COLUMNS

Consistency and multi-touchpoint experience design

June 4, 2012

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One of the guiding design principles for creating a positive user experience has been the consideration of consistency as a critical attribute of the experience.

Designers have evolved the principle within the context of the design of single touchpoint interfaces such as software applications or ecommerce Web sites.

However, the challenges of designing integrated multi-touchpoint digital, physical and hybrid user experiences delivered via mobile, Web and software warrant a fresh look at how design teams apply consistency and just as importantly ignore it.

To tackle the challenge of fragmentation of context and the ever-expanding number of customer-facing touchpoints, I would like to offer four additional factors to consider in tandem with consistency.

Consistently connected
How is consistency considered when context is distributed and user expectations are established by more than one series of interactions on several different touchpoints?

This has become the norm for many products and services and particularly so with the ever-increasing number of point-of-sale touchpoints and the supporting touchpoints that drive traffic to completing a retail transaction.

The customer lifecycle that influences a consumer from awareness to purchase may include digital billboards, email, Web sites, location-based offers and social communities, to name a few.

Customers should be able to feel a connection within and then between touchpoints that goes beyond simply experiencing or interacting with the exact same element.

For instance, imagine a customer who interacted with a series of touchpoints over a period of time. She has searched for sneakers at online retailer Piperlime, added a specific brand to her Svpply wish-list, and a couple of weeks later checked in on foursquare at a shoe retailer at the local mall.

This is the time to present her on her mobile phone with a coupon for 20 percent of a shoe brand that she has been tracking.

Customer experiences with satisfactory outcomes such as this are more likely to generate strong consistent emotional responses such as feelings of success, accomplishment, community, contribution, partnership and self-worth, which in turn, will generate positive perceptions of the brand.

Consistently smart and personal

Customers change over time. Needs change from day to day. Companies treating all interactions in exactly the same way, all of the time, do not cater to the immediate and changing needs of consumers.

As companies begin to track, learn and respond to the behavior of customers over time, smart touchpoints can consistently demonstrate their understanding and knowledge of customer needs by providing products, services and communications in the right context.

A good example is a customer checking in via foursquare at a local restaurant and receiving a discount on his food bill for using his American Express card. This is much more impactful that receiving a generic $5 coupon attached, say, to your monthly statement.

When businesses segment consumers to identify potential customers for new products and services, channel strategies identify which touchpoints are most likely to positively impact consumer decisions as they move through a sequence in the customer journey.

Different customers use different channels and expect the experience to match their particular goals and needs.

With the benefit of advanced behavioral analytics and one-to-one marketing a possibility and imperative, companies are looking at methods for personalizing or tailoring that experience to segments of one.

Though the example has been provided many times, Amazon's sophisticated curating of products that are relevant to the customer, based on purchasing and browsing history, has created a smart and personal shopping experience.

Consistently original
Design teams need to consider how they can elevate the distinctive traits of unique touchpoints.

Each touchpoint can provide opportunities for differentiation, opportunities to surprise and delight, opportunities to do what they do best.

The challenge for business is to bring a sense of natural experimentation and improvisation to the delivery of products and services and the environments within which they are delivered.

Music services such as Spotify, eMusic, and Pandora are constantly evolving ways that increase the delight in discovering and enjoying music.

Integration with social media platforms connects users to what friends are listening to, custom radio stations based on specific artists or genres expose users to new artists, and concert information informs when artists are performing in your locale.

Consistently branded
Finally, brands must reinforce the experience of products, services, environments, communications and the behavior of front-line staff with consistent application of brand attributes.

Nike+, adidas miCoach, and Speedo Pace Club are great example of strong brands, with passionate followers, who have been able to transform their core equity into tangible experiences that extend and enhance the brand.

Beyond the visual manifestations of the brand, it is the brand's core personality that puts it in a position to reinforce the value that has been delivered, and the equity established over time.

The world's strongest brands have the ability to truly win the omni-channel battle, where customers experience the brand as a single whole, and not a set of standalone disconnected channels.

Brands with a clear vision of the value they provide customers will take a single view of their customers and coordinate the delivery of products and services in brand strategic ways, and manage the multichannel consistency factors of the brand.

Design teams need to develop a deep understanding of customer behavior and motivations, driven by both quantitative research through data and analytics, and qualitative research through direct contextual contact with customers. It is key to informing strategies that can direct business and design teams to create the right consistent experiences over time and place. Why do this?

Well, not just to prove Oscar Wilde correct when he said that consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative, but also to realize that integrated, delightful experiences, designed from the customer's point of view, generating repeat interactions with the company through channels of choice can deliver increased sales, repeat customers, long-term loyalty and passionate advocacy.

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