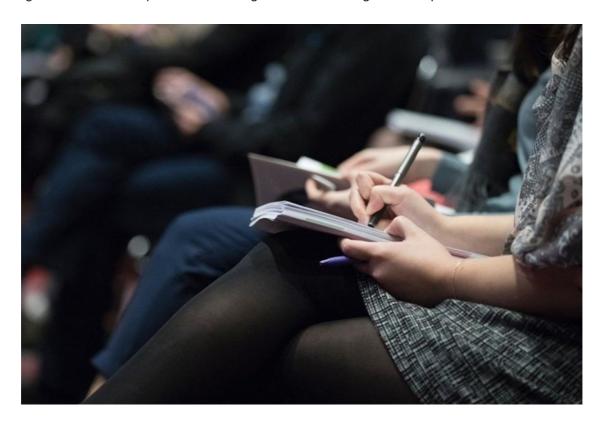# The human factor: a top insight from a CX Masterclass

Worldwide, brands are under unprecedented pressure. Companies, from legacy to startup, multi-national to local, are all grappling with how to meet steeply rising customer experience (CX) expectations; how to keep up with consumer trends that change at the speed of light and how to harness the tech that is evolving faster than we can adapt.

These were key themes underpinning the recent CX Masterclass hosted by nlighten, where some of South Africa's top CX leaders and digital transformation specialists came together to share insights and unpack the latest in CX trends.

From data mining to data ethics; differentiation to automation, what the experts did reveal is that we are still a way off from handing it all over to the machine. When it comes to meeting expectations at every customer touch point with your brand and company, human intelligence and the human touch are still paramount.

CX working hand in hand with machine

According to Nathalie Schooling, CX specialist and CEO of nlighten, while companies do need to be making the necessary investments in latest tech as an enabler of their business growth and sustainability, it's important to sort the current capabilities from the hype.

"New tech, such as AI, is all very exciting," she said, "When it works well, it's a fantastic enabler - but when it doesn't, customers experience frustration. Then, what you want is to speak to a human who will sort it all out for you and transform the experience. Research is showing that currently, AI is only getting it right 50 to 60% of the time, so the portion of 'exceptions' that can't be automated and need to be managed effectively by people is significant. Today's reality is that we don't get the results we want by handing over to the machine, we get them from being in charge of it."

Mining the right data in the right places

One thing that never changes is the truism 'Know thy customer'. In order to deliver satisfaction along the CX journey, today's brands and companies need to be acutely in touch with who their customers are and what they need and want.

Nathalie Schooling, CX specialist and CEO of nlighten

In this digital age and omnichannel environment knowing your customer well enough to meet their (much higher) expectations has never been so complex and challenging.

"This is where tech such as machine learning and applied AI comes to the fore," said Schooling.

"Businesses can now invest in solutions that unlock insights from their big data so that they are empowered to become more personal and predictive. Companies, such as Netflix are getting this right. They know how to use the masses of data that is available to them to personalise their service further with suggested products based on a customer's viewing history. Data is the key, but while the tech enables access to so many more insights, it is the human intelligence applied to what you do with it and how you use it that makes the difference in your CX."

Another CX Masterclass speaker, Nic Ray, CEO of BrandsEye SA, highlighted the importance of mining data in the right places.

He points out that minute by minute, millions of customers are complaining about or complimenting products and services. "Businesses know this volunteered data is valuable," Ray said, "But it can be a struggle to keep up with the pace, scale and volatility of social media feedback. Being able to accurately measure and understand how and why customers feel the way they do is of high strategic value and is a significant competitive advantage for omni-channel customer journeys. Traditional CX metrics like NPS, although important, provide a historical view on actual customer experience, whereas social media data allows for real-time monitoring of customer feedback. This empowers a company to be appropriately agile in their

responsiveness to customer feedback.”

Why you can't leave personalisation all to the machine

Personalisation is one of the major drivers of rising CX expectations. Data and analytics are playing the key role in enabling real-time personalisation but Schooling again warned that companies shouldn't get caught up in tech hype.

"AI, and all its possibilities, are very exciting, and it is incredibly important to plan for the future, but we can't forget where we are today. As we shape CX strategy, we need to be clear about what our limitations are today, and that what we most need to understand is what people need and want right now, including the generational needs of people. At this time, AI does not understand human nuance and tone or even, sarcasm. It cannot analyse the tone of a customer's feedback. The human touch, and uniquely human understanding are still critically relevant in today's CX journey."

How differentiation is also about hearts and minds

When it comes to products, services and CX, brands and companies are in a crowded battle for differentiation. Digital alone cannot make headway in the fight to stand out.

At the masterclass, Reynard Uys, co-founder and head of professional services at Immersion UX, highlighted the considerable opportunities offered by the human focus.

He said, "While the digital transformation of offerings, business models and communication modes are all essential, it is all in service to the kind of plainly human engagement that wins hearts and minds. It starts within a company with its employees to harness the value of them as brand-building ambassadors and extends to an organisation-wide customer focus. With an unwavering commitment to solving human problems, meeting human needs and improving human lives, you open up customer engagement opportunities where they generate content that supports your business goals and become advocates for your products and services."

"The journey to understanding what your customers experience, think and feel at every touchpoint when interacting with your business is no longer a road less travelled," says Schooling. Two years ago, a Gartner customer experience survey found that 81% of businesses expected to be competing mostly, or completely on the basis of CX by 2019."

This latest nlighten CX Masterclass put the spotlight on how we can't ignore the human factor, and tech enablers and digital drivers must be strategically integrated with human intelligence.

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