



Customer Experience

It's User Experience in the Bigger Picture

Customer experience (CX) is a relatively new term in the government conversation, while user experience has long been recognized as an important part of IT development. But there's a big difference. Simply put, **Customer Experience is User Experience on steroids.**

User experience deals with digital products, like websites and applications.

Customer experience does that, too—and more. CX focuses on all the ways people interact with your organization. It looks at their relationship with you over time. And it's also concerned with what happens behind the scenes, for instance with business processes and organizational culture.

This matters, because the big problem now is not how to make websites work. The big challenge is creating connected experiences for people, across digital and traditional channels.

Customer Experience Basics

Excellent customer experience makes it easy for people to get things done, no matter how they interact with your organization. In person, over the phone, through the mail, or online, people aren't forced to start from square one when they move from one channel to another.

But channels aren't automatically connected. Touchpoints don't spontaneously support the total customer experience. They have to be designed, or redesigned, with customer experience in mind.

In principle, solving CX problems is simple. Know your customer, collaborate with them, and design systems and processes that work across places and over time. In practice, though, it calls for different ways of thinking and doing. Here are four.

About ICF

ICF (NASDAQ:ICFI) is a leading provider of professional services and technology-based solutions to government and commercial clients. ICF is fluent in the language of change, whether driven by markets, technology, or policy. Since 1969, we have combined a passion for our work with deep industry expertise to tackle our clients' most important challenges. We partner with clients around the globe—advising, executing, innovating—to help them define and achieve success. Our more than 5,000 employees serve government and commercial clients from more than 65 offices worldwide. ICF's website is icf.com.

Customer Journey Mapping Case Study

An ICF client awards grants to social service agencies that help people gain financial independence—by owning a home, going to college, or building up their business. It's an important mission and a strong program. But the grants are complicated to get and challenging to run. Word of mouth spread, and organizations aren't applying, which means grant money isn't getting into the communities where it can do good.

Our client realized they need to better understand their customers—the social service agencies that should be applying for grants. We used Customer Journey Mapping to learn directly from potential grantees, walking in their shoes, understanding their frustrations, and co-designing ideas with them to make the program work better for everyone.

User engagement. Do user research, test continually, and get customer input early and often, not only after you've built and launched an important program.

Organizational culture. Effective CX requires an organizational culture that encourages and rewards customer-centric actions. For instance, consider how to incentivize employees for serving customers across channels, regardless of where staff sit.

Customer journey mapping. Use this excellent tool to discover and chart your customers' interactions with your touchpoints. The resulting diagram provides a shared understanding that helps everyone plot the way forward to increase customer satisfaction and engagement.

Design **thinking.** This key, innovative practice offers a suite of creative tools that help the team work together to find and solve the right problems.

Creating the Road Forward

At ICF we understand customers' needs and the current state of an organization's service delivery through market research, user research, and business analysis, using our proprietary Volte process. We then create models for shared understanding, such as personas, customer journey maps, and mental models, that allow organizations and stakeholders to prioritize and implement effective solutions.

Customer experience is a powerful way to improve service delivery, and clients are scrambling to incorporate new processes into existing programs. It's now time to build CX design into the development of services and products from the outset. Through good customer experience design, an organization can avoid expensive and complicated work-arounds, improve return on investment, maximize relationships with customers, and become more effective at building what customers need and want—products and services that solve people's real problems.

Mary Schwarz
mary.schwarz@icf.com +1.703.934.3610

