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CUSTOMER ACUMEN

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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

In today's fast-paced, technology-driven society, the phrase "adapt or perish" rings truer than ever. Digital transformation is not merely a buzzword; it is a fundamental shift reshaping how businesses operate and interact with customers.

The migration of brands to the digital world signifies more than just a transition from physical to online services. It represents a profound evolution in customer engagement, convenience, and experience. Businesses that succeed in this migration understand that their customers crave the speed, accessibility, and personalization that digital platforms offer. With the rise of e-commerce, social media, and mobile applications, consumers expect instant access to products and services. The digital world offers unparalleled convenience: transactions can be completed with a few clicks, customer service is available 24/7, and personalized recommendations make shopping experiences more relevant and enjoyable.

For businesses, the advantages are equally compelling. Digital platforms provide a treasure trove of data, allowing companies to understand their customers better and tailor their offerings more precisely. The insights gleaned from customer interactions can drive innovation, improve products, and enhance marketing strategies. Moreover, automation and AI reduce operational costs and increase efficiency, giving businesses the agility to respond swiftly to market changes.

However, the journey to digital transformation is not without challenges. Businesses must address issues such as cyber security, data privacy, and the digital divide. It is crucial to ensure that all customers, regardless of their technological proficiency, can transition smoothly.

This quarter in Customer Acumen, we look at '**Leaving the Past Behind: Migrating Customers to the Digital World'**.

Jay's article highlights that businesses must understand the psychological process of transitioning during digital transformation, ensuring trust, transparency, and constant engagement to maintain customer loyalty in a fast-paced digital world. In the **Spotlight** section, **Praveen Joseph, AVP - Records Management (South Asia), Crown Worldwide Group** highlights that digital transformation is crucial for businesses to stay competitive by enhancing efficiency, meeting customer expectations, and leveraging new technologies, with clear communication of its benefits through personalized and consistent messaging. We review **Jake Dunlap's "The Innovative Seller: Keeping Pace in an AI and Customer-Centric World"** which is a strategic playbook for sales

professionals, emphasizing the importance of AI, personalized customer experiences, and adaptability in sales strategies to thrive in today's dynamic marketplace.

Our in-house Cartoonist, **Vikram Nandwani** highlights the power of digital transformation!

We value your relationship with us and look forward to your feedback and comments on how best we can serve you through our e-zine, **Customer Acumen.**
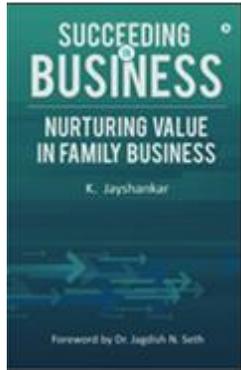
Wise change makers are those who remember William Bridges' words in his classic work on Change, 'It is not the changes that do you in, it's the transitions'. Businesses that forget this pay a heavy price in delayed timelines and cost of implementation, besides hours of wasted and frustrated effort, and more. Bridges insisted that change happens externally. It is situational, and a given, and we really have no control over it. Players win or lose the game in the moments of transition, as this internal psychological process requires support, since it is the battleground of resistance. Highlighting the three major stages of that we go through during the transition, Bridges saw it as an experiential journey of Ending what currently is (the loss and letting go part), moving to a Neutral Zone, and finally The New Beginning, when we have accepted a changed reality to continue living.

Businesses also must understand this cycle when dealing with customers. However, many firms have faltered in their digital transformation journey by treating it merely as a technological (mis)step. While one could understand that the pioneers in the digital world where explorers who did not know better, it is a matter of concern when even today firms transpose physical processes into an electronic format and consider it digital changeover. The worst cases that come to mind for such idiocy are web portals of many government undertakings. Their indifference to citizens (actually consumers) is palpable in the coarse manner in which they seek unnecessary information, with unfriendly navigation interfaces. Truth be told, it reeks of the physical world where insensitive government officials made you fill documents in triplicate and run rings around you by making you go from pillar to post to complete routine transactions.

Once the customer who is resistant to change transitions to the digital realm, companies are faced with the task of starting anew to guarantee their continued loyalty and retention. Bridges spoke of new beginnings, and that is relevant in the world of business too. After discovering the pleasures of digital transactions (speed, ease, comfort, variety, and such other benefits), the customer - as is her wont, and her legitimate right - begins to survey the landscape to check out who else can offer similar or even better benefits. This is what a seller has to be prepared for. If you have not ring-fenced your customer, you are likely to lose her to competition who are out to poach them with the promise of better experiences. Wooing customers has therefore to be an on-going activity and not episodic events.

What is it that binds customers to you in the digital world? What has not changed from the days of the physical store is the issue of trust generated by performance results from the products and services offered by the firm. However, in the digital world of virtual transactions, more factors are in play. Loyalty from customers is the outcome of multiple engagements across touch points and even through omni channels. Overcoming resistance from customers is a small matter compared to tackling the natural resistance that is wired into the DNA of internal employees. The cultural modifications that need to be tackled to deal with the saboteurs (both active and passive) within a firm is a grave matter that cannot be ignored. Bridging the talent and skill gap for business transformation involves both a mindset change and process modification. And, if you add regulatory compliance (as in financial industry, for instance), penalty for breaches can cripple the firm (remember Paytm). However, the greatest threat of all today is data security and concerns on privacy. The reluctance of customers is genuine when they have been singed by data theft and consequent financial and reputational loss. Regaining digital trust after such a fatal episode is extremely hard and a firm may well right-off such customers for good.

As the digital world progresses, companies too are becoming adept at managing customer relationships in this virtual world. Some instances of good practices include clear communication and total transparency with customers of the firm's policies (not couched in legalese that confuses the user, and which is primarily meant to protect the firm), and an early mea culpa, if and when errors happen. Clear, early and empathetic expression of regret by the firm rather than thrusting the onus of proof on the customer is a good way to win trust - and perhaps Amazon is the best example of such a firm that is widely respected both in the B2B and B2C world for its quick turnaround to customer complaints (an inevitable matter when handling millions of daily transactions). Further, no customer enjoys the feeling of being 'trapped' by the firm once they begin interacting with them. The freedom of being able to 'opt out' at no cost is a welcome trust building measure that is worth investing in from the firm. Let the customer know they are in a relationship with you built on a foundation of choice, rather than compulsion where they are 'locked in' - and the gains can be immense to you. Another important step is to ensure that your business content is updated and refreshed constantly, generating a feeling of comfort to the customer that her knowledge about you is the latest rather than historic.

A last word of caution: that the digital world is extremely fast-paced is a no-brainer. What is also good to note is that rules in this world are being re-written constantly. Indeed, the domain is known for its contra culture of challenge, as that often goes viral. However, in the quest for instant 'likes', firms have tripped and got bruised when they jumped on the bandwagon of the latest trend (Zomato and Pepsi come to mind). To survive in the intense heat of the competition, firms have to draw on the bank of goodwill that they have generated over a long period of time (in the case of legacy brands) or through quick service recoveries, being alive and agile to the heartbeat of the virtual world. Treading with caution, therefore, is good advice for those new migrants to the digital universe.

SP⚬TLIGHT

Praveen Joseph

AVP - Records Management (South Asia),
Crown Worldwide Group

Praveen Joseph is a seasoned professional who has been spearheading the Records Management business in Crown South Asia. His journey with Crown began in 2007 when he joined as an RMS Manager in Chennai. His exceptional leadership skills and strategic acumen led to his promotion to the role of Regional Manager for South India in 2010, overseeing operations in Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai.

In 2013, Praveen's responsibilities expanded to encompass the entire South Asia Business, including India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Over his 16-year tenure with Crown India, Praveen has significantly boosted revenue, elevated India's performance, and gained valuable insights into facility acquisition. He has been instrumental in securing the Colombo facility for Records Management service, a strategic move to tap into the burgeoning market.

Praveen's visionary leadership has been pivotal in expanding the Records Management service portfolio. He has successfully integrated digital transformation solutions, including workflow automation, document management systems, and business process management through AI/ML, and Robotic Process Automation.

His relentless determination, perseverance, and resilience in enhancing the records management business and diversifying service offerings during challenging times have not gone unnoticed. He was recently honored as the runner-up for the inaugural Ken Madrid Award, instituted in memory of Crown's former CEO.

Praveen holds a Master's degree in arts and brings to the table a rich experience of 16 years spanning Sales, Business Development, Operations, Customer Service, and Branch/Region Management. His diverse skill set and comprehensive understanding of the industry position him as a prominent figure in the information management industry.

CA. What is digital transformation and why is it crucial for modern businesses?

PJ: Digital transformation is a critical process that modern businesses must embrace to stay competitive and relevant in today's digital age.

Keeping Up With Customer Expectations: As digital technology evolves, customer expectations change. Businesses need to provide seamless experiences across multiple channels.

Improved Efficiency: Digital transformation automates manual processes, reduces errors, and boosts productivity. Cloud-based solutions allow employees to collaborate efficiently from anywhere in the world.

Competitive Advantage: Leveraging emerging technologies like AI, machine learning, big data, and the Internet of Things provides insights into customer behaviour, streamlines operations, and enhances decision-making.

Cost Savings: By reducing manual labour and streamlining processes, digital transformation helps businesses save costs. For example, adopting cloud storage reduces hardware expenses.

Enhanced Security: Implementing advanced security measures such as multifactor authentication, encryption, and network segmentation protects data from cyber-attacks and minimizes the risk of breaches.

Increased Agility: Digital transformation enables businesses to respond swiftly to changing market conditions and offer innovative products and services.

CA. How can companies effectively communicate the benefits of digital transformation to their customers?

PJ: Communicating the benefits of digital transformation to customers is crucial for successful adoption. Here are some effective strategies:

Customer-Centric Approach: Design and digitize customer journeys to align with their needs and preferences. Understand their pain points and demonstrate how digital changes will enhance their experience.

Consistent Messaging: Capture customer signals across channels and touch points. Use tools like customer experience orchestration and analytics to ensure consistent messaging and experiences, regardless of how customers engage with your company.

Personalization: Target customers with highly personalized communications. Show how digital solutions cater to their unique requirements and strengthen their connection with your brand.

Seamless Interfaces: Implement new digital communication methods, such as automation tools and AI, to create seamless interfaces for customers. Revamp product pages and make purchasing options intuitive on your website.

Highlight Benefits: Clearly articulate the advantages of digital transformation: operational efficiency, streamlined processes, cost savings, customer loyalty, and empowering employees with innovative tools.

Remember, effective communication involves emphasizing how digital changes directly benefit customers, making their lives easier and enhancing their overall experience.

CA. What strategies can be employed to maintain customer trust during the transition to digital services?

PJ: Maintaining customer trust during digital transitions is crucial.

Expedite Prioritization Of The Customer Experience: While integrating systems and processes, ensure that customer experience remains a top priority. Shield customers from disruptions and communicate any changes transparently.

Keep The Lines Of Communication Open: Consistent communication is key. Update customers on statuses and processes during the transition. Make them feel informed and at ease.

Show Your Customers That You Care: Empathize with their concerns. Greet them with friendliness and address any issues promptly. Avoid automating away genuine interactions.

Provide Proactive Support: Anticipate customer needs and resolve issues before they escalate. Optimize on boarding processes and enhance self-service support resources.

Remember, building trust requires empathy, transparency, and a customer-centric approach.

CA. What are the key challenges businesses face when migrating customers to digital platforms and how did you tackle them?

PJ: Migrating customers to digital platforms presents several challenges. Below are the various points that you need to consider for a successful migration.

Data Security and Privacy: Protect sensitive data during migration. Comply with regulations (e.g., GDPR) while ensuring robust security measures.

Data Governance: Manage data availability, integrity, and security in the cloud. Optimize legacy data for cloud systems.

Legacy System Compatibility: Evaluate existing systems and upgrade them to be cloud-ready before migration.

Service Disruption: Plan for minimal disruption during the transition. Implement robust data backup procedures.

Cost Management: Optimize resource usage and monitor costs. Avoid unexpected expenses.

Skill Gap: Train your workforce to be cloud-savvy. Bridge knowledge gaps.

Regulatory Compliance: Ensure compliance with industry-specific regulations during migration.

Data Migration Plan: Develop a comprehensive plan for data migration.

Change Management: Prepare employees for the shift. Communicate changes transparently.

Remember, addressing these challenges strategically ensures a successful transition to digital platforms!

CA. From your experience please share how Crown has won & retained the loyalty of its customers during difficult phases like COVID and in the move from physical records to digitization.

PJ: Like any other businesses Crown also went through the grind during COVID and this realization created the platform to innovate. Keeping the information management spectrum intact, we understood that employees working from home had the challenge to retrieve & process information or work on data remotely. This brought up the idea to create a portal which can hold the information the customer needs and work collaboratively while operating from remote locations.

Customers appreciated the fact how the information was made available to them which helped them to take critical decisions and to continue their process without disruption. Below are the list of Digital initiatives which helped organisation to transform their manual process into digital.

Document Management Software

Problem: Due to remote working, employees in an organization found it difficult to access information to carry out their day routine jobs. Due to lack of information on hand, employees had to stretch too much coordinating with many other stakeholders and end of day getting exhausted.

Solution: The DMS allows scanned images to be hosted on the cloud and provides various users in an organisation to access them when they need it. Each document can have multiple naming fields so that it is retrieved using key word search. The document

which are stored in the cloud can be virtually separated so that the confidentiality is maintained which means they can only view documents related to their department.

The DMS also comes with other rich features such as:

1. Control Access - The super admin can decide what type of rights to be provided to an employee either provide full rights to access the document or just provide rights to view and not to download or print.
2. Document Sharing - The user can also share the document securely to others outside the organization when needed. The document will go as a link and validity of the link can also be provided beyond which the document cannot be opened. The user can also decide to provide only view access or download access based on the requirement.
3. Security - The documents stored are encrypted and the complete audit trail is made available to the super admin on the activity conducted in the DMS. It provided information such as how many people accessed the documents, viewed, downloaded or forwarded.
4. Version Controls - Documents keeps getting updated with the recent ones and the DMS has the capability to capture the versions for easy accessing.

Human Resource Management - Workflow Solutions

Problem: COVID forced the HR support functions to operate from home and the document collection for new recruits and completing the exit formalities became a challenge. COVID also allowed people to join companies from their hometown in which case their joining formalities was delayed.

Solution: HR onboarding solution is an interface between the HR personnel in an organization and the candidate joining the organization. Once the candidate is finalized the traditional way of document collection was through hardcopy or through scanned images by mail. Document collection through mail was a possible solution but it has its downside when comes to large transactions as the HR personnel will lose control over too many mails and attachments to manage.

Crown HR onboarding solution allowed the HR personnel to send a link to the candidate through mail. The candidate just has to click the link and fill up the form provide all necessary information and also attach mandatory documents which are required for onboarding the employee. The forms attached in the link directly comes to the DMS and the HR personnel can view, reject and accept the document which gets stored on cloud. The system also keeps a track of the missing mandatory documents which the candidate has to submit and sends frequent reminders to fulfil the request. This feature eradicates the email chain between the HR and the candidate.

Post the joining, the entire lifecycle of the employee can be managed through the portal by generating auto populated forms for probation, confirmation and further appraisals which are even signed digitally. This way the hardcopy does not gets generated and the digitally signed forms gets stored in the DMS

Account Payable – Workflow

Problem: The vendor payments got delayed since the invoices submitted could not be sent to the HO for processing since the authorized signatory was not available in office for signing. Traditionally the invoices were couriered from the branch office to the head office for processing which had a delay and cost involved for each transaction.

Solution: Crown Account Payable workflow enabled the admin user at the branches to scan and upload the invoices on the system. The invoices virtually travelled to the next authorized user gets approved and finally reaches the HO finance team for processing. This way the authorized person need not be in office for approving and the signing can be done from wherever he operates. The time and cost of courier is also saved and the supplier gets the payments on time.

The system is the fastest selling solution after COVID since many organizations felt the value it provides in saving cost and enhancing the efficiency.
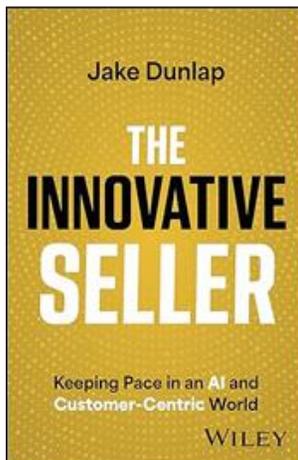
Jake Dunlap's "The Innovative Seller: Keeping Pace in an AI and Customer-Centric World" is a strategic playbook crafted for sales professionals and leaders navigating today's rapidly evolving sales landscape. As CEO of Skaled Consulting and a recognized influencer in sales strategy, Dunlap draws extensively from his experience in scaling global sales teams. His insights, prominently featured on LinkedIn and other major platforms, are enriched by real-world examples and actionable strategies aimed at transforming traditional sales methodologies to meet the demands of today's digital and consumer-driven marketplace.

Dunlap's exploration begins by highlighting the transformative impact of visionary leadership and the consequences of failing to adapt in a fast-changing market environment. Drawing parallels between the downfall of Blockbuster and the rise of Netflix, he underscores the perils of clinging to outdated business models and critiques traditional B2B sales processes for their failure to align with contemporary consumer behaviors. He passionately advocates for a paradigm shift towards innovation and adaptability in sales strategies.

Central to Dunlap's narrative is the transformative potential of AI, particularly Generative AI tools like ChatGPT, in revolutionizing sales operations. These technologies automate routine tasks, deliver data-driven insights, and facilitate personalized customer interactions, thereby enhancing efficiency and engagement. In an era where consumers prioritize personalized experiences, Dunlap challenges sales leaders to embrace customer-centric strategies that resonate with evolving preferences and expectations, redefining the B2B sales landscape.

The "4 Cs of Modern Sales Transformation" emerge as a strategic blueprint designed to empower sales organizations to thrive amidst uncertainty:

- Commitment to Technology and AI Proficiency (CTAP): Encouraging the integration of AI and advanced technologies into sales processes to align with shifting consumer behaviors and optimize operational efficiency.
- Current Go-to-Market (GTM) Strategy: Emphasizing the importance of personalized, data-driven marketing strategies that transcend traditional outbound approaches to effectively engage modern buyers.
- Customized Sales Experience: Prioritizing the understanding and mapping of diverse customer journeys to deliver tailored experiences that resonate with unique buyer personas.
- Consistent Performance Optimization: Advocating for continuous improvement and adaptation to maintain competitive advantage in a dynamic market landscape, leveraging real-time data and actionable insights.

Dunlap also delves into the critical importance of personalized outbound strategies in modern sales and marketing practices. He critiques generic outreach tactics, advocating instead for scalable personalization techniques enabled by advanced sales engagement platforms. The strategic significance of understanding buyer personas and leveraging technology to tailor messaging and optimize conversion rates effectively is emphasized.

The author's unique blend of visionary foresight and practical wisdom equips readers with the tools needed to embrace innovation, harness the power of technology, and prioritize customer-centricity in their sales strategies. By integrating AI insights, understanding evolving consumer behaviors, and cultivating agile sales practices, Dunlap empowers sales professionals to navigate and succeed in an increasingly competitive and transformative marketplace.

FEEDBACK   UNSUBSCRIBE