Design Thinking Provides An Extra Edge In Relating To The Customer: Rahul Ramachandran

There has been an abrupt outpouring of concerns over privacy implications of customers across platforms. With emerging technologies and constant use of social media, the majority of the consumers are becoming pessimistic when it comes to tracking their customer journey. With recent privacy scams and other issues, it is proven that a product's success is not only about innovation, but also about how a brand maintains their systems in place, handles data, stays ahead of their competitors and satisfies the buyer.

Keeping in mind of all these aspects, the consumer only gets more apprehensive of the values, pushing towards minimising risks and building online trust. With each and every device connected to the monstrous growth of IoT, this has widened the grey area of digital marketing. Marketing has been making a subtle change from a customer centric ideology to a data centric entity. This hyper targeting shift in paradigm has highly put into question the intent of marketers. Is it improving the customer experience or just refining monetary optimisation of marketing campaigns? The ethical barriers have become more and more irrelevant. We are in an era of a digital marketplace where there is hardly any differentiation between products and marketing is highly situational. There is a great hype about how each brand strategizes about customer centricity, but hardly does anything about it. The customers have grown sick of the marketers.

This is where the model of design thinking might actually fit marketing. Design thinking is the process which aims to solve a problem in human centric ways by brainstorming, ideating, prototyping and testing, to understand the human element in the problem. And on the other hand, customer centricity is an organisational effort, and not a technological data driven challenge. The customer seldom differentiates between the functional groups of a brand and this resonates the need for a design thinking approach towards problem solving in marketing.

The concept of customisation makes more sense in terms of digital marketing when the brand consumer interaction is at its personal best. In such an advantageous position Design Thinking fits perfectly in understanding customers and creating futuristic innovative solutions. Well, the budgetary advantages do provide an edge for the digital marketing platform over conventional modes in understanding the customer needs and creative solutions, but by empathising and finding innovative ways to actually engage with the customer in an uncontrolled environment can provide better solutions on brand building.

The digital market has closed the gap in marketer-customer interactions with multiple platforms enabling such dialogues and providing clear/honest feedback about the product or campaign. The diversity showcased is unlike anything in the past, where you can actually get into the finest level of detailing with the data available and come up with creative ways to engage the customer and address them individually rather blasting them with emails and communications which are based on computer generated data. Well, if there is anything that digital marketers have learnt over the years, it is that there is no formula for virality (success). No matter what your data said, there is always a customer putting your mails in spam. The complexities of understanding a customer requires a cross functional approach and asking the right questions. There is a great need on the consumer side to interact with the brands

without actually yielding from them the invasive details of their behaviour. Imagine having your customers, HR, Finance & IT people along with the marketers on the same team trying to create a new campaign. The perspectives, ideas and opinions that the cross-functional team brings to the table will help in accurate definition of problems and creative ways of handling such problems.

Given such a thesis to work on, it only makes sense to prototype, test, implement and improvise to get it right rather than adhering to a single strategy based on data. Digital Marketers rely too much on data, that they actually believe that changing the colour of the call to action button directly impacts the sale of product. It might be true at a marginal level, but concentrating too much on such data driven models takes the life out of the creative models that are required in marketing. Breakthroughs and innovations cannot be achieved by data based models, but by adapting to creative models.

Design thinking methodologies will provide you with that extra edge in relating to the customer in a better way than what the predictive models of data suggest, and gives you ample space to innovate, test and improve. The normal approach in moving to the customers and to ask what they want does not provide you with futuristic views of new products or solutions, but rather incremental benefits to what exists today for the immediate future. Design thinking quickly enables you to creatively come up with futuristic solutions to problems that may not exist.

This becomes the first step of any innovation. Marketers have to come out of the mindset of creative thinking which worked best for them in the past and instead, be open to new and creative problem solving techniques and innovative ideas to identify and execute futuristic and long term exercises.

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