

Customer journey mapping: The path to loyalty

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W In an ideal world, the journey people take to become loyal customers would be a straight shot down a highway: See your product. Buy your product. Use your product. Repeat.

In reality, this journey is often more like a sightseeing tour with stops, exploration, and discussion along the way—all moments when you need to convince people to pick your brand and stick with it instead of switching to a competitor.

Staying on top of all of these moments might seem overwhelming, but mapping your customer's journey can help. It can give you and your team a greater understanding of how your customers are currently interacting and engaging with your brand, and also help illustrate how your products and services fit into their lives, schedules, goals, and aspirations.

Let's take a look at five steps your team can take to start journey mapping.



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1. Find the sweet spot where your customers' goals and your own align

Before you start journey mapping, nail down your business goals. Any marketing and communication you deliver during the customer journey should be focused on helping your brand reach those goals.

However, it's important to acknowledge that your customers' goals might be different from yours. For example, let's say your goal is to sell more sunglasses with new, improved lenses that have a better profit margin. Meanwhile, your customers' top concern might be getting sunglasses that match their personal style. Lens protection could be their second or even third priority.

Consider how your marketing and communication strategies can help your customers reach their goals while also getting you closer to yours.



2. Identify all of the communication touchpoints in your customer's journey

When do you traditionally communicate or engage with customers? Make a list of these moments and group them based on when they happen during the journey: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase.

Now find communication touchpoints you may have missed. Track what actions and interactions between your brand and your customers happen just before and after each of the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages.

For example, you might decide that a major moment in your purchase stage is when your customers are guided through your website to buy an item in their shopping cart. But you might notice other communication touchpoints right before that purchase moment, like your website confirming to customers that an item has been added to their shopping cart, then suggesting related products.

Looking for all these touchpoints can quickly bog your team down in a lot of details and micro-interactions. To avoid that, prioritize the moments that get you closer to achieving your business goals.



3. Recognize pain points and moments of delight

How might your customers feel at the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages as they attempt to achieve their goals? For example, could your customers be happy that your website makes browsing easy, but frustrated at how confusing it is to purchase a product?

Find the moments where your customers might have negative experiences. Who on your team is involved in those touchpoints? Your web designers? Your marketing team? Your copywriters? Are there other team members who could collaborate and improve the situation?

Say a customer likes how your online ad describes your product. But when they go to your store, salespeople present the product differently. That's an opportunity for your copywriters and salespeople to better align their language and sales pitches.



4. Experience the customer journey yourself

Imagining how your customers might feel during their journey is valuable, but actually experiencing it for yourself can uncover much-needed insights.

If your business is run online, open a browser and experience what it's like to be your customer. Similarly, if you have a brick-and-mortar store, go into a location that sells your product. Afterwards, ask yourself about the main communication touchpoints you encountered. Did they work well? Did they help you complete your journey? What was missing?

And don't forget about the competition. Become one of their customers and experience the journey they've created. Then ask yourself all of the same questions.



5. Visualize your customer journey map

Go beyond just writing down your customer journey and communication touchpoints, and actually create a visual map of them. This doesn't need to be a polished, heavily-designed visualization. Simply write each of your touchpoints down on individual sticky notes or papers, then pin them in order to a wall.

By doing this exercise, you're helping your team take a bird's eye view of the entire customer journey. You can organize your thoughts and collaboratively brainstorm new ideas for changing or adding to your communication at these touchpoints.

Make sure to create hypotheses around why new communication touchpoints will improve the customer journey, then implement and test them. If your hypotheses are wrong, go back to your journey map, reassess, tweak, and improve.

Yes, the journey mapping process can be fairly intensive, but it can have a big impact on your business. That's why it shouldn't be just a one-time event. Customer tastes can shift, new technology can become available, and your brand itself might evolve. So it's important to do journey mapping at least once a year and evaluate what communication touchpoints are still working and what needs to be revisited.

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