

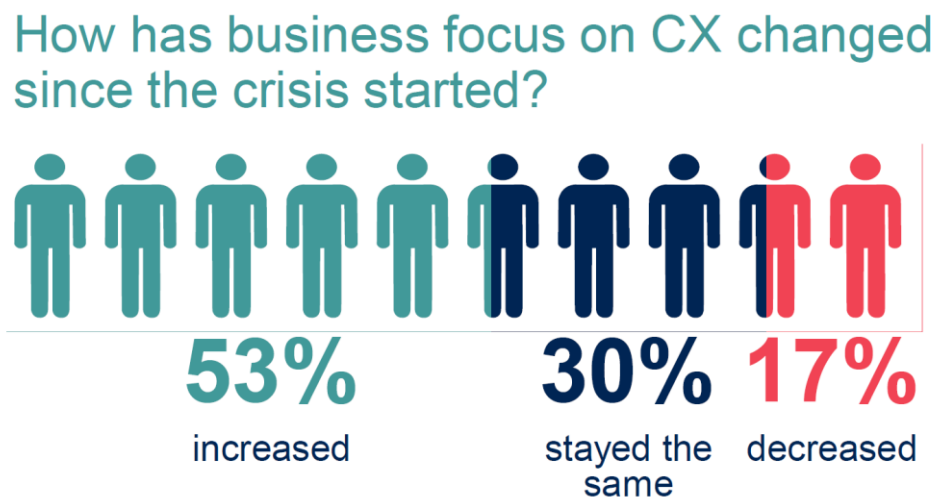


Trust & Authenticity

New Redefined Customer Values Driving CX Best Practices

CX is More Important in a Post COVID-19 World

Kinetic Consulting recently participated in a study undertaken by Ipsos and Awards International on the views, opinions and predictions for CX in 2021¹. The survey had 549 CX professionals respond to a series of questions designed to capture the main consensus on CX in a post-COVID-19 world. Not surprisingly, the study highlighted that due to challenging market conditions companies were placing more focus on CX as a means to address changed customer behaviours. The study identified that 53% of respondents said their organisation had increased their focus on CX:



A common theme for the increased focus on CX is centred on reducing customer churn. Many organisations are facing reduced business activity, and few are acquiring new customers, so the attention has shifted toward the preservation of their existing customer base.

The study also identifies that many CX professionals are pivoting their focus to address changed customer behaviour due to the crisis. Respondents identified that the single most significant change in customer behaviour had been the shift towards digital for business transactions and support. The report identified 88% of CX professionals identified digital as the most significant change in customer behaviour, and more importantly, 79% think that this changed behaviour is likely to remain as a permanent change post-COVID-19:

¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/customer-experience-cx-voices-2020>



In response to these changed behaviours and tougher market conditions, many organisations are making investments to elevate their customer experience to differentiate themselves from the competition further. The leading companies are making the necessary investments to ensure their customer experience meets the new expectations of their customers. The study identified that 88% of CX leaders agreed that their organisations would continue to invest in CX as a strategy to outperform the competition.

The study affirms that many leading organisations are looking to double down on their CX focus in an attempt to differentiate themselves in 2021 and effectively respond to changed customer behaviours, expectations, and a challenging marketplace. The findings of the study should not be a surprise to any CX professional who knows the correlation between customer experience and business success. The question that remains to be answered from the study is what values have specifically changed for people that is linked to their changed behaviours in how they interact with organisations. This paper is an attempt to answer this question to help practitioners focus their CX efforts by carefully addressing what customer now consider valuable from a brand. The two dominant values that have been redefined from the crisis are the values of trust and authenticity.

Trust Has Been Elevated as One of the Most Important Values for People

During the crisis, people learnt to work from home, shopped online and minimised their physical visits to shops and service centres. It has been close to seven months for many people practising a new way of conducting business and interacting with organisations.

An insight into the question as to “how long it takes to see permanent change?” can be found in a study undertaken by Phillippa Lally - a health psychology researcher at University College London. She published a [study](#) in the *European Journal of Social Psychology* in 2009. The study examined the habits of 96 people over 12 weeks. Each person chose one new habit for the 12 weeks and reported each day on whether or not they did the behaviour and how automatic the behaviour felt. At the end of the 12 weeks, the researchers analysed the data to determine how long it took each person to go from starting a new

behaviour to automatically doing it. On average, it takes more than 2 months before a new behaviour becomes automatic — 66 days to be exact. The researchers found that the adoption of a new habit can vary widely depending on the behaviour, the person, and the circumstances. It took anywhere from 18 days to 254 days for people to form a new habit. The new behaviours practised from the crisis are now reaching that 8-month critical point where new habits become permanently adopted as the new normal.

Remote work and online sales and service require new levels of trust not previously needed before the crisis. Employers have to trust that employees are doing the right thing working from home. Businesses are now required to trust their suppliers and partners that are working from remote locations can deliver the same quality work. People have to trust that the digital systems and e-commerce transactions are both safe, reliable and comprehensive as their brick-and-mortar counterparts. Consumers visiting physical stores, branches, or travelling on commercial transportation have to trust that the business is following COVID-19 health and safety measures that do not compromise their wellbeing.

Trust has become a critical factor in how a brand differentiates itself in the marketplace. Trust in a post-COVID-19 world is ultimately about how a brand can give their customers sufficient peace of mind in any interaction that has been impacted due to the crisis. A great example of going the extra mile to give customers peace of mind can be demonstrated by Emirates Airline. They provide free cover for passenger's health and quarantine costs if they are diagnosed with COVID-19 on their travels with the airline.² Emirates has gone the extra mile to give its customers extra peace of mind, not only through the free cover but by making it compulsory for every passenger flying to undertake a COVID-19 test and present a certificate that they tested negative before boarding a flight.

Organisations seeking to elevate their CX in 2021 will need to address how they can build and elevate trust with their existing and new customers. The focus should be to elevate trust with all interactions across all touchpoints.

Authenticity now Matters More

One of the unique consequences of working from home has been the gradual blurring of work and home and professional and private personas. People have gradually given up on the idea of trying to dress for work or pretend that the barking dogs or screaming children are the television playing in the background. Zoom virtual backgrounds have given way to real, and sometimes messy home environments. One of the consequences of our enforced lockdown has been to break down the barriers we have lived with for so many years. The separation between business and home has progressively been eliminated

² <https://www.emirates.com/ae/english/help/covid-19/free-covid-19-cover/>

during the crisis. People have learnt to accept CEOs wearing hoodies and screaming children as normal background noise. The shift in behaviour has been for people to accept the private persona as the only persona. The shift to accepting a single *real* persona without having a fabricated professional persona has a necessary prerequisite to conducting business has elevated the value of authenticity for people. People have become more averse to artificial personas displaying unreal or pretentious images of who and what they are. It is no longer considered “business-like” to be sitting in a corner office doing a Zoom call or giving a presentation. Honesty and authenticity have replaced fabricated and contrived brand positioning. Brand communications need to be honest with their customers and deliver an authentic experience, even if it is flawed. Brands typically don’t want to display vulnerabilities but with the crisis brands that expose a level of vulnerability to their customers are likely to be respected more than those that don’t acknowledge the vulnerability. This is contrary to traditional thinking about brand communications, but the crisis has now placed a strong emphasis on the importance of being authentic, and now people expect that the brands they deal with also reflect this new significant value. An example, of this type of communication, can be found with the GoDaddy 24 x 7 contact centre. When contacting them, there is a message clearly stating that their staff are working from home and to possibly expect some call dropouts. Keeping it real is an important and essential component for building loyalty to the brand.

Elevating CX in 2021

It is clear why organisations should seek to elevate the CX in 2021. Not only is the coming year likely to be challenging on many business fronts, but people have changed their behaviours and their expectations as a result of the crisis. The opportunity that lays ahead is to capitalise on these new changed expectations and behaviours by designing and implementing initiatives that can elevate the CX for existing and new customers to ensure increased brand loyalty and market differentiation.

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