

Three Smart Ways

to Exceed Your
Customers' Digital
Expectations



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Introduction

73% of consumers rank customer experience (CX) as a vital factor in their purchase decisions (coming after only price and product quality).¹

Customer expectations are always high. They expect faster speeds, more options, and better personalization. You've probably experienced this as a consumer, which means you understand how above-and-beyond experiences can ignite brand loyalty. But as a business leader, you also know how much time, budget, and effort are spent developing those experiences.

Business leaders are embracing innovative new technologies like AI to rise above those expectations and stay competitive. A Forrester survey found that 80% of business leaders listed improving CX as a high priority. They see that delivering better CX is a crucial driver of growth. According to that survey, "High-quality CX isn't a nice-to-have—it's a revenue driver. Even small improvements in CX quality can reduce an enterprise's churn and increase its share of wallet, adding up to millions in revenue."

Generative AI is giving rise to exciting new ideas for delivering even better CX. But bringing these ideas to life requires a lot of planning and moving parts. When infusing new tech into your CX processes, it isn't always clear where to begin or how to level up from where you currently stand. With an end-to-end cloud platform in place, it's easier to prime your tools and teams to take advantage of emerging AI and machine learning.

The result is greater faster app deployment, more opportunities for innovation, and enhanced security and compliance. Azure solutions have helped companies across industries ready their teams for adopting the latest technology without disrupting business as usual or putting data at risk during migration.



Leaders are catching up on the value of customer obsession—the number of US enterprise business leaders whose companies are customer-obsessed rose by 3 percentage points to 6%."

Forrester

84% of organizations are either exploring or are currently using AI and machine learning to become digital-first businesses.

Foundry, IDG

¹ Consumer intelligence series: Future of customer experience, (PWC)

² Forrester Blog: US CX Quality Falls For An Unprecedented Second Consecutive Year

³ Digital business executive summary, (Foundry)



Introduction

Jumpstart a new CX approach

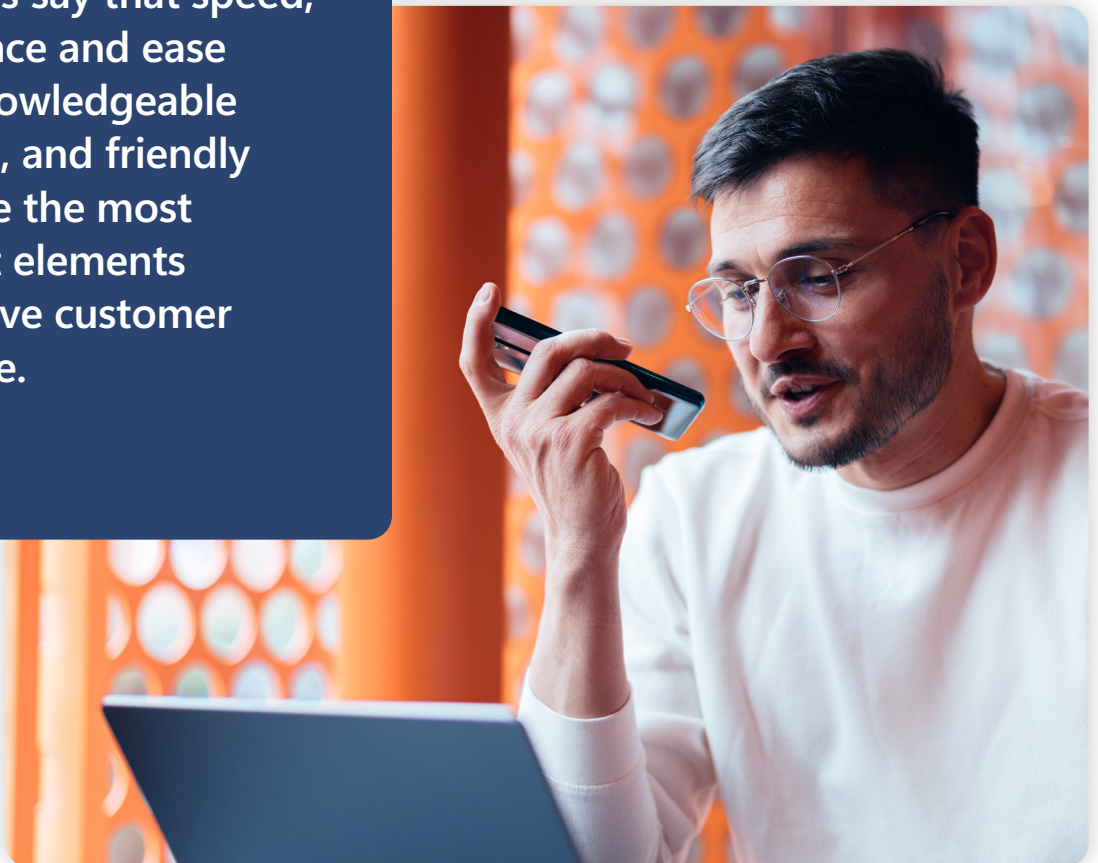
Whether your organization is leading in healthcare, innovating in education, or developing the next big app, it's critical to have a CX-driven approach to growth.

This e-book will serve as a guide for launching the next step of your strategy to increase customer loyalty with superior digital experiences. With the right tools and expertise, you should be able to put your strategy into action so your teams can:

- Innovate and deploy new experiences using a unified, streamlined process.
- Be ready to implement future tech capabilities when they arise.
- Take advantage of advanced technology while reducing IT costs and complexity.
- Deliver secure experiences that foster trust and loyalty in customers.

80% of American consumers say that speed, convenience and ease of use, knowledgeable assistance, and friendly service are the most important elements of a positive customer experience.

PWC



¹ Consumer intelligence series: Future of customer experience, (PWC)

Three ways to unlock your digital potential

For leaders and teams wanting to combine creativity and technology, here are three ways to kickstart your experience-driven digital strategy.

Envision your customers' digital experience



Develop your data strategy



Build alignment between business and tech teams



Envision your customers' digital experience



Consumers increasingly want their relationships and interactions with brands to be **memorable** and **experiential**.”

Forbes

Successful experience-driven businesses are built on a deep understanding of customer needs and expectations. It's important to see this from the perspective of your target customers and to understand you're being compared to the full range of digital experiences currently available in your industry and beyond.

Identify how your target customers feel about their current digital experiences to get started. Performing a deep analysis of customer sentiment will reveal where you're meeting the basic expectations, where you're exceeding them, and where you might be missing chances to rival the competition.

Divide up these insights into **“baseline customer expectations”** and **“differentiating experiences”** on the next page. This will form a picture of opportunities to innovate beyond the “expected” and into the “game-changing.”

Whiteboard exercise: Create your digital innovation roadmap

Categorize your findings into the groupings below to start building your digital innovation roadmap.

1. Baseline customer expectations: What are the foundational customer expectations for digital experiences your organization must meet.

For example:

- Customers expect to be able to buy at any time of the day, on a range of mobile devices
- They expect a website to be always available and responsive.
- They expect security and respect for their data privacy.

2. Differentiating experiences: How could you give customers more of what they love, going above and beyond competing experiences?

For example:

- Customers want proactive, personalized recommendations and guidance when looking for products and services.
- They want fast responses to questions or support inquiries on the channel of their choice.
- They want unique experiences that demonstrate innovation, creativity, and a true understanding of their needs.

⁴The top 4 customer experience trends in 2023. (Forbes)

Three ways to unlock your digital potential

Envision your customers' digital experience

Once you've identified key customer expectations, closely examine the experiences your organization delivers to customers. Find the gaps and envision ways to bridge them with innovation and creativity. This might mean resolving a poorly performing mobile app or website that goes down at peak periods (e.g., Black Friday). It might mean incorporating a highly personalized customer portal with more self-service options or a virtual assistant that can help customers get satisfactory answers to their questions. Here are some examples of how other companies turned their knowledge about their customers into experiences that delight.

Real Madrid drives global fan engagement with a digital sports platform

Around the world, Real Madrid fans share a fierce passion for and unshakeable loyalty to the team, faithfully following its performance and players closely. Until recently, however, the club's ability to interact with its huge fan base was limited to fans attending games in the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, visiting its website, or participating in its social media channels.

The leading sports franchise needed a way to connect with its growing global fan base and give them a more immersive club experience. Its solution was to create a global "digital sports platform" for fans, including:

- A fan engagement platform to capture and store fan interactions, including mobile check-ins and profile updates on the official website.
- An extended video platform to host new and historical video content on Real Madrid matches.
- An interactive consumer app for mobile devices that lets fans engage with the brand wherever they are, including virtually accessing stadiums and statistics.

The new platform and app enabled Real Madrid to increase one-to-one engagement, implement highly targeted campaigns, and better track and analyze fan behaviors, increasing fan profiles by **400 percent** and digital revenue by **30 percent**.

John Hancock provides accurate, immediate self-service options to customers with AI

John Hancock has been a trusted resource for investing, insurance, retirement, and financial advice for over 160 years. One of the company's mantras is: **Decisions made easier, lives made better.** With that mantra in mind, the company is always looking for ways to help customers make the right financial decisions, providing them with accurate and relevant information, guiding them through the decision-making process, and addressing their concerns or questions.

When customer traffic to contact centers began spiking due to the pandemic, the company evaluated how it could manage high volumes of inquiries and reduce wait times. The answer was an AI chatbot assistant on customer-facing websites that could handle general inquiries and free up agents to focus on more complex issues.

The AI virtual assistant complemented the teams' activities when handling activities like password resets and case escalations to the call center, while also providing customers with the ability to perform self-service options every day. The result has been reduced wait times, increased customer options, and the ability to provide customers with immediate and accurate responses.

Questions to ask:

Are you providing strong digital experiences?

1. How modern, clean, and functional is your website?
Is it in need of an update compared to competitors' platforms?
2. Is your website mobile-ready and does it provide a seamless experience across different devices?
3. Are you able to maintain an engaging and personalized customer journey across all of your channels?
4. Do your customers have self-service options (chatbots or interactive guides) to assist them when searching for products or support?
5. Can routine/predictable interactions or transactions be streamlined by incorporating AI automation?



Develop your unified data strategy

Data is the lifeblood of an experience-driven business, providing you with insights for smarter decision-making. When developing your data strategy, a strong approach is to map the questions you need to answer. Then, evaluate the data you have and the data you need to answer those questions. It's especially important to take note of where disparate data systems are slowing down progress. If enough of your data is unstructured, disparate, or hard to access, a unified platform could help provide a single source of truth to help speed up data-related processes.

Mapping your data strategy

1. The questions you need to answer

These will naturally emerge as you work on identifying your customers' needs and expectations.

As you map out the entire customer journey, mark the touchpoints and behaviors you don't have insight into.

For example:

- Which platforms and channels do your customers use and prefer?
- How many steps does it take for a customer to purchase a product or use a service?
- Where are the bottlenecks or roadblocks in your customer journey?

2. Mapping the data you have

You likely already have troves of data throughout your organization that could deliver new, meaningful insights—you only need a way of extracting the most important data for your specific needs. Explore the systems and databases that may hold siloed structured or valuable unstructured data.

For example:

- Have you built connections to structured data that may reside with different teams, such as bridging marketing campaigns and sales data?
- Are you able to access and analyze unstructured data such as customer emails, mobile location data, or audio transcriptions from customer support?

3. Identifying the data you need

Working through important questions you need to answer and mapping the data you have will set you up to identify and secure the data you need.

For example:

- You could unify databases across teams to quickly expand access to valuable customer information you may be missing, like the marketing and sales example above.
- By implementing new digital and analytics capabilities, you can capture new data from existing platforms (mobile) or analyze new unstructured data sets.
- Some companies have also incentivized customers to share even more data by creating transparent “data loops” where customers see how the company uses their data to create additional value.
- As the volume of data your teams use, share, store, and analyze, make sure to build security into multiple layers of your operations to avoid putting that data at risk as you innovate.



74% of CX leaders say that improving content and knowledge delivery to customers and employees is essential.”

Gartner 2023

Whether you go big or start small, prioritizing a data strategy is a great way to quickly uncover new customer and business value without a major investment. Here are some strong real-life business examples.

Alstom provides customers with high-performance and scalability

Alstom does more than help provide rail transportation for more than 90 million passengers every day. It's also an innovator of tomorrow's mobility—which Alstom believes should be efficient, sustainable, and digital.

With that goal in mind, the company decided to create a digital services platform in the cloud so its teams would have the tools and flexibility they needed to accelerate and simplify the development and deployment of new experiences.

Innovating in the cloud allowed Alstom to deliver better CX in several areas of business, including:

- Deployment of onboard video systems that can detect the number of passengers, identify abnormal movements, and spot abandoned luggage.
- A dedicated platform for measuring rolling stock energy consumption that can provide drivers with best practices in real time, improving overall fleet operations.
- Applications that report train location data and transmit relevant information to passengers, including alerts and recommendations in case of service disruptions.

Looking ahead, Alstom has plans to use generative AI to make life easier for train operators and find new avenues for lowering its carbon footprint.

LaLiga delivers next-generation fan experiences by reimagining data and AI at scale

With more than 2.8 billion fans worldwide and 200 million social media followers, LaLiga is one of the world's largest sports leagues. Keeping its digital ecosystem at the forefront of cutting-edge experiences helps the league keep fans engaged before, during, and after matches.

To meet the rising demands of a content-driven entertainment enterprise, LaLiga implemented a tech-driven strategy that included:

- A platform that could provide 360-degree experiences, including real-time advanced football statistics with a fan-facing web portal.
- Layers of security that would help minimize their attack surface during the migration process.
- Create cloud-native applications that would provide the most cutting-edge experiences and deepen fan loyalty.

Modernizing the league's digital ecosystem gave fans even more to love and engage with. LaLiga's transformation has helped inspire fan enthusiasm, drive revenue growth, and create new opportunities for sports clubs, leagues, and federations.

By transitioning to cloud-native applications, LaLiga has also been able to reduce time to market and adapt to shifts in trends with more agility.

Questions to ask:

How cohesive is your data strategy?

1. Are you sharing and combining data sources with cross-functional teams spanning marketing, customer service, sales, operations, and more?
2. Do you have “360-degree” customer profiles that include preferences and purchase patterns and omnichannel interactions across mobile, digital, and even brick-and-mortar touch points?
3. How close to “real-time” is your data-driven decision-making?
Is reporting siloed to data teams or is it a self-service activity?
4. Do your analytics tools provide predictive or even prescriptive recommendations based on your data?



Build alignment between business and tech teams

Creating a strong partnership between internal business and technology teams is a vital yet often overlooked opportunity. Think about ways you can embed technology specialists at the center of the customer journey. At the same time, ensure your business teams are similarly aware of the company's technology roadmap. This will drive deeper cross-team collaboration and understanding, which will lead to fewer technology barriers, more effective solutions, and more value to the business. When each team understands how the other ideates and delivers value, aligning goals and expectations is easier.

How you approach these partnerships and communicate between teams is important, so here are some tips:

Aligning IT and business teams for cross-functional collaboration

1. First, approach these conversations with an understanding of each team's unique challenges. Your technology teams are working to ensure the business's engine stays running, so it's key to understand the complexity of their role and find out what keeps them up (or working) at night. If they're worried about siloed data or security, consider migrating to a unified cloud platform where they can more easily manage data and get more visibility into security threats.

Once you've established clarity on the tech side, focus on the new business requirements for your technology. Those will become the building blocks of these conversations, giving insight into exactly how and why you want to implement new tools and technologies. Then take that a step further—look for the CX outcomes your business team is trying to achieve. Keeping the customers in focus will help everyone speak the same language, whichever part of the process they're coming from.

2. Next, enter these conversations with an exploratory mindset. This partnership is about forming a solution together, not making a technology transaction. Technology experts can provide insight and guidance on the biggest challenges and roadblocks, but at some point, you may have to ask IT teams to leave their technologist hats at the door. Discuss what might be possible in an ideal world rather than immediately working through operational responsibilities and implementation strategies. Working backward from an ideal scenario will be much more conducive to a productive conversation than starting from a place of roadblocks and resistance.
3. Lastly, align your vision and needs with your teams' goals and aspirations. How can you get them invested in this project and partnership? Can you demonstrate how adopting new technology and building new solutions can both streamline their workflows and help them deliver new value to the business?

It will be more effective to start from existing plans and investments to build a joint roadmap than to try and shoehorn a new digital experience roadmap in after the fact. Thinking about new digital solutions alongside existing technology plans will also help identify where both teams may already be heading in the right direction.

Three ways to unlock your digital potential

Build alignment between business and tech teams

Here are some examples of how business and technology teams have partnered effectively to enhance the digital experience.

Kraft Heinz develops groundbreaking apps that break down barriers between sales reps and customers

Kraft Heinz had always been “data rich” as a company. However, the way it used data to uncover meaningful insights was a manual and slow process. With more than 200 globally recognized brands, the company’s sales teams needed a single source of truth to identify the largest growth opportunities across its retail customers.

Kraft Heinz previously maintained dozens of internal apps, which made it hard for sales professionals to understand or connect data to generate insights. When the company envisioned an analytics solution that would serve as a unified data platform for its sales organization, it committed to a cloud-first approach and an agile way of working. The strategy included the creation of two new apps: I2A and LaunchPad. I2A helps the sales team connect the dots between what’s happening with its customers and, in the sales channel, to identify growth opportunities proactively. LaunchPad serves as the central destination to access I2A and other business applications to track store implementation, workflow approval, and more. Essentially, LaunchPad acts as a single destination for teams to run the business.

Kraft Heinz migrated its legacy reporting solution that would be able to support a robust foundation for advanced analytics, enabling real-time insights for the sales team. For example, one sales lead used the new technology to identify a retailer that was not selecting a product even as its competitors were increasing their purchases of that particular item. They shared the insight with multiple retailers, which led to significant sales. The transformation has helped Kraft Heinz access key insights and discover ways to help them grow their business.

Iberia Express embraces cloud technology to improve the traveling experience

Iberia Express doesn’t see its passengers as flyers but as clients. That perspective drives the airline to always seek ways to provide more personalized and immediate experiences for the people they serve.

For Iberia Express, having an e-commerce platform allows it to provide services that set it apart in the hotly competitive low-cost airline market. Having already migrated its platform to the cloud, the company began looking for opportunities to use AI and machine learning to create more personalized and secure digital experiences. The next step in its digital transformation included:

- Using AI, Azure Machine Learning Studio, and Azure Databricks to analyze customer behavior and provide more personalized and relevant offers to specific clients.
- Making the platform more secure and resilient to the activities of cybercriminals.
- Adding new layers to the architecture, such as a repository capable of storing a huge amount of data cost-efficiently.
- Using a fully managed NoSQL database service to minimize response times.
- Adding new layers of business intelligence would allow the team at Iberia Express to monitor the main KPIs they want to track about the e-commerce platform while providing a user-friendly interface for business users.

By taking advantage of new technology and evolving its core architecture, Iberia Express has provided travelers with more customer-oriented experiences than ever before. Travelers get more personalization in their interactions with the airline—and they’re safer from cybercriminal threats. At the same time, fraudulent purchases on the site have dramatically decreased, and high peaks in traffic are easier to handle with instant scalability. Now, leaders at Iberia Express are looking for more ways of using their new architectural foundation to create better convenient flying experiences.

Questions to ask:

Is technology powering or holding back your digital experience?

1. How easy is it to add new functionality to your platforms and campaigns to enhance the digital experience?
Do your technology teams have a seat at the table?
2. Are you able to easily scale your website and applications alongside spikes in traffic, or do on-premises resources make this difficult and inefficient?
3. Have you developed a mobile app and is your website responsive to different devices and form factors?
4. Are you able to serve customers personalized experiences based on their preferences?
5. Are you taking advantage of AI or machine learning?
For example, to automate data clean-up and analysis or deliver engaging interactions using virtual assistants?



Bringing your vision to life

Begin your CX transformation by engaging with the teams and decision makers you'll work with to become an experience-driven business. Here are some tips for launching your strategy to exceed customer expectations.

Assemble your innovation dream team



Kickstart your innovation workshop



Start building your solution



Assemble your innovation dream team



Start assembling your innovation dream team with representation across business and technical teams. This should include development and operations. Identify passionate individuals from a variety of customer-facing teams like marketing, customer service, and sales. You can do this while creating your digital scorecard, developing your data strategy, and getting IT leaders involved in the conversation.

Rather than build your digital scorecard solo, this is an opportunity to engage your first group of innovation teammates: marketing, sales, and customer support. Use a whiteboard session to pull from each team's expertise when mapping the customer journey and your digital competencies.



When building your data strategy, connect with your data analysts (if you're lucky enough to have them), or reach out to whoever has the broadest insight into how your organization is managing data. Regardless of the data you uncover, having these conversations will help you find the best person to support new data-driven capabilities as part of the innovation team.

When engaging technologists, think about who you want to be embedded in your innovation engine. Ensure you're identifying the right skillsets and someone with an appetite for a long-term partnership—or at the very least, an exciting project.



Kickstart your innovation workshop

You'll want to conduct an innovation workshop once you've assembled your innovation dream team.

There are several ways you can organize this, but here are a few useful suggestions:

- | Establish a shared goal and commitment to improving the digital experience. Beyond aligning on a north star for the team, identify each member's role and how this will impact the project and their day-to-day workflows.
- | Go through the pain points and differentiators you previously identified and rank them in terms of "essential," "high-value," and "transformative." This will help you prioritize your innovation team's work based on how each capability will impact CX.
- | Work together on a technical assessment that maps out the technology and data investments you'll need and the potential value each capability could bring to customers, teams, and the business. This will help you further prioritize initiatives according to ROI and should begin to define the parameters needed for the next big phase—developing a pilot solution.



Start building your solution

In today's business landscape, innovative digital customer experiences are paramount in driving success and differentiation. Customers no longer solely base their loyalty on product quality—they seek memorable and innovative ways of interacting with brands. Positive CX fosters brand loyalty, strengthens customer retention, and generates positive word-of-mouth—all of which significantly impact a company's plans for growth. Using technology to elevate CX, leaders can cultivate lasting customer relationships that boost retention rates and drive revenue.

Azure lays the groundwork for better experiences with AI

Azure tools and services provide teams with the speed, scalability, and security they need to reach new heights of CX excellence. With a reliable cloud infrastructure in place, it's possible to establish an AI-ready framework that supports your strategy for exceeding customer expectations.

Confident innovation at scale

Azure helps you lay a strong foundation for adopting generative AI capabilities. Access to cutting-edge and just-on-the-market capabilities in computing, large language models, and services like OpenAI allow teams to innovate with agility and deliver more exciting experiences at scale.

Unified, end-to-end platform

Regarding reducing complexity, communication is key—between people, machines, cloud environments, data centers, and edge applications. Azure offers end-to-end solutions that unify systems, simplifying critical data management, analytics, and app services.

Trusted security

With over 3,500 security experts and the most compliance offerings of any cloud service, Azure is dedicated to providing customers with reliable, trustworthy cloud service. This commitment to privacy and security helps Azure customers take advantage of AI tools while protecting their data from threats or disruption.

Take the next steps

Learn how Azure can help you create innovative customer experiences. Connect with an Azure specialist for guidance and ideas.

[Contact Azure Sales](#) >