Benefit through clever automation

In the article 'Improve the experience' we introduced the concept of CX, or customer experience to give it the full title. And in 'Think Like A Customer' we explained the importance of aligning the Print Service Provider (PSP) sales process with the customer buying process. It seems logical as a next stage to consider what happens when your prospect buys into your offer and becomes a customer.

Specifically, to consider what their journey will look and feel like as they navigate your production process. How they will experience your business. From initial enquiry, through estimating, proofing, production, delivery and invoicing, aim to create a frictionless customer experience. The ultimate aim is to leave them with a positive reflection of you, your team and the overall business. Only through this can you build enduring customer relationships.

An often overlooked aspect is the consideration of the communication mediums open to you and how you use them. There is a dizzying array of potential channels. Email, telephone, SMS, WhatsApp, Zoom, Teams, Slack, live chat. And the list goes on.

When you use multiple mediums, it's important to ensure the audit trail isn't scattered across them, making it difficult to track evidence of sign-offs, queries and detail when needed.

And as important as it is for you, you also need to ensure your client is comfortable with the channels you offer, and can save vital information to fulfil their own internal requirements. Live chat on a website is a good example, a download of the conversation should always be available. Remember, they will need an audit trail as much as you will.

> "COMPLEXITY IS YOUR ENEMY. ANY FOOL CAN MAKE SOMETHING COMPLICATED. IT'S HARD TO MAKE SOMETHING SIMPLE."
>
> Richard Branson

When it comes to assessing the production process, an old joke comes to mind; "How do you eat an elephant"? The answer of course being, "in bite sized chunks".

Begin by breaking your entire customer communication process down into stages, and examine each one to establish two things:

1.
What do we do well and requires no change?

2.
What could we improve?

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Concentrate on the areas that you have identified as requiring improvement. Seek to automate low value, repetitive tasks, for example, the receipt of data files. Eliminate the action of having a person opening each file, checking and actioning it, by installing software that does the work for you, and then sends the merged and checked data to a folder for action. The most successful direct mail companies have been automating data receipt for the last decade and more, as they understand that manual intervention takes longer and introduces the chance of error. Similarly, the introduction of cameras on folding and enclosing lines has enabled swifter and more precise verification of enclosed packs.

Always remember, time = money. If you can reduce the time it takes you to do something, you reduce the cost of production. You can then choose whether you bank the saving, thus improving your margin, or pass it on to the customer. That's a business decision that should be weighed up for each individual case.

There are other benefits:

Improved production schedules enable faster deliveries, and happier clients

The **reduction** of human error reduces reprints and credit notes

Staff are freed up to work on more creative and valuable tasks, which add **quantifiable value** to the business

Installing intelligent systems can also help you achieve "lights out" production, whereby equipment is working for you even when there is no shift physically on site. It is a reality for sites to receive on-line orders, where the artwork and data is automatically merged and sent to the press, which then prints and binds the job, ready for the operator to despatch in the morning. The software is programmed to look for issues and divert any problem files to a dedicated spoils folder so they don't hold up production.

Once you have analysed your own business, turn to investigating that of your key customers. Ensure you understand a customer's internal process, their technologies and those they aspire to. Find ways of integrating with their systems to increase efficiency, for example, online ordering to manage printed collateral in a retail environment, or ticketing within a travel environment. It is absolutely true to say that the more you can install automated solutions that work within a client environment, the longer you will keep that client.

If you can find ways internally to realise the maximum reward of new technology, and introduce it for the right reasons, at the right time, in the right way, you can then "rinse and repeat" the solution with your entire client base. Which can only enhance the customer experience.

This article is one of a series supporting the **Canon Ascent Programme**, a business development initiative for Canon Professional Print customers. If you'd like to know more please contact your Canon Account Manager or search "Canon Ascent Programme".