The link between what your customers need and what you offer is no longer a
straight line—it's more like a series of curlicues. Empowered by the Internet and
emboldened by social media, consumers are taking increasingly complex and
independent journeys from what they want to what you have. Consumers want
companies to respect, connect, understand, and educate them, all while offering
quality products and services. They want a companion for their journeys—not just
a buy button and an eReceipt.

Consumers also no longer discriminate between the companionship they
experience with brands like Amazon.com and the engagement they expect
from their utility, government agency, or health insurer. Many managers in highly
regulated industries struggle to meet new consumer engagement expectations.
Consequently, they see low engagement, high abandonment, and costly
customer service metrics. Market share and profitability soon suffer. The few
bold market leaders ahead of the curve are taking a different approach. They are
learning to analyze, transform, and improve their customer's journey.

Connecting to a customer's journey may start with a chief marketing officer or
sales executive. These customer champions look to journey mapping as a way
to drive change and become more customer centric. Other champions have more
tactical needs. They try to understand the best way to squeeze more value out
of their marketing dollars or come to grips with how digital and social media have
affected their marketing mix.

Accurately identifying and mapping key
interactions, pain points, and moments
of truth is critical to understanding the
quality of your customer's journey.
COMPANIES CAN OPTIMIZE THEIR CUSTOMER’S JOURNEY BY TAKING THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

1. DISCOVER
   Collect and analyze information on your customer's existing journey by analyzing market research findings, status reports, satisfaction data, and publicly available information. Identify interaction points, conduct interviews with stakeholders and subject matter experts throughout your organization, and determine what is really going on between your customer and your brand.

2. MAP
   First, create a baseline map of each customer's overall journey by plotting every interaction in sequential order. Next, using segmentation data, develop personas or customer profiles to make your customer relatable. And finally, validate each customer's journey through a workshop with your cross-functional teams.

3. TEST
   Your workshop helps to develop hypotheses, but to know your customer's experience for sure, you must ask directly. Rely on market research to validate customer pain points.

4. ACT
   Reconvene your cross-functional teams to discuss the customer-confirmed pain points identified through research. Have the teams brainstorm solutions and then develop a mini-business plan for each solution. Tie the action plans together through one enterprise roadmap that prioritizes next steps.

Done well, transformation of a customer’s end-to-end journey can extend across an entire organization. Journey mapping may boost customer experience and engagement, and it can reduce costs and streamline operations. Accurately identifying and mapping key interactions, pain points, and moments of truth is critical to understanding the quality of your customer's journey. Effectively implementing solutions that address pain points and improve satisfaction can be especially challenging. But when customers are satisfied, companies are rewarded. Earn happy customers by successfully moving ideas for journey transformation from the whiteboard, through the boardroom, and into their day-to-day lives. Staying on top of and adapting to customer preferences and needs over time creates satisfaction and engagement that lead to better outcomes for your business.

An improved customer experience is not a once-and-done activity. It requires realistic goal setting, ongoing tracking and monitoring of metrics, and minor program tweaking to ensure that goals are being met and customers’ needs
are being addressed. After you begin transforming each end-to-end customer's journey by enacting the steps above, keep the momentum going by enlisting "customer champions," educating and socializing your entire staff, forming action teams, setting realistic goals, gaining leadership buy-in, and forming a customer-oriented committee. Companies that take consumerism to heart and make strides to transform the end-to-end journey can achieve empowered, engaged customers and, ultimately, better business outcomes.

About the Author

Mary Carter has more than 12 years of experience providing strategy, marketing, and communications solutions to companies in various industries, including health insurance, financial services, and consumer packaged goods. She works with a portfolio of U.S. national and regional health insurance carriers and healthcare associations with an emphasis on healthcare reform and consumer engagement marketing strategy.