What is a Customer Experience Map?

A customer experience map is a document that visually represents the entire experience your customer has while interacting with your company. The customer experience is mapped with three perspectives in mind:

1. Need – what the customer sets out to achieve
2. Interaction – steps customer takes to reach their goal or meet their need
3. Emotions – how the customer feels during the interaction

Here is an example of a customer experience map we did at Yahoo! around an issue that was commonly reported. We prioritized this issue because of the data analysis we completed.

Customer Flows: Account Recovery – Tablet

Pick your most painful journey and map it!
Why do you feel that it is important to complete customer experience maps?

Going through the steps to understand and create this visual depiction of the customer experience can uncover hidden costs to both you and the customer, and may uncover opportunities for profit.

At Yahoo!, our strategy was to really focus on getting a better understanding of our customer experience. To do this, we analyzed lots of data to understand why customers come to get help. The data told us that customers are coming not just to solve a problem, but to learn as well.

We differentiated customers into categories based on their level of utilization of Yahoo! products. The categories we settled on were Tourist, Light, Medium, and Heavy.

It made us realize how important it was to identify and serve our heavy users. Do you know who your heaviest users are? If you don’t, how can you understand their needs?

What are the high-level steps you took as you began creating customer experience maps?

Getting started is the hardest part!

1. We began by digging through data (e.g. surveys, verbatim feedback data, utilization data) looking for patterns. Specifically we were looking for patterns in the user profiles, user intent, and common issues.
2. After identifying these patterns, we dug deeper into each category to learn as much as we could about the different users, what they came to do and what the common issues were that they faced.
3. We selected our most painful journey and mapped the activity flow associated with that journey. Doing this helped us understand the real customer experience with the issue or activity.
4. Finally, we organized a Customer Experience Summit, which offered us the chance to interact with customers directly and to share their experience firsthand. Executives from multiple departments participated, and heard recorded interactions with customers representing high pain issues.

Tell us more about the Customer Experience Summit.

The highlight occurred when everyone attempted to complete the steps on a few pre-defined journeys. For example, for a specific known issue found during the data analysis, we asked participants (customers and executives) to work together to complete the steps to solve that issue. It is so valuable to see and feel the customer
experiences from their point of view. If you haven’t watched your customer use your product, it is well worth the energy to do this.

**What was the biggest learning during the Customer Experience Summit?**

The Customer Experience Summit was a huge success. It was a very powerful way to make everyone at Yahoo! really understand the customer support experience. It also made it clear that everyone has a role to play in improving the customer experience or building service excellence.

**Delivering service excellence really is a team sport. Describe an example where leaders at Yahoo! had a learning moment regarding the role they play in providing service excellence.**

I have two examples. The first was a leader attending from product management/marketing who held the traditional view that Support owns the issues coming from customers. After listening to a recorded example of a challenging customer experience, it became clear to him that he needed to play a part in fixing those issues.

Another example was an executive from the legal team. He came into the Summit thinking that there was little connection between him and the customer support experience. However, it became apparent to him after listening to a recorded support interaction that the support analyst was struggling to provide excellent service because of decisions that his team had made.

**Tell us a bit more about your thoughts on the role of KCS and the Evolve Loop in customer experience.**

The KCS Evolve Loop is all about learning how to improve the customer experience. Including activities like customer experience maps in your Evolve Loop analysis can help you better understand what gaps exist in the knowledge shared with customers.

We found that it is very helpful to include as many data points as possible during your Evolve Loop analysis. This includes analysis of your content but it might include data points from other sources as well. For example, look at your customer survey data and your customer search behaviors to bring more depth to your understanding of the complete customer experience.
In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge with customer experience mapping?

The biggest challenge we faced was to help everyone to take responsibility for the role they play in the customer experience. In a large company, it is challenging to make every single contributor feel that they have a direct connection to the customer. The best way forward is to get representatives from as many teams as possible together in a room and help them all understand that this is a team sport and that everyone works together to make it better for customers.

Another challenge you might encounter is that there is already a dedicated “Customer Experience” team that has been given responsibility for these activities. If this is the case for you and a team is already in place, network with that team and volunteer to participate in their activities. Being a part of that team will help ensure that you are able to insert the Support/KCS perspective into their activities. If they are doing customer experience mapping without Support/KCS, then they are missing big opportunities to ensure that the learnings are deep and robust.

You shared an example of a very large cross-organizational customer experience mapping. What advice do you give those who aren’t able to start that big? Where do you recommend they start?

There are so many places to start. Analyze whatever data you have to understand what customers are saying. You don’t have to have a huge data set to do this. Some places to start might be customer portal survey data, support transaction survey data, or KCS content data.