



# A Branded Customer Experience® Transforming Promises into Action

by **JANET LEBLANC**, Janet LeBlanc + Associates Inc.

## **ABOUT JANET LEBLANC + ASSOCIATES INC.**

A leading North American consulting firm specializing in customer experience management. Recognized as one of the foremost experts on customer-centric leadership, Janet LeBlanc guides senior leaders on how to use customer strategies to drive business growth. We partner with public sector institutions and Fortune 100 companies to overcome silo-based obstacles and collaborate on how to earn customer-driven growth.

Our team of dedicated professionals deliver services across four practice areas including leadership, customer insights, customer experience design and innovation, and performance improvement.

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Creating meaningful experiences with brands is becoming increasingly more difficult to achieve. The rise of the digital age is forcing traditional marketing and communication channels to change as customers gain more control over their relationship with the brand. Smart phones, social media and apps allow consumers to gather information, find competing products and talk to one another more easily than ever before. Customers can also choose to bypass an organization's branded marketing messages entirely through search engines, comparison sites and online reviews.

By shifting the focus from a branded marketing message to a Branded Customer Experience®, organizations can deliver on a brand promise with greater consistency while increasing awareness about whether customers are getting the personal experiences that matter most to them.

## **A Branded Customer Experience® Defined**

A Branded Customer Experience® is a designed experience—one that is intentionally differentiated from other brands through the consistent delivery of a well-articulated value proposition across all customer channels. It is the culmination of an organization's brand vision which articulates the core values inherent in what the brand stands for and its promise to customers about how the organization will deliver on their expressed expectations.

A customer experience brings a brand to life. Customer experience is the result of interactions that occur through a series of steps, encounters and moments along a journey that influence a customer's relationship with, and perception of, a brand or organization. Key moments of truth exist along the journey where customers may pause and evaluate the experience or make a crucial decision, giving them an opportunity to form or change an opinion about a company or brand. These defining moments present ideal occasions to reinforce a brand promise.



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## Designing the Branded Customer Experience®

Designing a branded experience requires a clear understanding of the promise you are delivering and how you want customers to think, feel, and act at every step of the journey. The cues that reinforce the brand promise can be perceived through several dimensions: sensory experiences such as the calming scent experienced during a visit to the spa, social experiences exemplified by the Genius Bar tech support station provided to Apple customers, or emotional experiences as reflected in an empathetic experience provided by a caregiver during a patient experience.

Experience design is the process by which brand cues are crafted as part of the ideal customer experience. This design should reflect the brand promise with absolute clarity, deliver on the brand's unique selling proposition, and connect with customers and their needs.

## Journey toward a Branded Customer Experience®

Our five-step framework for designing a Branded Customer Experience® helps organizations to understand the journey needed to design a new experience or to examine and revitalize an existing one.

**Step One: Understand what customers value most** – Develop a deep appreciation of customer expectations through voice-of-the-customer research and customer loyalty analysis. Uncover key value drivers of the end-to-end experience relative to competitive offerings. Define customer expectations within the marketplace and identify a differentiated value proposition that is important and relevant to customers.

**Step Two: Identify the brand promise** – Define the vision for the brand through the creation of a brand promise. The more clearly the brand promise is articulated in all the details that comprise the customer experience at all experience points, the more likely the brand will be perceived as authentic to its values, and customer-focused in its offering.

**Step Three: Design the ideal experience** – Map the current customer journey and plot all of the key customer interactions with the brand through the customer life cycle. Identify defining moments along the journey to reinvent the experience using brand cues, either rational, sensory or emotive, to support the brand promise. Orchestrate cues along the journey to reinforce the branded experience either through rational or emotional experiences.

**Step Four: Align employees to understand and deliver the branded experience** – Commit to a customer-centric agenda by aligning organizational goals, objectives, metrics and actions to the branded experience. To be successful, it is critical for all people, processes and



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technologies to be strategically aligned with a united focus on delivering the brand promise at every interaction.

**Step Five: Design your visual expression of the Branded Customer Experience®** – Ensure all communications and collateral (both online and traditional) reflect a consistent, intentional experience that will support the experiential brand cues along the customer journey.

## The Role of the Senior Leader

Jared Weiner, a leading futurist, believes that design thinking will become one of, if not the most important core competency for leaders in the future. Today's senior leaders must fundamentally understand how the Branded Customer Experience® translates to activities in marketing, communications, operations and human resources and keep pressure on each department to understand its role in delivering on the branded experience. Senior leaders must have a vivid description of the brand vision and communicate it in fundamental ways that resonate with employees and customers alike. In essence, ensure they understand that they are stewards of the experience as customer expectations change and evolve over time.

A Branded Customer Experience® requires careful planning and ongoing attention. Senior leaders play a critical role in defining the brand vision for the organization—essentially clarifying “who we are” as an organization. Articulating core values that are inherent in what the brand stands for sets the identity of the brand in specific ways that produce tangible benefits for the customer.

## Transforming Promises into Action

Creating and delivering a Branded Customer Experience® is a challenge for most organizations today. Every department within an organization must use design thinking principles to identify methods to apply brand cues throughout the experience within all functional areas of responsibility.

For service organizations and call centre environments in particular, the customer experience is a series of interactions that happen over time. Consistency is extremely important across all touch points and employees must be fully aligned with the type of experience the organization is trying to deliver.

Developing a call centre persona is a great way to help employees understand how they exemplify their branded experience and ensure consistent delivery of the intended experience. Go Daddy, the world's largest domain name registrar, has a call centre persona that matches its company's personality and brand. With 13 million customers around



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the world, Go Daddy wants people to easily start, confidently grow, and successfully run their own business. Their call centre agents have a persona that matches their brand—youthful, energetic, inspiring and innovative. Subtle gestures are incorporated into a call to reflect the company's brand values— from the spirited messaging found within their IVR system to its 24/7 personalized telephone service. Customer service agents are ready to help customers launch their new business with a zest for innovation and entrepreneurship that is felt with every encounter.

Employees are the key to ensuring the branded experience is actioned. They must have the competencies, skills and interpersonal style that exemplify an organization's brand values. Recruitment, role clarity, training and development are essential to ensure employees are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to follow through.

## The Way Forward

A Branded Customer Experience® needs to evolve with customer expectations. Organizations must continually develop and measure the customer journey to identify new ways to reinforce the brand promise throughout a customer's experience with a company's product or service. The entire organization must be aligned to the Branded Customer Experience®—from the senior leadership team, across the marketing, communications and human resources departments and over to front-line employees. The brand vision must clearly articulate the identity of the organization and its core value proposition. Customer experience practitioners must plot the journey of the customer through all encounters to identify opportunities to reinforce the brand promise with proof points that are easily recognizable by the customer.

When a Branded Customer Experience® successfully transforms promises to action, organizations are empowering themselves with the ability to deliver on a brand promise with greater consistency while increasing their awareness about whether customers are connecting with the brand. The most memorable customer experiences will grow and strengthen brand loyalty and drive performance results to new heights.

*Janet LeBlanc is a business strategist, keynote speaker, and leading authority in customer experience management. As President of Janet LeBlanc + Associates Inc., she coaches senior leaders on how to use client-centric strategies to improve performance. Janet partners with public sector institutions and global Fortune 100 companies to overcome silo-based obstacles, connect with client perspectives, and collaborate on how to deliver a Branded Customer Experience®. She can be reached at 1-613-730-2709 or by email at [janet@janetleblancassociates.com](mailto:janet@janetleblancassociates.com).*

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