25 Cool CX Brands
Organizations that are bringing change to customer experience delivery through daring, creative, and inspirational strategies
Customer experience often gets a bad rap. These days it seems as though stories of customer pain points and company failures among news outlets are commonplace. Many companies, however, are quietly working to improve the way they engage with customers and ultimately deliver better customer experiences.

These 25 brands have caught the attention of 1to1 Media’s editors for having standout customer experiences in 2016.
For Life is Good, Altruism Comes Easy

“Life is not perfect. Life is not easy. Life is good.” That’s the tagline of Life is Good, the t-shirt company that also works to spread optimism. The company encourages customers to spread the optimism on Twitter and Instagram through #GrowtheGood. The greater efforts are through its Life is Good Kids Foundation which partners with childcare organizations to positively impact the quality of care delivered to vulnerable children. Through personal and professional development resources, Life is Good has offered retreats and ongoing support to more than 5,000 youth professionals.
TIAA Gets a Data Makeover

For some organizations, building a data-driven culture requires a leader who drives the changes throughout the organization. For others, becoming data centric takes a village. At TIAA, getting the organization focused on data required a lot of bottom-up support. TIAA’s CMO Connie Weaver led the cultural and business transformation to become data-driven. She brought in new hires focused on data, enlisted the help of 1,000 customers and prospects to join a community where TIAA gets weekly insights on campaigns and product ideas. The team also redesigned all processes based on what the data tells them and overhauled all marketing processes and templates across the

“Don’t underestimate having to re-do everything on the process level to get people to embrace that.”

Jaime Punishill, head of digital marketing and channel management at TIAA
Southwest Owns Up to Mistakes, Rewards its Loyal Customers

In July, Southwest Airlines experienced a system outage which impacted “multiple technology systems” resulting in 700 canceled or delayed flights over a three-day period. Rather than ignore customer complaints, Southwest acted openly and honestly about what caused the issue. As a follow-up, the airline offered all Southwest Rapid Reward members (not just those impacted by the outage) 5,000 rapid reward miles to be used on future reward flights. This is a true measure of an organization owning up to its mistakes and taking care of its loyal customers.
Vanguard Puts Customers in Charge of their Financial Future

Typical financial advice is expensive so to appeal to consumers, Vanguard innovated. The company created Vanguard Personal Advisor Services where advisers collaborate with customers to create tailored financial plans. Customers also get equipped with digital interaction tools and a dashboard to help track and plan their progress, giving them immediate access to their information and putting them in control of their finances. The success rate is in the numbers: It’s attracted more than $37 billion in assets.
Henry Ford’s vision for his company was to put the world in motion. Today, Ford is building on its founder’s dream through its new subsidiary—Ford Smart Mobility, which aims to design, build, grow, and invest in emerging mobility services. The cornerstone of this initiative is its Ford Pass—a free digital platform for customers that offers a marketplace with mobility services, such as parking apps and ride sharing services, FordGuides to help customers move efficiently, recognition for loyal members, and FordHubs that enable customers to experience Ford’s latest innovations. Ford is taking steps big and small to bring its customers the solutions that will put them in the driver’s seat.
Nestlé Waters North America is treating customer engagement seriously. The company announced a new digital Consumer Engagement Center that’s housed within Salesforce’s New York City office. The command center is staffed by a handful of employees whose job is to monitor and manage both online and offline data about Nestlé’s Water brands. According to Antonio Sciuto, Nestlé Waters North America’s CMO, the engagement center serves four purposes. The first is to listen to consumers through community management. Second, to analyze all of the data that Nestlé Waters has about its customers’ behavior and products to create an integrated view of the customer. Third, use that data to engage consumers with relevant messages. Fourth is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future campaigns.

“We have to think digital-first because we’re following our customers,”
Antonio Sciuto, Nestlé Waters North America’s CMO
Aria Resort & Casino Turns Small Data into Big Revenue Opportunity

Big Data’s sheer size overwhelms most marketers. Aria Resort & Casino, an MGM Resorts property, took control of guests’ small data and made it a big revenue opportunity. In February, MGM Resorts outfitted its 4,004 guest rooms with digital touchscreen tablets that offer everything from temperature control and housekeeping to TV remote control. It also controls elements outside of the room. Guests can order room service, purchase show tickets, make spa reservations, and it all integrates with its loyalty program. That data is allowing the resort to learn the types of information guests access, when they access it, how they use the information, and their direct paths to purchase. Lilian Tomovich, CCO of MGM Resorts, explained: “We now have this richness of data. All of a sudden, all this data is coming toward us and we have an opportunity to optimize.”
Humana Jolts and Jams its Way to a Better Customer Experience

A health insurer that’s focused on improving the patient experience across the enterprise? Not possible? It is. Last year, Humana started the journey to drive stronger self-service and empathetic resolution opportunities, and the Consumer Experience Team implemented some creative ways to seek feedback and encourage collaboration among employees. Geeta Wilson, director of consumer experience, said they’re challenging Humana’s corporate routine. Now consumer experience team members start every day with Jolt meetings where employees who don’t typically speak publically will share ideas. During its Idea Jams, different employees start off each weekly meeting with a music jam. Some people even bring in a band to kick things off. Wilson said it’s meant to stimulate cross-departmental conversation. Finally, during “Drop-In Thursdays” executives and anyone in the organization are welcome to visit the team’s innovation lab to ask questions about how they work. Nearly 4,000 employees have dropped in so far.
Caesars Entertainment, which operates Harrah’s, Caesars, Bally’s, Planet Hollywood, Paris, The Flamingo, and the Horseshoe casinos, recognizes that the experiences of its customers are strongly tied to their interactions with Caesars’ employees. In fact, Caesars’ research has found that guests who are highly satisfied with their experiences with Caesars’ employees spend 3%-to-13% more on gaming the following year. To help foster engaged employees, Caesars has created an employee appreciation program that offers employees tangible rewards for improving the guest experience. Fellow employees and managers can recognize employees for customer-centric accomplishments, earning them rewards points that can be redeemed for products and services. Since introducing the program in 2009, the company has allocated over $108 million in rewards to 65,000 employees. Moreover, customer satisfaction continues to improve, reaching its highest level yet in 2015.
Dorchester Collection Delivers the Luxury Experience

Dorchester Collection operates 10 distinctive luxury hotels such as The Beverly Hills Hotel and The Dorchester in London. Unlike The Ritz-Carlton, which has created a playbook to address different aspects of the customer experience at each of its hotels, Dorchester Collection takes a more entrepreneurial approach at each of its luxury hotels. Still, there are some best practices it does apply to each of its hotels. This includes placing a red carpet at the rear/service entrance of each of its hotels so that the customer and employee experiences are aligned. One of the mantras for company: Check-in is not at 3 o’clock. It’s whenever the guest arrives.
London’s Natural History Museum Personalizes the Visitor Experience

The Natural History Museum in London wanted to find a way to better engage its visitors and provide a more personalized experience so it partnered with Adobe and software developer Ensemble to build a Natural History Museum app. One of the app’s interesting features uses signal information from the museum’s WiFi network to pinpoint where visitors are standing in the museum and which display they’re likely looking at. The museum can use that data to deliver contextual information about the display that they’re looking at or suggest other exhibits and events. The first release of the app was introduced in April and the app already has more than 8,000 users. "Being able to offer these features gives us new ways to highlight attractions and encourage people to explore," noted Digital Media Strategy Manager Celena Bretton.
Castrol, the maker of motor oil and other petroleum-based products, has taken extra steps to make its customer experience program more visible to employees and management. For instance, Castrol branded its CX program as Castrol Customer Heartbeat to help reinforce the importance of customer centricity throughout the organization. The company has also added a layer of CX managers in each of the geographies the company operates in to ensure that customer experience is being addressed in each of the markets where it does business. Over the past three years, these and other customer-centric efforts have helped the company to boost its customer loyalty scores by 15 points.
A few years ago, employee satisfaction studies conducted by Mercedes-Benz revealed that nearly half of its employees were disengaged. To help drive engagement and to help employees become more familiar with its products, the company launched a 2.5-day training program for U.S. employees near its manufacturing plant in Alabama. The program includes a tour of its factory and driving Mercedes vehicles both on- and off-road, including racing Mercedes vehicles around a racetrack with a Skip Barber racing coach. In 2016, Mercedes-Benz was one of only three automakers (including Audi and Kia) whose customer experience ratings have improved from 2015 to 2016, according to the 2016 Temkin Experience Ratings.
Philips Healthcare Connects with Remote Patients

Philips Healthcare, a medical technology company, is equipping cardiac, cancer, and other types of patients with wearable devices and is using Internet of Things networks to gain a deeper and immediate understanding of patient conditions while patients are at home and to identify when to offer a patient proactive treatment before an emergency arises. For instance, the use of wearable devices and care management software via the cloud enables physicians to track the vital signs for cardiac patients who have wearable devices and notify them immediately if a patient’s symptoms indicate his or her heart isn’t functioning properly. Philips’ efforts have reduced readmission rates for cardiac patients by 50% while reducing care costs by 25%.
IBM Fabricates CX into Its Design

With a massive global footprint, IBM sells thousands of products and services to companies across multiple industries. To bring consistency to the customer experiences it delivers, IBM has developed a CX design process for every product it sells. This includes a reusable library of resources that company employees are expected to use, including a stakeholder map and customer empathy maps which are used to help IBM employees to better understand the attributes, needs, and interests of targeted customer personas.
Year Up Offers Bright Futures to Youths Who Lack Them

As an active participant in Big Brother’s mentoring program since 1985, Gerald Chertavian is well aware of the challenges faced by young people seeking good-paying jobs and training, particularly those from impoverished urban backgrounds. In 2000, Chertavian founded Year Up, a non-profit that has partnered with 250 companies such as American Express, Google, Facebook, and Pegasystems to provide technical training, college credits, and internships in helping thousands of low-income, 18-to-24 year olds go from poverty to professional careers within one year. Sixteen years later, more than 15,000 people have gone through the program, with an average annual salary of $38,000.
One of the challenges for medical patients who aren’t hospitalized but are extremely ill is the difficulty in traveling to a hospital or a doctor’s office to receive a check-up. To help ease this burden for patients, Seattle Children’s Hospital is equipping physicians with video systems on their laptops to enable them to meet with and evaluate patients who are too ill or frail to come for an appointment to one of its facilities and use remote diagnostics to check on their vital signs. In 2016, U.S. News & World Report ranked Seattle Children’s Hospital as the #1 children’s hospital west of the Rocky Mountains and #5 nationally.
Northern Illinois University (NIU) was struggling to keep up with inquiries from prospective students and the marketing team had no way to track potential students from interest to enrollment. Last year NIU turned to marketing automation provider Act-On to help it capture and segment information about prospects. Students submit contact and background information through a Web form that is routed to a CRM system. Prospects are prioritized based on how likely they are to enroll and assigned to academic advisors. Streamlining inquiries this way has “enabled us to see and manage what our lead flow looks like all the way through the funnel,” says Marketing Manager Anissa Kuhar. “It makes us smarter and better able to manage and redirect how we’re spending our resources.”
Stitch Fix Differentiates itself with Data Science

With a team of data scientists, Stitch Fix is betting that by combining data with human experts it can pick the right clothes for each customer. Stitch Fix is an online personal shopping service that sends clothing to customers to choose from after they fill out a style profile. Recipients pay only for what they want to keep and return the rest. The San Francisco-based company uses data about its clients’ preferences, inventory, and returns as well as the expertise of stylists to decide which merchandise to send to customers. Stitch Fix’s bet appears to be paying off. Forbes estimates that the private company brought in $250 million of revenue in 2015 and that number is expected to jump by 50 percent this year.
Mic, an online news publication that’s geared toward Millennials, places a lot of value on user feedback and data. The company solicits feedback from readers about everything from font size to story topics through one-on-one meetings and video conferencing. For example, Mic is considering removing its infinite scroll feature after readers indicated in feedback sessions that they didn’t like it, explained Anthony Sessa, vp of product and engineering. “It’s actual Mic readers — we’re talking with them about every product,” Sessa told Digiday. “Everything goes through testing.”
Headphone maker Sol Republic set out to build a community of brand advocates. The California-based company refers to its consumer advocates as “Soldiers of Sound.” Fans access the community through an app where they can earn points for activities like posting a selfie or creating a video with a Sol Republic product to earn merchandise and access to events. To date, the 6-year-old company’s customer-based community includes more than 30,000 members who create YouTube videos and Instagram posts about the brand. “We wanted to build a community of music lovers, not just customers, so we’ll do things like provide buses at a musical festival to help people get around and have surprise DJs jump on the bus too,” said Kevin Lee, co-founder and CEO of Sol Republic.
Luxury clothing designer Rebecca Minkoff is optimizing a critical part of the shopper’s journey—the dressing room. Several of the brand’s flagship stores have been outfitted with interactive dressing room mirrors that provide personalized assistance. Shoppers tap the mirrors to activate product screens that recognize the RFID-tagged clothing in the room. As shoppers try on the clothing, the mirror displays items that complement the clothing. If the customer is unsure whether to purchase an item, she can save her fitting room session to an app and purchase the item at a later time. On the backend, store managers are able to track which clothes were taken into the fitting room, what was purchased/not purchased, and which styles resonate with its audience.
Nutrisystem Is Hungry for Customer Insights

The weight-loss company Nutrisystem maintains open communication channels between the customer service team and other parts of the organization to stay in touch with the customers’ needs. Employees are encouraged to listen to a variety of call types in the contact center during “open house sessions” and customer service agents share insights with executives at roundtable meetings. One of those insights led to the decision to add more frozen items to the company’s a la carte menu, leading to an uptick in sales.
True Religion Connects Online and In-Store Experiences

Premium jeans maker True Religion has given Apple Watches to associates to help them engage customers more effectively. Swiping a finger across the Apple Watch screen lets store associates access True Religion’s full inventory and filter it by size, style, color, or wash. Associates can then send the image of the merchandise from the watch to a large high-definition monitor for the customer to view. The image includes a barcode that can be scanned to complete the sale and items that are not in the store are shipped to the customer’s home. Consumers who have downloaded the app can also opt into alerting associates when they’ve entered a True Religion store to receive more personalized service.
Bridgestone Aims to Transform Vehicle Maintenance

Bridgestone Retail Operations wants to change perceptions of vehicle maintenance as an inconvenient and costly chore while enhancing the customer experience. The company is calling its initiative Vision 2020 and is looking to leading retailers like Starbucks and Nordstrom for inspiration. Bridgestone Retail is reviewing the way it does business to move away from one-time, transactional relationships and create an environment where customers are comfortable returning to a Bridgestone Retail store for all of their automotive maintenance needs. As part of its initiative, the company has established a “lab store” concept, where new ways of customer interaction and auto service processes are being tested, evaluated, and benchmarked.
About TTEC

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