

*A simple, yet powerful
customer experience model.*



THE
GUARANTEED

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

**How to Win Customers by
Keeping Your Promises**

JEFF TOISTER

Sample Chapter. Not for distribution or resale.

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PART 1

Winning Customers with Guarantees



Chapter 1

IDENTIFYING YOUR CUSTOMER'S PROBLEM

Imagine driving cross-country on a road trip.

You need gas, and you need to use the restroom. Choosing a place to stop is a big decision. Gas stations can be miles apart. The station you see on the horizon probably has gas, but there's no guarantee they'll have a clean restroom. Do you need to stop now, or do you have enough fuel to keep going until the next one?

You size up each gas station's convenience store you pass as your level of urgency increases. Some are rejected at first glance for being too scary. You slow to scrutinize others. Will the restroom be open or out-of-order? Will there be a line? Will it be clean?!

Your car's gas gauge is hovering near "E," while your own tank is dangerously close to "F." Decision time. Where will you stop?

You're not alone in this experience. A study from the travel app GasBuddy found that 40 percent of Americans worry about finding a clean restroom on a road trip.¹

Buc-ee's, a chain of gas station convenience stores located primarily in Texas, has developed a devoted customer base by solving this problem. Driving through Texas, you're likely to encounter any number of humorous billboards advertising the nearest Buc-ee's location:

★ "Top two reasons to stop at Buc-ee's: #1 and #2."

- ★ “Let us plan your next potty.”
- ★ “Restrooms so clean we leave mints in the urinals.”
- ★ “Our aim is to have clean restrooms. Your aim will help.”
- ★ “Your throne awaits. Fabulous restrooms.”

The billboards speak clearly to customers on the go who desperately have to go. They demonstrate an understanding of this common road trip problem and promise that Buc-ee’s will solve it. Many travelers will drive past other gas stations to get to a Buc-ee’s, because Buc-ee’s provides an assurance that other brands don’t.

Your heart might skip a beat when you walk into a Buc-ee’s for the first time. The restrooms are clearly visible from the front entrance, but so is the steady stream of people walking in and out of them. Will there be a long line? Or worse, will it be a mess?

Buc-ee’s does not disappoint. 8.3 million ratings of fuel and convenience retailers on the GasBuddy travel app rated the restrooms at Buc-ee’s as the best in America.² The restrooms at each location are unbelievably plentiful and clean, and each is well-stocked with paper and soap. Many are downright enormous.

The Buc-ee’s in Katy, Texas, has a whopping 28 toilets in the women’s room and 30 urinals and 12 toilets in the men’s room. The restrooms alone are larger than a typical convenience store. There are lights above each stall that illuminate in red when the stall is occupied and green when the stall is available, which helps you avoid awkward door jiggling or shoe gazing. They’re continuously patrolled by employees who keep the toilet paper and hand towels well-stocked and the restrooms sparkling.

Clean restrooms attract customers, but that’s not all Buc-ee’s has to offer.

It has all the items you’d expect to see in a convenience store—such as soda, candy, and chips—though on a much larger scale. The New Braunfels location, which is thought to be the world’s largest convenience store at 68,000 square feet, has 80 fountain dispensers, 120 fuel pumps, and 27 cash registers.³

There are also things you wouldn't expect to find in a typical convenience store. Larger Buc-ee's locations have a barbecue counter where employees make hot sandwiches to order. There's an enormous display of house-made beef jerky and candy. Keep walking, and you'll come to a large section selling Texas-themed gifts and Buc-ee's apparel.

I once stopped at the Buc-ee's in Luling, Texas, to get a dog leash. My wife and I were on a road trip, and I had accidentally left our dog's leash at my mother-in-law's house in Houston. "Let's stop at Buc-ee's," I said. "I bet they have dog leashes." Sure enough, they did.

The size of the store and the sheer number of customers can intimidate first-time visitors, but Buc-ee's is surprisingly convenient. There are multiple cash register lines open with friendly cashiers ready and waiting to serve you.

Buc-ee's draws large crowds. Its locations average nearly four times as many customers as a typical convenience store.⁴

Imagine attracting four times more customers to your business than your competition. What would cause so many customers to give you a try and, once they did, keep coming back? The secret is customer experience.

What Is Customer Experience?

Customer experience and customer service often get confused with each other. It doesn't help that both companies and their customers frequently use the terms interchangeably.

The distinction is important, since customer service is just one aspect of the overall customer experience.

Annette Franz is a certified customer experience professional and consultant who helps companies become more customer-focused. Franz shared this definition of customer experience on her *CX Journey* blog: "The sum of all the interactions that a customer has with an organization over the life of the relationship with that

company and, especially, the feelings, emotions, and perceptions the customer has about those interactions.”⁵

A traveler’s first interaction with Buc-ee’s might be one of those funny billboards they see along the highway. Perhaps they see several. (I counted 19 on one stretch of highway in Texas.) The experience continues as they pull into the enormous parking lot and see row after row of gas pumps and a building many times larger than the typical convenience store. Once inside, the spotless restrooms and huge product selection are further confirmation that Buc-ee’s is very different than the typical gas station.

Franz’s definition of customer experience includes all interactions a customer has with a brand, even those that happen outside of a shopping experience. Let’s say a customer is so enthralled with the store that they buy a Buc-ee’s t-shirt. (Guilty, I have one.) Wearing that t-shirt in public is sure to garner appreciative comments from fellow Buc-ee’s fans. That becomes part of the customer experience, even when the person wearing the t-shirt is hundreds of miles from the nearest Buc-ee’s location.

Customer *service* is more narrowly defined than *experience*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, customer service is “The assistance and advice provided by a company to those people who buy or use its products or services.”⁶

This means customer service is an important part of customer experience, but it’s not all of it. Examples of customer service might be a retail salesperson helping a customer select a new television, a technical support rep helping a customer troubleshoot a software program, or a stadium usher helping a group of fans find their seats.

The Buc-ee’s experience includes great customer service. There are lots of friendly employees who answer questions, serve up hot sandwiches, and ring up your purchases. The experience also includes many elements that are not customer service, such as the clean restrooms or enormous product selection.

Think about the customer experience your company offers. What are some elements that aren’t considered part of customer

service, but which have an impact on the feelings, emotions, and perceptions customers have about your brand? Here are some examples:

- ★ Advertising
- ★ Website
- ★ Product packaging
- ★ Product delivery
- ★ Billing

If your business has physical locations, there are many aspects of *experience* that are not part of *service*. Where your business is located in relation to your customers determines how easy or difficult it is for customers to travel to you. The availability of parking and other transportation options are also factors. The décor, product displays, location of cash registers and employee work stations, and even the music playing in the background are all part of the customer experience.

The design of your products and the way a customer uses them are part of the experience, too. Your favorite pair of shoes is a great example. The way the shoes look, the way they make you feel when you wear them, and the way they perform when you walk in them are all part of your experience.

The quality of the products you sell is also important. Do they work as intended, or do customers struggle to use them? Are they easy for customers to assemble, or do customers get confused and return them at a high rate? Are your products reliable and top quality, or do they break prematurely?

Third-party interactions can also play a vital role in customer experience. A furniture store that relies on a separate delivery company has made that delivery company part of the furniture-buying experience. Having a third-party company provide warranty repairs or answer calls made to a customer hotline means those companies are part of the experience, too.

Consistency is another aspect of experience. Do customers have a similar experience every time they interact with your company? For companies or franchises with multiple locations, is the experience consistent no matter where a customer visits? Or do your products, service, and employee interactions vary widely?

How Experience Can Set You Apart from the Competition

Customer experience can be overwhelming. The idea that experience encompasses literally all interactions customers have with your brand makes it impossible to identify and manage every single aspect. Many executives recognize the importance of customer experience, but don't know where to start.

The good news is, your business doesn't need to serve every imaginable customer need. You can differentiate your company, department, or location from the competition by identifying one problem your customer is trying to solve, and then consistently solving that problem better than anyone else.

There are a lot of coffee shops in my neighborhood. Many have good customer service with friendly, helpful employees, but I only go to two. One is a Starbucks, which has thousands of locations around the world. The other is The Simple Coffee House, or Simple, which has just one location.

The specific coffee shop I choose depends on the problem I'm trying to solve that day.

Starbucks is better at convenience than any other coffee chain, so I go there when I need to grab a quick cup of coffee. I can pay for my drink via the Starbucks app, and I can even use the app to order ahead of time, so my drink is waiting for me when I arrive. This particular Starbucks is located near a freeway, so it's easy to stop on my way home or when I'm heading out. It doesn't have a drive-through lane, but there's always a parking spot available near the entrance, so I can get in and out quickly.

The Simple Coffee House competes with Starbucks by being a great place to meet a friend or find a place to set up my laptop and get some work done. Seating is more plentiful than at my local Starbucks, so I know my friend and I will have a comfortable place to sit and chat without feeling crowded by other guests. There are lots of power outlets spread throughout the seating area if I need to charge my phone or computer. There's a record player near the front playing old jazz records, creating a fun vibe. The coffee at Simple is much better than at Starbucks, which is important when I want to relax and enjoy my beverage.

Offering a great experience to customers like me who are looking for a place to gather allows Simple to compete with large, established coffee chains like Starbucks. Simple is less convenient than Starbucks—it's farther from the freeway, there's no way to place an order in advance, and drinks take slightly longer to make. But Simple has an excellent reputation in the neighborhood with a 4.5-star rating on Yelp.⁷

Simple's Yelp rating is due in large part to many customer experience elements that make it a great place to meet a friend or get some work done. Here are the percentage of Yelp reviews that include positive mentions of key attributes:

- ★ Great coffee (79 percent)
- ★ Inviting atmosphere (46 percent)
- ★ Ample seating (32 percent)
- ★ Vinyl record player (24 percent)
- ★ Plenty of power outlets (18 percent)

Consistency is an important part of customer experience. People need to know they can count on your brand. The Starbucks I go to near my house has a seating area where I could meet a friend or get some work done, but it's often crowded. There have been many occasions when all the tables were taken or no outlets were

available, so I can't be sure that the Starbucks will be a good place to sit and stay on any given day.

So where does customer service fit in, and is it still important? Yes! Customer service is part of the overall experience, so it plays a critical role in attracting and retaining customers.

Simple's Yelp reviews call out great customer service 65 percent of the time. Many of those reviews mention specific people by name for making customers feel welcome.

There's another Starbucks location that's about the same distance from my home as the one I frequent. It's equally convenient, but the employees at this location are less friendly. That poor customer service causes me to choose one location over another.

Think about the choices you make as a customer. There's a good chance many of the companies you do business with do one thing really well that's important to you, even if other elements of the experience aren't perfect. You're loyal to a certain brand of shampoo because it makes your hair look fabulous, even though it's more expensive. The airline you fly upsets you with extra fees, but it has comfortable planes and offers the most direct flights from your local airport. There's often a wait at your favorite restaurant, but the food is amazing, and friendly servers call you by name and remember your favorite dish.

Buc-ee's wins customers from competing brands by consistently providing restrooms that are far superior to anyone else's. It averages a four-star rating on Yelp across all locations, with a whopping 46 percent of those reviews mentioning the restrooms.⁸ Cody Esser, who writes the *Impulsive Traveler Guy* blog, traveled to 33 Buc-ee's locations over the course of three days in 2018. He reported that not a single restroom at any of those locations was dirty.⁹ I polled family and friends in Texas, asking what they love about Buc-ee's. Nearly everyone mentioned the clean restrooms.

Of course, the Buc-ee's experience is more than just clean restrooms. It keeps customers coming back with stores that are bigger and have a broader selection of items than a typical gas station convenience store. My friend Robin summarized the Buc-ee's

experience nicely: “I love that you can get bakery items, fresh-made candy, wonderful hot sandwiches, that they have a gift shop, and also have clean bathrooms! They have everything a traveler could ever want.”

The challenge for any business is to figure out exactly what problem it can consistently solve better than the competition. It has to be something that customers value so customers choose you over other options. Creating a Guaranteed Customer Experience will help you solve this dilemma.

The Guaranteed Customer Experience Model

Amazon dominates e-commerce in many markets around the world. In the United States alone, the company is responsible for an estimated 37.3 percent of all online sales.¹⁰ One reason people habitually buy from Amazon is it consistently solves one problem quickly and conveniently: “I need to buy _____.”

You can fill in the blank with nearly every product imaginable. Customers flock to Amazon to buy books, groceries, and household goods, as well as larger items such as ping pong tables, surfboards, and furniture.

The Amazon website is easy to search across multiple product categories. Many products have hundreds or even thousands of customer reviews. Once you find something you like, you can often order it with a single click. Depending on where you live, most products can be delivered in as little as one day (sometimes faster). The company is famously reliable and uses rigorous process controls to prevent shipping errors. It's also remarkably consistent at meeting its promised delivery windows.

A study from the research firm Walker Sands discovered that 41 percent of respondents chose Amazon over other options to purchase a product because of faster delivery. Among those

customers, 15 percent purchased from Amazon despite cheaper prices elsewhere.¹¹

Throughout this book, you'll meet companies like Amazon and Buc-ee's that have won loyal customers by identifying the problems their customers face and then solving them consistently. These companies have built customer-focused cultures that align marketing, operations, customer service, and other departments around helping their customers succeed. This commitment to customer experience is so strong, they guarantee it.

A typical guarantee makes a promise, such as how long a product will last without breaking, or that customers will be totally satisfied with their purchase. Behind the scenes, companies must work hard to keep those promises or risk losing both credibility and customers. Guarantees often include a specific remedy in the event a promise isn't kept—such as refunding the customer's money or replacing a defective product. The remedy gives customers an extra amount of assurance and creates an additional financial incentive for companies to keep their promises.

The Guaranteed Customer Experience model applies the concept of a guarantee to the customer's overall experience. You win customers by promising to solve a customer's problem, retain customers by making sure that promise is kept, and encourage unhappy customers to give you another chance by recovering from service failures.

Identifying the problem your customer is trying to solve is at the core of the Guaranteed Customer Experience model. Once you understand your customer's problem, you can create a guarantee to solve it that ensures your customer has a great experience. We'll cover the rest of the model in future chapters.

For now, let's start by identifying a customer problem that you can solve.

Exercise: What Problem Does Your Customer Have?

This book contains a series of exercises to help you create your own Guaranteed Customer Experience. You'll find these exercises at the end of each chapter.

The goal of this first exercise is to create a one-sentence problem statement that clearly describes a common customer problem. In future chapters, you'll use this problem statement to construct an experience guarantee that wins and retains customers.

There are two steps to writing the customer problem statement. The first is to identify a customer problem. The second is to write a problem statement that describes the issue in one simple sentence.

I created a workbook to help you complete this exercise and others you'll do throughout the book. You can download it at guaranteedexperience.com/workbook.

Identify a Customer Problem

The problem you choose to focus on for this exercise depends on your role.

If you're a business owner, CEO, or senior executive, think about a fundamental problem your business solves. For example, a company selling electronic medical records software might serve hospitals and medical centers needing to efficiently track patient records.

If you're a product manager, think about a problem your product solves. A tile grout cleaner might help consumers who need to keep the tile in their kitchens and bathrooms looking new.

If you're a department manager, think about a problem your team solves. A purchasing manager might support a factory that needs to have the right raw materials on hand to build products. A contact center manager might serve customers who need to get help with a billing, delivery, or product issue.

If you're an individual contributor, think about a common problem your customers face. For instance, if you're a restaurant delivery driver, you help customers who need a convenient way to get the food they ordered delivered fresh and on time.

This is unlikely to be a new problem you've never heard about. Rather, it should be a problem you're already aware of, and this exercise will help bring clarity about how you can address it.

You can also use customer feedback to help identify a problem to solve. Many people instantly equate feedback with surveys, but you can also get feedback from direct customer conversations, listening to social media and online reviews, and even observing your customers.

Here are some questions that can help identify a customer problem:

- ★ What problem do your customers discuss most often?
- ★ What is the reason your customers choose you over other options?
- ★ What does your customer do with your product or service?

My recommendation is to focus on finding just one problem to start with, and use it to create your first Guaranteed Customer Experience. You can go back and create more guarantees once you successfully implement the model for the first time.

Warning: Identifying your customer's problem requires you to see your business from your customer's perspective. For instance, if you want to know what someone on a road trip wants most from a gas station convenience store, just imagine being that customer. Once you do this, the problem is often quickly revealed. There's a good chance you already know what it is.

This is not the time to convene endless committees or study groups. In my experience, this kind of corporate over-think almost always causes people to miss something obvious.

Write a Problem Statement

The second step is to write a problem statement. The statement should be written from your customer's perspective, focusing on their problem rather than your viewpoint.

Start your problem statement with the words, "I need to." Imagine what your customer would say as they describe their problem. Here are some examples:

- ★ Buc-ee's: "I need to use the restroom."
- ★ The Simple Coffee Shop: "I need to meet a friend for coffee."
- ★ Amazon: "I need to get something quickly."

I created a problem statement while writing this book. My goal was to identify the problem you were trying to solve when you decided to read it.

"I need to win and retain more customers."

Write your problem statement before moving on to the next chapter. Then you'll have a real-life example to work with, providing important context as we walk through the steps to create a Guaranteed Customer Experience.

Chapter 1 Notes

- 1 GasBuddy, “What a ‘Relief!’ GasBuddy Study Finds Gas Station Restrooms Are Getting Cleaner, Reveals Top Rated Restrooms In Every State for Peak Road Trip Season,” news release, May 14, 2019.
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- 3 Hannah Denham, “A Texas-size mart’s road to fame,” *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2019.
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