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What's Your Customer Experience Like?

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Panelists:

Rob Breeding, Founder and Coach, REV Advisory Group

Shannon Gronemeyer, VP Operations and Technology, Service 800

Todd Alexander, Owner and Principal Consultant, CORNERSTONE 3®

Alan Wallner, President, Visionary, Conscious Branding

Alan Wallner (00:15):

Hello everyone. I'd like to welcome you to Thrive!cast. I am Alan Wallner, the president and visionary of Conscious Branding and Thrive!cast is a series focused on you, your business and your success. And with each episode we focus on a topic to spark new thoughts and to generate ideas and to push the boundaries of what we know is familiar. Hopefully we may even frame up a new mindset to ignite your business forward and inspire action. And that's really important during this business climate. It's something where we're looking to strive to do. Recently, I was doing some research on customer retention, just trying to figure out what's happening in this climate. And what's shifting and changing. I came across this interesting statistic. It said 92% of customers are willing to change because of a bad experience.

(01:09): And to me that indicates that a customer's loyalty is not solely based on a brand name, a product or a price even. It's their personal experience be it good or bad that has a significant impact on determining their loyalty to you. And so today we're going to take a look at why your customer experience and delivering high levels of customer satisfaction should be a top priority moving forward, especially in 2020 and beyond. But first I want to introduce you to our panelists today. I have Rob Breeding, he's the founder and coach of REV Advisory Group. Rob works with growth-minded business leaders, using a people-centric approach and a philosophy focused on improving implementation and accelerating results. Rob's love for people, business and leadership development are at the heart of everything he does. So welcome.

(02:09): We have Shannon Gronemeyer. He's the VP of operations and technology at Service 800. Shannon's philosophy for creating revenue growth is driven by developing a customer-centric operating culture. He believes that companies should leverage feedback collected from customers and then use that to prioritize improvements, to add value to the customers. Shannon. It's great to have you here today. Thirdly, here we have Todd Alexander, he's the owner and principal consultant at CORNERSTONE 3. Todd has a passion for customer experience and works with companies to a variety of critical business challenges, such as sluggish growth, lack of market differentiation and undeveloped sales systems and helps companies deal with cultural change in team development. Todd, thanks for being here today.

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What Are Businesses Doing Wrong in Terms of Their Customer Experience?

(03:16): This has definitely been an interesting time in customer experiences, a very timely topic for today's business climate and with more business transactions happening online over a video conference, or even in a more complex, less personal ways in person, especially with masks covering up smiles. It just really has changed our whole way of creating experiences for our customers. So that that customer the experience customers have and their happiness or satisfaction plays a critical role in determining their loyalty to our businesses. So with that, I'm going to ask our panelists, what do you see most companies doing wrong in terms of creating an experience for their customers today, especially in this climate? And I'm going to start with Rob.

Rob Breeding (04:15):

This is an interesting topic. One of the things that I like to look at is what type of relationship do I have. I think this is where companies can really miss the mark, misconstruing what their customer relationship is and what it looks like. And maybe the simplest way that I could elaborate on that would be I see things on a continuum. So it's left to right only it's right to left. So on one side, you've got the transactional experience, where I've got a product and service and I'm just interested in exchanging that for money. On the other side of the spectrum is this partnership that needs to be created. And I think where companies miss the mark is when they become too transactional. They are concerned too much about that and not so much about the partnership. A partnership is created by aligning the company's mission, vision and values with what their customer's mission, vision and values. And then also with their employees and their vendors and creating an environment where not only are the products and services fulfilling their needs, but they're aligning with those people that you can create. It creates high engagement with their employees and higher engagement with their customers.

Alan Wallner (05:41):

You're seeing them focus more on the sale then developing a relationship at all the different levels within their business and building that long-term relationship with people.

Rob Breeding (05:55):

It's their mindset about it. How they use it. Is it a transaction or is it a partnership? Is it a relationship? And it's some example on one side; I used to have a wireless phone company. You go online and you can buy the accessory for my wholesale cost. That drives me crazy because it's just generic. On the other hand, you might have a company like Shaklee where my wife sells this director distribution model. And it's like a cult, you know what I mean? Everything aligns from the customer. And so that obviously is what we want. We want that relationship, that partnership with our customers.

Alan Wallner:

Yes, that connection, Todd, I'd like to hear what you have to say.

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Todd Alexander (06:46):

I'll play off what Rob said. The exciting thing that I'm seeing is a silver lining or whatever it is with COVID, that is, so many of the clients that I'm working with are now more focused on the customer than they ever have been. And I think it's a lot out of necessity because they're seeing their retention numbers going down. They're doing everything they can to generate sales out of their existing customer. But they're also looking at how can they go out and acquire new customers at this time. For me, that's real, that's exciting, that focus is going to be on the customer. I say that the three things, and you'll, you'll hear me talk a lot in terms of threes. I intend to do that.

(07:36): I've see three things that companies are failing to do. One is if they haven't done the work and in mapping their buyer journey they're really struggling to understand where are the opportunities, and if they have mapped their customer journey to whatever degree, what I'm finding is those maps, that view of the customer journey, is outdated. If they did it prior to March, it's outdated. And I've seen some organizations where their journey is literally obsolete because what the buyer needs, how they're buying when they're buying who's involved in the buying decision, all those sorts of things, it's gotten blown up to a certain degree at which plays back to what Rob said about how they're buying and particularly in a B to B environment that forced them to go to virtual selling and virtual buying.

(08:45): And that's one is that they're failing to really go back and evaluate that buyer journey in an intentional way. Two is what I'm finding; is that they're looking at the customer experience as it's like one moment that initial customer interaction and there's zeroing in on that one piece, but not looking at across the entire continuum. And when we talk about a customer experiencing operationalized customer experience, it's a start to finish. Virtually everybody in the organization touches it in some way, the front stage players, sales, customer service, and the backstage ops. So that's the second thing is that they're zeroing in on one moment and not looking at all of the threads. Another thing that I've found fascinating is for the first, maybe for the first time, but I'm definitely more often as B to B companies, are recognizing that emotion is a huge part in the buying experience.

(10:03): And for those of us, I'm an old guy, I mean, I've been in B to B and B to C for a long time. And for the longest time, I was always told that B to B, it's all about rational logic, and actually what I'm seeing in my clients and the B to B environment is emotion is even a bigger part because there's so much more at stake and there's so much uncertainty. And if we don't recognize that as part of the customer experience and actually address it and take action to address that emotion, it's getting tough for us to deal with customers. So that would be the third thing; they're just not recognizing that emotion plays such a huge part in the customer experience, even in a B to B environment.

Alan Wallner (10:52):

I would agree. Emotion plays a big part of it because they have to make a good buying decision. Their job's on the line and who wants to lose their job today. It's not a good thing. And working from home. They're maybe less comfortable in the environment that they're

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trying to work within. And it's just a lot more stress, a lot more emotion wrapped around a large buying decision, or even a small one. Emotion definitely plays a bigger role in it. I would agree on that. So Shannon, I'd like to hear your perspective

Shannon Gronemeyer (11:25):

The environment from my perspective is super interesting right now, and Rob and Todd both mentioned this. I think you're seeing companies go one of two different directions, either they're doubling down on the need to be more intimate with their customers and develop stronger relationships so they're coming out stronger than when they came in, or they're really focused on the cost side of the equation and how do readjust my balance sheet based on the realities of the revenue stream. It's fun to see the innovation that some companies are putting into place to be more connected to their customers. But regardless of the path you go down, there's a couple of things that jumped out at me in terms of what I see people doing wrong, whether they're focused on cost or improving experience. One is self-service and the movement towards increasing self-service for our customers. And what's interesting about that for me is, it's the intent that matters? Why am I driving self-service? Is it to push off the workload that my team normally does for the customer in order to save money and put that in the lap of my customer and I have to, or am I actually trying to create a method of them doing business with me, that's how they want to do business with me? There's nothing wrong with self-service, but the customer should choose when they're serving themselves and when they want to talk to somebody, when they want to be cared for.

(12:38): So it's one of those things, that, number one, I think a customer needs to have a choice. We shouldn't force our customers down a single channel like everything's online now and you can't talk to an agent anymore. And when we do give them that option, it needs to add value. I mean, you don't force your customers to move from one channel to another. You make the other channels so attractive, that that's how they migrate. And so I think because of the cost reductions that we've seen, there's been a forced movement towards customer experience online. And that's not always a positive thing. The second one for me is how companies are trying to manage challenges or problems or service issues with either their service or their product.

(13:24): And there's a really interesting study that I just love to tout that came out and was produced several years ago. And what the study found was that if I bought a product, I had absolutely no problems with the product, I had a 78% chance of repurchasing. If I had a product and I there was something wrong with it. And I called customer experience. I had a poor experience getting my issue resolved. I had a 32% chance of repurchase. If I bought a product and had a problem, but a great service experience, getting that resolved, I had an 89% chance of repurchase. So my repurchase rate with a product problem and a good solution was better than if I didn't have a problem in the first place. So it's all about this relationship we create with our customers and resolving problems.

(14:08): You don't get a chance to create a relationship. If everything goes smoothly, everything's online. And I have no reason to reach out to you. And the second part of that

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is, I think everyone's experienced this, you have a problem. You try to get resolution, the agents have no empowerment to solve your problem. And they adhere to a strict set of rules and guidelines. You finally escalate and a manager gives you what you were looking for. But now, it doesn't matter anymore. If you're still upset, you got exactly what you wanted, but the experience was still awful because it wasn't resolved first time. So it's the way the agents manage the experience and the focus on providing good solutions and building relationships, I think is something a lot of people miss.

Ensuring Positive Customer Experiences

Alan Wallner (14:48):

You're just making it as streamlined as possible. Whereas if you've got to come in through the phone, and then there's this long method of going from one, pushing one button, answering another question, another button, and then being put on hold, once you get hit there, that's a good way to start losing business. I believe that now with everything becoming more automated, yes, it helps the intention is streamlining things, but is the intention you have to really balance that with the customer, the intention around the customer, is it going to make their experience better or not? I think that's really important. Many people think of their brand as their logo. And in reality, the perception people have of you is based on the experiences you create for them. So that really makes your customer experience important. And so from that initial awareness to the stage of being loyal, there's so many variables in there. How do you ensure that your customers' experience with your company is a positive one; it's awareness to loyalty, all the variables with that. I'm going to check in with Todd.

Todd Alexander (16:22):

That is the challenge. I think you hit on it. And there was something Shannon said that resonated with me and that is just stopping and taking the time, why are we doing what we're doing? And I think it's there. What I'm seeing particularly in the first few months March, April, May is there was so much there, although you, the companies I was working with, they saw the revenue dropping off. And this mad scramble and working on PVP. And, and early on, although there was this belief that we needed to have a connection with a customer in a lot of these different companies, it was so much about us and not about the customer.

(17:23): And that sounds obvious, but what I'm finding is, is even pre-COVID is that cultural shift from internal to external thinking, external looking externally and then bringing that internally is so important. And I think back to something that happened early in COVID, so many sales teams and sales reps, didn't know what sort of conversation they were supposed to have with a customer. What do I do now? What am I supposed to say? And I remember being in these different coaching conversations and say what if you were to just simply demonstrate empathy, at least at this stage, and reach out to customers, prospects, and basically be there to see how they're doing. And it was fascinating to me, the

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conversations that came out of that and that connection that occurred. Now, we've moved out of that to some degree, I believe as part of the customer experience, we're trying to help customers make sense of what's going on.

(18:42): Because in some organizations they've been totally disrupted, they don't even know how to make decisions because they're being spread thin or they've got this coming at them or whatever it may be. So where I'm going with this is the experience we're creating now is shifted from we just want it to be a pleasurable experience and no hassle to now we need to be there to help them make sense of it. The other thing that I'm seeing, and this gets back to your fundamental question, is what can we be doing to create that positive experience and tie it back to the brand is the companies that I see that are creating a really positive experience have made this shift where the customer is the hero.

(19:36): And that seems so simple and obvious, but I feel like for a long time that we've operated that if we, as the sellers, show up as the hero, we're going to earn their business. And where does that leave the customer? And the shift is where the customer is the hero and that everybody in our organization looks at the customer as the hero. And it's really our role as the guide. I'm a big fan of Donald Miller and StoryBrand. What's amazing is when, what I've seen companies about that thinking, it goes all the way back into the culture, and it starts to resonate with every employee in the organization that, Oh, yeah, that's what we're here for, that's our mission to help the customer be the hero. So how can I do that, whatever role I may have. So it starts with that understanding then shifting to changing the brand to where the customer is a hero and then making it cultural. I'd see that as the connection to ultimately creating a positive customer experience.

Alan Wallner (20:48):

And then even tied into what you said with answering the earlier question with the buyer's journey. Just start rolling that all together, the buyer's journey, along with how do you keep them in the hero role and you as the guide, and the helper role to achieve the best journey possible. Shannon, I'd like to hear your perspective.

Shannon Gronemeyer (21:26):

I think Todd's absolutely right. I've always held this fundamental belief that businesses only exist to solve some need for their customers and to do it better than anybody else can. That's everything else is window dressing. That's why we're here. And in times like this, we can get really distracted by everything else going on around us, in our own business and the culture and the news, et cetera. And in terms of what do I need to do to create a positive experience? I use the same answer for a lot of questions, ask your customers. It's always amazing to me, how infrequently some companies talk to their customers to find out what they want, what they need and what problem they're trying to solve. How do I solve that problem compared to my competitors or others out there? And so I think it starts with taking this time that you might have to become much more intimate with your customers, what is going on in their lives?

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(22:19): What are they trying to accomplish? What do they need to do? What do they want to feel like when they do business with you? What do they want the experience to be like? I think, Alan, you said earlier that a lot of decisions are made are based emotionally. And I think some of the research shows up to 90% of the decisions we make are emotionally based and our customers are no different, they're making decisions based on emotions and feelings too. So what feeling do you want to create in them? What experience do you want to create for them? If that much of their decision process is based on how you make them feel, we should probably be more focused on that. And so how do we design an experience that elicits the emotions, the feelings I want with my customers, and if I can do that my business will thrive. Everything else will come on.

Alan Wallner (23:02):

Ask the customer because at the end of the day, that's why you're there. And if you can get on that more personal level with them, it's amazing what they're going to tell you. They'll open up and share all kinds of things, give you all kinds of ideas and it almost becomes a cheat sheet on how to ensure that they have a good customer experience.

Shannon Gronemeyer (23:25):

It's almost a cheat sheet. If you ask customers to write questions, they'll tell you what to do, and they'll tell you what they'll do in return for you doing that. It's almost like them leading you.

Alan Wallner (23:34):

So definitely have that dialogue. The dialogue gets missed a lot, but that is key to everything here. And I think that's a good way, to better understand their emotions as well, too. Rob, I'd like to hear your perspective.

Rob Breeding (23:50):

Todd started off talking about the hero and now we're talking about having this interaction with the customer. I think that would play really well with what I would add. And that is that I think increasing the collective EQ of the organization. So I think I heard Shannon say we need to put a process in place to gather that information and we map it out and I think where I come at it, maybe not differently necessarily, but the idea is that, the very people inside of our organizations need to execute this. And they need to be able to do that for us. And so I think there's some real benefit in terms of ensuring that we create that positive experience ongoing in educating and bringing the level of EQ up in the individual people that populate our organization.

(24:44): And that, of course, collectively as a company. In my coaching there's an instrument that we use, and Alan, you didn't ask the question this way, but you use the terms thinking doing and feeling. And to me and in one of the devices that we use, it gets at the person that way. So at the high level is the thinking piece. And then it's the doing. And then at the very deep level, as you have been talking about is the emotional level, and

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that's really where the connection is made. And I don't have the statistics like Shannon from the study, but I know back at Sears, back in the day, we used to talk about that all the time. If we could just have a customer to have a problem, we could solidify that relationship if we could just solve it correctly. And so training our people to be empathetic and not only understanding themselves and their customers, but being able to learn to regulate that situation. That's what emotional intelligence is. And I think that's such a critical competency. You mentioned I'm a people-centric coach, and that to me is the difference between having a good plan and being able to execute it.

Keeping Your Business Together Despite the External Stresses

Alan Wallner (26:02):

You hit on a key thing here, emotional intelligence; everyone's emotional intelligence is being put to the test these days with what's going on. Lot of stress and people aren't being able to work together in a culture, they're all separated working remotely. So we've all talked about emotion, talking with the customers, really understanding their world, thinking, feeling, and doing and all that stuff. With all the external stresses canceling out your culture, what are some things you can put into place to help hold this thing together? That seems to be becoming very fragile these days based on everything that's going on. And I'm going to throw that back to you, Rob.

Rob Breeding:

Obviously just being intentional and aware. I think that's been a theme is that just being more focused. I know for my clients, they have been very concerned about their people. That has been a major concern. And I think that has, in some ways distracted it from the customer. But I think that is the key, we need to prioritize our relationships in our culture in order to make sure that it's functioning properly. And that our competency level is there and that people are okay because if they're not okay, engagement with employees goes down and with customers, it's going to follow.

Alan Wallner:

Shannon, what are your thoughts?

Shannon Gronemeyer (27:54):

We used to do a lecture or speech on relationship between employee experience and customer experience. And we talked about this downward spiral that exists. You can't be conscious of one without the other; if you create a bad experience for your employees and now they get on the phone, they're upset, disgruntled, unhappy. They talk to a client who has a problem. The client's getting less than positive reaction. And so now the client's upset and now the employee's thinking, boy, this place sucks and this person's yelling at me. And you just get those downward spiral of experience. And so I think one is the front

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line for your customers. Those folks have to be in it with you. They have to be happy to be there. They have to be motivated.

(28:43): They have to be directed by the vision that you've cast with them. And they have to understand you need to create a culture and understand the importance of what they're doing with their customer. These are the people that are writing our checks. This is our livelihood and that agent's sitting wherever they are in the world can have a dramatic impact on the performance of our company. And so for them to feel a part of it and the part of digging us out of the business disruption we're in today, I think it can be motivating, but it's got to be loud.

Alan Wallner (29:11):

Todd, I'm curious to hear what you have to say about that.

Todd Alexander (29:19):

I'm not sure if what I'm about to say is that much different from what Shannon and Todd said. And that leads me to a meeting I was having with a client yesterday. And we were looking at strategy, and there's a ton of anxiety in the room around where's the organization going to go, do we have the right skills? How are people going to be engaged? And a leader made a really profound comment and she said, it's our responsibility as the leadership team to provide our employees enough information on an ongoing basis through this whole COVID to where they can make really good decisions or make decisions for themselves. And that seems obvious. But what I think what has happened is they've gotten away from regular communications, which I think is picking up on what Shannon said there. And for that matter, Rob, is communication to the employees and keeping those lines of communication open. Even if we don't know exactly what's going to happen and we're uncertain to be able to actually, here's what we do now.

(30:46): And to be thinking about what information can we provide them, our employees, where they can make those choices and those decisions for themselves, meet them where they're at, as opposed to them trying to meet us where we're at. And again, for me, that's a silver lining because culture is so important. I'm seeing more and more companies being very intentional about communication, whether it's one-to-one or in a group, or it's a weekly update or whatever it may be. To me, that's inspiring because people are recognizing they have to keep their employees connected and aligned and as ambitious as possible.

Shannon Gronemeyer:

Just to reinforce what Todd said, I met with a business consultant last night. She does sales, leadership consulting, very good at what she does. And she gave me the story of two different worlds. She described two customers of her. They're both financial institutions, both banks of similar sizes. And one of them has a leader that says, this is an amazing time for us to transform the way we serve our customers and the products we offer. And when she talks to the lower-level sales, they are really jazzed up, we're going to take it and work it at this time, we're going to take share from our competitors. When she goes to the other bank and they're all about, Oh, this is an awful environment and people aren't spending

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money. And when you talk to lower level employees there, you feel that doom and gloom, and it's all about the direction, the leadership, that's 180 degrees apart.

Benefits of a More Holistic Approach to the Customer Experience

Alan Wallner (32:31):

And that direction typically comes from understanding that customer journey or the buyer's journey and having that dialogue. And that's the way I understand it. And so when you go and put together these customer journeys and buyer journeys, you have the awareness to loyalty. You also have your sales or your marketing and sales and companies tend to keep marketing and sales separate, even awareness and loyalty separate. Do you see this as a time to explore integrating that a little bit more and rounding out a more holistic approach to the experience, the customer experience? And with that, I'm going to start with you, Shannon.

Shannon Gronemeyer (33:17):

The first response I'd have to that is I worked with a partner once who used the phrase customer experience is a team sport. And I really liked that. Everyone in the business has an impact on the customer directly or indirectly. And that's the way we need to approach how we collaborate and coordinate as we're supporting customers. And a great example for me in the disconnect between sales and marketing and the rest of the organization can be, I can establish a brand image with my marketing that my sales team thinks is unrealistic and has to work around that when they're in the, in the field and the image doesn't really line up with what my customers want. So I have to sell a little bit differently only to have my customer experience organization deliver a different experience than I either promoted from a marketing perspective or committed to from a sales perspective.

(34:06): So that disconnect between who I tell people I am and what they actually experience when they make the first phone call in the business can be huge at times. And so as an organization, again, it's all about designing the experience a client's going to have as they go through their journey. And those things will have to be aligned. It can't be done in individual silos. I can't hand the customer off to the next organization without having collaborated with them on what that experience handoff is supposed to look like and how the customer is supposed to be treated fair. So it's got to be all part of the same ecosystem. You know, I can't say that I'm an expert in the industry and you call a very inexperienced tech support person. I have to go to three levels of support before you get help. You can't say I'm your partner, but I'm going to transfer you overseas to my call center whom you can't really understand them. You can't say, I know we know you, we care about you. And then I ask you to give me your credit card six times before I can solve your problem. So these things all have to be lined up around the experience you want to design.

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Alan Wallner (35:07):

Yeah, it's overselling and over promising and underselling or underdelivering, you've got to make sure that everyone understands the whole journey and what you're all doing together. Otherwise you can fail on that.

Rob Breeding (35:38):

I would just want to jump in if it's okay. I couldn't agree more with what Shannon just said and rather than reiterate what he's saying, I think on the practical side I love Patrick Lencioni in terms of teamwork. You mentioned the word team right at the beginning. And what you need to have is you need to have trust, but I look at the second level, it's this ability to carry on a debate, to get people to buy in. And what you said is so true, sales and marketing aren't aligned, and I would add to customer service and delivery. And so if we can get these folks together and out of these silos and come up with a strategy, they're going to execute it way better. I would include the customer. Like you said, at the beginning, we need to even include them in the dialogue and how it should look. And so anyway, I'm just huge on that. I mean, when collaboration is done well, the results are just exponentially better. And I think companies need to pay attention to that.

Alan Wallner (36:41):

I agree. In the end, everyone knows what the intention is and everyone's working together to create the same thing.

Rob Breeding (36:46):

Could I also add, because my clients told me this, they don't want to do it. You know why? Because it takes time. If they're a CEO, you're a high D. You're a driver and you just want to ram it down. You just want to get something done. And collaboration is a little slower process, but I think the results in important things like this, like we're discussing, can be that much greater.

Alan Wallner (37:14):

To some degree it's like that old saying stepping over dollars to pick up dimes. And you miss a streamlining or other opportunities to make it even better.

Rob Breeding (37:28):

Yeah. And engaging with these people takes a little time getting people together to collaborate and fight about it a little bit before you do something. Another favorite saying, I'll tell you, is from John Perry. He passed away this last year and was my first mentor as a consultant. He would say people don't have to get their way, but they want to have their say. And so getting the customer to have their say, getting the customer service and marketing and sales, to all have their say and developing a system out of that is the best approach.

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Alan Wallner (37:59):

Really understanding the empathy with a client, what they think, feel, do, and what they're going to say, all of that's very important. Todd, like to get your perspective on this too.

Todd Alexander (38:10):

My foot was thumping a little bit when Shannon we're talking soldiers, I'm going to sound like I'm probably going to sound Shannon. Like the example of the sales leader who is really optimistic. And knows I'll probably get emails after this. Like why do you start by saying, well, what's really good. Kobe is

(38:39): Here's the thing I believe that what's been awesome about the last few months has been this emergence of virtual selling. And this plays directly to your question now and with virtual selling, which includes this includes video conferencing, email texts, social media, your website, all these different, all the different touch points that are blended together. And if there was ever a time where we needed collaboration between marketing and sales, and to Rob's point marketing sales and customer service, add it in there and who am I missing? I mean, the collaboration required to really pull off high-end virtual selling in all the different needs. I just mentioned absolutely to do it. You have to have collaboration, which I'm seeing salespeople going in and having conversations to Rob's point conversations with marketing, that they've never had; marketing every conversations with sales working together or to enable the customer journey, but doing in a virtual selling environment and marketing and tech, and it are helping sales do that and then provide, and then now also more than ever we have the catalyst for CRM to really take hold because we need that data to be able to communicate with all three of ours, like never before.

(40:20): So yeah, I think we're at one of those amazing inflection points where we elaborate, you need to bring all those functions together to create an experience for the customer that they've never had before. One statistic I just read recently is that the first statistic is pretty obvious. So within the past three, four or five months I think 95% of B2B companies have switched to virtual selling. That's pretty obvious. The more fascinating statistic in there is that 65% of the buyers in that study said that the experience in virtual selling was as good, if not better than before. Well, there's something there that we have an opportunity to capitalize on. And it's going to require that collaboration that Shannon mentioned, Rob mentioned, Alan, you said that out on the front end. It's critical that we're going to have to come together in a congruent way to work together, deliver that experience in this virtual environment, not to say that face to face, not coming back, that's just going to be icing on the cake, but we've got to master this whole other new way of showing up in the marketplace.

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How Buying and Selling Has Changed in 2020

Alan Wallner (41:34):

I'd like to hear what Shannon has to say on that too, because I've also heard some people saying, you can close a sale for \$50 online, but when you're talking a \$13 or \$50,000 sale virtually that's a different story. So I'm curious to know Shannon, based on what you heard Todd talking about, what's your perspective on that? Is it the same thing or is it different?

Shannon Gronemeyer (42:10):

I think the good news is we've all been thrust into this virtual world. Buyers and sellers are all in the virtual world right now. So buyers still have need, they still have problems that need to be solved. And so it's not as if the sellers have tried to go virtual overnight while buyers expect to still see people in person. We're all in the same boat together. So we're all making that journey. I think it's really interesting though. I think back to my days, working for the telephone company and we've had video conference around for 20 years now, and the story has always been, you can't sell over the phone, you can't sell virtually, you've got to go shake a hand, kiss a baby, buy a beer, play a round of golf, it's the only way that you can get done. And I think companies are starting to realize now the technology is so great.

(42:54): I can have a really meaningful, intimate conversation with someone virtually over a video conference. And it saves both of us time. I'm probably more focused than I was when we met in person. And I think to Todd's point, there's a magic that's being created here around virtual selling. And remember too, the buying environment these days, the role of sellers, has really changed. You used to have to educate the buyer. Now, the buyer is usually pre-educated before the seller gets to him. And so now I can pinpoint that contact in a very efficient, effective way and I can reach more people so I can even make more money in a virtual environment. So I agree with Todd, there's something really magical that could happen out of this that drives efficiency and effectiveness in our sales organization.

Alan Wallner (43:43):

And you're starting to see it in a couple of new innovations that are coming out. So it's going to get real interesting to see how it all evolves here. Rob, how about you?

Rob Breeding:

I would just add on that. There's been a couple of client or prospect interactions that I've had in the last couple of days. And one guy, I was on the golf course, and he had to correct himself. He says, the one thing I love about this COVID environment. That's what he said to me; then he had to stop himself and say, maybe I shouldn't say that. But it was around this topic that it had forced us to fast forward into what was going to come eventually.

(44:25): Some of this online selling, and he was in the finance world, so he's watching stocks and different things. And then the other one was a company that had actually had to lay off about 40 of their 150-person workforce. And this wasn't the owner. It was the next level and, again, optimistic about what they were going to be able to achieve with less. And

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the fact that the folks, and I think Todd mentioned this at the beginning, that some of these folks that are being furloughed weren't too productive. It's a hard thing to say, but to some extent you raise your game or it's going to be tougher to play. I think there's some positive things; obviously we could find some negatives too, but I think companies need to also accelerate what they're doing.

(45:23): My comment that I had thought about prior was that if you're already ahead of the game and you're focused on culture and communication is really good in your company, you're going to be able to execute these new things and keep up with the change that's occurring. If you're not, you better get going and jump on quickly, or you're going to get left in the dust.

Alan Wallner:

I agree with that last statement, because things are not going back to where they used to be. So you really need to be in the mindset of evolving. And changing and learning. And they're in this timeframe and we're doing a little bit of reinventing.

Rob Breeding (46:01):

And getting rid of that mental block, to your point. Somebody said it, but we have this limiting belief that you can't sell virtually or you can't do something a certain way. And I think any limiting belief we have, we should try to do away with. Don't let those thoughts get in your way.

Shannon Gronemeyer (46:27):

Having said all that, there are some realities we need to address. If I've got a sales organization that was highly relational, highly face to face, and that's what they've been doing for 20 years, I've now asked them to get on the phone, to pull up a web conference, to figure out the technology, to change the way I engage virtually, et cetera. So I agree with Rob, we need to get rid of that limiting belief, but we also have to equip our sales team with some new skill sets.

Todd Alexander:

I was just going to pile on to what Rob and Shannon said and particularly just that whole limiting belief and then what I'm picking up on, what you're saying, Shannon, is we have to, to a certain degree, be sensitive that they're having to not only shift what they do, but who they are. I've been a seller for years and years and this whole relationship face to face whether it's shaking hands and having dinners and being together, that defined who I was and now we're having to help them transition, that's just how you did it. You can still be this relational person. It's just to your point, it's the skills and the activities that you're going to utilize to do that and help them help them through that.

(48:00): And it's interesting. Just the last thing I'll say in that regard more and more often the last few months I've been working with salespeople on their personal brand. And I have

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not done that in the past. And it plays right to what is your personal brand? What is the problem you solve, forget about how you do it. Let's focus on that. Then, we will bridge to how you actually do it, but let's get focused on that. And it's almost as if it reenergizes them. I think what you're saying, Shannon, is helping them make that transition to a new way of working. And that's the human element of what we all do. It's like you have to mourn for the loss, in a sense, the way things were and embrace what's going forward.

ATTENDEE QUESTION: *What are the steps to take with trust and the customer experience if your service category isn't general or not known by the customer or misperceived?*

Alan Wallner (48:54):

I really liked the notion of reinventing yourself, time to rebrand yourself. Because that's really what we have to do to survive and to come out of this ahead, it's really like that. So now we're going to shift a little bit here and we're going to bring in some of the questions that our attendees have. And I've got one here that says, what are the steps to take with trust and the customer experience if your service category isn't general or not known by the customer or misperceived? With that, I am going to start out with Shannon on that one.

Shannon Gronemeyer (49:38):

If I understand the question correctly, if the clients I'm working with don't necessarily understand the value that I bring in the sector that I work in, or I misperceive, maybe there's a value I provide, but for whatever reason, the market perception is wrong. I'll go back to what I said before. It's talking to my customers; my clients perceive my brand incorrectly and the value I bring to them, that's something I have to solve by talking to them. And there's a variety of ways to do that in our business. We do a lot of phone interviews to collect feedback, but it's also building a relationship at the same time. We also do face-to-face interviews, strategic interviews with business leaders. That's again about collecting feedback from our clients, but also building a relationship at the same time. And so for me, I'll always go back to do I know my customers well enough, do they know me? And that the answer is no. The only solution is to ask them

Alan Wallner (50:49):

What if it's a new, an unknown business category or service category that is not known by the customer? And so you're bringing an unknown to the table? I suppose, that it fits into the same thing?

Shannon Gronemeyer (51:06):

Maybe it's more communication at that point, but again, if they don't understand the value, we need to communicate it to them. What is the emotional need that you're trying to meet? What is the experience they want to have? What is the problem you're trying to solve for them? And I don't think you can do any more than being exceptional at communicating how

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you make their life better, how you solve their problem, how you deliver an experience that you want to deliver. It's just communication.

Alan Wallner (51:36):

The benefit of the benefit. Todd, I'd like to hear your perspective on that one.

Todd Alexander (51:43):

I liked what Shannon had to say. And if it's possible, there's a word in there that I am just zeroing in on and that's trust. If I miss the mark, I missed the mark, but what I've found time and time again, is that customers are going to evaluate trust in three dimensions: our sincerity, our liability and our capability. And the challenge with that is if you're an unknown, it does come back to the messaging and the stories that you tell whether it be success stories or case studies or customer testimonials or whatever it may be. But when I'm working with sales teams or trying to build a customer experience that exudes trust, I'm always coming back to, we look at the continuum of the customer journey, how are we actually doing, what are we doing to actually show up in a sincere manner, prove that we're reliable and then prove that we're capable? And usually there's moments of truth in that journey, particularly at those moments of truth, where are we showing up being sincere and authentic, or being reliable, and where are we demonstrating our capabilities? And for that matter, where are we not, because if we're not they won't advance the journey. So that's how I tie the trust piece into the customer experience, is along those three dimensions, it seems simple, but it's pretty amazing how often we do get judged on almost every dimension.

Shannon Gronemeyer (53:28):

That's a good point, Todd. And if you're a new brand and you're trying to educate your market on the value you provide, you don't have a lot of forgiveness if you don't deliver what you say you can, so you better get it right. You better do what you say you're going to do right out of the gate.

Alan Wallner (53:44):

Definitely. It's much more difficult to repair something than it is to do it right. Rob, how about you? Do you have some thoughts to bring?

Rob Breeding (53:44):

I have just a little something maybe that on top of that, but it has to do with establishing trust. The idea that when you go to market with the product or whatever, you start with a question; you're going to have to ask a lot of questions. And I think software development has taught us something in the sales process. Todd, it seems like you're the sales guy of the three of us. I mean, we're all sales guys, but, thinking a lot about process, I like the idea of iterating.

(54:34): I go out and I try a message. I listened to the person, I asked good questions in a conversation with a potential client. And then my next call is different. I just keep iterating

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until I find that message that's resonating. And I think that's a way software has done. I remember we bought a POS software from an early person that nobody had ever seen back in the nineties. And we just loved it. They'd ask us questions. What do you like, what don't you like? They just kept making it better. And it made it perfect for us. And I think we need to do that more as I'm a consultant that the needs and the pain points and the things that bother our clients, and they need help with needs and wants that have changed. And you liked it when they asked you. It's a conversation. It doesn't have to be always me telling and selling. I need to listen.

Closing Remarks

Alan Wallner (55:35):

That's good. Before we wrap up here for today, is there anything that anyone wants to chime in or add, add on anything. So we're going to start wrapping things up here. We're coming to the end of our hour. And I'd like to thank our panelists so much for being here today and sharing their insights and wisdom. And I'd like to thank everyone for attending this Thrive!cast episode. And I hope you enjoyed the conversation. There's a lot of really good stuff, we covered a lot of good insights, a lot of good ideas. If you have any follow-up questions or questions we were not able to address due to time limitations, please send them to info@consciousbranding.com and we'll respond to you.

(56:24): We'll also be sending you a link to the recorded episode, along with some bonus materials, to keep the momentum around this conversation moving forward for your business. By all means, feel free to share that with your peers and other business owners, you think would be interested. And if you have any ideas for any future topics you'd like us to cover. Please let us know at info@consciousbranding.com. And I look forward to seeing you all back here. I really enjoy these conversations and learning something new all the time. And remember, you create your world. So believe in your vision, drive it with purpose and, above all, take action. So until next time be remarkable.

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