand but it can inadvertently reduce the value of your service and make it difficult to rebound. Instead, look at all areas to mitigate costs first to establish opportunities for revenue.

"Secondly, **pay attention to potential market share opportunities**. If you are willing to pivot your business model to survive these unprecedented times, your

company will be better positioned for success and can benefit from additional offerings.

"Although they may have avoided doing so previously, airlines could consider driving value for customers through offering discounts for extreme advance purchases, memberships to airport lounges or free upgrades to certain customers who aren't program members. Although these are simple additions, they serve as ROI in the eyes of the consumer while simultaneously enhancing their experience, even before setting foot on a plane.

"View this unprecedented global crisis as an opportunity to test your company's agility in the face of uncertainty. It's critical to adjust and adapt accordingly in order to prepare for future contingency plans."



TaskUs reveals how it supported one online booking provider lower its overheads while improving customer care delivery at scale.

For years, one of the leading online booking applications simplified the process of reserving hotel rooms at a discounted rate, regardless of whether users were booking last minute or planning ahead. Frequent users achieved different status levels, which entitled them to even deeper discounts and other benefits which made this company a top competitor in the industry.

Since its inception, this booking app set the standard for CX while growing to serve over 15 million users and counting. To sustain its model while fielding high

volumes of enquiries and adapting to seasonal peaks, the company had to keep overheads low.

Operational efficiencies to save costs

Company leaders began exploring the idea of outsourcing as a cost efficient way to supplement the internal customer care team. They needed a CX partner that was nimble enough to quickly scale up and down for seasonal volume fluctuations while controlling costs.

Due to the app's continued exponential growth and seasonal volume, customers often faced long hold times and poor customer service. Often, their mounting frustration with the company outweighed the rewards and benefits offered by the booking app.

A new partnership

Their BPO partner, TaskUs, implemented staff load balancing which enabled them to scale support operations during peak periods and exceeded the client's service levels by earning a 102 per cent. Teammates also attended cost reduction seminars hosted by TaskUs to develop keen negotiation skills. As a result, 94 per cent of customers who called in asking for a refund left with credits which encouraged customers to continue using the app and extended their loyalty.

After the successful 15-agent pilot program surpassed expectations, TaskUs became this client's permanent CX partner and the booking app has since continued its massive growth with lower costs.



Adding meaningful value with CX initiatives

Technological upgrades

From voice assistants and robot butlers to augmented reality features, there are several technological options available to enrich the guest experience. For instance, the hotel room key has seen recent upgrades. Rather than being a separate device that can be easily misplaced, the room access capability is being integrated into guests' smartphones, RFID bands and facial recognition technology. However, brands should beware of focusing too much on technology, as the line between a gimmick and genuine experience differentiator is a fine one.

Reflecting on how brands in the industry are applying

technology to make a meaningful difference to experiences, Manish Pandya, senior VP of digital at TaskUs notes: "Rewards and loyalty programs implemented by hospitality brands that leverage omnichannel technologies to route solutions have the power to anticipate customer needs and increase market share. Through the use of self-service on all channels, skilled agents and omnichannel interaction tracking, companies benefit from a 360° view of voice service, email, chat, SMS, and in-app messaging.

He adds: "This, combined with proactive notification systems that leverage member location services to provide real-time alerts during the travel lifecycle

creates an experience for travelers that matters. To take it a step further, some brands are also experimenting with their customer's personal smart TV channels, voice command devices and music preferences to deliver an unmatched approach to hospitality and comfort."

Loyalty programs

Hilton is probably the greatest poster child for this strategy, with Hilton Honors, the loyalty program from the hotel chain, being universally recognized as a great exemplar. It allows guests to use mobile check-in, choose their preferred room for their stay and make special orders such as extra pillows or pre-ordering room service on their way to the hotel.



CASE STUDY: Removing points of friction



TaskUs reveals how it supported one transportation company to eliminate a customer pain point in order to boost customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Born out of the sharing economy, this transportation company was a pioneer disruptor in the industry by revolutionizing the way drivers and passengers connect. Launched in 2009, it quickly established itself as fierce competition for fast, easy, and affordable transportation.

It experienced meteoric growth and expanded from a single city ride-sharing service to a global

provider with a presence in more than 30 countries, transporting over a million riders each day.

The disconnect

However, this travel disruptor had an inefficient process for returning lost items, this resulted in many rider queries stuck in "pending" status and a sinking customer satisfaction (CSAT) score. In today's always-on digital culture, consumers expect speedy responses, resolutions to their complaints and reasons to continue doing business. So the company decided to move forward with an outsourcing partner to innovate its workflow, increase CSAT and create repeat customers.

Reconnecting

TaskUs immediately went to work with this company to design, test, and launch a pilot project to reunite riders with their lost items. The key to success was human intervention: calling both drivers and riders so tickets could be solved and closed, something that was nearly impossible using only email.

This project evidenced that returning lost items quickly to riders plays a pivotal role in CSAT scores and directly impacts loyalty. TaskUs curated a new and improved workflow that reduced returning items from days to 24 hours or less and increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Immersion

Immersion is an often-overlooked way of distinguishing the experience provided to customers. It is a simple concept, providing escape by thoroughly and interactively embedding a guest into a concept. However, common implementation complexities explain why there are so few examples of this strategy. Disney Resorts and LEGOLAND hotels provide immersion successfully on a range of occasions – interactive dining experiences, hotel stays in an Alice in Wonderland rooms or rooms themed on LEGO’s most iconic environments

such as castles or pirate ships. By immersing guests into the universe of a brand’s identity, travel and hospitality brands not only have a key tool to delight customers at scale, but to also charge a pretty premium.

Entertaining a captive audience

Finally, knowing how to entertain a captive audience is a challenge that is all too familiar to all-inclusive resorts, tour operators and cruise lines. There, the greatest role model one could think of is the Norwegian Cruise Line’s

ship Encore, where passengers are never short of thrilling experiences to keep them busy at high sea. From an actual racetrack on the deck (by their own admission, the largest track on the sea) for those adrenaline junkies or virtual reality experiences for those who feel more comfortable in a digital world, there are many things for people to do on the Norwegian Encore besides the classic all-day activity schedule, swimming, dining and shopping most cruise boats offer.



FINAL REMARKS

Identify your customers' needs and deliver for them when it matters most.

All of the elements discussed all have one thing in common: they all need to be aligned with customer needs and requirements to drive meaningful value. Whether it is outstanding luxury or immersion in a different world all the way to practical, tech-driven seamless and innovative experiences, CX leaders in travel and hospitality work to understand what customers desire and then dedicate themselves to delivering to these preferences.

No company will be perfect in this execution, especially in the face of unprecedented global emergencies. There will be slip ups, but a genuine intent to recover experiences and improve for the welfare of customers is crucial.

It would be unwise to deploy short-sighted strategies focused on retaining earnings through policies that force customers to lose investments into travel and hospitality occasions thanks to the epidemic. The entities that will thrive on the back of the Covid-19 pandemic will be those that understand the true power of valuable and empathetic experiences delivered to customers in crucial moments. These situations will prove a brand's worth, its reliability and whether it is actually prepared to live by its customer-first taglines and slogans when the going gets tough.

Travel and hospitality brands that have the agility, capacity and empathy to live out long-sighted

sustainable strategies that deliver genuine experiences of value will find customers are more loyal than ever before going forward.

Adapt or die.

"The industry should look forward and be prepared to execute a next generation strategy for what is to come, as competition will be more fierce than ever", says Merideth Evans, senior director of client services at TaskUs. She continues: "After a long period at home, the world will be ready for experiences outside their front doors. The company who delivers a proactive and safe customer experience will take the lion's share of new business.

"According to the New York Post, millennials are the most eager to explore the world after Covid-19 ends. Although they are worried about the outcome of the pandemic, they are more fearless and desire more unique experiences than other generations. In fact, trends show that they are taking advantage of low prices and booking travel experiences later in the year and beyond.

"Regardless of the pandemic, it appears that eager, experienced travelers are future-focused and keen on quenching their thirst for travel and when the time is right, travel and transportation companies need to be ready to deliver."



About CX Network

CX Network is an online resource for customer experience professionals providing value-rich content such as industry reports, customer trends, best practice, latest industry news, interviews with CX leaders and so much more! Our focus on the content that matters to customer experience leaders most, allows us to cut through the white noise that surrounds this ever-changing subject, and makes us the primary resource for CX executives to turn to.

By joining our network you will receive expert commentary, reports, and resources developed by and for experiences customer experience professionals and industry insiders. With a growing membership and global portfolio of events, CX Network ensures you keep your finger on the pulse by delivering practical and strategic advice to help you achieve your business goals.



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