

Customer centricity: From stance to reality

Marie-Paule Bayol and Thierry Lalande



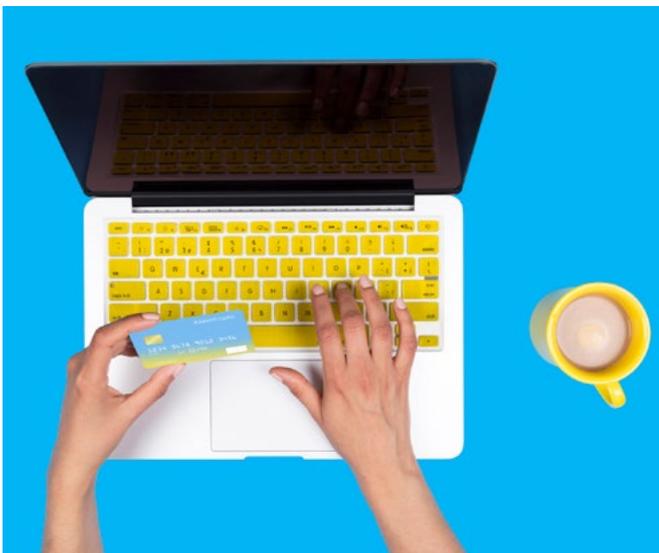
More than ever, customers have a powerful influence on their relationship with brands. Their voice matters and they can have a strong impact on a brand's behaviour. Brands must learn to be increasingly agile and follow six simple and decisive principles.

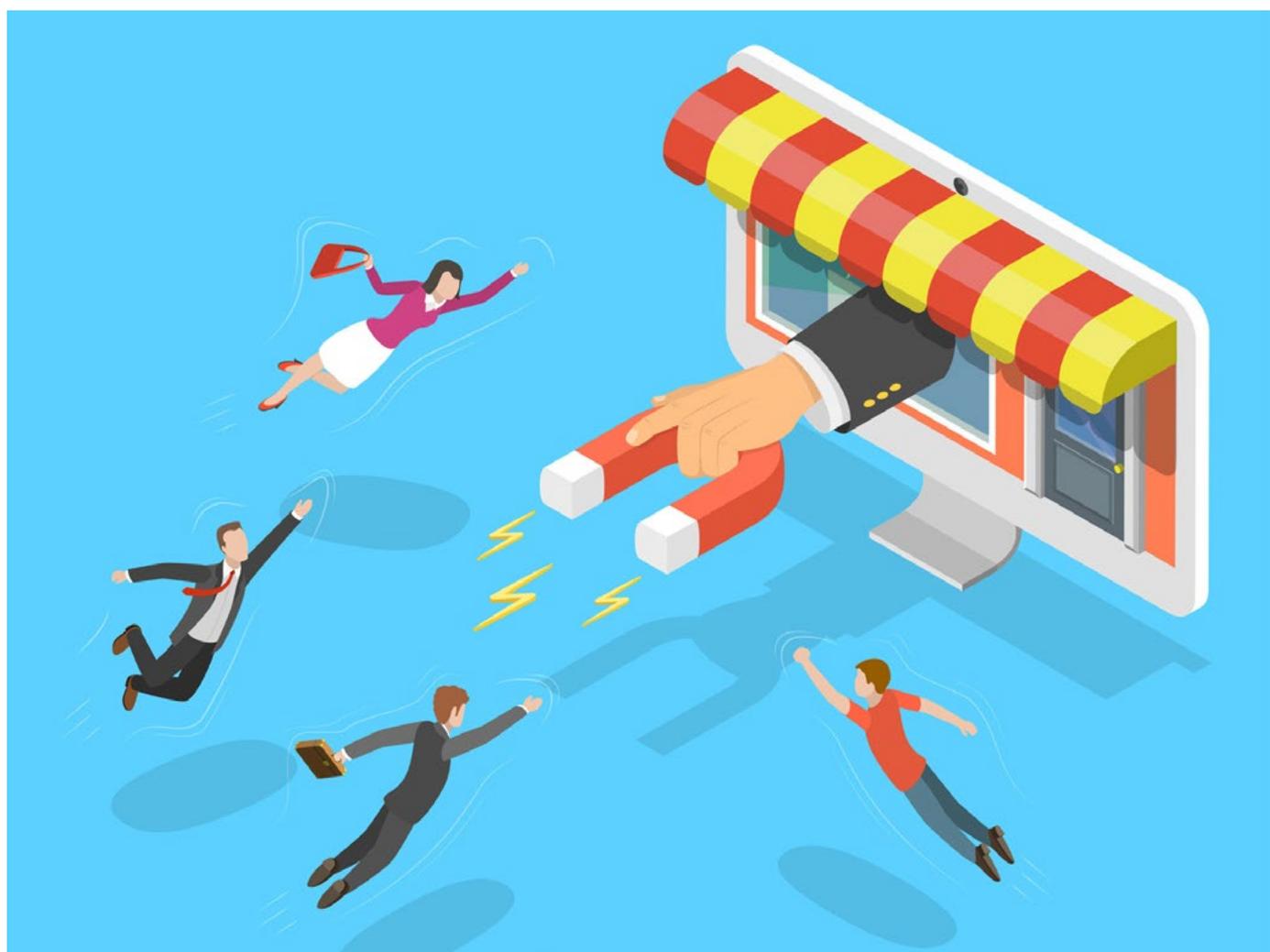
Some major trends are already having an impact and disrupting the way customer relations are managed. These are born out of a demand for instant access, growing disloyalty and an undercurrent of defiance towards brands. Not forgetting individualism in customers, who now demand to be known and recognised at every touchpoint.

Make no mistake: the consumer has seized the power in their relationship with brands. 'Customer centricity' – placing the customer at the centre of the organisation – can no longer simply be a pious vow, but must be seen as a strategic stake. It is vital for brands to be increasingly agile if they are to understand and anticipate change.

Building good relationships with customers requires brands to remember six key principles:

1. **The customer couldn't care less about the channel.** They expect coherence and perfect continuity in their experience between the different channels. Omni-channel – which has such a low-profile in reality – is expected as a 'basic'. Channels are going as far as 'merging' while promising the onset of a 'phygital' customer experience.
2. **The customer couldn't care less about touchpoints and reasons of contact.** The quality of the customer experience (CX) no longer revolves around a series of experience points spaced out over time, but rather around an everyday, ongoing intimacy. This intimacy no longer depends solely on the big interactions, but also on every little moment in everyday life, those quiet indicators of attention that give meaning to the relationship.
3. **The customer couldn't care less about sectors.** They don't just compare rival brands, but every brand in between, going beyond business sectors. Plus, the performance of certain emblematic players – often from the e-commerce world – has created new reference points for the customer relationship that are setting the bar high.
4. **Humans aren't machines.** Digital technology has strengthened the need for a human touch in the customer relationship. Consideration, benevolence, recognition of 'good customers', and also humour or the sharing of common interests are values expected in the relationship, and they help strengthen the bond with the brand.
5. **Awareness of the abundance of personal data is creating a demand for relevance.** Consumers may ignore the notion of personal data if it is used to enhance conversational pertinence, established within a framework of confidence. Big data is not just a trendy term – every proposal and message put out by a brand must be perfectly customised.
6. **Bland is boring.** Within a context of over-solicitation, consumers accord real value to anything a little offbeat or (positively) surprising in the customer experience. To achieve that, employees need more wiggle room. A rationale that sometimes clashes with outsourcing, relocation and productivity strategies.





The driving force behind a brand's future growth thus lies in a synergy of channels, real-time use of an intimate knowledge of customers (an approach capitalising on long-term value through creating engagement) and a reintroduction of the human factor at the right time. Challenges relating to brand stance, technological skill, product offering and management are intrinsically linked in this respect.

Ultra-personalisation of customer relations is just the beginning of a long story...