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Customer-focused not just in word, but action

One poll we have not yet taken is the percentage of large companies seeking to become customer-driven. Call it customer-centric, customer-focused, or something more creative, but you could bet that a majority of enterprises today focus on customer needs as part of their spoken brand promise and strategy.



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However, based on polls we have taken, companies generally fall short of being wholly customer-driven in their interactions with customers. One key indicator of this is the challenge to be "easy to do business with", which invariably affects the degree of customer loyalty, but which many companies aren't managing to do well yet. Across sectors, we see the favorable scores on this item ranging from just more than half to two-thirds of the buyers for a sector believing their vendor is easy to do business with.

One could ask, "Where does our core product or service fit into this – product quality, value, benefits, and innovation offered customers?" The answer is that designing the core product/service around buyer needs is a big part of what makes customers consider you and buy in the first place. It's huge. However, the core product is not the whole brand experience, nor is it what customers consider when rating if you are easy to do business with or not. The heart of "customer focus" or being easy to do business with is more your after-sales support than the core product itself. That deserves repeating – ***being customer-focused, or easy to do business with, is more about after-sales support than about the core product or service.***

Think of your own personal shopping to understand this truth. If a store or business offers a product or service of unique value or quality, you will consider buying it, but those features can and will be copied by competitors over time. We stay in longer term buying relationships with vendors making the whole brand experience work for us – convenience, personal service, standing behind their product, or service quality, etc.

The main business implication is that

becoming customer centric means more than communicating that message to associates – it means investing in after-sales support. Processes, people, and technology need to be examined – and improvements must be made to streamline the experience from the customer's point of view.

The Walker Loyalty Report findings on U.S. customers gave some more specific indications of what improvements could differentiate a company in being easy to do business with. In business-to-business categories, customers want more accessible and responsive technical support and customer service. They also complain about the purchase process, related to the caliber of advice on solutions/options during the proposal stage, as well as the ease of ordering and receiving.

In retail, buyers have issues with the ease of locating products in stores as well as the speed of check-out.

We must be realistic about what customer-driven means. It is not just attracting new customers with the right value or solution. Customer focus is fulfilling the buyers experience with our brand, and being so easy to do business with that we stand apart from competitors and our customers want to do business with us again.

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