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B2B leaders “flying blind” as companies lose control over customer experience and put growth at risk: Study

MARTIN KOVACS / Thursday, January 11, 2018



Business-to-business (B2B) companies are losing control over the customer experience due to convoluted buying processes and disconnected channel partner networks, according to a recent study.

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Accenture Strategy's *B2B Customer Experience 2017* study, surveying 1350 sales and customer service executives from B2B organisations around the world, found that just 21% of respondents believe they have total control over their organisation's sales networks and overall customer experience.

With customer experiences suffering, the Accenture study found leaders need to "abandon the benign neglect of traditional channel management" or risk a lack of growth.

According to the research, most customers are already 57% through the buying process before first engaging with a company representative, while 61% of all B2B transactions are now starting online.

Despite 71% of B2B executives saying customers increasingly want business-to-consumer-like experiences compared to a few years ago, 49% admit they are failing to deliver the cutting edge and highly relevant experiences customers crave.

And while 97% of executives say indirect sales channels are critical to their business, 84% do not have visibility into sales partner opportunity pipelines.

"B2B leaders know that customer experience is the gateway to growth and have increasingly relied on channel partners to help them deliver," said Robert Wollan, Accenture Strategy senior managing director.

"But many have been flying blind. Distracted by building extensive partner networks to increase selling opportunities, they've missed the critical balance of picking and managing partners who can leverage customer insight and use it to deliver better experiences.

"To regain control, B2B leaders will orchestrate their sales ecosystem by seeing partners as an extension of their business and empower them with customer insights, coaching and support. Only then can they fully tap their connected growth potential."

Accenture recommends that B2B companies seeking to deliver customer experiences that will drive connected growth should:

- **Focus on "ecosystem orchestration", not partner management** — Accenture says companies have the potential to regain control over customer experiences by viewing indirect partners as "extensions of their own business and critical enablers of customer value", and by

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teaming up with a select network of partners and ensuring they are well supported.

- **Be a supportive partner** — If companies want to deliver exceptional customer experiences, they need to be providing “connected insights” to their partners, says Accenture; the goal should be to facilitate continuous information sharing.
- **Get set with the right tech** — Technical tools including customer data management, analytics and social technologies can further help B2B companies deliver the kind of customer experiences that will set them apart from competitors.

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That would only be applicable to a particular category of goods/services. Take the apparel industry for example. You wake up in the morning and put clothes on because its the societal norm. Marketers are more concerned with the aesthetic appeal that a brand offers as it is the primary driver that defines consumer preference. A customer can still experience the value of association with the brand and if that customer is satisfied that the marketing meets their expectation they will repeat the process until there is a disconnect

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between the pitch and the product. What is more interesting is how the a "customer experience" is being simulated before the purchase is made. This will define brands moving forward in the 21st century. Webpages in 2D displaying pages of product no longer suffice at the top end of the market. New hardware within the home environment in particular (mirror technology) and on large screen audio visual equipment will be the platforms for this target market .This demographic is looking to be sold on reasons for making the purchase prompting the marketer to devise new methods of how they would be perceived as advocates for these respective brands. Established high Street retail brands will compete more aggressively for this lucrative market as they have the advantage of valuable brand capital and a customer base with deep pockets to further expand on the appeal associated with premium quality. This demographic is unlikely to be impacted by mainstream online e commerce . Associated infrastructure (i.e retail property) that accommodates this market sphere will only expand as the majority its customers & prospective customers still place an incredible amount of value on personal interaction (high level of service) at the point of sale.

In summary it would be prudent to reiterate that this type of marketing DOESN'T apply to everything, it is merely a very profitable niche that will develop within a particular segment of the market

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