

A customer-first approach during unprecedented times

Overview

The Pandemic has had a significant commercial impact globally, with over 94 percent of the Fortune 1000 feeling the heat of disruptions caused by it. Nigerian businesses have not been exempted from these negative effects. Some organisations have restructured their staff salary and even laid off workers in a bid to deal with the financial implications of COVID-19. Amid this crisis, the way organisations engage and interact with their customers has been critical. Focusing on and monitoring customer experience has become even more important, considering the current dynamics of business.

As a product of over 16 years' experience of acting as advisors to businesses in their diverse formations, Nexia Agbo Abel & Co. has documented Six Pillars of customer experience that serve as a framework for outstanding customer relationship management, and coincidentally during the COVID-19 outbreak, we see 2 of the 6 Pillars, Integrity and Empathy appearing very relevant. By treating customers in the right way now, organisations can continue to nurture and likely retain them in the long-term.

During lockdown, businesses needed to find new ways to connect with their customers. This unprecedented situation called for organisations to understand evolving consumer and community needs and react to them appropriately. This meant both reassuring their customers and also adapting quickly to provide the right products, services and solutions.

There are Six Pillars that can help businesses to better connect with customers and employees. Pre-COVID-19, they were powerful tools for creating successful, sustainable and ethical businesses. Now they provide an invaluable guide to corporate behaviour in uncertain times. They are a set of simple principles that help to navigate challenges by taking a customer-first approach. As the global situation continues to unravel, how and when companies should lend support to their customers and colleagues is a road less travelled. Unlike disaster relief, there is no roadmap or recipe for company involvement. However, companies must continue to keep their employees' trust, understand evolving consumer and community needs, and provide products, services and resources where appropriate.

The Six Pillars of Customer Experience

The 6 pillars show the universal principles that govern all positive human experiences with both customers and employees. These pillars are:

- **Empathy:** Showing that you care, choosing the right emotional response to address the customer's circumstances.
- **Personalisation:** Having a good knowledge of the customer's circumstances, prioritising effectively, putting the customer back in control.
- **Time and Effort:** Making it easy for customers to access information, get essentials and contact help desks.
- **Expectations:** Setting, managing and meeting customer expectations accurately in these difficult times.
- **Resolution:** Responding rapidly to customer needs and finding solutions to new customer problems and hasten innovation.
- **Integrity:** Doing the right thing, ensuring the needs of the many are met, prioritising safety, protecting the vulnerable, being seen to act fairly and in all customers best interests.

The organisations that master the 6 Pillars grow more quickly and manage costs effectively. The framework is hierarchical in nature. For example, focusing on Personalisation without addressing trust will bring little long-term benefit. Doing the right thing, finding creative ways to meet customer problems, accurately setting expectations, minimising customer effort, addressing customers' circumstances and showing you care all follow a natural sequence.

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