

## **RESOURCE: The 8 Stages Of The Customer Journey**

There are 8 stages of the Customer Journey. In order to truly connect with your customers it's important to engage with them every step of the way.

Ensuring that you weave your elements of storytelling the whole way through you can take your customers on a journey before they even arrive with you and long after they've left.

### **1. Awareness**

At this point in the customer journey your visitor or customer has just learned of your existence. They know very little about you and are on the lookout for information that gives them more of an understanding about who you are, what you stand for and what you do.

In this first stage buyers rarely know exactly what they want or need. In some cases they might not even know what possible solutions are out there – they may not have even identified the problems they have.

Now is the time to plant those seeds and nurture them to grow. Maybe they have come across your product, service or brand in a very basic way, they may have gone looking for specific information and stumbled across something that mentions your company.

Are you confident that your product, service or brand not only helps that prospect highlight what they need but also represents the solution they require? Don't forget, the solution could be as simple as "we need something to do on Thursday afternoon" or "I want to experience something new".

At this stage you're merely an idea ruminating around their brain.

### **2. Interest**

When your customer exits the awareness stage and moves into an active interest stage they will want to know more about you, they want to learn more about what you or your product, service or brand can offer.

At this point the driving force could be their own desire or external circumstances which now prompt them to see the benefits and/or value of potentially engaging with you – or another similar company.

For tourism businesses your customer could be looking at things such as whether there is car parking nearby, is there somewhere to have lunch, is it family friendly, how far away is it from where they are staying, what is the cost, what is the value for money, what memories will they create?

Something will have piqued their interest, maybe they've been drawn in by your story. Something has resonated with them and they need and want to know more.

### **3. Consideration**

At this point your potential visitor is actively going out of their way to learn more about the product, service or experience you offer.

It's generally felt that once a customer moves into the "consideration" phase they're not only genuinely considering the purchase but they are a "warm lead" for you to nurture.

Hitting them strong with your wonderful narrative and beautiful story could help clinch the deal. If they're comparing you to another company or brand - this is where you need to showcase everything you have to offer.

Your visitor will probably now be looking at the features and the benefits of your experience or attraction and they're deciding whether or not they want to stick with you or move to a competitor.

Getting the right content full of great story in front of your prospective customer at this point in your sales funnel is absolutely vital. If your prospective customer can't find the information they want or need then a competitor could swoop in and take them from under you just because they were communicating a better message.

#### **4. Evaluation**

If your visitor is in the evaluation stage you're definitely in the running for a completed sale. In essence the "evaluation" stage is an extension of the "consideration" phase.

However, by this point usually deep down the customer has made the bulk of their decision – they usually have a gut feeling or an inkling of which way they're going to go with regards to their purchase.

By this point your customer has convinced themselves that they will make a purchase.

By now they want to make the purchase and in many cases need to.

Whilst the majority of the decision making is complete this is not a lost cause – there's still the opportunity to change the customer's mind if they're not swaying towards you.

At this point you want to ensure you are serving content to the customer or have content available to the customer that is essentially a final summarisations of the options available and why they should buy.

At this point you want to reinforce the experience they will get as a result of interacting with your business. You want to remind them of the memories they will take home and show them the "icing on the cake".

#### **5. Purchase**

The purchase is the culmination of each of the prior stages. The customer has become aware, interested, considered their options, evaluated the situation and has now decided to make their decision to buy.

The product or service purchased has represented the best choice for them and they have parted with their money. However, the sale being made doesn't conclude the transaction or the journey.

Don't end your brand storytelling journey here. Make sure you carry it through into your booking system, confirmation emails and more.

## **6. Service**

The service stage of the customer journey can represent several things. It can be crucial to the purchase itself before and after. It represents the experience the customer had during the sales process and how the relationship between buyer and seller evolves after this.

The one thing you want to avoid, especially if you have a cooling off period or a "money back guarantee" is the customer getting "buyer's remorse" at this point. Regretting their transaction is the last thing you want them to be feeling in the time immediately after their purchase.

This is where your customer service and follow up is absolutely vital, it is a critical factor in influencing what your customer will do next and whether or not this is the end of their customer journey with you or whether they progress to other stages.

If the customer feels ignored, disrespected, misled or insulted at any point before or after the transaction this could lead to them changing their mind at some point.

Draw your customer in with your story - give them something more to look forward to when they visit. Think about all the things they may need to know in advance of arriving and make sure you deliver as much information to them as possible.

Now is the time to tell your customer about the local area, the great pubs around, things to do or even to send them links, connections and discounts to other collaborative partners.

## **7. Loyalty**

If you get the customer journey right up to this point you can create a very powerful customer. Moving your customer through the journey and into the loyalty stage is where most marketers hope they will land.

One of the reasons "service" is so important is because it leads to customer loyalty. Humans are creatures of habit and if we like a product or service, we will continue to purchase it. This creates a reliable stream of income for the seller and next time the sales process will be much easier. The customer may not spend as long considering and evaluating before a purchase, and they are already aware and interested.

In the "loyalty" stage you're creating brand ambassadors or brand advocates. People who will go on to tell others about your brand and repeat their experience with you to anyone who might be interested. There's nothing like word of mouth to guarantee a sale.

These customers will actively praise your product or service and will have a positive view and outlook on your brand. Their recommendations will install feelings of confidence in other buyers whose own path through the journey will be smoother because of this.

Think about what stories you're going to send your customers home with to tell their friends, family and colleagues. What will they tell people when they are recounting their experiences with you.

## **8. Re-Purchase**

The 8 Stages of The Customer Journey are a cycle that reoccurs every time the customer needs a product or a service.

If it's done correctly and you've effectively moved people seamlessly through your entire funnel then the initial stages can be shortened or even skipped when a re-purchase is on the cards.

If a customer is happy with their purchase and feels it was value for money then they are likely to use that brand again. If the customer has been treated well before, during and after the purchase this will only encourage them further.

This is the point at which some companies become complacent. Don't just assume because someone has bought from you before they're not expecting the same customer journey, experience and service. In fact, in some cases, they've such a high opinion of you and your brand you have a lot to live up to.

Don't neglect these customers by not nurturing them through your content and marketing strategy, they are just as important (if not more) than each and every new customer you encounter.

Give customers a sense that they are part of your brand story. Check in with them, add them to your mailing list and send them valuable, interesting content they will want to consume.