



Customer service - how to climb the service excellence maturity ladder

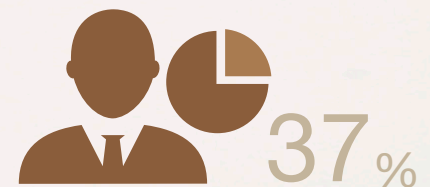
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## Introduction

By nature, customers are not loyal and when you factor in complexities attached with a 'buy' decision, the magnitude of the challenge that is customer retention becomes clearer. The only way to promote customer affinity that can lead to lasting loyalty is through customer service excellence.

Plenty of online and offline discussions have been devoted to deciphering the riddle that is excellent customer service. It has often been called the first step towards competitive differentiation.



In one of our customer engagement surveys, we found that as much as 37 percent of respondents were extremely dissatisfied with the service they received from various service providers (across verticals)

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### *That's 'fantastic'*

Disgruntled Starbucks customer Jason called in to the company's corporate offices after a mixup with a New Jersey branch's barista. Instead of simply giving him a refund, the customer service representative told Jason that they needed to "make him whole, and give him an experience nothing short of fantastic." They promptly filled his rewards card with \$50 of store credit.

*Source: Consumerist*

## Key trends

Talisma's research has shown that customer service expectations have grown significantly in the last few years. We've also examined over 15 customer service survey results published regionally and globally in the last 5 years to highlight a few trends that are common. Some interesting ones are:



- 1 Customers are now more unforgiving of brands that deliver below par service
- 2 Customers don't mind dialing call centers provided they are easy to use and provide quick results
- 3 Websites that do not offer online chat option are less preferred
- 4 Smartphones are fast becoming the medium of choice (for customers) when it comes to customer care
- 5 Discoverability, knowledge management and customization of digital channels are important for customers
- 6 "Human qualities" of customer service agents are important

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On a customer engagement evolution timeline (starting from reactive relationship management earlier to proactive engagement, now), our conversation should have moved beyond customer service by now considering the amount of time, money and resources service providers have invested in evolving a customer-centric culture, so far. But, despite their best efforts and intentions, service providers have not been able to make much headway. Why does this gap exist and what can businesses do to bridge it? This paper investigates.



There are no shortcuts to sustained customer engagement which is often an outcome of use of best practices within the organization and outside (vendors and other stakeholders). Focus on customer convenience often pays dividends for the brand and top line. A mix of best practices and convenience leads to service differentiation. Here are some practices you can follow to move up the service excellence charts:



Lack of follow-up on customer complaints is a major area of concern for many customers

-  Define your service excellence drivers: what exactly drives your business to deliver better service? Is it profitability, customer loyalty, brand equity, competitive differentiation or simply a legacy that your business wishes to adhere to? Be clear about your drivers and inform your employees about them.
-  Educate, encourage and use incentives to ensure employees align to your service excellence goals in their day-to-day activities. Empower employees to solve customer's issues without escalation.
-  Measure the strength of your relationships, and fine tune your processes while proactively solving problems and preventing their recurrence.
-  Capture and document customer concerns: the customer should not be made to describe her problem on more than one occasion. By documenting the problem, solutions can also be documented and conveyed to customers who raise similar problems in the future.
-  Culture and value match: while hiring employees, look for people who radiate service values that your business lives by. This will make it easier to bring them onboard sooner.
-  Customer engagement operations should sync with marketing strategies
-  Offer experiences that are not delivered in a one-off manner and are consistent.
-  Promote customer service champions within the organization and service advocates outside the organization
-  Leverage technology to the extent possible
-  Measure and improve; learn to figure out when your service standards slip
-  Figure out how to bring back detractors and hold on to 'drifters'

On the last point, technology can be among the most significant enablers of customer service transformation. When aiming at a higher level of service excellence, you need a technology roadmap to back you and ensure silo-less communication and collaboration across the enterprise for managing customer servicing. Needless to say, you also need to engage vendors with mature solutions to roll this roadmap out and ensure you don't lose out on competitive differentiation or customer wallet share.

A robust service strategy that is supported by trained employees backed by technology can take your service standards to a whole new level. The gaps that currently exist in your service will hurt your brand in the long run so it is imperative that you address them before they cause trouble.

### Omni-channel – the next frontier

Omni-channel customer experience involves building an ecosystem that can handle customer expectations seamlessly across channels. This involves a greater degree of understanding of customer behavior and investments in systems and strategies designed to service the customer as she communicates and transacts across channels.

The whole premise behind omni-channel engagement is that the sum of experience delivered is more than its parts. Thus, if your understanding of customers at a channel level (beyond transactions) level is not adequate, you will find it difficult to rollout a omni-channel experience which also places a huge premium on back-end-front-end integration of systems and the ability to identify the customer irrespective across channels.

The rules of engagement remain the same – service, satisfy and retain. But succeeding in an omni-channel world requires unified systems, data flows, analytics, cross-channel visibility, customer information and knowledge management.

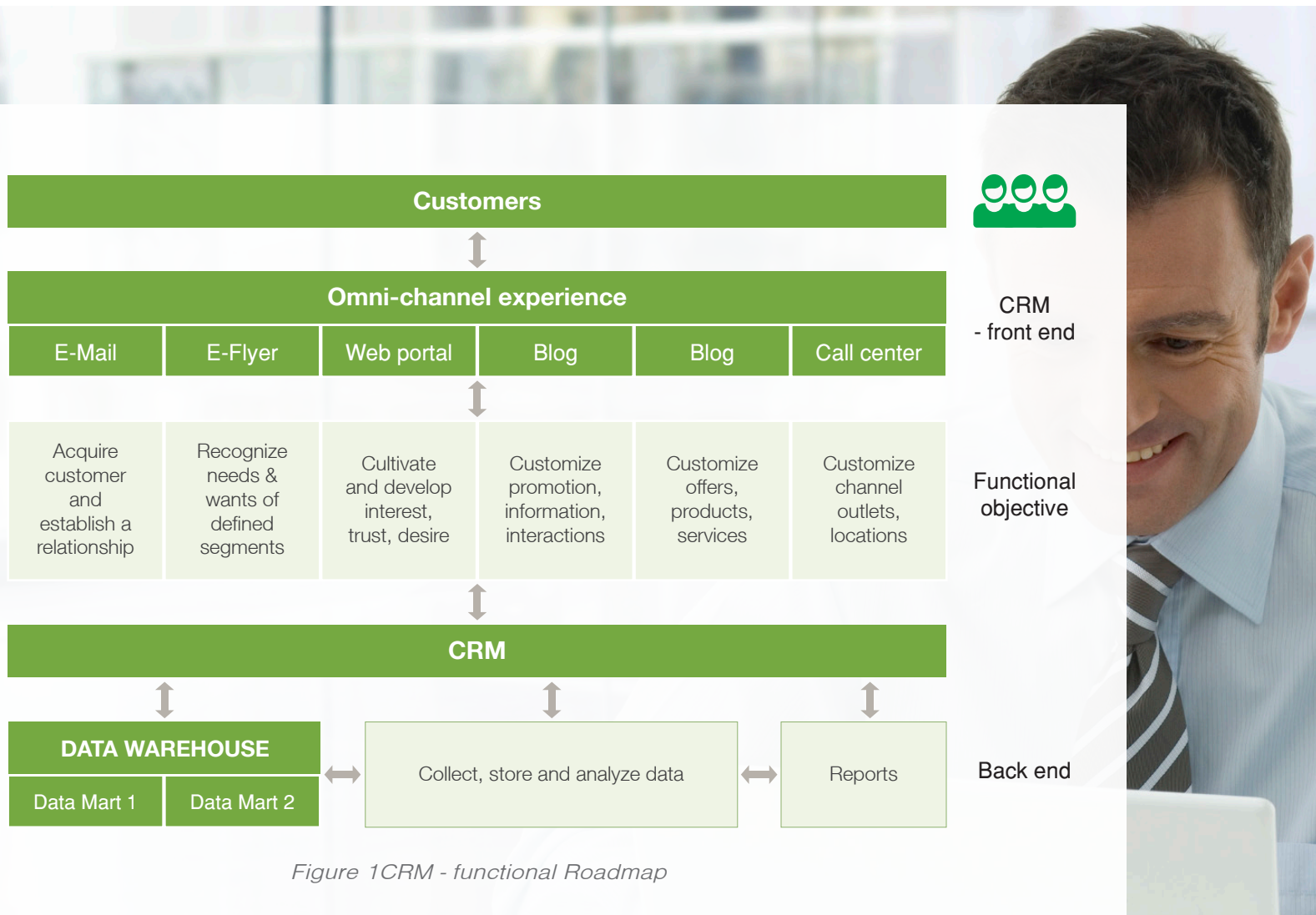


Figure 1 CRM - functional Roadmap

## The way ahead

The service strategy you define today will decide how your customers interact with your brand a few months down the line. With brands becoming more competitive, the need for customer service innovation is no longer a matter of choice. A streamlined and well-conceived customer experience strategy backed ably by technology, engaged employees and customer inputs will pave the way for your brand to grow from strength to strength.



## About Talisma Corporation Pvt. Ltd.

Talisma Corporation Pvt. Ltd., is the leading provider of Customer Experience Management (CEM) software for a wide range of industries. Talisma CEM enables organizations to deliver an exceptional customer experience on a global scale across engagement channels and interactions. Our solutions improve customer satisfaction by integrating the power of email, phone, chat, SMS text messaging, portal, social media and Web self-service with a robust and mature Web services platform, comprehensive analytics, and an intelligent CRM solution. Talisma serves a variety of industries through its vertical solutions, including financial services, travel and leisure, government, retail, business process outsourcing (BPO), and manufacturing.

Talisma also delivers a combination of advisory/consulting and services support under one roof to enable enterprise level CEM transformation initiatives.

For more information, visit [www.talisma.com/cem](http://www.talisma.com/cem)



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