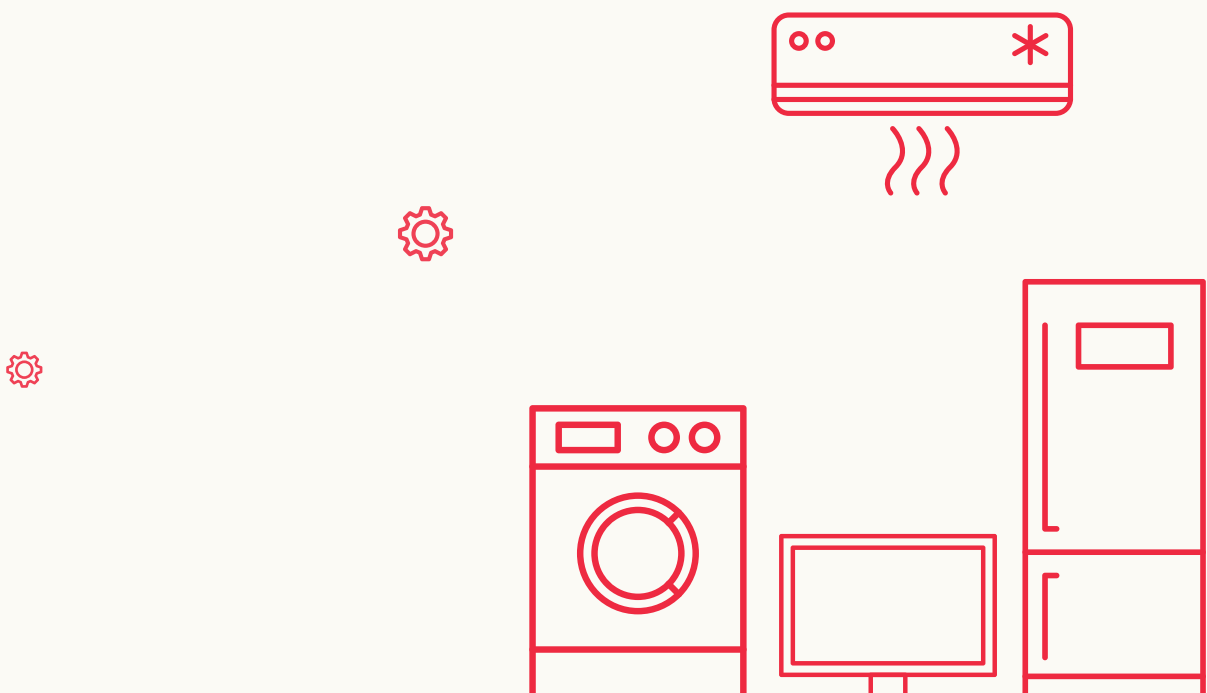# Six Essentials to Perfecting a CX Strategy: Consumer Durables

Your customers expect it, you need to deliver, here's how to do it right

Consumer durables fall under a specific category of products shared by ecommerce. A consumer durable can be described as any product that doesn't need to be purchased often, typically lasting three years or more, says the U.S. Dept of Commerce. Your typical appliances like TVs, home computers, dishwashers, and the like fall under this category which also includes furniture, cars, and jewelry. While sellers of durables do not sell to the same person often, the overall sales figures are an important marker for an economy's strength. In fact, the sale of durables is considered to be an economic growth engine. In the US, it made up 8.5% of GDP in 2023 and by July, it was valued at over $2.3 trillion in spending. A rise in spending on consumer durables has a direct and positive effect on GDP growth. People like to purchase durables, which are generally expensive when they have money to spend and are prosperous.

Consumer durables
market expansion

Over the last three years, the consumer durables market (CDM) was not at its best, and underperformed, say analysts. The long-term effects of the COVID pandemic on the markets are expected to recover in the coming year (2024). Inflationary pressures might be letting up, but global income stagnation is still very much an issue, so there is a reduced demand for new durables, and the high interest rates mean people hesitate to use their credit cards for new purchases, studies show. However, the contraction seen in 2023 might see an improvement in the coming years.

Production and manufacture of durables also shows a positive outlook for the coming year and going forward, globally. Looking at the numbers we can see that year-on-year (2023 to 2024) production improves by 3.3% and sales output goes up 3.4% while investment is up 3.7%

Consumer durables are expected to function and last long among buyers. Almost no one would invest their money in a car, for example, and want it to break down often. One of the reasons consumer durables is valued as an economic marker is because of the way it holds value. A market to sell/buy used products exists because even a 3-year old dishwasher still holds value. How then, does a manufacturer or seller ensure their customers have a great experience with them through the duration of their journey?
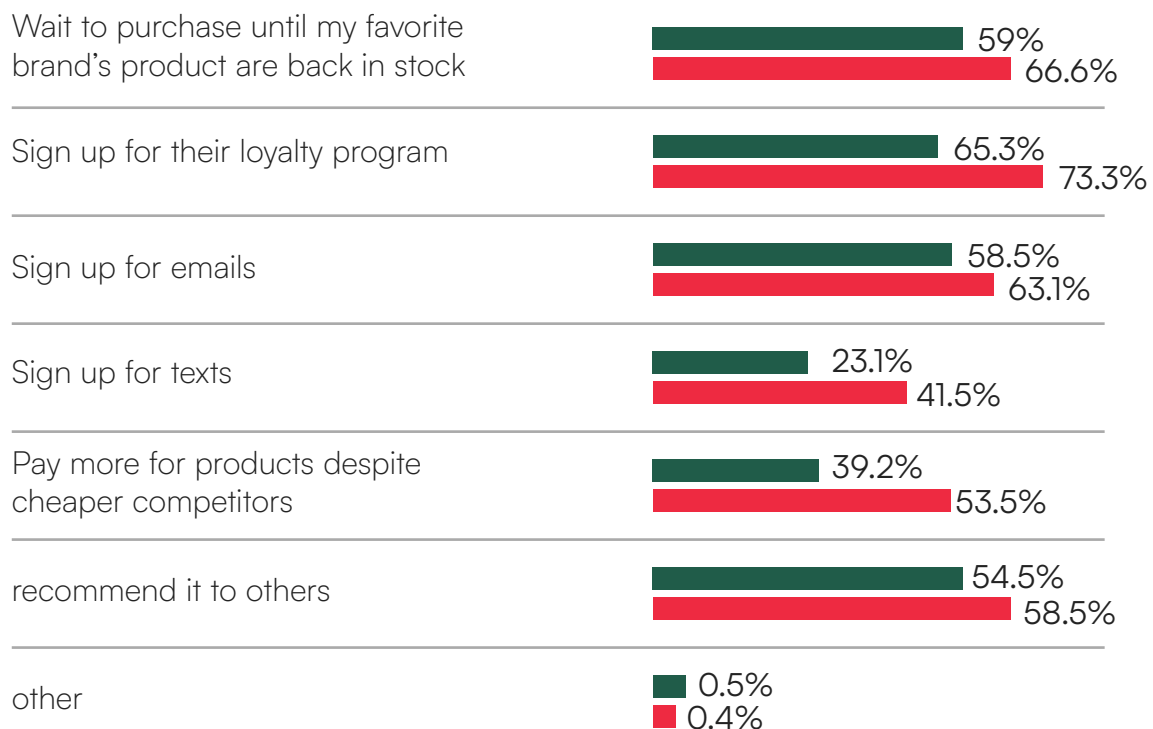
People are creatures of habit. Below are findings of a study conducted on typical buyer attitude and loyalty to certain brands. Buyers tend to stick with their brands of choice and brands have it in themselves to retain their loyal customers. It is for this reason, creating an ecosystem so that people get an all-round experience through their journey from time of purchase, through any service issues they may have, all the way to replacement with a new version of the product remains vital. When customer experience (CX) is right, customers rather stay than look for alternates. A study found that 66.6% people are willing to wait for their favorite brands to restock and that 53.5% people would rather buy from their favored brand, even if it means higher prices.

What would you do
for a brand you're loyal to?

■ **Global Answers**   ■ **US Answers**

Wait to purchase until my favorite brand's product are back in stock
- 59%
- 66.6%

Sign up for their loyalty program
- 65.3%
- 73.3%

Sign up for emails
- 58.5%
- 63.1%

Sign up for texts
- 23.1%
- 41.5%

Pay more for products despite cheaper competitors
- 39.2%
- 53.5%

recommend it to others
- 54.5%
- 58.5%

other
- 0.5%
- 0.4%

CX in the consumer durables market

Just like every other sector, CX in the CDM is vastly different. The CDM in itself consists of various product lines and entire industries within itself. CX expectations of a car buyer and a washing machine buyer cannot be the same, and so it can't be treated the same way. There are, however, several similarities as well. Both require showrooms, catalogs, an expert to demo and sell the product, an active after-sales service system, and even field service teams. Let's break down the different touchpoints that a potential customer would typically go through in their journey in the CDM—in this example we have a person who is in the market for a refrigerator.

Step 1

Walks into an appliance store/big box store/ checks online

Step 2

Narrows down a long list of potential fridges

Step 3

Makes the decision to purchase and places order

Step 4

Manufacturer sends technicians to install and demo the fridge

Step 5

Starts using the appliance

Step6

Encounters an issue so reaches out to customer care

Step7

Customer care attempts to troubleshoot the problem on a call
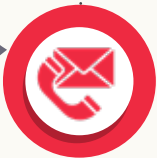
Step8
Service booking taken

Step9
Technicians arrive on-site to fix the problem

Step10
Follow-up from service center to ask about service

Step11
Service center offers extended warranty

Step12
Schedule regular maintenance

Step13
End of life for refrigerator

Step14
Walks into an appliance store/big box store/ checks online for new fridge

As seen in the above flowchart, there are multiple touch points that customers can use to interact with brands spread out over many years. Having a strong CX system is not only vital, it is the only way to go. The market is fiercely competitive and stand out brands are the ones who are also CX leaders.

The entire cycle as seen above could last anywhere from 7 to 9 years, often longer, as well-maintained examples are used for 15 to 17 years with regular service. A major component of any CDM product and unique to this sector is the wide range of after-sales services that have to be made available. Every one of these services come with their own layers of complexity. In case of vehicles, they are usually brought in, that means, there can be a customer coming in for a variety of reasons, so spares, service engineers, insurance agents and a host of employees all come together to make the interaction at this point as smooth as possible. For an appliance or other related products, there are field agents who get sent to the customer's home to solve any issues on site. It involves coordination, scheduling, and a system where the service engineers are already aware of the issues that need solving. Every one of these points of contact are opportunities to deliver great CX.

CX delivery in consumer durables

As with everything in the ever-evolving market and CX practices, there is no one set of rules to follow and narrowing something so vast and multi-layered. There are, however, ground-rules that govern any good CX effort. Considering consumer durables have a long arm and reach people for many years, winning back lost trust is both difficult and not always successful. A 2021 study revealed that while bad word of mouth can be bad for a brand, positive word of mouth is significantly more effective. The sheer impact of positive word of mouth eclipsed negative comments, so gathering positive reviews is the way to go as opposed to trying to avoid negative ones. A McKinsey study also found that 90% of all CDM products sold online were rated 3.7 stars or higher with every one-tenth increase in star ratings translating to a 6% growth in sales. If inferred from the point of view of CX, good CX that in turn leads to positive customer reviews affects the CDM sector way more than other retail sectors, the study found.

The trend continues even when the price of durables increases. The "inflationary environment" that the global economy was in, starting Jan 2021 to Jan 2022 saw the Consumer Price Index for urban consumers (CPI-U) went up to 7.5%—the paper notes that this has been the largest CPI-U spike since the early 1980s. In market conditions such as these, a positive experience makes an impact. Consumer behavior is such that when prices increase, spending becomes a lot more cautious and only the brands that offer great products backed by great CX continue to make sales.

Identifying
customer needs

Expectations and needs are major factors in purchase decisions for today's customers. In fact, studies have found that 88% of buyers feel that the experience a brand provides is as important as the product. From the CDM side, 80% of marketers also agree with the sentiment. The yearly "State of the connected customer" report notes that 66% of customers feel that companies should already know and understand their expectations. Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen posits a fresh outlook on this subject. He calls customer needs Jobs to be Done (JTBD) because customers don't just buy products, they rather hire them to get a job done. In the case of durables, it can be a refrigerator to preserve food or a washing machine to clean clothes.

Similarly, customer needs, he argues, is a job to be done for a service provider. The paper defines JTBD as "*a circumstances-based description of understanding your customers' desires, competitive set, anxieties, habits, and timeline of purchase.*" Customers' purchases are defined by how well services fit their requirements.

Christensen lays out ways to successfully identify these JTBDs and in extension, customer needs

Look internally

As a first step, it makes sense that a company that offers a service starts off by asking their own employees "what would you do?" (WWYD) Before buying a dishwasher, WWYD? When something goes wrong and you need assistance, WWYD? Would you be comfortable calling your own customer service assistance numbers? Would you trust your execs to reply to an email on time? Where would you rather go when you need service assistance? All companies, brands and CX providers are made of humans, the very same target demographic your brand seeks are already in the company, so start there.

Observe current customers

Your current customers are possibly the best source of information when it comes to CX expectations. In a perfect world, you can ask every customer what they want, need, and expect and solve for them every time, but that's not a reasonable ask. You can, however, observe their behavior, see how the product is used, keep a finger on the pulse as it were. There are forums online, social pages, and even insights to be gained from service technicians. It is possible to glean a lot of information just from hands-off observation. User stats, for example, hold valuable data. Going back to the dishwasher example, if it is a smart appliance with app connectivity, it would be easy to understand a number of things like how the device is used, how many times a day, what the troubleshooting stats are, based on usage, what kind of complaints are likely, if there are any points of failure across the model line and such.

Another more direct way to gather insights will be to gather user feedback. Can you push for feedback from regular users at various points in the user's journey? A quick phone conversation spaced out over months or years can offer real-world insights that are impossible to get from testing in a lab. Post service feedback and feedback taken during the complaint process also offer valuable insights into what the customer thinks of your CX efforts.

Talk to past customers

While we have seen the value of positive feedback and how it helps with getting new customers and retaining old ones, negative feedback can also offer a great outlook on the product. While the common wisdom as preached by most pundits online would be to ignore the negativity, there are reasons why a user who chose to buy the product faced grievances and was not able to get past the bad experience. Any gaps in the CX processes can be found here. Sending out surveys or questionnaires or even interviewing people who have left your brand for a competitor can be quite telling. Non-customers are also a great source of unfiltered information. A person who walked by and chose another brand can offer a unique perspective on why they chose differently.

Once a brand nails down what their own customers want, need, and love to have, it lays a strong foundation for something like a great CX strategy.

Making customer needs
the company's needs

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A customer-first strategy prioritizes CX over everything else which in turn reaps great rewards for the company. Having a CX base to all aspects of the business means you create lasting relationships, see a positive business growth, all of it accounts to a foundation of profitability. Looking at the last decade, the most industry-disrupting companies have all been ones that were built around placing customer needs first.
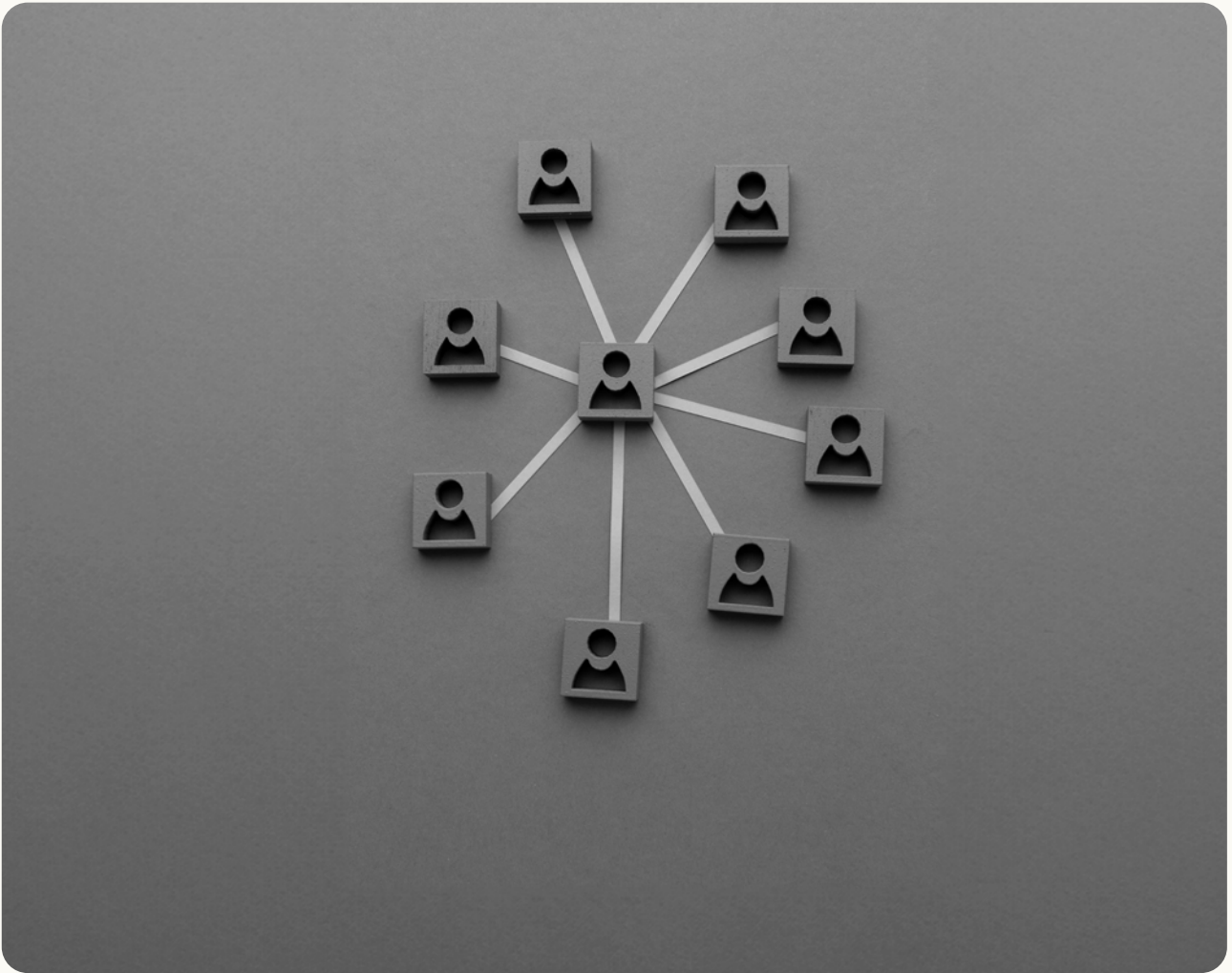
Happy customers spend more, buy more, and keep coming back. In fact, research suggests that 87% of customers who received good service will come back. They also speak to their friends and family about this great brand. Durables brands that are known for their customer-first attitude like Toyota—a brand that regularly finds itself on top of customer satisfaction lists—have an almost cult-like following from their closest and best customers. Their insistence on quality and the best after-sales service among all car makers around the world has catapulted them into becoming one of the largest players in the automobile space and has kept them there for decades. Loyalists even go on to purchase Lexus cars—Toyota's luxury division—when they are in a position to buy more expensive vehicles.

Another positive impact that customer CX-heavy companies experience is that employees who work there are more likely to stay. Being positive and

empathetic at work and in interactions with people as well as being associated with a brand makes employees want to stay. A study found that companies that are CX-forward also have high employee retention. It is not so far-fetched to surmise that a company with positive values and treating customers well also does the same with their own offering great job satisfaction.

76% of employees in companies with high customer empathy find their jobs to be meaningful while in companies that are not known for customer empathy, only 49% employees feel this way. Harvard professor James L. Heskett says company culture accounts for an employee performance differential of between 20-30%, that means making employees feel like they are doing meaningful work significantly affects the company's profitability.

The positives do not end there, the report says. A company loses up to 33% of every employee's salary every year, when they leave. Now multiply that amount for every employee who leaves throughout the year and it quickly adds up. Of the people who think of their workplace as one that prioritizes CX, 83% believe they will continue to work there for two years or more, but only 56% employees feel that way about companies that are known to be low on empathy.

Delivering
customer convenience

Every time a customer has to contact a service center, they are there because they were not able to solve an issue on the website, through self-service or FAQs. Today's customers are hesitant to call and would rather sort out issues by themselves. When the call does come through, they expect results. The idea is not just to create a great call answering environment, but to make it as easy as possible for paying customers to get served. Any service provider in the CDM need to have multiple points of contact through which a customer can reach them; email, phone, socials, chatbots on the site, registering through an app, or even walk-ins. Each of these touchpoints can no longer operate in their own silos and have got to embrace the idea of omnichannel services.

A simple way to look at this would be that when a customer, for example, one who has recently purchased a mechanical work table has a problem with the control pad. They are likely to first look at the manual, which already has a set of troubleshooting options, but did not work. Next step might be to look up online on the site where there are options for both self-service and FAQs, there might even be a chatbot there to help. So the person enters their name, the model number and email ID, in this case, there is already enough information with the service team to create a simple persona of the customer. Their email ID is likely to match with one provided during the time of purchase, at which time, their model number, details about the product, where it was made, where it was sold, with the date and time should already be a part of the customer profile. So when they do call in for a service appointment, the exec taking the call, should in all likelihood not have the customer repeat any information at all. An omnichannel system does just this. Apart from other functions, populates customer profiles making it easy for both customer and service providers alike.

85% believe consistent communication across the business at every touch point to be a vital factor in their journey with the brand.

For a consumer durables brand, it goes a step further. Continuing the example above, if the customer needs a service technician to come in and change parts or do a round of maintenance, they can also be assigned, communicate this to the customer and get an appointment with all their details already in place, all of this can happen in one call, and every call center would want to maximize their first call resolution stats, also possible only through an omnichannel system.

When the customer feels heard and responses are helpful, it is, in effect, delivery of great CX. From a customer service exec point of view, handling calls on a regular basis and being able to perform their tasks in the most effective way possible requires them to have the right tools. An omnichannel system offers them a clear overview of all the caller's history of complaints, their open tickets, and all their conversations from various touchpoints. Even if they were to move the case on to a different team or create resolutions, every action is simplified.

Handling returns
and refurbishments

A unique and vital component of any consumer durables seller is the after-sales returns and refurbishments. While durables are expected to last a decade or more, there are chances of damaged goods, or faulty items from the factory, there may be failures that crop up due to unforeseen defects. In cases like these, the seller has a few options—they can fix the issue, replace the product, or they can take the item back and offer a refund for the item. How these processes are handled determines CX for the aggrieved customer.

The sentiment toward returns policies was not something that a company or brand spoke of as a USP in the past, simply because it was considered a matter of pride to sell "the best" products. Advertising the returns or being liberal with returns had the danger of being perceived as the company selling faulty products, easy to scam, or even the company not being confident about what they are selling. The sentiments, however, have shifted significantly over the years. A company that offers returns and refunds when customers request it, is seen as a company so confident in their product that they are willing to replace a faulty example because of how rare it is for them to sell defective items—it is just a matter of simple perspective. It also puts out the message that they care about the customer and what they think about their products, which in turn makes the customer feel better about their purchases.

While there will always be bad players who seek to exploit return and refund policies, it is not usually the norm. How much risk a company wants to take on themselves comes down to their own internal policies, but making it easy for customers to reach and return faulty products should be a priority. Studies show

that 80% of customers are deterred from making a purchase if they get to know that a brand's return policy and procedures are known to be "difficult". More so if the prospective buyer is in the decision making phase of their purchase and there are other options that offer better service. Minimizing returns abuse is important and it pays to be vigilant, so long as it doesn't get in the way of CX efforts. Any company, especially one the durables space where people expect a long-lasting product with unreasonable restrictions ultimately becomes appealing to the masses.

Standardizing
after sales service

Unlike other retail or e-commerce sectors, CDM customers typically require a lot of support, this is right after their purchase, and for years of services after. One of the biggest complaints that people have with durables is that the pre-sales strategy is usually great, the approach, pitch, and sale are polished and perfected to convince the buyer that the product in itself is a great option, but oftentimes, post sales interactions are less than optimal.

If you are a maker and seller of durables, consider an example of a person in the market for an air conditioning unit. You have a great product, future-proofed, energy efficient and in the right price range. You have complete faith in the technology and product and sell the product with confidence, you even offer free shipping and installation at the customer's residence. From the customer's point of view, they have purchased and experienced positive CX. However, owing to unforeseen circumstances, there is a defect in the product, there seems to be a bug in the app connectivity, which might require a technical expert to get on the phone and help sort out any software-related issues, if unsuccessful, there might be an update required from the hardware side, or it might even

require the replacement of the device altogether. All of these steps need to be coordinated to perfection and that is where many manufacturers fall short. It is not out of wonton malice or the lack of care about the product they are selling, in fact, these slip ups happen in spite of best efforts.

No company wants to ignore its customers, in fact, many companies might not even be aware of how bad it is for some of their customers. Market studies show that 96% of customers will leave a brand if they have bad after-sales experiences. Conversely, 85% of customers will go out of their way if their experiences are great because 51% believe that good CX precedes price as a factor to making purchase decisions. Good experiences also build trust, with 87% of those surveyed showing a positive attitude towards companies that did well, CX-wise. So if you sell a great product but don't back it up with even better service, people will leave and never come back, they will also make sure their friends never buy from you.

One of the best ways to ensure your customers are getting your best is to offer tailor-made services. Reaching out for feedback, sending updates, newsletters and other communications regularly, being proactive with service, and making every touchpoint easy to access and pain-free for the customer, regardless of where they might be on the service life of the product shows the end user that you care about their experiences as well as the product they are using.

# After-sales service: brands that do it well

An example of a consumer durable brand that does just this is Suzuki. One of the largest automobile brands in the world, Suzuki has a wide range of products from commuter cars to race-spec motorcycles and commercial vans and trucks. They sell in 198 countries, and employ over 45,000 people according to internal reports. While they are known globally for their high quality vehicles, they do not operate in the luxury segment, so their competition in the market consists mostly of other brands that make everyday vehicles and a customer base of regular, everyday, working-class people. According to Mototrader, Suzuki's service is not just good for its segment, it is only two points behind the highest scoring brand in the luxury segment. They managed to score a whopping 831 points out of a possible 1,000. The industry average for its segment is only 786, says the report—this report is based on findings in the UK market.

Another brand in the CDM that also offers excellent after-sales support in Lenovo, according to reports. Being one of the largest in the PC sector, their CX after-sales solution is also tech-based. The Lenovo Vantage app comes pre-installed in all Lenovo PCs and helps customers not only register and log their purchase with the company, it also allows users to keep track of their device health, warranty information, and service history in one place. If users need to contact support, need information about the components in the device, get software updates, or check for any new patches that may have been released, it is all available through the Vantage app. If the person gets on call with a service agent, they already have all the information they need at a glance as the Vantage app has built-in dashboards. As far as creating a seamless experience with PCs goes, Lenovo is well ahead of the curve, experts say.

Employing a consistent end-to-end CX platform

Any CX platform will have a few features and abilities that allow a customer support team to offer a level of service that they might not otherwise be able to deliver. It can be as simple as having a list of numbers and queries on a spreadsheet to a complex CRM platform with dashboards and ticketing system with metrics that track everything from call duration to tone of feedback. The best one for your brand is somewhere in that space. A one-size fits all solution might not be the best option for you as every brand varies vastly in their service offerings. A customizable CX platform that best suits your business needs is the only way to go if you want to offer real, consistent and high quality service. Here are a few prerequisites to a great CX platform and why you need to get onboard with one custom-made for your company.

Tickets

Callbacks

Appoint-
ments

CX platform

Feedback

Allotm-
ents

Trackers

Services
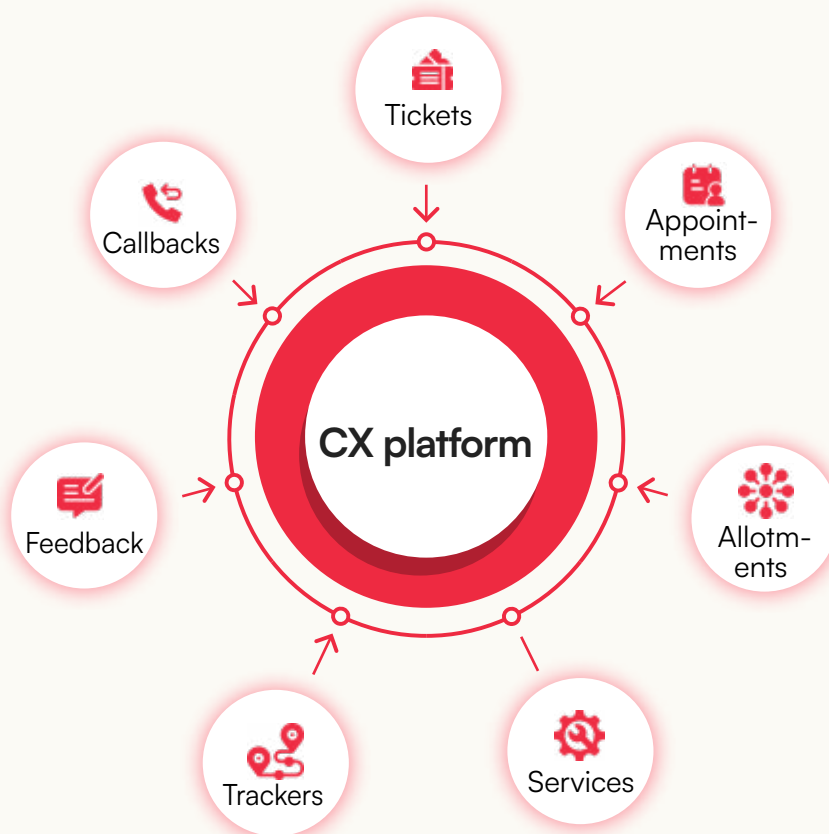
🎟️ Tickets

The first and arguably the most important part of any CX platform is its ability to create and track tickets. Tickets come from multiple sources, be it email, inbound calls, social media DMs, SMS, messaging platforms, chatbots, official apps, and any other way a customer can get a hold of you. An omnichannel ticketing system is the only way to go in today's market. Considering the multiple channels open to people, the volume of complaints and tickets raised has increased dramatically. A tool like Kapture makes handling the entire ticketing process simple and straightforward. Service agents receive complaints from multiple sources, sometimes the same customer might be lodging multiple tickets for the same issue.
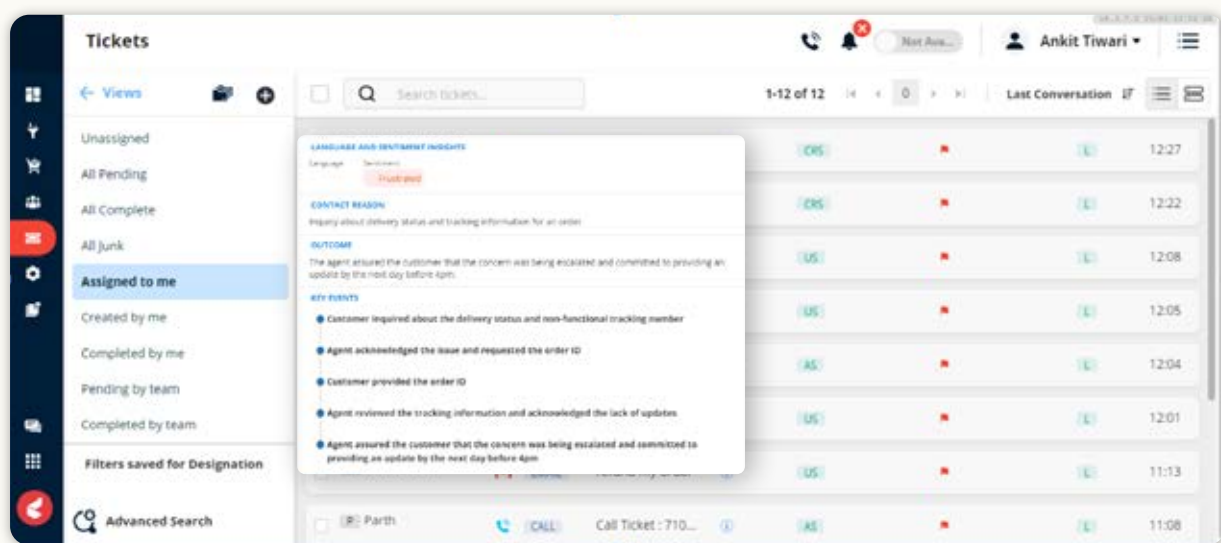
The system auto-populates tickets with all the details needed for the service agent to carry the complaint forward to the relevant teams. Information related to the ticket includes name, address, make/model, a detailed description of the issue, customer expectations, and any other details as deemed necessary. All this information is stored in perpetuity as part of the customer's profile or persona, so if the customer comes back with any other complaint, the service agent already has the information with them.

Appointments

As a part of the ticketing system, and if the customer's issue is not solved in the first call, especially for durables would be to either bring the product in for a service (smaller electronics, vehicles, and the like) or have a service technician sent home to fix the problem. Appointments on Kapture CX works on multiple levels for your service agents. First, the system logs in the time, date, and address where they need to go. Next the system looks for service techs who are active in the area or location that is nearest to where they operate, at the third level, the AI-powered system allots tickets to techs based on their expertise.

Each of the techs are allotted tickets through a custom mobile app—Kapture Field Service—through which they can log jobs. The same app also tracks their location, the start and end time for each job as well as maintains their on-hand inventory for spares and other particulars—all fully integrated and open to view by agents both in-house and in the field.

⚙️ Services

Kapture's CX platform simplifies service calls for the attending technicians. Kapture AI assigns tickets based on technician location through Pin Code Mapping and Geo-tagging, so they don't have to spend too much time traveling between jobs. Whenever applicable, the Skill-based Routing feature allots technicians jobs for which they show expertise. So if the ticket requires work related to the mechanics of a washing machine, for example, a tech who is proficient in that specific repair will be sent. The system works perfectly if you are a brand that makes multiple devices and each of those can have their own experts trained and provide the best possible service.

The companion app has the on-hand inventory of each service agent, so they can be notified if they are running low on spares and they will also know at a glance if they have all the spares needed for a job. At the site, if they run into issues that require more servicing or they uncover new issues, they can notify inventory teams in the warehouse through the app, wasting no time. If parts are not available at the warehouse, they can be ordered from the manufacturer as well.

🛰️ Trackers

Kapture CX works to not only make life easier for your customers, it also helps optimize the workflow for service agents and field techs. The app makes it possible for the entire service team to keep track of all agents on the field, helping them get to each job on time. When on-site, the app also gives each tech access to the Knowledge Management System. The KMS is a repository of all schematics and service manuals accessible through the app, this includes bomb-maps of all the parts, including parts numbers and replacement instructions. When guesswork is taken out of a repair job, it makes the repairs a lot more accurate and the service reliable, delivering better results and CX.

Feedback

Once the work is completed and the appointment fulfilled, the customer can give instant feedback that triggers the end of the job. It can be set up in such a way that the technician initiates a job closing, and the customer receives a link for feedback and an OTP through SMS. The ticket is either closed with the OTP or is taken to the next step, any escalations can also be recorded on the spot if the service is found to be less than satisfactory. Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) survey links will take the user to a form with details regarding the quality of the technician, overall service, and other details.

Callbacks

After the ticket is closed, or if there is an escalation that needs immediate attention, the system continues to track and prompt agents to resolve the issue. All these details get stored in the customer's profile and persona file so they will not have to repeat themselves and explain their whole journey. Callbacks also are a great source of valuable first-hand feedback.

The Kapture CX system on the whole can elevate not only your EX, but also your CX scores. Its AI-powered omnichannel approach and advanced capabilities that include seamless integration into existing systems, historical data, and compatibility with over 1,000 apps means delivering CX of the highest quality becomes pain-free for your agents. Considering the add-ons available and tailor-made for your specific consumer durables brand, including an all-powerful mobile app for field agents, the choice is not that difficult to make.

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