



Embracing the experience economy

The government’s focus on customer experience is rooted in an ever-evolving need to adapt to new expectations



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WITH THE RISE of the internet, social media and smartphones, it’s never been easier for citizens, employees and other customers to engage with government agencies. Today, those stakeholders compare agencies to every other business or organization they interact with. And they talk about those interactions with their friends, post on social media and write letters to their elected officials if their experiences don’t match expectations.

The power dynamic has shifted, and the result is the experience economy, including in government. It is evident in the goal on customer experience (CX) in the President’s Management Agenda; Section 280 of Office of Management and Budget Circular A-11, which directs high-impact agencies to embed CX principles and practices into

their culture; and the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. Furthermore, several recent laws focus on improving experiences for agency customers of all kinds.

Combining operational and experience data

“Customers” are any individuals or groups that interact with or receive services from an agency. They include the general public, employees, suppliers, other government agencies and contractors.

To develop a comprehensive strategy for understanding and improving all those experiences, agencies should treat CX as a business discipline and include experience data and operational data (X- and O-data, respectively) in their plans and evaluations.

Agencies know O-data. It is the number of visitors to a website, the ratio of accepted

to rejected service applications, employee retention and attrition, and the time it takes to process claims.

X-data reflects customers’ beliefs, emotions, perceptions, reactions and outcomes, and has historically been difficult to gather and analyze at scale. It is derived from direct feedback such as online reviews or email, focus group or roundtable discussions, and input from advisory committees.

O-data tells you what is happening, and X-data tells you why it’s happening. Agencies need both to have a comprehensive strategy for experience management.

Leaning on technology

Technological advances, including natural language processing and artificial intelligence, have made it possible for organizations to listen to feedback across the entire customer journey. However, this X-data is often dispersed across various teams, so the ability to bring that information together and look at journeys holistically will empower leaders to make better, data-driven decisions about how to serve customers.

It is also important to process and analyze that data in real time. Tools that incorporate AI and natural language processing can surface insights nearly immediately, without people spending hours, days or weeks manually analyzing feedback. This speed can empower employees and agency leaders to resolve customer needs as they arise.

Finally, agencies should prioritize security. Customers regularly supply





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sensitive or personally identifiable information, often unsolicited, and it is the agency’s job to keep that data secure. Programs like the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program exist to expand access to secure cloud-based technologies and mitigate risk for agencies and customers alike.

Executive buy-in at the highest levels is essential. Therefore, CX advocates should

ground their efforts in the agency’s strategic plan, executive orders, OMB guidance, mandates and laws. When they use those as internal selling points, they help leaders understand that what’s good for customers is also good for the business side of the agency.

Agencies can start small by launching pilot projects or linking the efforts of multiple groups across the agency. And they shouldn’t underestimate the power of

internal conversations about customers – during a meeting, in the hallway or over coffee. When employees keep having those conversations, the customer mindset becomes more deeply embedded in the agency’s culture. ■

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