

From contact center to Total Experience: A guide to building lasting customer loyalty

A practical guide to leveling up customer and employee experience by unifying communications, contact centers, and AI in one seamless platform.

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Introduction

Companies sell products, but brands sell experiences, and that's what people stay for.

Enter the era of the Experience Economy, where forward-thinking brands ensure consistency across every touchpoint and build trust through personalized and transparent journeys.

The Experience Economy isn't a new concept. American author B. Joseph Pine first coined the term in 1988.¹ Back then, the concept of selling experiences was largely confined to venues like theme parks and destination restaurants. Today, with the service economy in full swing, selling experiences span far beyond the world of entertainment and hospitality.

People who have a satisfying experience – whether it's applying for a loan, buying a new car, or visiting the doctor – feel motivated and appreciated. They become advocates, spreading the positive word and staying loyal to the brand. The same goes for employees, or internal customers, as you might call them. Those who are content in their workplaces are more productive and, like satisfied customers, more likely to stay. And happier employees usually mean happier customers, too.

“If employees aren't happy, that shows in conversations,” says Ted Yoshikawa, Head of Product, [Zoom Contact Center](#). “You can feel it in the words, how short somebody is in their responses. That's why our goal is to help companies retain their agents by giving them what they need to become more productive, and happier.”

But the truth is, many experiences are fragmented. Traditional contact centers primarily operate in isolation, resulting in frustrated customers and overworked sales and support agents. Matters aren't helped by the fact that both customers and employees interact with companies through a myriad of different touchpoints too, many of which reside outside the contact center. Customer journeys have never been more complex and multifaceted. Many agents spend more than their fair share of time switching between different apps, even if all they're doing is addressing a routine customer query.





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Total Experience is about lowering the barriers for customers to get the service they need. That means delivering great customer experience (CX) on every channel, empowering agents with information and tools, and connecting them to subject matter experts (SMEs) throughout the business.”

Michelle Couture

Global Product Marketing Lead, Zoom

It's time for brands to take a [unified approach to experience](#), one that transcends the traditional contact center and encompasses everyone connected to the business – customers, employees, and partners. As a business strategy, Total Experience (TX) seeks to deliver cohesive and personalized experiences. According to Gartner, brands that create superior shared experiences can outperform their competitors by 25% in satisfaction metrics for CX and EX.²

[In this guide, we'll share our best practices for moving beyond the conventional contact center to building experiences that don't just sell, but turn customers and employees alike into loyal fans.](#)



The power of unified experiences

For most companies, customer experience (CX) is a top priority. Delivering best-in-class services is table stakes, and technology has made that more achievable than ever. Yet many still fall short of meeting evolving customer demands for a more cohesive and personalized experience.

As we pivot away from the disjointed multi-channel experiences and resource-heavy ad-hoc integrations of old, it's time to put CX at the heart of everything your business does. That begins with an understanding that everyone has an impact on experience – either directly or indirectly. “Businesses aren’t just there to sell a product,” says Ted. “There are enough products on the market. Businesses must work in partnership with their customers, so both employee and customer experience can evolve together.”

In many organizations, there’s still a gap between employee experience (EX) and CX. While brands pride themselves on delivering white-glove service to their customers, they often grapple with challenges like increasing technical complexity and disengaged employees behind the scenes, especially in the case of the traditional contact center. When that happens, it’s just a matter of time before CX suffers too.

Total Experience merges customer, employee, and user experience (UX) into a unified strategy. With this comprehensive approach, every interaction, whether internal or external, contributes to a seamless experience. As Amy Roberge, Head of Global Contact Center, Solutions Engineering at Zoom, points out, “In the past couple of years, we’ve seen the conversation shift from simply wanting to integrate best-of-breed cloud products to how we can deliver better experiences within a single platform. We’re now focusing on how we can best connect all employees who need to deal with customers in the most effective ways.”

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While the contact center manages much of the customer journey, brands need to think more broadly about how the contact center can partner with other business units and technology stacks to deliver more holistic experiences.”

Michelle Couture
Global Product Marketing Lead, Zoom

Historically, contact centers operated in silos, resulting in disjointed experiences. However, to deliver the experiences employees and customers demand, businesses must move beyond the traditional contact center roles and consider every employee and touchpoint as part of the customer’s experience. “Every employee has a role to play, whether it’s the product team, engineering team, or any other business unit. It’s not just about the contact center,” says Amy. “Once employees feel a connection to that responsibility, things start to change. But for that to happen, leaders have to acknowledge that EX and CX are inextricably linked. You can’t do one without the other.”

A business case for Total Experience

- **Improved brand loyalty.** Customers come for the product, but they stay for the experience.
- **Fewer operational silos.** Teams collaborate seamlessly in the quest for better experiences.
- **Continuous innovation.** People make informed decisions faster with the help of data and AI.
- **Faster resolution times.** Employees can get sales queries and support tickets to the right people at the right time.
- **More productive teams.** Employees are better equipped to deliver an exceptional service.



Breaking down the barriers to great experiences

Despite the value of delivering a Total Experience, it can be challenging to achieve. As Amy highlights, “when it comes to barriers to delivering a Total Experience, I’d say there are, broadly speaking, two main categories. First, we have the business and operational barriers, and then we have the technical barriers. The way many companies are structured today is partly due to how things were deployed previously. For example, you have HR thinking about employee experience, and you have your contact center, chief experience officer, and others, all thinking about their remits in their own silos.”

Siloed operations, both internal and external, tend to be the biggest barrier to Total Experience. “My hope is that more business leaders will start seeing how intertwined employee and customer experiences are,” says Amy. “It often comes down to technology. You have different teams making different decisions about which software tools to use. Chances are, they’re probably all in the cloud, but they need to connect the dots. All too often, we see how IT teams are inundated with work to connect these systems together. They end up spending most of their time maintaining these integrations instead of focusing on how they can improve experiences.”

When it comes to technical barriers, Ted identifies three main topics that always come up in conversations with clients. “It all comes down to data. First, there’s the technical understanding of the technology and its real-world business use cases. Second, it’s about having the right security measures in place to protect customer data. Third is the accuracy of AI-generated outputs, especially with regards to preventing errors or ‘hallucinations’ in its responses,” he says.

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Integrating technology and data for an omnichannel Total Experience

Often, when businesses want to change their approach to CX, they focus on revising individual functions. They might target a specific platform, department, or business function. However, while prioritization is a practical necessity, they should always keep the Total Experience in mind. After all, any business is the sum of its various moving parts, hence the need to approach them as a greater whole. “Everyone wears multiple hats nowadays,” Ted reminds us, “they need to be able to carry out their tasks concurrently and seamlessly. Workflows need to happen across systems, without friction.”

To make this happen, you need to target the following key areas:

01 | Unifying touchpoints for seamless interaction

Although Total Experience is a cultural movement, technology is a critical enabler. Ted gives us an example of a common issue stemming from fragmented IT systems; “Let’s say a customer’s first interaction is with a [self-service chatbot](#) or [Interactive Voice Response](#) (IVR) system. Now, if their query ends up being escalated to an agent, you end up switching between systems. In the worst-case scenario, you’re even switching between different solution vendors. From there, it can go to other products and services and through multiple back-office experts. Total Experience depends on how effectively you can pass information along these processes.”

Total Experience also requires a cultural shift where everyone is aware of their impact on customer and employee experience and has the tools to succeed. “First, you’ve got to get your tech in order, and then you can adopt the right mindset,” says Amy. “This allows you to start experimenting within groups or certain workflows or customer journeys, without technology holding you back. Then, once you start seeing the value it provides to customers and employees, you can affect change throughout the wider organization.”

Total Experience isn’t something you can apply in one project, especially in bigger companies, so it’s vital to approach it tactically. “Think about where a lack of connectivity is causing the most pain for customers or employees,” Amy suggests, “start with the biggest problem spot and pilot a more connected solution there. By identifying the segments of the customer or employee experience that are most inefficient, or perhaps entirely broken, and focusing on implementing solutions that genuinely provide the most useful capabilities, you can enjoy high AI adoption rates.”

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The ultimate goal is to establish an infrastructure centered around a unified communications platform incorporating video, voice, chat, and [AI capabilities](#). However, in many current enterprise infrastructures, the contact center, despite playing a central role in customer experience, operates on entirely separate systems than the rest of the business. In many cases, they're outsourced when they should be integrated with the broader unified communications strategy. Some enterprises try to bridge these gaps by using application programming interfaces (APIs) and middleware, but these ad-hoc measures tend to be resource-intensive to implement and maintain. To address the limitations of these solutions, Ted recommends working with one vendor for your communication. "That way, you have more control over your APIs, data management, privacy, and security across the entire suite."

A true Total Experience strategy is an omnichannel one. For example, when you have a specific customer service request, it should incorporate all employee and customer interactions, regardless of the touchpoint. This includes digital touchpoints, such as text, email, and social media, and physical touchpoints, such as self-service kiosks widely used in retail, catering, and hospitality. This allows agents, supervisors, and CX leaders to gain a complete customer history in one simple view.

Steps for unifying touchpoints

- ✔ **Step 1:** Bring contact center operations into the business-wide communications strategy.
- ✔ **Step 2:** Prioritize integration of critical customer and employee touchpoints.
- ✔ **Step 3:** Shift from ad-hoc integrations and middleware to a unified, omnichannel platform.





Every employee or customer touchpoint can generate information, whether it's data collected automatically or input manually.

02 | Building personalized experiences with quality data and AI

Every employee or customer touchpoint can generate information, whether it's data collected automatically or input manually. The first part of Total Experience is ensuring you have the tech infrastructure to collect the correct data and store it in a centralized location – or a single source of truth (SSoT), as information governance professionals refer to it. Not only is this often superior to siloed systems for security and compliance reasons; it also helps to ensure that you have the necessary data available to understand your user journeys and the insights required to enhance them continuously. “If you have strong data profiles for your customers, which go beyond basic CRM to incorporate all past engagement history, you should have a complete picture of what a customer is calling about. Knowing that in advance is a huge benefit,” says Ted.

Once you have the systems, you have the data. And once you have the data, you have the insights needed to track the key performance indicators (KPIs) that matter most to the Total Experience and, by extension, customer satisfaction and employee productivity. For example, you might track usage and performance across different business functions, such as sales and service operations or internal meetings. Once you have everything in one place, you can map out the user journey and detect potential bottlenecks that might hinder top-level metrics like customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores.

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Head of Product, Zoom Contact Center

Even with a consolidated technology architecture, you'll still have many different data sources. When it comes to communications, these are likely going to be unstructured, taking the form of voice, video, and text. As Chandler Galt, Senior Product Marketing Manager at Zoom Contact Center, points out, "you've got all these different steps in the customer journey living in different places. The contact center is just one part of the whole customer journey."

Because of this, AI is vital for consolidating and making sense of that data and giving you helpful insights to build personalized experiences. But before you can layer on AI, you need to build a complete platform for Total Experience . Otherwise, AI will be limited in terms of its understanding and usefulness, drawing inconsistent data from different sources – in other words, garbage in, garbage out. Once you have a truly omnichannel user journey on one consolidated communications and contact center platform, [AI can become an invaluable asset.](#)

Steps for building personalized experiences

- ✓ **Step 1:** Consolidate your data sources under a centralized communications platform.
- ✓ **Step 2:** Focus on the key performance indicators that matter most to Total Experience.
- ✓ **Step 3:** Layer on AI to accelerate analytics and understand the voice of the customer.




03 | Balancing automation and the human touch

The value of AI and automation is undisputed. AI has proven vital in personalizing customer and employee experiences because it can help drive consistency at scale. In contact center operations, AI has already proven its worth time and again in speeding up resolution times. Thanks to generative AI-powered chatbots, customers can enjoy resolution of common queries on first contact without ever having to speak to an agent.

Nonetheless, as Amy reminds us, “agents are among the first to resist AI technology, as they think it will lead to them no longer having a job.” With the economy still reeling from job losses over the past couple of years, especially in the technology sector, the concern is understandable. A recent report by Resume Builder found that 37% of companies using AI said workers were laid off in 2023 because they were no longer needed due to their use of the technology.³

Despite the legitimate fears, figures like these don't really paint the full picture, especially in the contexts of service and user experience. Yes, modern chatbots can handle a broad spectrum of support queries in customer contact or employee help desk support centers. Still, there are many situations where people require genuine human empathy, context, and understanding, especially in fields like healthcare and finance – no matter how convincing AI can become. [AI still has a role to play](#), but rather than replacing workers, it's about freeing up time for agents to deliver the high-touch service their customers want.



AI has proven vital in personalizing customer and employee experiences because it can help drive consistency at scale.

“I always say I want to empower agents to be superheroes,” says Ted. “I don’t want them addressing the same queries, say 20, 40 times a day. I want them to be able to click the ‘easy button’ where they can get the information they need instantly. That way, they’ll have more time to provide the human interactions that can really make the difference when pitching a product or service and providing top-level customer care. That’s something that automation can never replace.”

Most contact centers are overburdened with requests. It takes too long for customers to get the service they expect. They end up being moved from one agent and department to another and, with each one operating in silos, resolution times end up being outstretched and severely detrimental to the experience. “It’s about leveraging AI in strategic and usable ways,” says Amy.

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In the contact center, it’s not about simply telling your agents that they have to use it; it’s about actually having them involved in the process of designing and implementing AI-powered solutions. They should be able to see how AI is about empowerment, not replacement.”

Ted Yoshikawa
Head of Global Contact Center, Solutions Engineering, Zoom

Steps for balancing automation and the human touch

- ✓ **Step 1:** Identify responsible use cases for generative AI in automating routine queries.
- ✓ **Step 2:** Deploy AI to provide real-time support for human agents.
- ✓ **Step 3:** Reinvest cost savings from AI into employee training and development.



Getting started

To win and retain customers, CX leaders need to work closely with other business units, including IT and HR, with the common goal of creating a Total Experience. That begins by bringing together all operations into a fully integrated business-wide communications platform that's capable of:

- Automating routine operations, such as taking notes during meetings or responding to common queries
- Supporting human-centered operations, including live video, voice, and chat – both in and beyond the contact center
- Providing real-time data-driven insights and support to help you map out and better understand the user journey.

The future belongs to organizations that successfully connect the dots between customer and employee experiences and break down the operational silos. They'll be the ones best positioned to solve the rising challenge of preserving customer loyalty.

To learn how [Zoom Contact Center](#) can help your business deliver highly personalized and quality experiences, [talk to one of our experts today.](#)



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