

How Optimizing Touchpoints Keeps Small Businesses Competitive

Marketers use the term “touchpoint” to describe any interaction a customer has with your business. It’s an important concept that captures both obvious and less obvious ways a customer may engage with your business.

Each touchpoint is part of a larger story. The sum total of all those touchpoints with your brand — the way your business represents itself — is the customer experience.

“Each interaction a customer has with your brand shapes their perception of you, and those perceptions translate to dollars spent - or not,” says [Toni Clayton-Hine](#), CMO at EY Americas. For small businesses, every touchpoint is an opportunity to make an impression and convert a potential customer into a loyal customer.

Here are six ways customers might interact with your business. Try to imagine each of these touchpoints from your customers’ perspective — and what steps you can take to ensure you’re making a good impression every time.

ON YOUR WEBSITE

A well-designed website is crucial for just about any business because it is often a customer’s first touchpoint. Every website needs to do two things well: be easy for customers to use and quickly provide them with the information they need.

A key part of making your website easy to use is creating one that displays well on any device. That means creating a mobile version of your website that functions on laptops, tablets and smartphones. This is important — [Adobe’s “State of Content” Report](#) notes that nearly 80 percent of people would leave a website that doesn’t display well on the device they’re using.

How quickly customers find what they are looking for is also important. [Vasudha Mamtani](#),

a user-experience designer at Deloitte, offers a rule of thumb: Your site has about 8 seconds to capture a person's attention. Microsoft has been designing software from that perspective for several years, Mamtani says. That means the content of your website needs to be clearly relevant and easy to find. Well-defined and obvious navigation through your website is the best way to help users quickly find what they need.

ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Small business owners recognize the necessity of social media to connect with customers, tell their stories, showcase their work, and provide customer service. Your company's social media channels are extensions of your company's brand. Always approach any customer interaction on social media with this in mind.

That's why providing customer support over social media must be done with care, marketer [Liz Greene](#) advises. "When customers use social media to complain, it's often because a company has already failed to assist them through conventional customer service channels," Greene writes.

Remember that your responses on a Facebook post or a Twitter thread are visible to everyone. How you handle a customer issue on social media creates a touchpoint — not only for the single customer you're helping, but for everyone else watching, Greene says. That's why the best solution is often to offer a phone number or an email address where they can reach you directly.

Finally, choose your social media platforms judiciously. Your customers won't expect you to have a presence on Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter and Snapchat. Create profiles on the platforms where your customers are, and commit to providing prompt responses whenever a customer reaches out.

OVER THE PHONE

There are many situations in which it makes sense to get on the phone with a customer:

- When the customer reaches out for support.
- When you reach out to the customer as a follow-up or to ask for their feedback.
- When you reach out to the customer to let them know about a promotion or an event your business is putting on.

In every case, a phone call is a one-on-one opportunity to directly communicate with your customers.

Phone calls can also be a point of anxiety for both the business and the customer. For the business, a phone call is a real-time, but limited communication channel.

You don't get to see the customer's body language, for example. And whereas written communication buys you time to re-read a customer's message for clarity, phone calls don't give you that chance.

For customers, a phone call can be frustrating precisely because someone might not be available on the other end. When businesses employ technology to buffer phone interactions, for example, that little bit of friction can be a major annoyance for a customer who has a problem that needs to be solved now.

Such was the case for Michael Bindrup, a business development advisor at the Nevada Small Business Development Center at UNLV, who tells the story of what happened when his washing machine broke.

After visiting one washing machine repair company's well-designed website, he called the phone number provided only to be answered by a machine that said the company was no longer taking service calls. He didn't try more than once and gave his business to a company that had a live, helpful person answering the phone.

This is a classic example of how important it is for small businesses to focus on the personal touch of a phone call. While digital touchpoints are crucial, too, you can't overlook what kind of experience you create for customers who need to reach you by phone.

IN YOUR PRODUCT'S PACKAGING

An oft-overlooked touchpoint is product packaging. If you are in the business of selling physical products, your packaging is an asset for promoting your brand and contributing to the overall experience someone has when they do business with you.

For starters, packaging must be designed in a way that accurately and effectively represents your business. Getting that right "is paramount to generating a positive product experience resulting in brand buy-in," says Alex Jones at Kendon Packaging. Customers should be delighted by your packaging and be able to instantly associate the package with your company.

Jones continues: "The packaging unveil must be done correctly in order to evoke a positive impact – finding the right balance between building suspense for that wow-factor reveal and functionality. Ultimately, for complete customer satisfaction products need to arrive in working order, so ensure the unwrapping experience is exciting without compromising the integrity of the product during shipping."

To delight customers, every step of the packaging and unboxing process must be considered within the context of a positive customer experience. Some elements to consider:

■ How visible are your logos when someone opens the package?

- Does the package look thoughtful wrapped?
- If you're sending instructions or safety warnings with the package, how easy are those for the recipient to find?
- Is there an opportunity to include a branded copy or even a thank you note to the customer?

BY EMAIL

A lot of small businesses use email campaigns to connect with customers, share information and promote their products or services. But when people are receiving an abundance of emails throughout the day, what you say and how you say it must stand out.

Above all, make sure these emails are relevant for the recipients. To stand out in a crowded inbox, your message needs to speak to a person's needs and how your business is designed to meet those needs. If you are a real estate agent, for example, a message to prospective homebuyers about newly discounted properties would be well-received. If you are a financial advisor, you could email your clients with guidance whenever the Fed raises or lowers interest rates.

One more email tip: Write every email as though you are sending it to just that one person who is reading it, stresses [Tom Kulzer](#), CEO of AWeber Communications. Customers don't want to feel like they are one of many; they want to feel as if you are speaking directly to them.

VIA PERSONAL FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTIONS

Personal interactions are the obvious touchpoints that small business owners can't afford to overlook. Research from [David Clark and Ron Kinghorn](#) at PricewaterhouseCoopers shows that the people in the business have to be "the driving force behind a customer's experience."

This means that every person in the company needs to be properly trained to interact with customers. Though it may seem obvious to you as a business owner, your employees may not understand the nuances of interacting with customers. For example, something as simple as tone of voice and body language can nudge a customer interaction toward a positive or negative perception.

Consider what may transpire during a face-to-face conversation with a customer who is being unreasonable. How your team handles this conflict will determine whether that customer chooses to do business with you again. It's important that everyone be trained to gracefully handle any situation customers may create when they walk through the door.

If your small business has a storefront or office, you will want customers who come in to feel

comfortable in your space. This starts with having someone available to greet them, senior business strategist [Lillian Connors](#) advises. It's a great way to make customers feel valued and appreciated.

Have a designated seating area for customers that offers more than just a place to sit. Providing refreshments and reading material goes a long way to making them feel cared for. This also helps put people at ease while they're waiting.

As you work through your interactions, put yourself in your customers' shoes. That's the best way to think through the touchpoints you've created. [Chris Ridson](#), design director at Adaptive Path, offers a nice way to simplify this work: All touchpoints should be relevant and meaningful to customers.

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