



Customer Experience Management

# Keep your customers smiling by better managing their brand experiences

eDigitalResearch   
For informed direction

## Introduction

A lot is being said these days about customer experience. Businesses and consumers alike are increasingly putting the overall experience at the centre of their thinking.

The customer experience, it would seem, is now vital. It's about making sure each and every part of your customer journey is great, delivering an exceptional level of service and making sure that your customers leave happy and delighted.

But to truly understand how and where to improve your customer's experience, it is first essential to understand how consumers currently rate their customer experience across a number of key industries and sectors within the UK.

The following paper examines key findings from a recent eDigitalResearch consumer survey investigating how consumers presently view their customer experience and what they feel should be done to better their experience with businesses and brands as a whole.

The results specifically examine:

- How customer loyalty differs across industries
- How different ways of contacting a brand can affect the overall customer experience
- The current state of customer contact experiences
- What should be done to improve the customer experience overall

## Methodology

An online survey was sent to a UK nationally representative sample between 5th and 9th April 2013. 2,032 responses were collected in total.



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## Loyalty

Customer loyalty is nothing new – it can be defined as a consumer attitude or behaviour to favour one brand over all others in the marketplace whether it's because they offer a better product, price or experience.

However, if a brand doesn't offer a good experience, they are simply relying on their product and price to keep people returning through their doors. And with profits being continually squeezed and more and more retailers promising to price match, it is becoming increasingly difficult for consumers to differentiate brands on price or product alone.

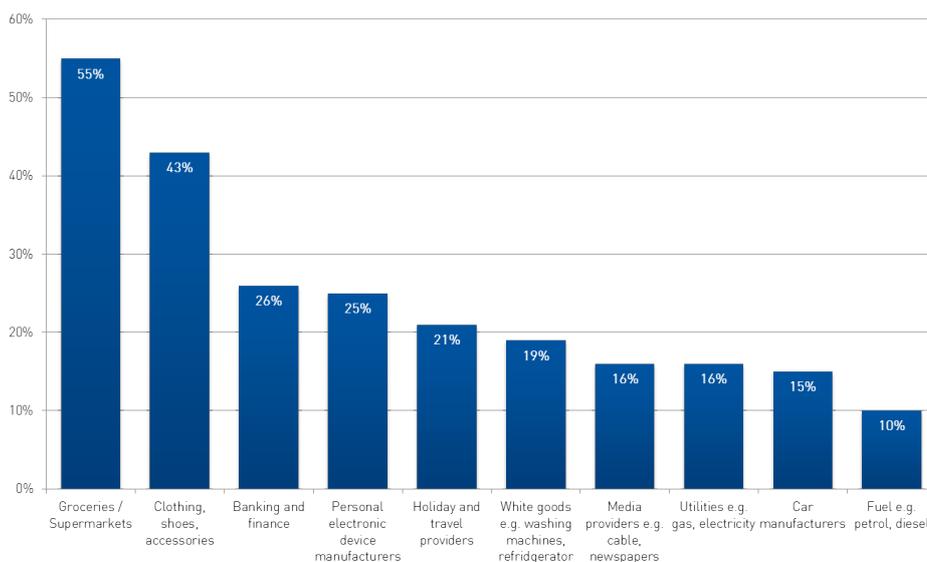
Perhaps unsurprisingly the survey into customer experiences found that supermarkets currently have the highest levels of customer loyalty in the UK with 54% of respondents saying that they almost always visit one brand over all others in the sector.

This was to be expected. Loyalty schemes are extremely popular in this sector and with differing store layouts, which can easily confuse new customers, and the introduction of online shopping baskets that save what you buy one week from the next, it is no surprise that people return to the same supermarket again and again.

However, more alarmingly, the results also found that loyalty levels across the rest of UK industries are relatively low. Clothing and fashion brands as well as the banking sector, alongside supermarkets, have managed to convert over a quarter of their customer base into loyal customers. Whilst many have their favourite shopping brands, the difficulty and hassle in switching bank accounts often means that a customer will stay with the same banking brand for years, technically

making them a loyal customer.

Utility providers, car manufacturers and fuel suppliers have the lowest levels of customer loyalty in the UK. Price comparison sites have become extremely popular in the past few years and are likely to have attributed to lower levels of loyalty in these industries.



Q: Thinking about companies or brands you feel loyal towards, i.e. the brand you would choose above any other if all things were equal, which industries are they in? Please tick all that apply.

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Loyalty is key to a successful business. A loyal customer often equals a happy customer – and a happy customer is going to be a lot more willing to spend more with your brand. With loyalty levels so low, companies need to look at ways of increasing retention – it’s no longer about just delivering a good product at the right price. Providing a great customer experience is key if brands and industries want to encourage repeat visits and increase profits.

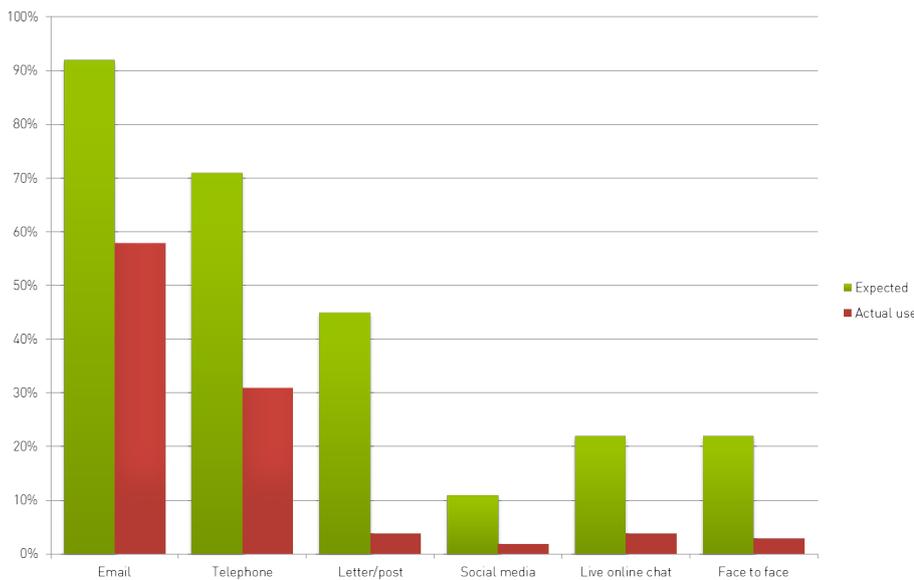
### The multichannel customer experience

Customer experience can perhaps be whittled down to simply engaging with each customer and providing a personal touch to make their experience with your brand a memorable one. It’s about seeing each customer as a human being and not simply a number.

To help better a brands overall customer experience, it is important to ensure that experiences are great across all customer touchpoints – including in store, online, telephone, email and social media. Customer experiences also need to be consistent across the customer journey – from initial browsing, purchasing and after sales care.

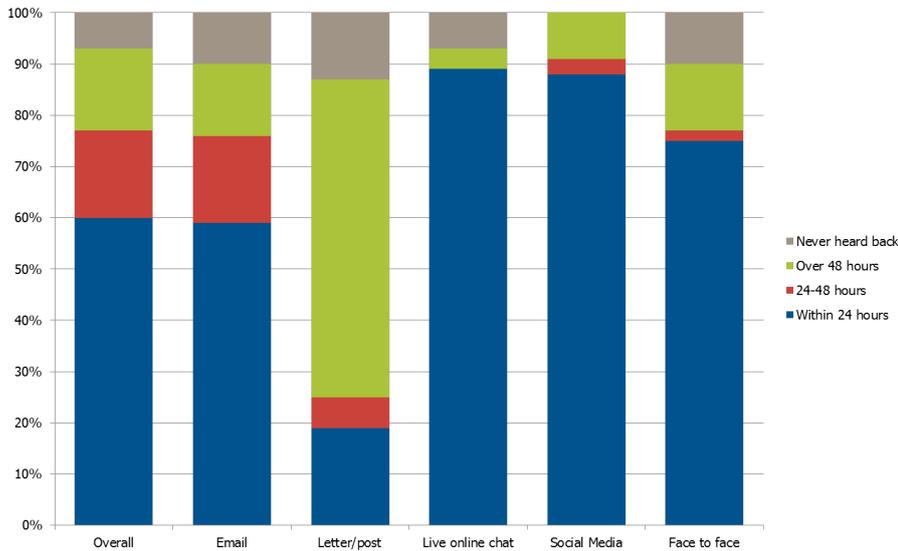
As part of the research, we looked into respondents last contact with companies across various channels comparing response speeds, processes and overall satisfaction.

The results found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that email is now an expected means of contacting a company. 92% of respondents said that they would expect to be able to contact a brand via email. In comparison, telephone, once the main way of getting in touch with a business, is now expected by under three quarters (71%) of those surveyed.



Just under 1 in 4 (22%) of people expect to be able to speak to a brand representative face to face or via an online chat service. Both of these customer service channels are immediate, allowing customers to gain feedback on their questions, queries or complaints in the moment and demonstrates the fundamental shift from bricks and mortar to online.

Q: If you were going to get in touch with a company, by what means would you expect to be able to contact them? Please tick all that apply vs Thinking of the last time you got in touch with a company, how did you contact them?



Q; How long did you wait until you first heard back from the company or brand that you contacted?

When we asked respondents what channel they used to last contact a brand, over half (58%) reached out by email, followed by around one third (31%) who used the phone.

However, how you contact a brand can greatly affect how quickly your query is resolved. The results found that around a quarter (24%) of all customer contact (excluding those that use telephone to contact a brand) hear back from a company within 6 hours or under.

However, on average, every one in 10 customers who contact a brand for whatever reason are left in the lurch and never receive feedback from businesses. It would appear that, on average, contact through social media is the quickest and most reliable way to get in contact with a brand and currently the only channel that will guarantee a reply to your query and complaint – and this is only because this form of communication is so open and public.

The results clearly show that there are currently major disparities across customer contact channels in terms of how customers are treated. If a customer decides that they need to contact a company, their experience should be the same no matter what channel they use. There are obviously some major limitations and restrictions in place for some channels (most notably long delays with letters and the post), but measures should be taken to ensure that departments and teams work together to provide the best contact experience possible.

Improving the customer experience should be a business wide operation. It is important to bring the various business silos together to work as one to put the customer at the heart of the business.

### Turning a negative scenario into a positive one

To improve your overall customer experience and increase customer loyalty, it is important that you turn a negative scenario into a positive one at every opportunity possible. That means that when a customer complains about a product, service or experience, all is done to ensure that their complaint is dealt with swiftly and the issue resolved quickly.

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We asked respondents how likely they would be to contact a company on a variety of issues. Most commonly, 68% said that would get in touch with a brand to ask a question, followed closely by 65% who said that they would make contact to complain. Under half (44%) said that they would consciously make an effort to contact a brand to leave positive feedback.

With the majority of consumers willing to contact a brand about a negative experience, it is important for companies to manage these experiences and turn brand damaging situations into a positive and better all-round experience.

Worryingly, however, the survey found that customer complaints are the most likely to go unanswered. Just under half (44%) of those surveyed who recently complained heard back within 24 hours, compared to 68% who said they provided positive feedback and received feedback from the company within the same time period. Perhaps even more shocking is the fact that one in ten of those that complained never heard back from the company they got in touch with.

It would also appear that complaints are the least likely to be resolved. Of those surveyed who recently contacted a brand to complain, just 61% felt that their issue was fully resolved. In comparison, 85% of those who had a question were satisfied that it was answered fully. Overall just over three quarters (78%) of consumers who had recently made contact with a company felt that there had been some sort of resolution to their query or complaint.

Low resolution rates are often affecting a consumer's view of a brand. Even those who originally provided positive feedback said that they felt worse towards the company when nothing was resolved or they heard nothing back. 10% of customers who gave positive feedback said that they felt worse after contacting the brand, suggesting that all customers expect some sort of response or recognition of their comments.

Post experience customer contact is a fantastic way of turning around a negative scenario and delighting customers. It allows brands to increase a customer's emotional bond with their business which is likely to have effect on their customer loyalty levels.

It would appear from these survey results that companies are consistently failing to resolve issues and this is having a major impact on how consumers view a brand and is greatly affecting their overall customer experience.

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## Customer feedback

Negative contact from customers and a limited number of consumers willing to make an effort to say ‘well done’ is likely to affect staff morale and could explain some of the poor resolution results we’ve seen from this research.

It is therefore important that companies encourage feedback from customers on their experience’s, sharing both negative and positive points to help brands to improve overall. Contacting a brand to share this information should be as easy and simple as possible for a customer. But it also needs to be easy to listen to, easy to act upon and easy to implement improvements for businesses too.

Customer Experience Management solutions, such as eDigitalResearch’s eCustomerConnect allow customers to provide feedback in their own words and on their own terms. By using multichannel methodologies, such as mobile, in-store point of sale, and SMS, customers can feedback on their experiences in the moment. Results are collected in real time and intelligent reporting tiers allow managers up and down the business to make immediate business decisions to make instant improvements to their customer experience. Results and positive feedback can then be shared around the business for better staff engagement with your brand.

However, this research shows that currently customers are finding it too hard to make contact with a brand. Of those that had recently contacted a company, 32% felt that they had to put in far more effort or slightly more effort to make initial contact than they expected. Worryingly, complainers are most likely to feel that they had to put in too much effort, with 44% saying that they put in more effort than expected.

In order to improve, brands must listen to their customers. This is not new thinking. However what is new is the way in which consumers can now interact with brands. Companies must listen across all of these channels if they want to make any big improvement to their business performance.

## Lessons to be learnt

The research found that customer loyalty is currently low across the majority of industries and sectors in the UK. Customer loyalty can be strongly linked to customer experience. As the retail market and economic circumstances continue to change, brands can no longer just rely on price or product to ensure that customers will carry on returning to their brand. Instead, their customer experience must exceed all expectations and these results suggest that currently this just isn't happening on a regular basis.



The customer experience really is essential. By bettering the overall customer experience, brands will likely increase the number of customers returning through their doors and in turn boost sales.

Customer contact is an area of the customer journey that currently needs attention. The results show that too often questions, complaints and feedback are going unanswered and unresolved. The results show that this is having a major impact on how consumers view a brand and is greatly effecting a customer's overall experience.

The survey has shown that the majority of people are contacting brands to ask a question, which is possibly having a negative impact on response rates and times. One way to manage this deluge of questions is to ensure that the FAQ and help sections of a website are more than sufficient. We're seeing more and more companies move towards self-serve models to help relieve the pressure on their customer contact channels, in turn improving response rates, resolution figures and the overall customer experience.

Having a way to monitor customer feedback, share real time results with staff and better manage your customer's experiences will all help to increase levels of loyalty with your brand.



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