How Emotions Drive a Customer Experience

Is your contact center evoking the right emotions from customers?

By **Colin Shaw,** Beyond Philosophy

"I am really annoyed at waiting so long for my call to be answered…" "The person I spoke to was so friendly they made me feel like I was talking to an old friend…" "They may say 'have a nice day,' but you can tell that they don't mean it."

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We have all heard customers say these things about their experiences. But what is at the core of these comments, and what can we do about it? We all know, from our own personal experiences, that when we have been waiting a long time for the phone to be answered, we feel "frustrated" and we think that the organization doesn't "care" about us. We can also feel when a person is being "friendly" and, when this happens, we are likely to be more open. It is all about customers' emotions.

Fifteen years ago, I was senior vice president at BT (British Telecommunications), responsible for 3,500 people in call centers around the globe. One day, my boss called me into his office and said, "Colin, I would like you to improve our customer experience, but do it at the least cost." Ever since that day, I have been thinking about how to improve the customer experience. It led me to establish my own company and write four books about customer experience.

Customers Are Emotional Beings

Here is the most significant thing that I have learned in those 15 years: More than 50% of a customer's experience is about emotions. Customers are people, and people are driven by emotions. Everything we do can be traced back to emotions. Whether it's about our human need to be social (Maslow) or the desire to be part of a tribe, the desire for status, the need to feel safe or many more aspects, emotions are at the core of human behavior. Quite simply, if you wish to improve customer experience, you need to embrace the fact that customers are emotional beings. Once you have done this, the next step is to design emotions into your customer experience.

But which emotions? If emotions account for more than 50% of a customer's experience, it's imperative that you know which emotions you are trying to evoke. Don't feel bad if you don't know—the majority of the organizations we work with don't know the answer either. That is quite amazing, really, as this effectively means organizations are leaving 50% of their customer experience to chance.
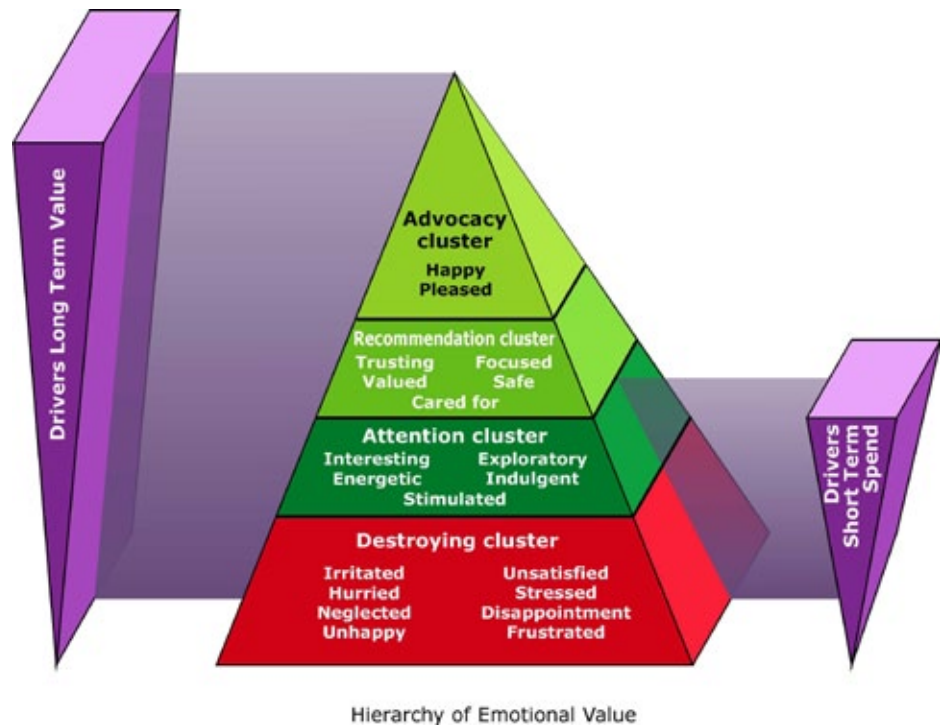
Now, I know what many of you are thinking: Yes, it sounds interesting, but where are the results? Show me the money! One of our clients, Maersk Line, the world's largest shipping company, has recently improved their Net Promoter Score by 40 points in 30 months by focusing on three emotions: Pleased, Cared for and Trust. We have plenty more examples of significant success from taking this approach.

Let's assume for the moment that you do not know the emotions that you are trying to deliver and, like many of our clients, you realize you should know. Surely, you should select emotions that drive most "value'"for you? When I say "value," I mean the "return" you get. You may determine "value" as being increased sales, customer retention, increase in NPS or customer satisfaction. Of course, you should. Therefore, which emotions drive most value?

Emotions Can Drive or Destroy Value

Back in 2005, we set ourselves the objective of discovering which emotions drive and destroy most value. Working with London Business School and the Chairman of Consumer Psychology, we undertook two years of research to discover which emotions drive and destroy most value.

Emotions That Drive and Destroy Value, Figure 1, right *

Drivers Long Term Value

Advocacy cluster
Happy
Pleased

Recommendation cluster
Trusting   Focused
Valued   Safe
Cared for

Attention cluster
Interesting   Exploratory
Energetic   Indulgent
Stimulated

Destroying cluster
Irritated   Unsatisfied
Hurried   Stressed
Neglected   Disappointment
Unhappy   Frustrated

Drivers Short Term Spend

Hierarchy of Emotional Value

We discovered that there are 20 emotions that drive and destroy value in a customer experience. Let me be clear, these are the emotions that we can scientifically and statistically prove drive value. It is interesting to note that, despite looking at every emotion possible in our research, emotions such as "delight" and "satisfaction" do not appear on this list.

Figure 1, above, shows four clusters of emotions that drive and destroy value. The Destroying cluster means that, if you evoke these emotions with your customers, you will lose value.
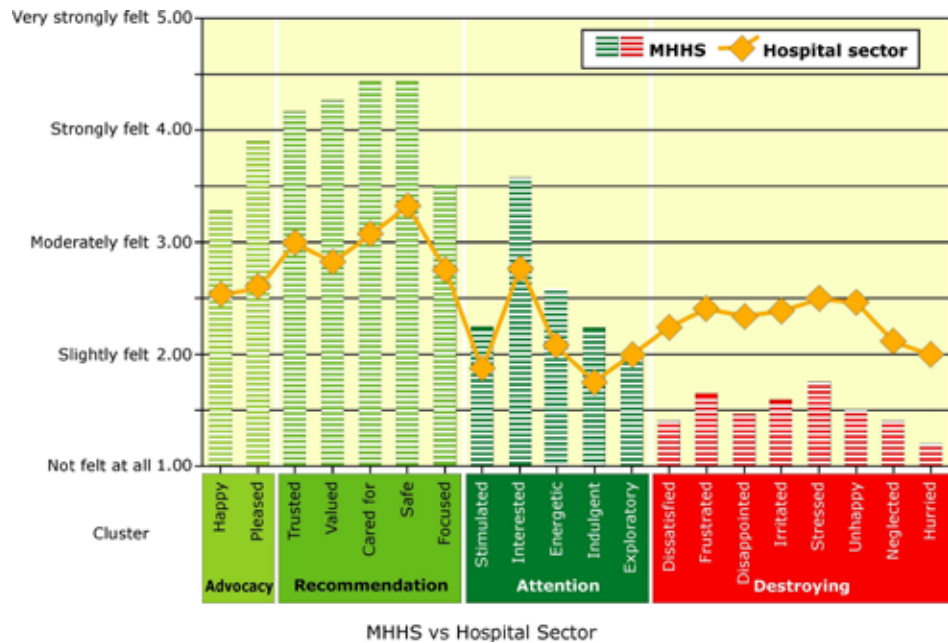
The Attention cluster effectively consists of the emotions that the Marketing tries to evoke, whether or not they know that! They want customers to feel "interested" and "stimulated" to "explore" what the organization has to offer. We can show statistically that these drive short-term value. This means that customers will buy the product or service from you, but they will not stay.

To increase customer retention and customer loyalty, you need to evoke the Recommendation and Advocacy clusters of emotions. These are emotions such as feeling "cared for," "valued" and "happy." These drive long-term value. Knowing these emotions is one thing, the next step is doing something with it. Clearly, a good first point is to understand how your customers feel about your company in relation to these emotions.

It should be recognized that all organizations have, what we call, an Emotional Signature. This is a level of emotional engagement with their customers, whether or not they know it

MHHS vs Hospital Sector

or not. Figure 2, above, is an example of Memorial Hermann Hospital System's Emotional Signature.

The line through the middle is the average index for the hospital's sector, which we established using our database of customer emotions in a customer experience. The vertical axis indicates how well this emotion is being felt. On the horizontal axis, are the 20 emotions that drive and destroy value.

How Do You Evoke the Right Emotions?

OK, once you know your Emotional Signature—what do you do now? The next question is, what are you doing that is evoking these emotions? What should you be doing to evoke your desired emotions?

This is where a few areas of the business start to link together. First, let's assume that you decided that the most value would be achieved by making customers feel "cared for." What do you need to do to evoke this feeling? The answer is, many things. For example, what type of people do you employ today? We all know that there are people who are good at this and people who aren't. Doesn't it make sense to employ people who are naturally good at making people feel cared for? It may be that your recruiting should be targeted at the "caring" industries, such as nurses, social workers, etc .

Isn't it also sensible that you now start to measure how much customers feel you care for them? What about training people on how they can make people feel "cared for"? Most of the training that we see focuses on how the systems work, and they spend five minutes talking about how to deal with customers.

Last, but by no means least, shouldn't you now design your customer experience so that people feel "cared for" at the end of the experience? This is where techniques like Six Sigma and "lean" simply are not suitable. In my experience, most organizations build "rational" experiences. It is more like a logical, left-brain flow chart that only captures half the experience.

You need to overlay an emotional experience design on top of this. When we're training clients, we have found that evoking emotions can be a difficult concept to grasp, so let me give you an example of how to think about this.

Stop and think for a moment about the last time you felt that someone cared for you. It could be in a family setting or a personal experience. Stop and think now. You may be thinking about a time when someone did something unexpected for you. Maybe it was as simple as making you a cup of coffee. Or maybe a person took the time to talk with you or listen to your problems. Now translate that to your customer experience—what does this mean you should do?

It means that doing unexpected things for the customer shows them that you care for them. This may mean that you need to give your people more time to demonstrate this, and you may need to change some of your measures.

Now you can start to see that from a simple concept of wanting to make customers feel "cared for," you need to change the way the company works and it has far-reaching implications. I'm sure that, as you read this, you're thinking: "Change our metrics to give them more time? Oh, we can't do that. What would happen to out average call-handling time?" Welcome to the exciting world of customer experience! You can now see the real implications of undertaking this work. Therefore, let me pose you a question. Are you serious about improving your customer experience? If you are, this is what it takes. If you are not, then I suggest that you don't even considering doing anything like this. Saying that you are going to improve the customer experience and then doing nothing is the worst of all worlds.

We are starting to see more and more organizations embrace the emotional aspects of the customer experience. At a recent Telecom event, SVPs from Comcast and Tellus told the audience that understanding and designing customer emotions into their experience was a key part of their strategy. I would suggest that it needs to form a key part of your strategy going forward, as well. ⓟ

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The DNA of Customer Experience: How Emotions Drive Value, by Colin Shaw, is available from www.beyondphilosophy.com/thought-leadership/books

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