How to Bridge the Gap Between What Your Organization Offers and What Your Clients Crave

WHAT CUSTOMERS REALLY WANT

(SCOTT McKAIN/Thomas Nelson/October 2006/224 pages/$21.99)
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How to Bridge the Gap Between
What Your Organization Offers and What Your Clients Crave

MAIN IDEA
There is a fundamental disconnection between what customers really want and what businesses currently offer. Customers want a personal connection with the people and the organizations they do business with so the outcome is a compelling experience rather than a mere transaction. When this happens, your product or service itself becomes compelling rather than just a commodity which can be purchased anywhere. This business–to–consumer disconnection frequently occurs in six major areas:

1. Increase the amount of time you devote to strengthening the culture of your organization.
2. Focus on building the relationships you have with customers so you provide them with a progressively better experience.

“It is possible for you to establish greater connections with your customers, provide them what they really want, and grow your business – all without expending significant amounts of money. This is more of an exercise in commitment and execution than budget. It’s having the right philosophy about what your business is really all about.”

– Scott McKain

About of Author
SCOTT McKAIN is vice chairman of Durham Capital Corporation and vice chairman of Obsidian Enterprises, recently named as one of the fastest growing public companies in America. Mr. McKain is also a cofounder of The Value Added Institute, a think-tank focusing on creating enhanced customer experiences. He is a member of the Professional Speaker’s Hall of Fame and a frequent commentator on FOX News Channel. Mr. McKain is also the author of All Business is Show Business.

Mr. McKain's personal Web site is at www.scottmckain.com.
### Disconnect #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What business supplies</th>
<th>What customers really want</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>A compelling experience</td>
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Too many organizations confuse the concept of “customer processing” with “customer service” and “customer experiences”. Each of these three terms represent a different level of customer interaction. Customers want their purchases to deliver an engaging experience. When that occurs, feelings of passion and excitement are generated which easily differentiate one business from all others. In short, the key to generating memorable experiences is to treat your customers like you’re going to see them every day for the rest of your working life.

The three general levels of customer interaction in the business world which often get lumped together are:

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**Level 1 — Customer processing**

Customers want their transactions processed promptly and accurately. Anything you can do to improve the speed and efficiency here will be appreciated, but it will be simple for your competitors to duplicate. For that reason, improving your processing won’t give you a sustainable competitive advantage.

Customers don’t really want to feel “processed”. To make transaction processing more palatable:
1. Use the customer’s name as often as possible.
2. Inject a little appropriate humor.
3. Make things as friendly and smooth flowing as feasible.
4. Find ways to make the wait part of an experience entertaining.

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**Level 2 — Customer service**

Many organizations think customer service can be delegated to just one distinct part of the operation. That’s incorrect. The delivery of great customer service needs to become a pervasive part of the mission and culture of your entire organization. You have to prove to your customer that service to them is part of the very fabric of your organization.

Customer service also entails forming a reciprocal relationship with your customers. Customers want to know you’re committed to delivering a level of follow up which is
beyond mere processing. You have to treat your customers as people rather than as mere statistics. That’s a challenge.

Customer experiences occur when customers have emotional connections to your business. This is the feeling which is generated when the business transaction has gone smoothly, the service is excellent and there is an attractive emotional element which engages the customer.

To create a great customer experience, you have to execute well at Level 1 and Level 2 first and then integrate three major components into your product or service:

1. Superior information
2. Systematic empathy
3. Sensation obsession

Taking each of these three elements of engaging customer experiences in turn:

1. Superior information – Great businesses don’t just know what customers want and need. They also make an intensive effort to discover even more about the customer. They know the reasons why individual customers feel the way they do. A good question to consider is: “Does your organization really know more about your customers than your competition does?” Note, however, you have to use that information with subtlety and restraint in order for it to be effective. If you tell the customer you know their children’s names and where they live, confidentiality alarm bells will sound all over the place. On the other hand, if you use that information to provide them with little things their kids will appreciate, your clients will take note.

2. Systematic empathy – This simply means your employees know they can take the steps necessary to create compelling experiences for customers on the spot rather than going through a long-winded approval process. Great organizations make empathy part of their corporate DNA. They don’t hide behind “company policies” which forbid customers to mix things up differently. Nor are they attempting to “exceed customer expectations”. Instead, great organizations develop a partnership with their customers which delivers mutual benefits and a long-term reciprocal relationship. When doing this becomes a high priority, an organization has systematic empathy.

3. An obsession for sensations – This means your organization has to prove to your customers you care more for them personally than you do for their money. It means to treat your customers like you plan on seeing them every working day for the rest of your life, and therefore you want a long-term relationship which is more than a mere succession of transactions. Great businesses are obsessed about what customers experience. They embed clues which tell customers they’re enjoying a superior experience to that provided by anyone else. They consider their entire business to be
one big customer-service department. This is the way they do more business, cross-sell and attract new customers. As a result, customers are passionate and enthusiastic about doing more business in the future, and often encourage their friends and associates to do likewise.

“Let me tell you how it is at Obsidian—we want loyal customers. If you're 'satisfied' and still go somewhere else, that doesn’t help us. So, to our companies, customer loyalty is priceless.”

― Scott McKain

“We have to be obsessed with customers. Think about it: most of the people who do business with us have the expectation that they may lose money being our customer! We have to make them feel good about it!”

― Tim Wilmott, chief operating officer, Harrah’s

“For many of our customers, installers are the only physical contact they have with Lucent. By providing these installers with additional education and skills in their field, installers are better able to serve customers. This leaves the customer with a positive impression of Lucent, which could lead to future business opportunities with that customer and others. That's what Lucent is all about – increasing our growth through our obsession with customers.”

― Ed Janas, Customer Service Vice President – Installation West, Lucent Technologies

**Disconnect #2**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What business supplies</th>
<th>What customers really want</th>
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<tr>
<td>Product focus</td>
<td>Personal focus</td>
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Many organizations focus so intensively on their products and product attributes they end up losing sight of the fact they should be focusing on the needs of their customers instead. It’s fine to have an intensive product focus as long as you have an equally intensive customer focus every step of the way as well. You want everyone in your organization to feel a passion for meeting the customer’s needs.

One of the most widely quoted business truisms is that people don’t buy products but instead buy whatever your product does for them. Yet the fact is very few companies act or think that way. Instead, most organizations have a product-centered focus.

Possible reasons why:
• It’s easier to focus on a product than on customers.
• People have a way of changing their minds.
• We’re desperate for business, so we sell what we have.
• If we keep looking, we’ll find someone who will buy.
• We have quotas to meet, and not enough time to think.

To move an organization from being product-centric to become customer-centric, there are three specific areas of the business on which you should focus:

- **Area #1 – Product design**

Well designed products have a lifespan exceeding that of average products. Yet too many products on the market today are chock full of features customers either don’t know how to use or can’t be bothered putting in the time to learn to use. Product design departments need to focus on creating compelling experiences for customers rather than matching what competitors are incorporating into their offerings. It’s vital that on a regular basis, your product design people sit down and talk with some real live customers to see whether or not their needs are being met. Ease-of-use needs to be engineered into more product designs.

To be more specific, look for ways to incorporate the four major elements of compelling products into your own product or service offering:

1. **Inspiration** – make sure your product does the things customers value the most in an innovative and unique way. Great products tend to have their genesis in an “Aha!” moment of inspiration. Develop insanely great products.
2. **Innovation** – look for a fresh and original way to deliver value to the people who will pay for your product. Differentiate yourself by doing something nobody else has done before. Make sure, however, customers actually value what you do.
3. **Exploration** – meaning simply not to stop when you get the first right answer. Most people are trained to stop looking for additional solutions once they find the first “right” solution to a problem. Don’t do that. Keep exploring. There might be another alternative which is even better.
4. **Creation** – get actual products out into the customer’s hands rather than just having nice ideas floating around. Execute well, implement what you have in mind and design some amazing products.

- **Area #2 – Product manufacturing**

Anything that can be digitized today can be personalized for individual customers. This is an area when mass customization becomes feasible. Customization has five levels:

1. **Pure standardization** – all products are the same and customers cannot vary anything at all.
2. **Segmented standardization** – a few different versions of a product are offered, targeting the preferences of particular customer niches.
3. **Customized standardization** – where customers can add different components to a base unit.
4. Tailored customization – people can choose from various options for the entire manufacturing and delivery processes.

5. Pure customization – every product is made to order in every aspect from design right through to fabrication, assembly and distribution.

The higher the level of customization you can offer as a business, the better. Many organizations still stick with pure standardization or segmented standardization because that’s the way they have traditionally done business. With just a little thought and effort, it might be easy to move to a higher level. This is well worth doing.

Area #3 – Delivery of services

Technology now makes it possible to deliver customized and highly personalized service for your customers. Again, only a few companies are really doing this at the present time. There are four steps involved in personalizing service:

1. Evaluate your current customer experience – and consider how engaged your customers are. Analyze whether outstanding service occurs randomly or by design within your organization at the present time.

2. Look for concrete ways to make your service more predictable – so your customers have the same level of experience every time they interact with you.

3. Build some momentum for enhancing your customer’s experience – by finding things you can do which customers will value. Ideally, you want to be growing and enhancing the excitement customers feel on an ongoing basis. Make each customer feel better all the time about their overall experience in dealing with your organization.

4. Concentrate on getting the details right – because they can make or break the overall experience. You have to sweat the small stuff and do all the little things well to provide your customers with a memorable experience.

“We have to provide a compelling reason other than price for consumers to buy Whirlpool-built products. We can do that only by understanding the consumer better than anyone else does and then translating our understanding into clearly superior product designs, features, and after-sales support.”

– David Whitman, retired CEO, Whirlpool

“No matter what your organization does, examine where your focus is maintained. If it is on your products, you run the risk of alienating your most valuable attribute, your customers. If you do not change your focus, your customers may change their supplier.”

– Scott McKain
Your customers aren’t stupid. They take note when you extend offers to attract new business that are better than those offered to your existing customers. This mind-set comes about because of some well entrenched traditions in the business world:

- Sales is a numbers game, and therefore the more people you try and close, the more people you will eventually sell to.

- When you “close” a sale, the sales function is over. You’ve overcome all the customer’s objections and got their business. It’s now time to move on to the next sale and leave the creation of added value to other parts of the organization to worry about.

- As long as you’ve got enough people coming into the front door of the business every week, it doesn’t really matter how many existing customers are going out the back door.

The paradox, however, is that if you build the customer relationship, loyal customers will generate far more business for less cost than constantly going after new business does. Customers will only be loyal if they are confident you’re focused on them and if you display the six pillars of strong relationships:

- Trustworthiness
- Mutual respect
- Acceptance of responsibility for results
- Fairness
- Showing that you genuinely care
- Good corporate citizenship

Customer relationships are built on two-way communication and interaction. There are six distinct stages of customer interaction which make up the customer life cycle:
| Stage #1 | The customer doesn’t know anything about you |
| Stage #2 | The customer thinks about buying your offering |
| Stage #3 | The customer becomes a first-time buyer |
| Stage #4 | The customer becomes a repeat buyer |
| Stage #5 | The customer feels an emotional connection |
| Stage #6 | The customer becomes a raving fan of yours |

Obviously, your objective is to move customers through these different stages systematically so as many as possible reach stage 6 and stay there. This is what the great organizations do consistently well.

So how, exactly, can you increase the depth of connection customers feel and move them consistently through the different stages so they become advocates for your organization? There are six points you should consider:

1. Always think win-win – meaning customers won’t feel loyal if they sense you are continuously trying to win at their expense. Make certain your customers feel like they are getting a good deal and winning most of the time and they will be very loyal.

2. Be selective – know which type of customers you’re trying to build relationships with and do the things they will value and appreciate. If you attempt to be everything to everyone, it will backfire. Narrow your focus and do some things exceptionally well rather than attempting to do everything and anything equally well.

3. Keep it simple – in terms of ease of transaction. Don’t become your own worst enemy by putting in place roadblocks which make doing business with you difficult. Everyone loves simplicity. Complexity breeds confusion, not loyalty from your customers.

4. Reward the right results – don’t provide incentives for behavior that drives customers away. Instead, analyze what builds strong customer relationships, measure it and reward whoever does that well. This will send all the right signals. Focus on rewarding those who create the experiences that ensure customer loyalty.

5. Listen hard and talk straight with customers – be forthcoming rather than hiding behind corporate double-Dutch. Be open and candid with what you tell your customers and they will trust you even more in the future.

6. Preach what you practice – and let people know about your various success stories. Enshrine in your corporate culture those who went out of their way to build a customer relationship. Execute your promises and be proud of that. Let the world know.
Customers will respond with greater loyalty only when you’ve given them a sound rationale for doing so.

One way to bring all six of these points to life is to strive to create a “continuous compelling advantage” within your organization. In simple terms, this requires you to find the answers to three key questions every day you are in business:

■ “What specific advantages does our product or service have over that offered by all other competitors in the marketplace?”

■ “Which of these advantages create a compelling reason for people to do business with us, and how do we communicate this advantage?”

■ “How can we create a continuous, never-ending way to keep enhancing our advantages to make them progressively more compelling and distinctive?”

“Customers want to be loyal, and the businesses that understand that point and exploit it (in a truly positive sense) through the development of continuous compelling advantages are visionary and remarkable.”

– Scott McKain

“Loyalty is the special ingredient in eBay’s sauce.”

– Meg Whitman, CEO, eBay

“An increase in customer retention of 5% increases profit 25% to 95%”

– Frederick Reichheld, author, Loyalty Rules

In a commodity industry, there are three key drivers of success:
1. Price – whoever can provide the cheapest product or service will have the biggest market share.
2. Quality – whichever firm can integrate more perceived quality into its products and services has the opportunity to charge more than anyone else can.
3. Service – the only place where a business can break through the commodity tag and become known as something more. The only trick here is it’s the customers who define what constitutes good service, not the companies in an industry.

Many consumer industries have become boring and predictable. Too many companies are playing it safe, and offer only me-too products and services. To become differentiated is becoming a serious challenge. To break away from this blandness, there are three key questions you have to consider:

- “What is different about the experience of doing business with us as opposed to doing business with one of our competitors?” – You need to come up with a list of very specific points, and then find ways to accentuate those differences. If you can do some minor things which tweak and enhance the customer experience, you can provide customers with a vastly superior and much more differentiated experience.

- “What specific programs do we have in place to keep our employees from becoming bored?” – Since employees are the delivery system for your customer experiences, if they’re bored, they will also be boring your customers. You’ve got to have some tangible programs in place which will encourage employees to step outside normal business practice if you’re to stand any chance of standing out in the marketplace.

- “How do we provide customers with some variety so they don’t become fatigued?” – Almost every company in every industry offer loyalty cards and rewards programs based around points. Therefore, if you do the same, customers won’t be terribly impressed. They’ve seen it all before. You’ve got to be doing new things which keep the experience fresh and relevant. This may involve:
  - Offering an enhanced customer experience.
  - Building more interactivity into your experience.
  - Changing the look of your store.
  - Updating the look and feel of your Web site.
  - Having something new and different to offer.
  - Running some great limited time offers.
  - Starting some unique and noteworthy marketing programs.
  - Using some new materials in your manufacturing.
  - Offering something original and distinctive.

To begin the process of differentiating yourself better:
1. Start with the six basic questions news reporters ask – and look for ways you can create a differentiation strategy. The six basic questions are:
  - Who are our customers?
  - What are customers doing with our products?
  - When do customers make their actual purchase decision?
  - Where do customers use our product or service?
  - Why do customers need us in the first place?
  - How do customers use us to solve their problems?

2. Carry out your own SWOT analysis – meaning look thoughtfully at your organization’s:
  - Strengths
  - Weaknesses
  - Opportunities
  - Threats
3. Put everything together and create your own coherent differentiation strategy – based on your business, your customer’s needs and your organization’s own ability to execute whatever strategy you come up with. Your differentiation strategy has to be:

- Unique.
- Difficult for competitors to duplicate.
- Built around aspects of your product or service customers consider significant and worth paying for.
- Able to be executed consistently well.
- Capable of being explained to your customers.
- Understood by everyone in your organization.

“Many commodity businesses have to be price leaders because they are neither creative enough to add value to their product or service, nor customer-focused enough to create the kinds of experiences customers REALLY want. If price is truly your core focus, you have chosen to play the commodity game – and you are in a trap. Many companies are so grounded in the commodity trap that they keep doing what they’re doing because they’ve always been doing it. However, some businesses break out of that prison – and discover remarkable success by providing what customers REALLY want. If businesses can find a strategy for differentiating a cup of coffee – or, for goodness’ sake, water – you can find a way to differentiate your product or service, no matter the size or scope of your business.”

– Scott McKain

“Don’t even think about using low prices to attract customers. Actually, the market is much less price-sensitive than you think it is. The market bears all kinds of prices. Can you believe people pay $50,000 for a watch? Three dollars for a bottle of water? Hundreds of dollars for pro wrestling tickets? Consumers will buy just about anything if they can see the value or benefit. The market doesn’t set prices … Marketers do! What makes you special?”

– Ellen Rohr, contributor, Entrepreneur magazine

“If people in the organization don’t understand how a company is supposed to be different, how it creates value compared to its rivals, then how can they possibly make all the myriad choices they have to make? Every salesman has to know the strategy – otherwise, he won’t know whom to call on. Every engineer has to understand it, or she won’t know what to build.”

– Dr. Michael Porter, professor, Harvard Business School
There are in common business practice five major sources of customer confusion:

**Source #1**

**An overwhelming number of choices**

Your own organization may inadvertently be offering so many products and options that customers can’t keep up. Therefore, they choose to go elsewhere where the options are easier to take in and choose from.

**Source #2**

**Incongruence between promotions and practice**

Your own marketing might be creating inflated expectations in your customer’s mind that you cannot possibly deliver on consistently well in the real world. This gap can create a substantial credibility problem.

**Source #3**

**Technology vs. Human touch**

Some efforts to streamline things and create efficiencies through the use of new technology can create confusion among customers who are looking for a “real person” who can give them answers. Relationships are built on human interaction and yet sometimes it can be difficult to track down a real live person in this era of voice mail, e-mail, auto responders, automated telephone answering systems and so forth.

**Source #4**

**The inability to do the basics well**

Customers find it very difficult to believe they can develop an emotional relationship with you when you can’t even get their monthly statement correct. If the customer’s attention
is on correcting your mistakes, they will find it impossible to build an emotional connection with your organization.

Sometimes companies overwhelm their customers with detailed technical information, often without even being aware they are doing it. This may include the use of terminology and buzzwords people outside your industry are not familiar with. You may be focused on coming to a logical conclusion while your customers are seeking an emotional connection or at least one based on the character and credibility of the presenter. Instead of automatically assuming an educational approach works best, you should spend some time researching what your customers want to hear. Keep things simple and tailor everything to the background of the customers. You can only be persuasive if they understand where you’re coming from and what you’re talking about.

At other times, confusion in the marketplace can be intentionally generated by your competitors. Or you may even be unintentionally generating customer confusion yourself. It’s impossible to build loyalty with customers who are confused. You can create a strong relationship with a customer by helping dissipate all the confusion, but it’s just not feasible to build an emotional connection with a persistently confused consumer.

To help your customers avoid the confusion dilemma:

- Don’t allow confusion to crop up in the first place – but form emotional connections with your customers.
- Be sensitive to any unintentional confusion you generate – and do everything you can to set right the errors that crop up from time to time.
- Try and communicate more clearly – so everyone is on the same page rather than having differing expectations and understandings.
- Simplify – so you can be clear and concise about what’s on offer for your customers.
- Streamline your options offered – so there is less chance for misunderstanding to occur.
- Tighten the gap between what you promote and what your organization actually practices.
- Find ways to embed more human touches into your business model.
- Get things right in the basics of your business – so there is consistency in the actions of all the different parts of the organization.
- Connect with the emotions of your customers.

“Sure, customers do and say dumb things. They irritate us – even in some cases make us angry. Yet, even though they are not always right – they are always the customers! Therefore, we may have reasons to get upset with them, but these reasons cannot become excuses for anything less than a compelling performance for them on behalf of our organization.”

– Scott McKain

“Does your organization ‘walk its talk’? In other words, are the actions that customers experience congruent with the advertising they’ve read, viewed and heard? It’s so obvious – if what I experience when I do business with you is inferior to what you’ve led me to believe I can expect, you now have a huge credibility problem with me. Some of
us at Obsidian have joked about the title of that best-selling self-help book ‘Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff’. We’ve decided that – at least in our companies – there is no small stuff! You know as well as we do that this is true because – to quote a crazy saying – ‘little fires not extinguished by sweat become big fires extinguished by tears’. A problem is never easier to resolve than in the moments when it appears small. We sweat the details. How else can we stay congruent and not confuse the customers we seek to serve?”

– Scott McKain

“Luxury today is more about a personal fulfillment. Too many choices confuse the consumer, and retailer’s roles are to edit the selection and give the shopper a reason, besides product, to come into their store or Web site.”

– Eva Jeanbart-Lorenzotti, founder, Vivre

“The purpose of any business is to profitably create experiences that are so compelling to customers that their loyalty is assured.”

– Scott McKain

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**Disconnect #6**

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<th>What business supplies</th>
<th>What customers really want</th>
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<tr>
<td>Status quo</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
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Too many companies offer the same products and services year after year. Consumers are bored by this. They want to be wowed by revolutionary new products and perceptive new services. Consumers want new offerings that push the envelope on what’s possible and feasible. They crave innovation, but at the moment, most businesses offer only the status quo.

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Quite possibly one of the biggest reasons businesses are happy to offer the same products and services year-in and year-out is the concept of “continuous improvement”. Many organizations devote the majority of their resources towards improving their operations by two- or three-percent each year. Therefore, they don’t have the time or attention necessary to create something new which is insanely great.

Corporations love the concept of incremental improvements because they seem so logical. This is why several business buzzwords have swept through management thinking in recent years, including:

- **Kaizen** – the Japanese term for continuous improvement. Many organizations have run kaizen seminars and training sessions to look at what needs to be improved.
- **Six sigma** – a systematic methodology for using information to enhance business processes, practices and systems.
Innovation, by contrast, is expensive, risky, difficult, potentially unrewarding and scary. It defies logical thinking. There are times when two guys working by themselves in a garage can create something which a major corporation has spent five years and more than a billion dollars trying to do for themselves. Breakthroughs can come from unexpected quarters, which scares the corporate planners. Furthermore, there are some business people who have an impressive track record of innovating in one industry after another. Innovation is a very difficult subject for business managers to grasp and understand.

Customers are rarely impressed by incremental improvements in products and services. Nor do they get enthusiastic about me-too products that are clones of original ideas. Instead, they want to be impressed and inspired by products they didn’t know were feasible. It is assumed companies will be trying to continuously improve what they offer, so it’s the breakthrough ideas that capture attention.

To be more specific, there are some obvious pitfalls in attempting to imitate other organizations and their product or service offering:

1. When you imitate someone else, you can only ever be as good as they are – because you’re allowing someone else to set the standards by which you’re judged. The more closely you imitate another company’s product, the more you add to the original product’s success. You are in effect saying they set the standard by which you want to be judged. The funny thing is the company you’re imitating couldn’t care less. Instead, they’re devoting their resources to coming up with their own next-generation products. While you’re busy playing catch up, they’re hard at work trying to figure out how to make a great leap forward. This is a problem.

2. When you imitate someone else, you can’t possibly create customer loyalty – because people won’t be raving fans of a me-too product. If anything, you’ll end up creating some demand for the genuine article rather than your clone.

3. When you imitate someone else, you’re putting yourself at the mercy of their innovations – you have to sit back, look at what they come out with and then scramble to get something comparable to market as soon as possible. That sounds like a lousy way to do business.

4. When you imitate someone else, your employees don’t become inspired – because everyone knows the real action is taking place at your competitor’s place of business. People want to be inspired by great ideas and vision. Copying what others are doing won’t generate any passion.

So what are the advantages of innovation for a corporation?

- By definition, an innovation is something which is not yet available in the marketplace – so you can safely say innovations grow the size of the market you’re serving.

- New generations of consumers are entering the marketplace all the time – and they want different products matching their tastes and interests.

- Diversity is good – and innovations allow you to appeal to people who think differently from your existing customers. Diversity of thought breeds innovation, and often it’s people from outside an area of specialization who come up with a new idea those more experienced in the field would never think of. At the very least, you need to be adding new people to your innovation team all the time if you ever hope to come up
with different ideas.

- It’s impossible to continuously grow your revenues by selling the same stuff to your old customers indefinitely – meaning the only way you can grow is by bringing something unexpected and exciting to your customers. Innovation drives revenue growth. Come up with something great and your organization will move forward in leaps and bounds.

- Innovation can make your competitors irrelevant – because they will be selling the same old products while you’re riding the wave of something which is fresh and original for consumers.

“Most companies today can’t grow revenue by flogging the same old stuff to the same old customers through the same old channels in the same old way. People may already be eating as many hamburgers as they are ever going to eat, drinking as much beer as they are ever going to drink, even buying as many plain vanilla personal computers as they are ever going to buy. But customers will always make room for something new, useful, and value packed. Consider DoMoCo, the Japanese company that developed an Internet-enabled mobile phone. Its i-mode service attracted 30 million customers in 30 months. Sure, you can grow today. But only if you bring something unexpected and exciting to your customers.”

– Gary Hamel, author

“Jack Welch said that while he always valued inventions and big ideas, he put a far greater value on people who could take those ideas and spread them, share them, move them through the company in ways that would make the customer happier and more engaged.”

– Information Week

**Conclusion**

To overcome these six disconnections, you have to create an obsession and ardor for your customers that transcends mere transactions. You have to build a corporate culture that is so obsessed with your customer’s needs that your employees are motivated to actually bridge these gaps in tangible and practical ways.

The six disconnections between your organization and your customers will most effectively be bridged when you do two things:

1. Pay more attention to the culture of your organization.
As simple as this may sound, many people assume an organization’s culture just develops on its own without any direction, and that you have to work with whatever you’ve got. Many organizations spend more time worrying about the price of their products than they do about the quality of their corporate culture. That’s a problem.

Great organization don’t leave important things to chance. They manage things proactively. Great organizations build powerful and highly differentiated corporate cultures. You need to do likewise by:

- Investing in the ongoing education of your people.
- Doing fun and zany things, like designating your people as official “taste testers” for your products or something equally engaging.
- Having an official “no secrets” policy under which every employee has access to the same information your senior management team uses.
- Putting in place a genuinely great profit sharing program which people will rave about.
- Finding ways to mark important events in your employee’s lives. For example, if you work for MBNA and you get married, the company pitches in $500 towards your wedding costs, pays for a limo for your wedding ceremony and gives you an extra week’s paid holiday for your honeymoon.

“Highly successful organizations are spending a great deal of time focusing their attention on the culture in which their employees work, and in which they therefore create experiences for their customers. Is your organization doing anything worthy of joining the list of the 100 Best Places to Work? If not...when are you going to start?”
– Scott McKain

2. Create a culture of the customer.

Working on enhancing the culture of your organization works best when you center your efforts on strengthening your relationships with customers. Your overriding goal must be to profitably create experiences for your customers that are so compelling their loyalty becomes assured.

To do this consistently well will require:

- Common and consistent goals.
- The commitment of the entire organization’s resources behind the delivery of great customer experiences.
- Role clarity between different members of the team.
- Strong team leadership.
- Mutual accountability within the team.
- Great knowledge and skills.
- Reinforcement of the required competencies and skills.
- Power to be shared with those who are in the front lines for creating customer experiences.
- Rewards to be shared even-handedly.

"Your challenge is to build a corporate culture that is so customer obsessed that you and your employees create innovative approaches that bridge the gap and resolve the six disconnections that impair customer relationships and client loyalty. If you accomplish that task, your company will receive one of the highest accolades in business – to be known as an organization that provides customers with what they REALLY want."

– Scott McKain

“When all of your efforts have tended to revolve around the product or service, to suggest that the very purpose of your business is to become compelling to your customer is heresy to some. This, in part, explains why the level of customer service often rise only to the height of lip service. In business we tend to be very insular. We listen to the same people internally, attend association meetings with other professionals from our same industry, and read the same trade journals as our competitors. There is a great external source you can tap for insight, information and innovation: customers. Tapping into their viewpoints is critical to building the connections that customers covet. Let’s face it: though we hate to admit it, customers often know as much or more about our products and services than we do, because they are the ones using them in the real world."

– Scott McKain

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