



Marketing's Role in Taking Customer Experience Firmwide

By Ida Cheinman

According to an Accenture study,¹ 90% of B2B executives cite customer experience (CX) as very important to achieving their companies' strategic priorities. But only 20% excel at it and see strong returns on their investment.

Why are the other 80% of companies failing? Often the cause stems from misalignment between CX goals, strategy, and execution. Although companies understand the importance of CX, they struggle with the "how" of implementing it.

To capitalize on CX potential, experience design and implementation must be fully integrated into everything an A/E/C firm does—from its long-term strategy to daily actions and across all functions, departments, and communications.

CX is not a program. It's how your firm operates.

Creating Value Through Integrated CX

Successfully operationalizing CX throughout an entire firm requires a monumental cultural, behavioral, and operational shift.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the A/E/C industries is that most firms still operate in functional silos:

- Marketing oversees the brand experience (BX)
- Leadership and project management lead CX
- HR manages the employee experience (EX)

As a result, everything is fragmented and inconsistent: the brand, the process, and the experience. Delivering value to customers through a unified and seamless experience—and reaping the full benefits of CX—relies on full integration. And, until there's a unifying force across all functions and departments of the firm, it will continue to result in a fragmented and inconsistent experience.

Because CX ties directly to the brand and culture (places where marketing plays a major role), marketing becomes the natural choice to help firms master it.

Customer-Focused Brand

Your brand is central to your firm's experience. Brand-based CX and culture create competitive advantage for any business today.

In fact, CX is how your firm delivers on its brand promise. It dramatically impacts how clients and prospects perceive and remember your brand, because it affects the brand experience—for better or worse.

- Does the experience match what the brand has promised?
- Have you clearly articulated your firm's value to customers?
- Do all your brand expressions speak in your firm's unique brand voice?

To answer these questions, you must first strategically define your brand and its core elements. You can't skip this step in the branding process and make it all about the logo. Brand strategy is a critical link between brand promise and delivery, between BX and CX.

📍 Where To Start

- Begin with a brand strategy informed by customer research. This will help articulate the brand in terms that are relevant and meaningful to customers.
- Develop a brand through the eyes of those who experience it. Becoming your clients' top choice takes more than a well-crafted marketing message. Creating a purpose-driven, values-based

brand and experience has become essential for attracting ideal clients to your firm.

- Take control of the brand expressions and actions at every customer touch point—from personal interactions to public-facing communications and across all offices, departments, and teams. Lead your firm's ongoing brand engagement and education efforts to ensure that every employee (client-facing or not) is aligned with the brand, can articulate the brand, and lives the brand with every decision, action, and customer interaction.

Customer-Focused Culture

Your customers' needs and journeys are cross-functional. They aren't based on your firm's organizational chart.

You can't create a seamless experience for your customers if the internal company structure doesn't support it. All business functions must understand their roles in improving firmwide CX and how it contributes to firm growth and profitability.

A brand's reputation is based on customers' perceptions and how well the brand meets their needs. Marketing plays a critical role in understanding, communicating, and serving those needs.

Where To Start

- Implement feedback processes and tools. Make customer feedback standard to how your firm conducts business. Collect customer data and direct and indirect feedback at all stages of the customer journey.
- Use data-driven insights to align your firm around a shared vision for CX. Marketing should serve as a curator and translator of information. It should share a comprehensive view of the customer across the firm, helping all teams and departments design and deliver better CX.

Customer-Focused Experience

How do we make our customers' lives easier and better? The answer to this question must guide all decisions, interactions, and experiences.

Making your firm more customer-centric begins with two things:

- Understanding your customers: what they value and why
- Understanding their decision-making context

This deeper level of understanding enables the shift from firm-centric communications and experience to customer-centric.

Relevance is about creating value—helping your prospects and clients do their jobs, achieve their goals, and advance their personal agendas. In return, they'll give you their time, attention, a piece of their business, and, ultimately, their loyalty.

Making your firm relevant requires rigorous, ongoing research and data mining across the entire customer journey and creating a shared understanding of customers among all employees.

Where To Start

- Develop robust customer personas. Learn your customers' aspirations, fears, challenges, and motivations at every step in the relationship. Discover how they consume media, interact with technology, come into contact with your brand, and search for information and content.
- Map the experience for each persona across the entire journey—from awareness to the first contact through the process of engagement and into a long-term relationship.
- Conduct a touch-point audit that encompasses all departments and functions of the firm—not just marketing. Prioritize those touch points that have the most influence and impact on the customer decision-making process.



Story Behind the Picture

84.51°, an analytics and marketing firm, enlisted BHPD Architecture to design a new regional office in Chicago's historic Old Post Office. My biggest challenge was planning the shoot and making sure all the elements were prepared, as we were shooting just prior to the tenant moving in. Everything in frame looks perfect and clean, but just out of view was the chaos of last-minute construction and unpacked boxes. The project's success was due to the teamwork and collaboration of each company involved.

84.51° Chicago office. Chicago, IL. BHPD Architecture and DW Hammer. ©Josh Beeman Photography, joshbeemanphotography.com.





Maybe you're not ready to replace your CMO with a CXO. But consider adding the X and creating a CMXO, chief marketing and experience officer. It's a step in the right direction."

—Shep Hyken, CSP, CPAE, Chief Amazement Officer, Shepard Presentations

- Use the audit to identify any gaps between the current and desired experience and develop an actionable CX blueprint for experiences your firm wants to deliver at each key touch point. Define specific actions each team will take to ensure a unified and seamless experience across the entire customer journey.

Put CX Into Action

What are some common challenges and considerations?

Make CX Manageable

Executing firmwide CX, not to mention creating a firmwide CX culture, can be overwhelming. Consider an incremental approach. Prioritize a few quick wins that build momentum, secure buy-in, and help you make the case for your firm investing more in CX.

Once you have a few victories under your belt, begin tackling your firm's biggest CX issues. Then you can move on to designing more complex CX architecture and experiences.

Keep Up With Changing Customer Expectations

Customers' expectations are rapidly evolving. A/E/C customers no longer tolerate outdated, fragmented, or generic processes, communications, and experiences. They want everything to be online, available, accessible, convenient, seamless, and fast.

Your firm must continually evolve its collective skill sets, processes, and technologies to meet customer needs for information and experiences that are relevant, personalized, and useful. Marketing, sales, and project management teams must be intentionally built to help customers do their jobs (faster, with more ease) and boost their confidence that your firm is the right choice as a partner.

Stop Mislabeling Soft Skills

The abilities to actively listen, exhibit empathy, thoughtfully communicate, and be vulnerable and authentic—in other words, connect on a human level—are typically referred to as soft skills.

Strong emotional intelligence is paramount in customer and team relationships. Labeling these critical abilities as soft skills devalues their essential role in the customer-first culture and experience.

Prioritize the EX

Employees are instrumental in delivering an exceptional, differentiating experience to your firm's customers. The quality of the EX your firm delivers directly affects the quality of experience your employees will deliver to your customers (CX).

Everything—from how you communicate internally to your work environment and daily rituals—contributes to your employees' understanding of the brand and what it means to act on-brand.

- Does your firm live out its stated values?
- Does it reward on-brand, values-based behaviors?
- Are your employees aligned and engaged with the brand?

Studies show that brand-based culture, EX, and internal alignment directly translate into increased motivation and productivity, higher quality of work, and better CX.



Marketer contributing editor IDA CHEINMAN is principal/creative director of the brand strategy, design + digital firm Substance151 in Baltimore, MD. She's a designer, strategist, writer, speaker, and tech geek helping A/E/C firms win in the 21st century competitive marketplace. Contact her at 410.732.8379 or ida@substance151.com.

The Opportunity for Marketing

The biggest downfall of CX implementation is internal misalignment. To align your firm around its CX strategy and champion the change throughout the firm, you need a strong leader.

No other business function is better positioned to bring unity and collaboration in improving firmwide CX than marketing. In fact, it's marketers who:

- Know the firm's internal and external stakeholders
- Understand the ideal customer and have customer data to back it up
- Communicate well—and we know how open, transparent communication is essential for strong leadership

Why Should Marketing Want To Lead the Charge?

According to a Forrester study,² 76% of business executives state that improving CX is a high or critical priority. This presents an opportunity for marketing to be at the center of what matters for your firm: competitive advantage and future growth. Leading the CX charge can create measurable value for your firm and the marketing function within the firm.

More and more companies are hiring chief experience officers. In the absence of that, in many industries it's increasingly becoming marketing's role to align their companies around CX.

Business leaders now place more importance than ever on CX and EX as related to the bottom line. Taking charge not only earns marketing a seat at the strategic table, but also helps future-proof marketing roles as essential. ■

¹*Better 2 Best*, Angelos, Jason, Davis, Phil, and Gaylard, Mark. Accenture Strategy, 2017. https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/pdf-53/accenture-strategy-b2b-cx-anthem-pov.pdf

²"Predictions 2019: Customer Experience," Manning, Harley, et al. Forrester, November 5, 2018. <https://go.forrester.com/blogs/predictions-2019-customer-experience-comes-under-fire/>