

Mapping Your Customer Journey In 5 Essential Stages

 contentchampion.com/customer-journey-mapping

Imagine you're planning a trip for a friend.

You have a vague notion about her, but haven't bothered asking much about her interests, motivations or preferences.

You know where *you* want to send her, and a general sense of the route *you'd* like her to take, but beyond that you haven't given it much thought.



You scribble down where you want your friend to end up, hand it to her and say, "Go."

What do you think the chances are that she'll either enjoy the journey or arrive somewhere she actually likes?

Pretty low right. In fact, the result of all this is that she might never trust your decision making again.

While this unlikely plot is perfect for a bad reality television show, it's what happens when otherwise forward-thinking companies skip mapping the customer journey.

When you consider that Customer Experience (CX) is predicted to take over price and product as a key brand differentiator in just a couple years time (by 2020) and that research shows 91% of customers who have a bad experience with your company won't consider giving you a second chance, it's clear understanding your buyer's journey is critical to creating and maintaining your competitive edge.

A customer journey map - or sales funnel, or marketing funnel - tells the story, both in words and visually, of the path your clients take from initial contact through all engagement touchpoints and on through to a long-term relationship. It supports key business goals and

helps you easily visualize the complete process that a person goes through to get from your company what he or she wants or needs over time.

Hint: You don't steer the customer experience; your client drives the process. And the journey isn't always linear. As you research and document results, you'll discover many unexpected, alternate routes, deterrents (pain points, challenges) and even roadblocks that will help you adjust your systems, processes and options for a smoother journey.

By the end of this post, you'll be able to confidently develop a customer journey map where each client touchpoint is clear, and everyone in your company can use to get on track to better serve your audience, beat your competition and improve your bottom line.

The Benefits of Mapping Your Customer Journey



The digital age has been a boon in many ways, with multiple opportunities for companies and brands to directly connect with their target audiences in increasingly personal ways. This is also a double-edge sword, as [Salesforce](#) points out, 70% of consumers say technology has made it easier than ever before to take their business elsewhere.

Today's buyers expect (and demand) a seamless, intuitive, instantaneously responsive experience. If they can't find what they need, or worse, when they're frustrated or confused and find themselves repeating their concerns to service reps in different departments or via different channels, then your buyer's journey will likely proceed from your company to one of your competitors.

This is where customer journey mapping comes in, and benefits include:

- Reinforcement of customer touchpoints that work – and clarity around those that don't.
- A client-focused perspective derived from the actual, authentic actions, thoughts and emotions of people who interact with your company or brand (vs. what your internal team *thinks* customers should experience).

- A clearer flow and ordering of the customer experience, including where things break down – and it can be as nuanced as a mobile vs. desktop experience, or a channel-specific disconnect, such as contacting your company through social channels vs. through your website.
- Better collaboration between departments/silos to address pervasive customer pain points and challenges.
- The development of a unified, company-wide, customer-centric vision and mission.
- Identification of gaps in ownership of key touchpoints and/or a reassignment of responsibility if appropriate.
- Insight into why certain tools, products or services are underutilized or overlooked by customers.
- Inspiration for new products or services to better meet customer expectation/demand.
- Renewed focus on what matters most to your customers, with clear indications on how you can maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

How to Map the Customer Journey

As you embark on *your* journey to map the customer experience, remember to take in the rich landscape – the context – as you plot your points. So strap in for a creative ride, and don't be afraid to let go of the wheel and truly let your customers steer.

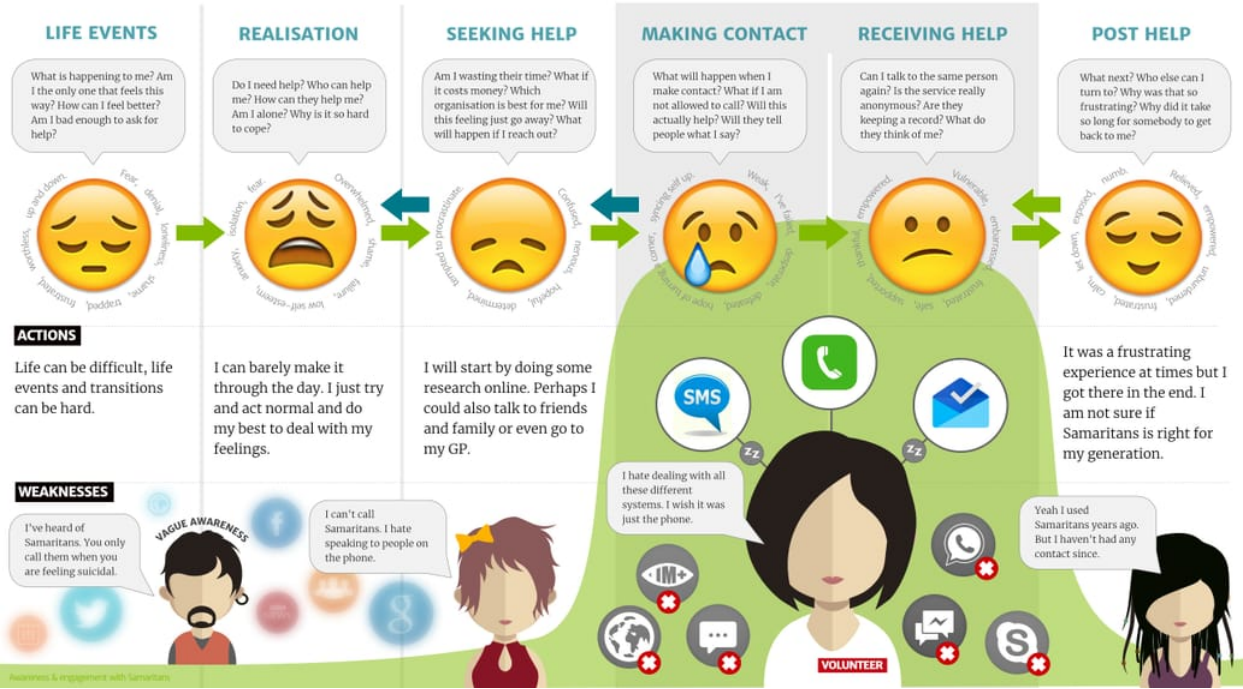
Step 1: Know Who's Driving By Creating Your Customer Avatars



Knowing your audience is marketing 101; to do so, you'll need to create a customer avatar, which is a fictional, composite character that reflects the key attributes of your audience. (You can find out how to create a customer avatar in 5 easy steps [here](#).) Keep in mind that many businesses have more than one avatar, which in turn will result in more than one customer journey.

During the process of creating your customer avatar(s), you'll conduct market research including surveys, data and interviews to get to the heart of their demographics, psychographics and overall motivation for using your products or services. This rich information – needs, desires, challenges, and pain points – gives you insight into why they contacted you in the first place.

And don't forget, each avatar has different motivations & needs - and therefore embarks upon a different journey, as this great example from Paul Boag for the Samaritans highlights:



Once you understand what make your avatars tick, you can come up with goals that propel them on their journey. This will help you assess whether or not you're meeting your avatars' expectations at each touchpoint. Conversely, it will also become glaringly clear if and when you lose sight of their goals.

Because once you meander off the path to delivering what you've promised, you'll see how easy it is for your customers to follow.

Step 2: Define The Stages Of Your Customer Experience



Define The Stages of Your Customer Experience



You probably have an idea of how a “typical” customer engages with your business. Jot down what you think you know the flow to be; a general outline may look like this:

- Research: This is where your brand or business is discovered.
- Evaluate/compare: The potential customer weighs his or her options -- and it may well not include interacting with your company (i.e. consulting with a friend, doing online comparison shopping).
- Commit: The customer moves from a perspective to a newly minted client.
- Engage: The customer uses your product or service and forms opinions based both on the tangible performance and other potential factors, including your purchase reinforcement and support.
- Recommit/disengage: This is the critical part, where your customer either maintains or expands his/her connection with your company, or decides to try something else if the experience isn't positive.

Of course any of this can vary or change, based on the individual. It's possible someone buys your product impulsively, for example, and then decides after the fact to do the research. As already mentioned, this process is not necessarily linear, and as you'll discover through your research, there may even be other points you didn't realize existed along the way.

While you're identifying each phase, be sure to also take note of every touchpoint you can think of where the customer might engage with your brand or business. For example, online ads, an influencer's social media post, picking up your product off a shelf and reading the packaging, and so on.

Be as exhaustive about as possible – this is where gathering staff and colleagues from various parts of your organization in a conference room and jotting notes on a whiteboard makes sense.

Step 3: Add Qualitative And Quantitative Research



Now that you have the general outline to plot your customer's path, it's time to quantify and qualify it with tangible information. You may already have a good amount of information from the legwork you did to create your customer avatar. But now you want to fill in the blanks with information about the journey itself and how and where it meets your customer's goals along the way.

a) Online data

Analytics are the perfect place to start, beginning with your website's built-in stats or Google Analytics. Here you'll find detailed information about where your customers came from and where they went on your site once they got there... as well as when they bounced. From these analytics you should be able to glean insights into their pain points, too.

Important: Keep in mind the numbers alone won't necessarily tell the whole picture. For example, people may be spending a relatively long time on a particular page on your site not because they're so enthralled by the information there (imagined/positive), but because they can't find what they're looking for (reality/negative).

Social media analytics can also give you insight into your customer experience, particularly when it comes to sentiment. Further, by reviewing specific social media mentions, you may get more nuanced information about your customer service. While most social platforms have built in insights (like [Facebook](#)) and analytics, Twitter has an [Advanced Search](#) feature that you can use as a fairly sophisticated sentiment analysis tool. Other tools worth investigating include [Hootsuite Insights](#) and [Buzzsumo](#), both of which have free trials and relatively low-cost versions.

b) Qualitative research - anecdotal information

You may want to start with the easiest and most accessible place to gain insight into the customer experience: the members of your team who deal directly with the public, for example, customer service reps or salespeople. While they may have been in the room with you during initial brainstorming, this round two should include specific notes about not just what they've observed, but also the phase at which they deal with customers.

Be careful not to generalize an entire customer journey from, say, someone in your call center who normally speaks to only those people who have already purchased your product.

Better than speaking to those who deal with customers is to actually connect with your customers themselves. Best case scenario is to interview several customers to discuss their personal journeys from initial contact through to where they are today with you product or service. Questions can include:

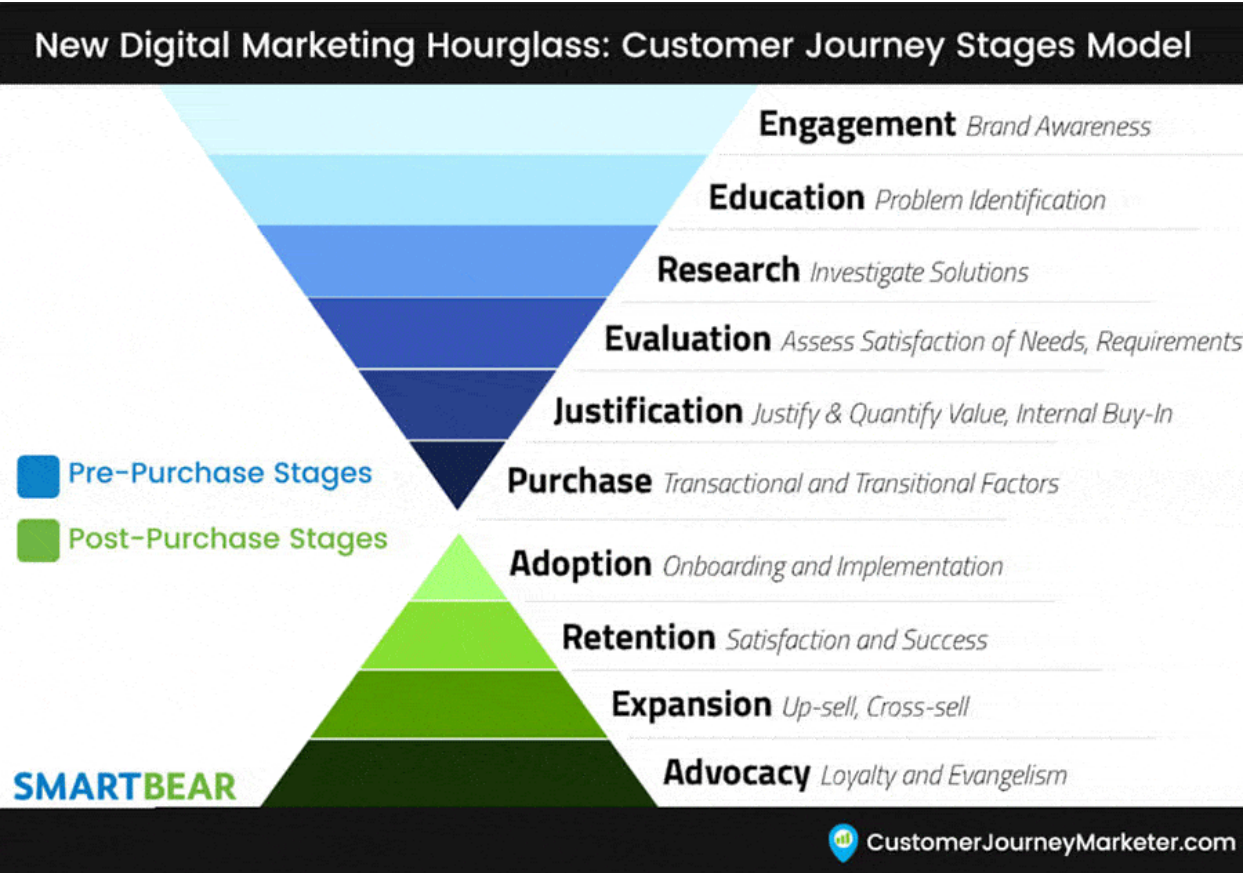
- What was your goal before you purchased [product/service]?
- How did you find out about [product/service]?
- What did your purchase process look like?
- At what point(s) did you interact with our company?
- How was that experience?
- How likely are you to recommend our [product/service] to your family or friends?

As you did when you created your avatars, you could also conduct an online survey using tools such as [Ask Your Target Market](#), [PollDaddy](#) or [SurveyMonkey](#) with versions of the same questions you've determined for your interviewees.

c) Intent based keyword research

Using powerful tools like Ahrefs and KWFinder - and cross-referencing our results with a manual analysis of the top ten search results in Google, we can also gain some valuable insights into what our ideal customers are searching for and why.

This fantastic [guide to performing keyword research for SEO](#) on the Ahrefs blog has a great section on searcher intent, and highlights how you can assess the value of keywords and their search intent based upon each stage of your buyer's journey. The article also references a superb graphic called the '[Customer Journey Hourglass](#)' - that can help you map out keyword search intent.



Step 4: Make Your Customer Journey Map Actionable By Adding In Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

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Make Your Map Actionable By Adding Key Performance Indicators

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The whole point of mapping the customer journey is to use the insights into consumer’s true experiences and take action to improve the process by meeting your customers where they are.

But how do you know what progress -- and improvement -- looks like?

This is why integrating CX metrics into your buyer's journey maps is so important. This gives you the necessary tools to help measure how well the actions you implement enhance your CX over time.

The following are examples of the kind of CX metrics you may want to employ in your mapping exercise:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS): Measures customer loyalty by asking buyers on a scale of 1-10, how likely it is that they would recommend your product/service to others. (Ideal scores are the 9/10s, under 6, and you have work to do.)
- Customer Satisfaction (CSAT): Asks how satisfied customers are with a recent interaction (i.e. customer service call, purchase).
- Customer Effort Score (CES): Checks in with a customer to see how easy (or not) getting an answer to a question was.

However your company measures CX, the quantitative assessments give you insight into the emotional experiences of your customers at a given phase or touchpoint on their journeys -- which adds richness to your map and clearer opportunities for improvements.

Step 5: Lay It All Out In A Visual Representation

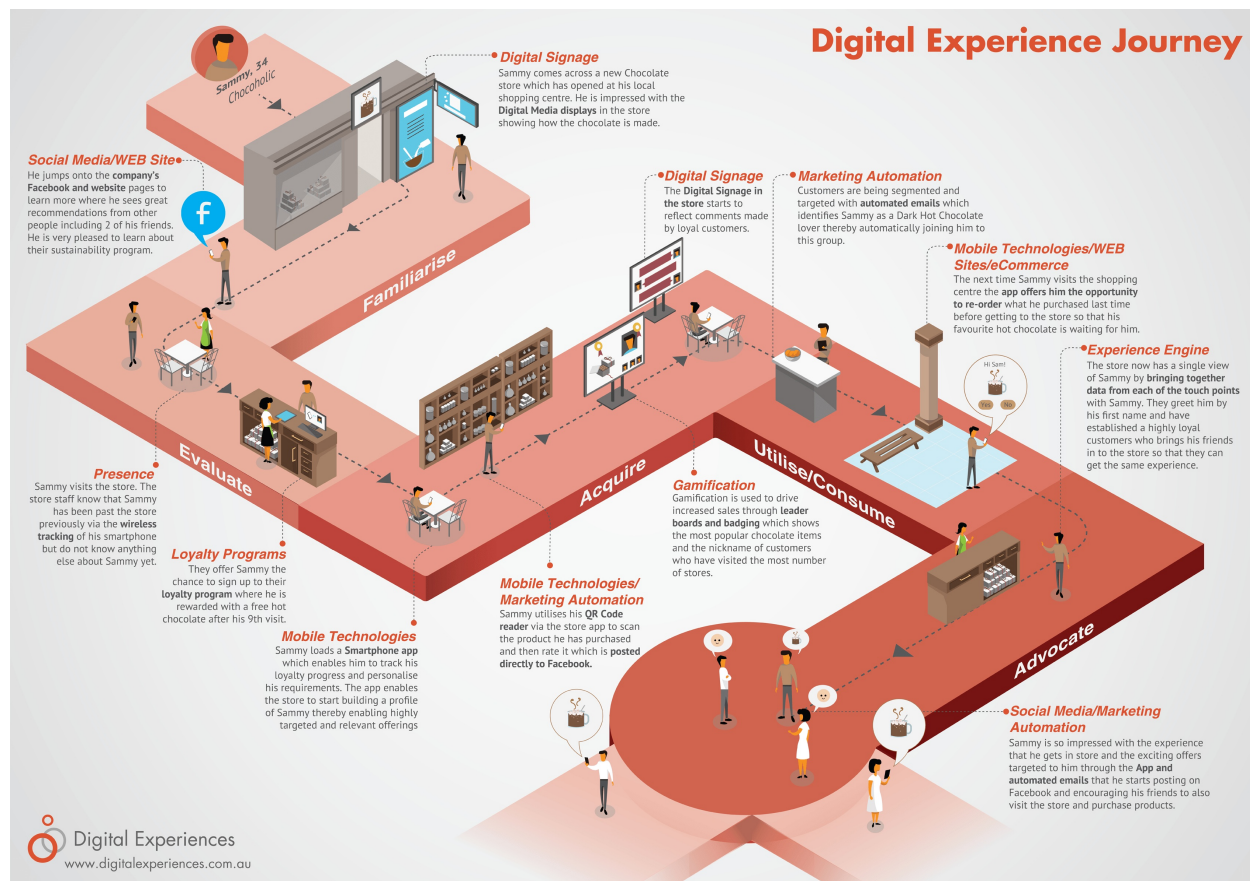


Now that you've done all the legwork to understand your buyer's experience, the last step is to turn it into an actual map that graphically explains the process to your team and stakeholders, allowing them to get a quick and easy understanding about the emotions that drive customer decision making every step of the way.

Employ your design team, or if you don't have one in-house, hire someone to create your customer journey map for you. The easier it is to read and engage with, the more likely your team will be able to visualize and holistically comprehend your customer experience.

As mentioned above - there is no set way to do this, and each organisation will have different outcomes based on unique customer requirements - but to get your creative juices flowing here's one of my all time favourite customer journey maps from [Digital Experiences](#)

- an Australian company that specialises in creating these for clients. This superb infographic charts the customer journey of Sammy - a self-confessed chocoholic!



It's Time To Map Your Sales Funnel

In a world where virtual exit ramps abound, understanding the customer journey is more important than ever before. Not only does it give you deep insight into how people truly view interactions with your company, it also allows you to break out of silo-mode and into the interdepartmental collaboration needed for better results.

More importantly from our perspective, however, once you have successfully mapped your buyer's journey you can use this to inform your content creation in future - and this is where things get really exciting from a content marketing perspective.

That's all the subject for another post, but in the meantime why not give customer journey mapping a go based on this guide? If you have any questions, let me know in the comments below.

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