Customer Experience Matters!

The Content
Guide to Better CX

acrolinx

Over the past few years, customer experience (CX) has become a focal point for businesses looking to create value in an increasingly competitive landscape. In a world with so many choices, if you're not delivering the kinds of positive and engaging experiences your customers expect, they'll take their business elsewhere.

That, of course, can have serious implications for your bottom line. Figure 1 below compares two companies with identical growth rates and illustrates how churn slows growth over a five-year period.

Back in 2014, an Accenture report cast light on this reality when it described the "switching economy," the $6 trillion global challenge — and opportunity — that organizations face as customers routinely take their business from one company to another.[1] Among the primary reasons cited as to why so many customers were changing who they did business with were issues like "confusing websites, staggering call center wait times, and difficulty solving their problems no matter which channel they used." In short, customers were fed up with the lackluster experiences brands were delivering.

Figure 1. The dangerous impact of churn on corporate growth.

- Company A 5% Churn Rate
- Company B 10% Churn Rate
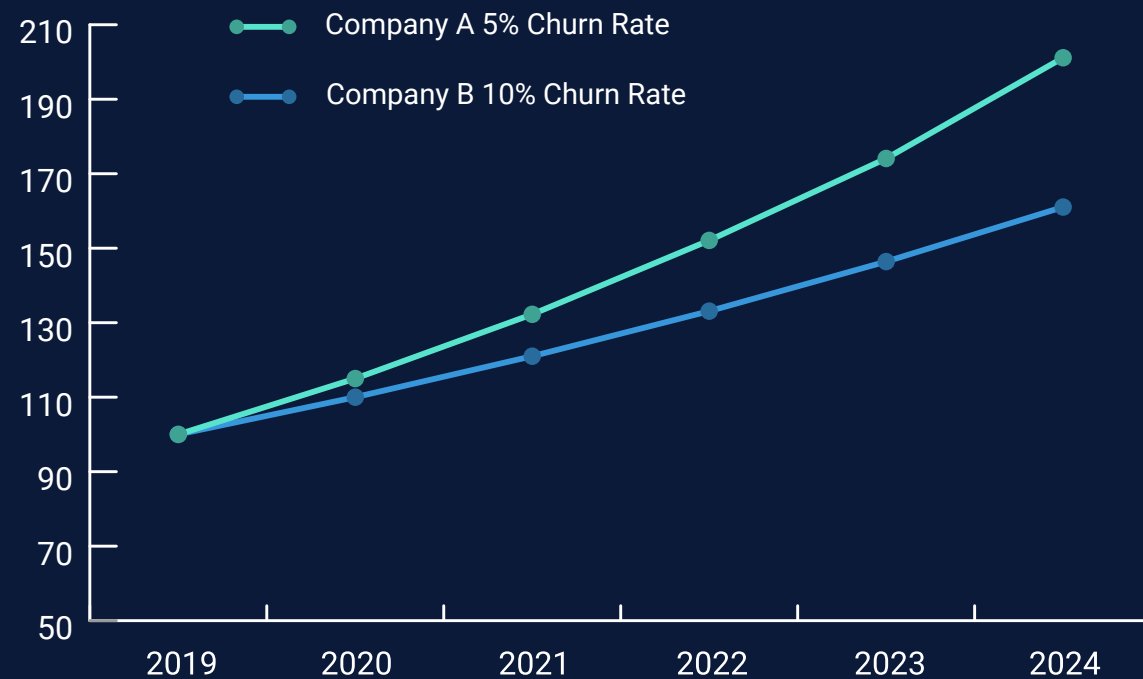
67 percent of consumers and **74** percent of business buyers say they'll pay more for a great experience.[2]

1 "Customer 2020: Are You Future-Ready or Reliving the Past?" Accenture, 2014.

2 "Customer Experiences Hit All-Time Highs," Salesforce Research.

Today, the idea of putting customers first has become a foundational part of almost every company's playbook, regardless of industry. That's because companies know the stakes are high. If they get CX wrong, they're at risk of losing customers. Meanwhile, for those who get it right, the upside potential is huge. Great CX helps companies drive repeat revenue and cross-sell opportunities, promote loyalty and advocacy, and stand out from competitors.
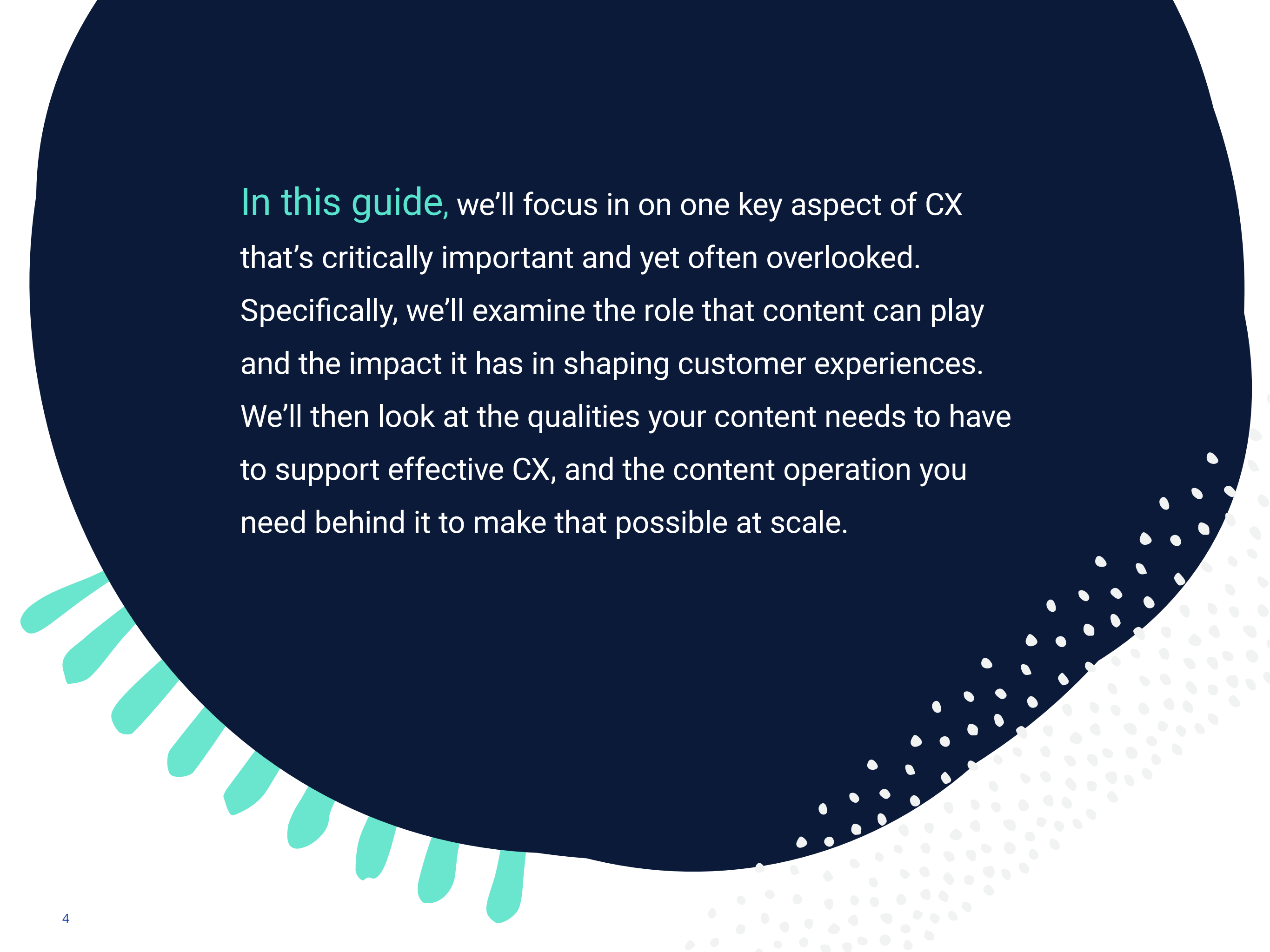
And the importance of CX isn't just hyperbole. According to a recent report from Aberdeen Group, when it comes to CX, best-in-class organizations (those in the top 20 percent) outperform everyone else (the bottom 80 percent). That's true across an array of important metrics, including things like revenue, customer satisfaction, and customer retention (See Figure 2).

Given the connection between CX and business outcomes, companies are hard at work trying to figure out how they can make improvements. And there's no shortage of areas to consider: overall product satisfaction, customer service, perceived value, and even emotional connection all have a role to play. Countless other variables help shape customer experience, too.

Figure 2. The business impact of focusing on customer experience.[3]

Metric	Top 20 percent	Everyone else
Year-over-year change in annual revenue	35.4%	7.7%
Year-over-year change in customer satisfaction	37.4%	-0.8%
Customer retention rate	86.0%	57.7%

3 Aberdeen Group, "The Customer Experience Value Chain: Paving the Way to Advocacy," October 2016.

In this guide, we'll focus in on one key aspect of CX that's critically important and yet often overlooked. Specifically, we'll examine the role that content can play and the impact it has in shaping customer experiences. We'll then look at the qualities your content needs to have to support effective CX, and the content operation you need behind it to make that possible at scale.

The Role of Content in Customer Experience

In today's digital world, when people interact with brands, it's usually through content. Would-be customers search for solutions to their problems online, visit company websites to learn about products and services, and download eBooks and white papers to gain the information they need to start solving their problems.

Buyers also use content to help validate their decisions before actually buying something. They'll read case studies, consult FAQs, and scour product fact sheets for information. And, after buying, they'll look to your company's technical documentation, customer service content, and training materials to become proficient users and troubleshoot any challenges they may run into. These are just a few of the many examples of how content plays a key role at virtually every touchpoint throughout the customer journey.

47%

Nearly half (47 percent) of B2B buyers view three to five pieces of content before contacting a sales rep.[4]

4"2016 Content Preferences Report: B2B Buyers Value Trustworthy Content with Data and Analysis," Demand Gen Report.

"The majority of our customers interact with us via three or more channels within a single interaction, across multiple devices. It's critical that the digital experiences we deliver are consistent from a brand standpoint, but also integrate a clear understanding of each audience. The ability to offer this aligned multi-channel customer experience is a market differentiator that not only results in increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, but also new customer acquisition and revenue growth."

Nick Mehta
CEO, Gainsight

One of the drivers behind today's digital experiences is the fact that we live in an age where customers want to be in charge. Most have adopted a self-service mentality where they want to access the information they need quickly and easily, on their own. In fact, many prefer not to engage with sales or customer service reps until they're well down the path to purchase or simply don't have another option.

What all this means is that in many cases, your content isn't just your brand ambassador. It's also one of the primary tools you have to help shape the digital experience you're creating for your customers. That's because it's the basis for most interactions and typically your primary form of communication. As a result, every blog post, Tweet, and line of web copy is an opportunity to either enhance or diminish a customer's experience with your brand.

Practically speaking, the takeaway is that your content has to do double duty. Not only does it need to convey critical information to meet your customers' needs, it also has to do so in a way that helps create a positive overall experience with your brand. That's a tall order, but it's critical.

Recent research from Forrester reinforces just how critical.[6] "Customers are three to four times more likely to say they trust brands that communicate clearly. And when customers trust a brand, they prefer it to other brands. In contrast, when companies do not communicate clearly, customers perceive the brand to be deceptive or unethical — as literally trying to cheat them." The research goes on to say that how well your company communicates with your customers has a great impact on your brand's overall customer experience. And that impact can really affect your bottom line.

73% of consumers want to solve product and service issues on their own. In fact, nearly one third of all consumers would rather "clean a toilet" than talk to customer service.[5]

5 "The Aspect Consumer Experience Index: Millennial Research on Customer Service Expectations," Aspect Software & The Center for Generational Kinetics, April 2015.
6 Faith Adams, Margaret Rodriguez, Danielle Place, Michelle Yaiser, Laura Garvin Tramm, Harley Manning, Scott Ross, and Rachel Birrell, "Read My Lips: Clear Communication Can Mean Billions In Revenue," Forrester, July 31, 2017.

Content Can Make or Break Customer Experience

Imagine a simple scenario: You just bought a new SaaS product to support your business and have run into some trouble using it. Invariably, your first move is probably to go online and poke around for a solution. And it's one thing if you're not able to find an answer to your question, that happens. But it's really another when you find what you think is the right solution, only to be met with content that's confusing, inaccurate, or outdated. Your positive customer experience can quickly turn into a distrust of the product and the company behind it.

We've all been there and felt our frustration rise as we've had to wait on hold after calling a company's customer service center (when we couldn't count on content to solve the problem on our own). That's not exactly a scenario that leaves customers feeling good.

Avoid content that's:

✔ **Unhelpful**

✔ **Confusing**

✔ **Not personalized**

✔ **Obsolete**

✔ **Misleading**

✔ **Hard to find**

While your customers may tolerate the occasional misstep, repeat bad experiences with your content have a cumulative effect. Over time, they can negatively impact perceptions of your brand and begin to adversely affect your customer experience KPIs, including things like:

→ **Customer satisfaction scores (CSAT).**
Customer satisfaction scores are a measure of how happy a customer is with a particular product, interaction, or transaction with a brand. Since content either drives or supports each of those experiences, it can play a role in overall customer satisfaction.

→ **Net promoter score (NPS).**
A net promoter score is an indication of how likely a customer is to recommend a company to another person. While your content and communications are unlikely to be the sole reason why your company is worth recommending, they can certainly be among the factors that contribute to your score.

→ **Customer effort score (CES).**
A customer effort score measures the perceived effort needed to do business with your company. And when it comes to your content, clear and easy-to-understand communications go a long way toward making a frictionless customer experience. As we saw in the Forrester research mentioned earlier, hard-to-decipher, confusing, or frustrating communication can make the journey to customer loyalty a lot more challenging.

> " *"If you can only measure one thing, it should be effort. Our research finds that effort is the strongest driver to customer loyalty."*[7]
>
> Sarah Dibble, Executive Advisor, Gartner

→ **Customer retention rate.**
Customers churn all of the time. And while different kinds of things play a part in churn, your content should never be one of them. Think of great content — content that's clear, consistent, helpful, on-brand, and aligned to your business goals — as a tool you can use to help keep your customers happy, by engaging them and helping to solve their problems.

→ **Customer service costs.**
As we saw earlier, if your content is confusing or not helpful, your customers are going to call into your customer service center a lot more. With calls costing up to $8 each, there's a real incentive to keep the number of calls low.[8] Having great content that addresses customer needs and empowers customers to solve their own problems is critical to their success with your product or service. The same can be said for strong content that helps your customer service reps do their job. If they have clear, helpful, and easy-to-find content at their disposal, they can help turn around bad experiences before they cause real damage.

Now, let's imagine a very different experience. One where your content doesn't have a negative or even neutral impact, but rather where it actually helps play a role in creating a better customer experience. In the next section, we'll consider what that content might look like and what it takes to create it.
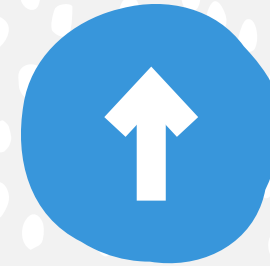
7 Jordan Bryan, "What's Your Customer Effort Score?" Gartner, July 12, 2018.
8 "Call Center Metrics: Cost Per Call," VHT.

US businesses lose **$62 billion a year** because of bad customer experiences.[9]

A moderate improvement in customer experience would impact the revenue of a typical $1 billion company an average of **$775 million** over 3 years.[10]

9 Chris Bucholtz, "The $62 Billion Customer Service Scared Away," New Voice Media, May 24, 2016.
10 "ROI of Customer Experience, 2018," Experience Matters, August 21, 2018.

The Path to Better Customer Experiences Starts with Better Content

Now that we've covered the importance of CX and drawn the connection between it and content, the question becomes what does content that drives better customer experiences actually look like? And how can you create it? While the answer is relatively simple, getting there is much more challenging, particularly at scale. Let's look at the characteristics your content must have to deliver better customer experiences. We'll then consider how to actually make that happen.

Content that drives positive customer experiences needs to be:

1 Useful

Your content should help your customers. It should give them the information they need to solve their problems independently, whether that's figuring out potential solutions to a particular business challenge or simply troubleshooting your product or service. Anticipate your customers' needs and make sure you've got really useful content in place to address them.

2 Clear

Clarity is one of the most important aspects that delineates between positive and negative experiences with content. When your content is clear, it's easy to understand. When it's not, it can lead to ambiguity and ultimately be a major source of frustration. Remember, just because something makes sense to you doesn't mean it will to everyone else. Your content must be clear to everyone who needs it.

Content that drives positive customer experiences needs to be:

3 Personalized

4 Consistent

Personalization is about more than just greeting a customer by name in your next email or newsletter. It's about serving up content that's relevant to that particular customer, based on his or her unique situation and needs. Plus, you have to make sure your content has the right terms and phrases and tone of voice for your audience. Great experiences aren't generic, they're tailored for individuals.

Consistency is essential because it helps ensure that your customers' experiences are all of the same caliber across every channel. That way, it never feels as though the brand they're interacting with is disjointed or unfamiliar. It creates a sense of trust and builds confidence that results in a better overall experience.

"One of the best ways to avoid churn is to focus on what I call 'relationship ROI.' When we work to create deeper relationships with our customers, over a long period of time, we more easily survive the day-to-day hiccups and set ourselves up for higher lifetime value. It's all about creating an emotional, more personalized customer experience — one that leads to ongoing trust and loyalty."

Dave Blake
Founder/CEO, ClientSuccess

Content that drives positive customer experiences needs to be:

5

Appropriately voiced

6

Emotionally connected

Having a distinctive tone of voice that helps personify your brand is critical. However, that voice must be contextually appropriate. What one situation calls for might be very different from another. Likewise, what's an appropriate tone for one audience may not resonate with another. While it's essential that you know your audience and how they'll be using your content, it's also important to make sure that everyone who creates your content knows how to apply those insights to achieve the right tone of voice.

Customers value emotional connections when it comes to CX. According to a 2016 Harvard Business Review article, the way to move beyond simply satisfying customers is to really connect with them.[11] Emotionally connected customers not only generate greater value, but each time they engage with a brand they feel connected to, they become more convinced that the company really gets them. Emotional connection-based strategies include content and messaging that's appropriately voiced and styled to build that bond.

11 Alan Zorfas and Daniel Leemon, "An Emotional Connection Matters More than Customer Satisfaction," *Harvard Business Review*, August 29, 2016.

Content that drives positive customer experiences needs to be:

7

Easy to find

Not being able to find the information they need can make customers want to pull out their hair. That's why it's so important to organize and optimize your content for search, so people can easily access what they're looking for, using intuitive keywords.

8

Current and accurate

Content that's labeled by version, or new vs. legacy, will impact what information your customers consume. Fresh and up-to-date content contributes to higher customer engagement. By not letting things get dated, you're showing you care about customer experience. Your customers will recognize and appreciate that.

Creating content that drives positive customer experiences is fairly easy for smaller organizations that have just a handful of people creating relatively small amounts of content. At enterprise corporations, where there may be hundreds or even thousands of content creators, it's much harder. All the more so when different teams and departments, in offices all around the world, are creating that content in silos. In these scenarios, it's not unusual to find that content chaos results in major issues with clarity, consistency, brand alignment, editorial bottlenecks, time to market, and high costs.

To have a successful content operation that can create customer-focused content at scale (and contribute to the KPIs we talked about on page 9), you not only need a sound content strategy, but all of your content creators have to be aligned with it. And that's virtually impossible at large enterprises if you're relying on traditional processes and workflows, static style guides, and manual editorial reviews.

To achieve the necessary alignment, you have to find a way to operationalize your content strategy and turn its key elements — your goals, priorities, and policies — into actionable processes and metrics. We call this Active Content Governance and it's an approach that makes sure that everyone who's part of your content operation is working from the same playbook. That way, it's much easier for enterprises to produce content that supports great customer experience, no matter who in the organization is actually writing it. When you implement Active Content Governance with the right technology platform, ensuring this kind of alignment at scale becomes an easy and automated process.

Value of Active Content Governance in CX

- Consistency in content style, tone, and terminology

- Clearer, more succinct content for better reuse and more cost effective translation

- Improved search and findability

- Better CSAT/CES/NPS scores

- Lower cost per ticket

- Higher customer retention rates

The Time to Create Better Content for CX Is Now

Over the past few years, CX has become an increasingly important factor in determining the success of companies around the world. Companies that get it right stand to gain a whole bunch of benefits that directly impact their bottom line. Those that fail will continue to see their customers stray.

While many factors help shape customer experiences, content plays a role in almost all of them. That's why it's so important to make sure that every piece of content or communication your customers see is useful, clear, personalized, consistent, appropriately voiced, and easy to find. And for large enterprises, the key to doing that when there are so many moving parts is by ensuring alignment with Active Content Governance.

At a time when content is more important than ever, investing in a platform that enables Active Content Governance is critical to creating the content you need to drive better customer experiences across your enterprise.

To learn more about Active Content Governance, download Content Grows Up: The Active Content Governance Playbook.

acrolinx

Better Content. Faster.

Acrolinx is revolutionizing strategy-aligned content creation. Our platform is helping large global brands, including IBM, Google, and Facebook, produce better content, faster, at enterprise scale. Acrolinx is a spin-off of Germany's DFKI, one of the world's leading research institutes in the field of artificial intelligence.

Learn more at acrolinx.com