

CX/UX

Preparing for a new era of digital engagement

Changing customer expectations and new technologies such as AI are reshaping the digital landscape, forcing brands to adapt or risk falling behind, writes **Jason Walsh**



Customer experience (CX) can make or break a brand, as how we experience our interactions directly impacts our satisfaction, the likelihood of loyalty, and therefore a company's bottom line.

Today, with more and more interactions – whether in marketing or commerce itself – shifting online, one key question, then, is: how can brands simplify their online interactions with their customers?

For a start, brands should prioritise their customers as people, not just data points, said Ger Hayden, director of digital at digital marketing agency Core Optimisation.

Despite the fast pace of the digital world, many brands remain slow to adapt, with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) only now driving meaningful changes, he said.

"The shift away from cookies and toward first-party data has highlighted the importance of transparency, consent, and control. Customers now expect greater privacy and clearer handling of their data, pushing

brands to build trust and deliver value beyond just compliance," he said.

For CX success, he said, brands should focus on a strategy that encompasses a single customer journey, thus avoiding siloed strategies for ads, on-site interactions, and post-purchase engagement.

"It's essential that we have a strategy for the entire journey experience," he said.

In addition, Hayden said customer relationship management (CRM) integration was a must, as connecting CRM systems with digital platforms allowed the tracking of customer engagement, measuring of lifetime value, and assessment of real business impact.

Thirdly, he said, a bespoke measurement strategy was necessary to build a measurement framework aligned with the customer journey and media strategy.

"Tier metrics into tactical, operational, and business-level insights to focus on outcomes, not just data gaps," he said.

However, things are not standing still. Technology itself is driving changes that need to be noted and adapted to.

"A prime example is Google Lens, now the fast

Core Optimisation
Year founded: 2015
Number of staff: 57
Why it is in the news: AI is driving change in user behaviour, so organisations need to think about marketing in a new context

“People now expect seamless, user-friendly experiences as the norm. Customers don't compare brands to their competitors – they compare them to the best in the industry”

est-growing media type on Google, with 20 billion visual searches every month – 25 per cent of which have commercial intent. By the end of 2024, Google's AI Overview on search engine results pages is projected to reach over one billion users," he said.

This integration of AI into search engines, alongside new players like Perplexity and ChatGPT, promise to make searches more intuitive, personalised, and efficient, allowing users to find what they need faster.

However, for businesses, this presents opportunities to enhance customer experiences with tailored content and highly targeted campaigns.

"The shift in user behaviour is already evident, with more conversational searches becoming the norm. Notably, 15 per cent of all Google searches made daily are brand new."

Businesses can harness AI to create more relevant and engaging content, make better decisions at scale, and leverage data modelling for more accurate predictions. However, true success comes from combining AI with human expertise.

Ger Hayden, director of digital, Core Optimisation
Keith Wiseman



AI powered by human direction is key, as it blends the efficiency and insights of machine learning with the creativity, ethical judgment, and strategic thinking that only humans can provide.

The consumer experience

Of course, not all markets, or indeed transactions, are the same. Reaching consumers, for instance, can require a very different strategy from reaching business customers.

However, while the context differs between B2B and B2C, the goal remains the same; understanding, reaching and measuring customers with an optimal experience, Hayden said.

"In B2B, customers are becoming more accustomed to immediate, streamlined experiences and, as an industry, we've become too focused on hiding pricing, and case studies behind non-transparent data collection and lead generation techniques.

"As customer behaviour continues to demand transparency and instant information; the brands that create trust through clear pricing, in-depth case studies, and professional communication will win. B2C customers seek seamless experiences across every touchpoint – from engaging with ads to navigating a frictionless website and service."

In addition, he said, an often-overlooked factor is clear transparency on the speed and convenience of delivery and returns.

Ultimately, Hayden said, customer and user experience should absolutely be standard practice – but they aren't.

"Agencies and marketing teams are often incentivised to increase ad spend rather than get to the root of their growth obstacle, their customer experience.

"These features are no longer optional; people now expect seamless, user-friendly experiences as the norm. Customers don't compare brands to their competitors – they compare them to the best in the industry."

Strategic design solutions exactly when you need them

JASON WALSH

Experience debt may be a new term, but it is far from a new problem: whether through acquisition or ad-hoc decision-making, organisations find past choices, which may well have been right at the time, come back to haunt them.

Brian Herron, director at agency Each&Other, said that this kind of experience

debt is something that plagues customer experience, particularly for fast-growing companies.

"We know about technical debt, and what happens there is you continue to build on software because the pressure is on to do something fast, but the underpinnings are not fit for purpose so you're stuck. Then you're left with an anchor behind you as you try to move on, so do you keep going or start again," he said.

"I think that experience

debt is similar, and something we should be talking about. A company scales and the complexity of its software scales, but at some point the CX [customer experience] is held back by previous design choices," he said.

Indeed, it is no surprise that scaling companies make choices at certain points to do certain things, often driven by speed and customer feedback. Everything is tactical, it may even be tacked on, and over time things can become inconsistent and not fully integrated.

"We see it expressed in different ways. It sometimes might be increased churn, lower renewal rates, stalling revenue, reduced upselling and cross-selling," Herron said.

The answer is simple, but not easy: organisations need design leadership. The problem, however, is that it is expensive.

The demands of modern business require not just creativity but also a deep understanding of customer behaviour, technology, and strategy. However, balancing these needs with budget constraints and evolving priorities often leaves design under-used or misaligned with broader business goals.

For companies without the resources for a dedicated in-house design team, or where the workload fluctuates, finding the right solution



Brian Herron, director at agency Each&Other: 'The solution isn't necessarily that there is a genius UX thing to be done. The real gap is around leadership, and around shaping teams'

becomes even more critical. The question is: how do you access top-tier CX design expertise exactly when you need it, without committing to the cost of a full-time hire?

It's an important question, because many organisations neither have the resources to have a full-time design department nor the work to justify one. Of course, the typical response to this has been to turn to an outside agency on a consultancy basis. This works well on a project basis, but what if what is really needed is deeper and ongoing strategic work?

Each&Other, as an agency that specialises in customer

Each&Other
Founded: 2014
Number of staff: 20
Why it is in the news: Each&Other is in the process of launching a novel fractional head of design service

insight, user experience (UX) and digital product design, thinks it has the answer: embedding design skills deeply inside organisations.

"It might be time to con-

sider a fractional head of design. You hear about fractional CIOs [chief information officers], but we're applying the same principle to design," said Herron.

This is where the concept of a fractional head of design has the potential to be transformative: by embedding an experienced design leader into the organisation on a part-time basis, companies gain access to strategic design guidance without the overhead of a full-time hire.

It's a model that allows organisations to address both immediate tactical needs and long-term strategic goals, Herron said, and enables or-

ganisations to course-correct while scaling, as a fractional head of design brings the expertise to assess what's working, identify where experience debt is accumulating, and create a roadmap to evolve the customer experience in a sustainable way.

By addressing experience debt proactively, businesses can avoid the pitfalls of disjointed customer journeys.

The model is particularly appealing to businesses navigating rapid growth or digital transformation as it brings on board someone who can work across teams, break down silos, and champion the customer perspective consistently.

For organisations struggling with fragmented experiences or grappling with scaling challenges, the solution may not be to redesign the entire ship but to steer it with precision – and certainly not to keep adding more systems, processes or code.

"Everything is built at a certain time and, in most cases, that decision makes sense. Right up until it doesn't. At that point, what you do not want to be doing is bolting on ad-hoc choices with no guiding system beneath steering how they can fit together," he said.

Having a fractional head of design also empowers organisations to make informed decisions about their design investments. By providing

strategic guidance and expertise, a fractional head of design can help organisations prioritise projects, allocate resources effectively, and measure the impact of their design efforts, for precisely as long as is needed – and no longer.

"You may need someone only for 12 to 18 months. Are you ready to make a hire for that? Someone with relevant industry experience, who can command a salary of, minimum, €140,000 a year?"

The solution is the same as it ever was with CX and UX delivery, Herron said, which is to say: understand what you need to do, what the market is doing, and then design to scale. The point, however, is that a fractional head of design can be the motivator needed to ensure this actually happens.

"The map or route to getting a better solution is set out, but the internal teams are set up to deliver business as usual. The teams are set up to take instruction, nip around the edges, and deliver the next feature, and they may lack experience in delivering big things. Also, because they are internal and because they are seen as execution, they may not be able to have the voice to bring a new idea.

"The solution isn't necessarily that there is a genius UX thing to be done. The real gap is around leadership, around organisation, and around shaping teams," he said.

It's okay... if your customers hate your website & can't use your apps*

*We don't think it's okay. If you feel the same way, we should talk.

Each&Other
Competitive advantage by design.
www.eachandother.com