



THE POWER OF ALIGNING YOUR TRAVEL COMPANY AROUND THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

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About this report

The power of aligning your travel company around the customer journey

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Introduction

A customer-centric travel brand puts the customer journey at the core of everything it does. The result? Satisfied, repeat customers who are likely to recommend your products to others. To succeed in today's travel marketplace, brands must put the customer experience at the center of their business plans.

Even small moments of delight or frustration can shape a traveler's perception. While some aspects of the travel experience are beyond our control, travel brands can take steps to understand the customer's needs and to ensure that brand promises are kept. Investing in the customer experience is not just the right thing to do—a customer-centric approach benefits the organization in multiple ways. Satisfied customers are more likely to return and to recommend your product to others, ultimately helping to drive revenue and profit.

The evidence in support of customer-centricity is unequivocal, making it is clear that organizations that fail to focus on the customer experience are putting themselves at a significant competitive disadvantage. Companies' customer experience (CX) ratings are **strongly correlated** with revenue growth, according to research from McKinsey & Company. In the U.S., for example, companies designated as CX leaders grew their revenue more than twice as quickly as those dubbed CX laggards between 2016 and 2021. Satisfied travelers **are more likely** to repurchase and recommend to others—and when a brand manages to both satisfy and delight, the positive impact is even greater.

Here's additional research that supports keeping the customer first:

- A one-point customer satisfaction improvement on a 10-point scale corresponds to at least a 3% increase in revenue. (McKinsey)
- 80% of customers say the experience provided by a company is as important as the products and services. (Salesforce)
- Modest improvements in CX performance led to a 34% increase in future purchase intentions. (Qualtrics)

Despite the importance of customer-centricity, travel organizations face a variety of challenges that can make it difficult to devote attention to "Voice of the Customer" (VoC) initiatives. Companies that fail to prioritize customers are missing out on crucial insights and opportunities to steer their business in the right direction. Or worse, if your brand fails to meet travelers' needs, they will quickly jump ship.

True customer-centricity goes beyond collecting feedback or simply tracking VoC metrics. Building a traveler-centric organization means unifying the entire company around customer experience strategy. This white paper, developed in collaboration with Allianz Partners, provides a roadmap, including best practices and examples, to focus your whole company around the customer journey. In this report, you'll learn how to sharpen your company's focus on the customer journey; best practices for collecting and leveraging customer feedback; and how to rally your organization around the customer experience.

Read on to understand how you can put the customer journey at the center of your organizational strategy.



Focus on the customer journey

- **Understand that traveler expectations are constantly changing.**
- **Keep your brand promises.**
- **Make your company easy to do business with.**
- **Take a holistic approach when mapping the customer journey.**

Customer expectations are constantly evolving. Technological advances, rising competition and industry disruptions all shape how travelers perceive a brand's services and business practices. To deliver a superior experience, understanding the customer's perspective throughout their journey is essential.

There are many things companies can do to keep the customer journey in focus. First, recognize that what works today may not work tomorrow. Pre-determined customer expectations are one of several factors that

influence the impression travelers form of their experience. But traveler expectations are constantly evolving, so it's crucial to stay attuned to customers' needs.

Creating a customer-centric organization is not a one-time project or a set-it-and-forget-it data collection plan. Instead, it is an ongoing effort that is woven into the fabric of the organization. A customer-centric organization must continually collect customer feedback, analyze and categorize the data, share customer insights within the organization and leverage what has been learned.

Second, ensure that when your brand makes a promise to its customers, that promise is kept. If your marketing materials portray your company or product in a certain way or promises you'll do something, you must meet that expectation. If you don't, travelers' dissatisfaction may be shared on third-party review sites such as Trustpilot, Google Reviews or Yelp, or social media sites like Facebook.

Travelers have a lot of options to choose from, so you need to make it as easy as possible to do business with your company. Your organization should be laser-focused on the customer journey, understanding what travelers are doing and feeling in every stage of the process. When you drill down to understand what your customers are experiencing, you can identify pain points and hassles they may encounter and look for ways to alleviate those. Your goal is to make traveler interactions as seamless and enjoyable as possible.

These three factors—pre-determined expectations, promises made to customers and the ease with which customers can engage—all play a key role in defining the customer experience. While remaining attuned to these key factors, your organization should put systems in place to support and implement the broader customer experience strategy.

Map the customer journey

Start by mapping the customer journey to identify major points of interaction or defining moments for the customer. In travel, this journey often aligns with the travel journey (e.g., dreaming, planning, booking, pre-trip preparation, traveling, post-trip). However, the specific touchpoints and points of contact will be unique to each brand. Be sure to consider all the different ways your customers may interact with your brand and the various paths they might take.

“Each touchpoint or interaction with a website, the app—whether a customer is asking a question, making a purchase, filing a claim—these are all individual customer journeys,” says Maggie Butler, director of customer experience at Allianz Partners. “When a company is willing to spend time evaluating each touchpoint individually and assigning resources to each, that’s when you really uncover core customer hassles that need to be addressed.”

A common mistake some companies make is to envision a singular customer journey. In reality, there could be hundreds of potential customer journeys for a given brand, because not all customers follow the same path. Be sure to identify where the customer journey may branch and collect feedback accordingly.

For example, at Allianz Partners, it is important to collect feedback from travelers who end up needing to



file insurance claims. But it is also useful to get input from those who do not file claims to understand their experience as travel insurance purchasers. Look for similar branching paths in your brand’s customer journey.

In addition to mapping all of your company’s customer touchpoints, it is worthwhile to also consider the customer’s trip as a whole. While your company may interact with the customer primarily during a particular part of their trip, to truly understand what travelers are going through, it is important to take a holistic view. Understand the entire customer journey—not just one part of it. For example, a hotel company should understand a guest’s trip from start to finish, including transportation (e.g., air or road travel), in-destination activities, etc., to understand how other parts of the journey impact the hotel stay.

Collect and contextualize customer feedback

- **Survey everywhere and often.**
- **Monitor sentiment on review sites and social networks.**
- **Combine feedback with other metrics for a holistic view.**

It is essential to understand customer likes, dislikes and expectations. And because customer perspectives are always evolving, it is crucial to constantly gather and monitor feedback. A robust strategy includes collecting solicited feedback via surveys as well as closely monitoring unsolicited feedback on third-party review sites and social networks. By leveraging all of these sources of input, your company can gain a more accurate, real-time view of the customer.

Survey best practices

All of the touchpoints identified when mapping the customer journey collectively shape the overall traveler experience. So, your organization should collect survey feedback across all of these touchpoints. This broad approach enables you to track changes over time, identify areas to focus on for improvement and then evaluate the success or failure of any changes you make. Understand that customers are not going to respond to every survey, and give them options to respond on topics that are meaningful to them via different response mechanisms.

When designing your survey, you'll want to target your questions depending on which part of your business you want feedback on. Common key performance indicators (KPIs) include customer satisfaction (CSAT), customer effort score (CES), repurchase likelihood and net promoter score (NPS) (i.e., how likely customers are to recommend your product or organization). Beyond these core metrics,



however, additional questions may be chosen that are specific to your business. It's important to give customers an opportunity to provide open-ended feedback as well to ensure you capture hassles you may not be aware of. Understand that customers may not complete all of the questions, so be sure to order your surveys so that the most important and actionable questions are presented first. It's also best not to force a response to an open-ended question.

While you should be surveying customers at various points throughout the customer journey, ensure there is at least one common question across all survey touchpoints. For example, your common question could focus on customer satisfaction, allowing you to compare your CSAT score across touchpoints. This approach makes it possible to compare performance across channels, identify trends and track fluctuations over time.

The goal is to understand what is and isn't working. Survey results, in combination with other operational metrics, should provide your organization with the insight needed to fix anything that needs attention and to identify the changes needed to meet and exceed customer expectations.

Combine customer feedback with other metrics for a more holistic view

Customer input is more valuable when placed in context. To gain a full picture of the traveler experience and glean maximum insights from customer feedback, customer survey results should be combined with other metrics. Survey results should be viewed alongside insights gathered via travel review and social media sites. At Allianz Partners, a dedicated team called the Social Care Team is responsible for responding to customer feedback offered on these third-party sites.

For a more holistic view of the customer experience, solicited and unsolicited customer feedback can be merged with operational data such as device, shopping/booking channel, products purchased or claim status. For example, if survey feedback indicates an issue with the booking process, considering experience data alongside device/channel data might reveal that issues primarily occur via a specific shopping method, such as the mobile website via a particular browser. This insight allows the company to pinpoint more specific areas for improvement.

Combining experience data (X-data) with operational data (O-data) allows organizations to gain a more holistic view and prioritize actions that will have the most significant impact. Experience data gives organizations insight into how customers feel, while operational data shows what customers actually do. By marrying these two data sets, companies can move from simply understanding what went wrong to understanding why something went wrong and how to fix it.



Rally the entire organization around a CX roadmap

Collecting feedback is only the first step. To truly leverage the VoC data, it is essential to foster a customer-centric approach throughout the organization. The best practices below provide a roadmap to help travel companies put customer experiences at the core of decision-making and to build a more customer-centric brand.

Foster cross-functional communication and collaboration

Customer insights only drive change if they are shared and acted upon. In a traveler-centric organization, customer experience data should be accessible to everyone who can use it to improve the customer experience.

To start, creating a customer dashboard is an effective way to make feedback visible across the organization. These dashboards provide real-time snapshots of customer sentiment and key performance metrics, making it easier for teams to stay informed about the current state of customer satisfaction.

However, dashboards on their own are easy to overlook unless there are also systems in place to regularly review results across relevant stakeholders. Implementing regular review cycles helps ensure that insights are actively discussed and keeps employees aligned with customer-centric goals. Remember: Customer feedback is only useful if it is shared broadly within the organization.

To ensure customer feedback is fully leveraged, create an organizational structure that supports regular analysis of customer experience data, communication of results and relevant action based on the insights gleaned.

To fully leverage customer feedback, organizations should establish a structured approach to analyzing customer experience data, sharing insights and driving action based on key findings.

Consider creating dedicated teams that focus on both analyzing customer feedback and implementing meaningful improvements. One team should bring





together experts from various functions to analyze customer experience findings alongside operational data to identify emerging patterns and areas for improvement.

A second team should consist of leaders with the authority to drive change. By collaborating with the analytics team, they can prioritize key insights and implement strategic improvements across departments. This structured, cross-functional approach enables organizations to translate customer feedback into impactful actions, ensuring alignment and measurable improvements in the customer experience.

Start at the top – then rally the entire organization

Customer centricity is a top-down strategy, making executive support critical. In addition, every organization struggles to juggle multiple priorities, so it can be easy to lose sight of the customer. But executives who understand that customer satisfaction fosters long-term revenue growth can ensure that the customer experience drives prioritization decisions throughout the organization.

Executive leadership should guide every employee—regardless of department—to think from the customer’s perspective. Whether an employee works in finance, customer service or IT, they should try to see things from the traveler’s point of view. This empathetic approach

ensures the entire organization is unified in its efforts to improve the traveler experience.

One way to do this is to encourage employees to imagine interacting with the brand as a customer would, envisioning the challenges and moments of delight a traveler might encounter. Make an effort to understand what customers want from your organization and how they may be feeling at every stage of the travel journey.

On the other side of the transaction, consider the promises your brand is making to the customer. Understand how these brand promises are shaping customer expectations and then put your customer experience strategy to work to evaluate whether these expectations are being met.

Adapt the roadmap to fit your organization

This process can be easily adapted for organizations of different sizes and types. The key steps remain the same: collect customer feedback, analyze the feedback alongside other relevant organization metrics and knowledge, and share the results with your team—whether yours is a large organization, a small or medium enterprise (SME) or even a travel agent “team of one.” Most importantly, use the insights gleaned to make real, customer-driven improvements in your products and services.

Case study: Allianz Partners' focus on claims

- **Hyperfocus on the claims process yielded a huge jump in customer satisfaction (CSAT).**
- **Post-claim satisfaction increased to mid-fours on a five-star scale by 3Q24, up from mid-twos in 2Q20, during the height of the pandemic.**
- **These scores include both paid and denied claims, highlighting the importance of collecting feedback from customers with varied outcomes.**

Allianz Partners has worked hard to unify its entire organization around a holistic customer experience strategy. The company's leadership team has fostered immense cross-functional collaboration and strategically aligned project efforts to focus on pivotal moments that matter most. Case in point: The company utilized customer experience data to design and execute a comprehensive overhaul of its insurance claims process. The multi-year undertaking leveraged customer insights to inspire big changes and yielded substantial gains in customer satisfaction.

Across the travel industry, customer satisfaction ratings declined during the COVID-19 pandemic as travelers struggled to navigate their new normal. In response, Allianz Partners invested money, time, internal resources and organizational focus to improve the customer experience. After careful consideration, Allianz Partners chose to hyper-focus on the claims process, a critical point of interaction for its customers.

To begin, Allianz Partners completed a customer journey mapping project focused on claims, breaking down every step of the process and every possible path the customer might take. The journey map included customer touchpoints within the claims process such as first notice of loss, the fulfillment process, status checks, decision points, etc. The team overlaid experience and operational data across the entire claims process to understand how customers experienced every step. Based on the analysis, Allianz Partners made a list of things that could potentially be improved. By leveraging both experience and operational (i.e., X and O) data, it was possible to prioritize the improvements that would have the biggest impact on the customer experience.

These insights were then used to create a multi-year operational roadmap designed to get customers through



the claims process more quickly and optimize processes for internal claims examiners. Allianz Partners identified two external factors and one internal factor to focus on. These included:

- **Revamping claims communications:** Optimizing the emails being sent out to ensure that communication is clear and efficient.
- **Upgrading the claims website:** A full redesign and rebuild of the claims website to make it easier to use and understand and faster to submit online.
- **Making internal claims processing more efficient:** Ensuring internal processes are smooth to ensure best turn-around time for claims.

Each of these improvement projects involved different functions and different teams of people. But with everyone aligned on the common goal of improving claims satisfaction ratings, these teams were able to align on common threads across the separate projects. For example, the company's emails and website were streamlined to show the same claim information that a claims examiner would provide over the phone to ensure consistent communication and maximize customer understanding. The systems in place to foster cross-functional collaboration enabled everyone to work together to achieve their shared goal.

Results: The hyperfocus on improving one area of business paid off. Overall post-claim CSAT scores improved significantly. In 2Q20, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when customer satisfaction hit a low across the travel industry, post-claim satisfaction was in the mid-twos on a five-star scale. By 3Q24 that score increased to the mid-fours, amid a significantly improved customer claims experience.

Notably, the post-claim surveys are sent to all claimants, regardless of final claim determination. By surveying customers with a range of experiences, Allianz Partners identified opportunities to improve product education and communications so that travelers have a better understanding of how to file a claim and what is covered. This process played a key role in boosting post-claim satisfaction.



Conclusion

In an increasingly competitive travel marketplace, a customer-centric approach is essential for long-term success. Travel companies face numerous competing projects and priorities daily. Those leaders who put the customer experience at the center of decision-making—and that design their organization to ensure employees do the same—will thrive. These traveler-centric organizations will have the insights they need to make the right decisions and to act quickly when correction or innovation is required.

Companies seeking to build a more customer-centric organization should start by focusing on the customer journey. Understand your customer's trip from start to finish and map all of the touchpoints where they interact with your brand. Then, collect customer feedback via internal surveys as well as third-party sources, and place that feedback in context by combining it with operational data for a more holistic view. Finally, to fully leverage the insights gained, put systems in place to rally your organization around a customer experience roadmap.

To build a customer-centric organization, collecting and analyzing customer feedback is only one piece of the puzzle. You must also have teams and systems in place committed to leveraging and communicating the lessons learned throughout the organization. By aligning the entire organization around the customer journey, you create a company culture passionate about the Voice of the Customer.

To see how Allianz Partners can help your travel company deliver a top-notch customer experience, reach out to us at AllianzPartners.com.

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