

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW NORMAL

MAKING
CUSTOMER CENTRICITY
A REALITY

ONLINE PANEL DISCUSSION SUMMARY - 16 JUNE 2021



Customer Centricity

Peter Lavers, Director, Customer Attuned

Customer centricity is a term that has been around for a number of years, but what does it mean in a business-to-business environment and how do we turn the words into a change in the way in which our businesses are run?"

We were delighted to host our fifth online panel discussion in June, which continues our series on Providing Leadership in the New Normal.

Sincere thanks are extended to our panellists for sharing their insights and stories: **Louise Evans**, Head of Customer Experience at UCAS; **Paul Willoughby**, Head of Insight & Strategy Research at the Beazley Group; and myself, Peter Lavers, Director of Customer Attuned and recognised influencer in the subject. We were again most ably hosted by my colleague **Alan Thompson**.



LOUISE EVANS
UCAS



PAUL WILLOUGHBY
BEAZLEY GROUP



PETER LAVERS
CUSTOMER ATTUNED

In this summary, we will recap the key points that were discussed during the event: -

- **what customer centricity means to our panellists;**
- **what impact the pandemic has had on their approach;**
- **and the challenges they have faced in developing and implementing a customer centric approach across their organisation.**



Alan Thompson
Panel Moderator

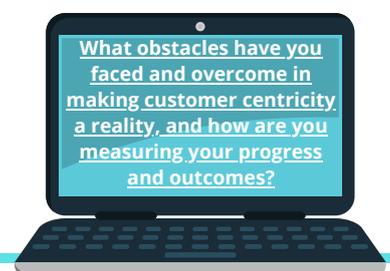


Watch the panel discussion again.

We've edited the questions from the panel discussion into separate videos, so you can choose to watch them in order or simply watch the questions you're interested in the most.



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What does customer centricity really mean within your business?

Louise explained that **UCAS** is an education charity, with three distinct customer groups of (i) university and college education providers, (ii) teachers and advisers, and (iii) applicants and pre-applicants.

Customer centricity for UCAS is all about balancing this “three-legged stool” and ensuring that each customer group is equally and appropriately served. UCAS has always delivered excellent customer service; now it’s about a customer centric approach across the whole business, from development and product teams to those in back-office areas, ensuring that the customer is always in the room and that their needs and requirements are the primary drivers.

The latest corporate strategy also addresses the need to be both product focussed and customer centric, with staff training to understand what this means to each of them in the context of their roles.

Paul introduced us to **Beazley**, a successful insurer that has evolved from a specialist Lloyd’s syndicate to a global insurer with offices in Europe, Asia, and across North America.

They have built this position based on their reputation for expertise, and demonstration of innovation to solve problems in complex insurance lines such as cyber, space and fine art.

All of Beazley’s business is intermediated, which poses a challenge to customer centricity as they do not have clear sight of customer. Paul explained the consequent importance of everyone knowing how they can have a client impact within this business model. Customer centricity in Beazley is therefore all about being visible, consistent and a trusted partner.

Peter noted that both Louise and Paul spoke about a whole-company approach being required to be customer centric. This agrees with what he’s found in over a hundred customer management projects – that you’ve got to address it “systemically”.

The secret to customer centricity is to embed an undercurrent of customer focus throughout the organisation. At Amazon they call it “customer obsession”, which begs the question “what do we obsess about”?

In many companies the reality is that sales, products, channels (esp. digital) and the competition come much higher up than customers!

Our late colleague **Doug Leather** defined customer centricity in his book **"The Customer Centric Blueprint"** as an “eco-system” (see caption) and this still holds true, and also emphasises the need to be joined-up – customers notice when we’re not!

Doug Leather defined customer centricity as:

"The eco-system and operating model that enables an organisation to design and deliver a unique and distinctive customer experience"

Trust was also mentioned, and at Customer Attuned we passionately believe that trust sits at the heart of good B2B relationships. If your customer management “eco-system” builds, embeds and protects trust with your customers, suppliers, intermediaries and partners then you’ll be well placed to win and keep long-term profitable client and partner relationships.

Peter emphasised in his response, that -

"Customer centricity isn't just a soft "marketing" term - it's a truly authentic way of doing business."

Has the pandemic accelerated or hampered your customer centric strategy?

For **Paul**, it has accelerated the change in hundreds of years of tradition, fast tracking digital solutions to continue winning and serving clients. The most important change is that clients are asking for more help about risk, seeking expert advice on how they run their business in the New Normal (e.g. with greater cyber risk) and how **Beazley** can assist.

Louise echoed Paul's comment about tradition, with hundreds of years of university history meaning that there is a whole spectrum of leaders through laggards to deal with within their customer groups.

UCAS has been a leader in digital transformation, and was able to switch to 100% home-working with no degradation of service, whereas teachers, advisers and university staff did not fare so well. This put UCAS in a positive position in the sector, continuing to deliver products and services and able to quickly respond to government decisions and u-turns.

This gained a lot of **trust** from customers who were struggling to manage this disruption, as UCAS was able to really focus on what mattered to its customers

UCAS' leadership in digital transformation in its sector gained a lot of trust from customers who were struggling to manage the disruption.

The pandemic has consequently enabled **UCAS** to refocus, and served as a timely reminder of how much the sector relies on trusted guidance and advice e.g. to an applicant who feels caught between a rock and a hard place; or to a university that's unable to spin up a call centre at short notice. It has also enabled UCAS to move some of its 'dinosaur' customers to digital activity - that can only be of mutual benefit to all concerned!

Peter outlined three impacts:

1 A positive in B2B is that time has been spent on building relationships rather than just pushing sales!

2 Another is the increase in collaboration within organisations, across channels, and in supply chains to solve problems and continue to deliver the customer experience. For example, traditional channels such as call centres have turned multi-media and omni-channel (particularly when physical outlets have been closed), and effectively "saved the bacon" of companies because people need/want to speak to a human being in such trying times

3 A note of caution was raised regarding "digital transformation", which is being pushed as the answer to everything. It's certainly a big part of the answer, but doesn't automatically equate to customer centricity because its outcomes are going to be highly dependent on the underlying drivers behind the programme (e.g. cost cutting).



Top Obstacles in Making Customer Centricity a Reality



Louise's biggest issue is ensuring that all **UCAS** staff are on the same page in understanding what customer centricity really means - not just doing what the customer wants or what we think they need, but thoroughly understanding customer requirements and translating those into effective solutions that may vary across customer type and segment - its 350+ university customers are all very different, with complex IT systems, diverse markets, and unique recruitment targets. A programme of training across the whole business at all levels has been really effective to get people thinking. It's how UCAS is ensuring that staff behaviour has a 'customer in the room' mindset, and that the three-legged stool isn't wonky.

Paul cited three key challenges for **Beazley**:



1. Access to good, clean, single-view client data
2. Ensuring people know how they impact the end customer, and incentivising good behaviour
3. Organising in a way that makes sense, e.g. clarity on who 'owns' a relationship when many product lines are in play

Peter described three top obstacles, which he included in his article in the latest Newszine.



1. **Leadership** - can't stress enough how important it is that leadership who "get it" is to customer centricity
2. **Silos** - and silo thinking / behaviour as much as the structure
3. **Not being systemic** (joined-up, end-to-end) as previously described. This is why Customer Attuned introduced our new **Trust Capability Builder** this year, which ensures that trust is intertwined throughout the way that the business goes to market; acquires and builds customer relationships; and enables & equips its people to deliver the proposition



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Measuring Progress and Outcomes

There was unanimous agreement from all three panellists that customer surveys are insufficient to track the progress and success of customer centricity.

Louise shared how social media enables them to ascertain mood and sentiment very quickly from emotionally driven students, so in B2C, measurement works well, however the B2B side is still a challenge.

Paul echoed that Beazley's customers had reached "survey fatigue" and the last thing they feel like doing, is completing yet another satisfaction survey.

His priority (when lockdown lifts) is to get front and centre with Beazley's customers, building relationships to get those real life satisfaction metrics.

So instead, when you are considering measurement in your company, Peter recommends using hard and soft, internal and external, metrics to reflect the complexity of the business system of managing customer experience and customer value, and that good data is a prerequisite.

Question Time

Here are a few questions the audience asked the speakers:

Is customer centricity just an external process? What about employees & partners, should the strategy include them too?

Justin Doo, Director, Okta Inc

Paul asserted that it is absolutely critical to work with external partners who interact with clients on Beazley's behalf so that they deliver consistency of approach. There's also a vital need to ensure all internal staff understand their role in delivering customer centricity even if not in a client facing role.

Louise agreed - we are all internal customers of each other and customer centricity begins with the internal customers so we can live and breathe our values. All members of UCAS staff are given chance to get on phone to listen to applicants directly so they can listen and experience and ultimately realise how their role impacts on customers.

Peter remarked on how he has observed that customer centric organisations also look after their suppliers; and questioned why voice of employee (VoE) studies aren't correlated with VoC despite the proven links between the two.

Gartner have predicted that more than 75% will ditch NPS by end of 2025 - what will replace it?

Victoria Page, Head of Data, Capita Plc

Paul explained that Beazley already don't use NPS because "give us a score" methodology isn't appropriate for the level of person with which they're dealing, and because of the intermediated nature of their business - they need a more in-depth strategic conversation to measure the success of each relationship.

UCAS also don't use NPS and haven't done so for a while. Louise utilises focus groups and social media sentiment analyses, but recognises that they need to do more for B2B customers to get a better handle on the state of relationships.

Peter has always had concerns over NPS as a 'silver bullet', especially in B2B and intermediated settings, where trust is emerging as the most valuable strategic measure.

He stressed that leadership commitment to act on the results and findings is often more important than the measure itself, so did not reject NPS, but emphasised that it's better suited to B2C environments.

He also commented that so-called 'touchpoint NPS' can be very flawed as advocacy/recommendation is based on whole-experience rather than isolated interaction.

Can customer centricity be rewarded through pay, incentives etc., or should it be just informal recognition?

Stewart Waddy, Commercial Manager, BUPA

Louise explained that UCAS are actively looking at how they can reward staff for 'customer success' (such as advocacy, engagement, sentiments, adoption of products and services).

Paul stressed the requirement for everyone to be customer centric no matter their role rather than putting a few front-line people 'on a pedestal' i.e. providing recognition of a good job done wherever in the value chain.

Peter responded that it needs to be both - a culture where there is recognition for doing the right thing for the customer backed with performance management focused on things that are more systemic and drive cross-business success e.g. overall client profitability rather than per-product revenue.

BUILDING TRUST IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

We specialise in helping our customers build better B2B relationships to drive mutual commercial value.

In B2B, we believe that Trust sits at the heart of a successful client centric strategy and the proposition is underpinned by trust-based relationships with customers, partners and colleagues.

Trust is a key dynamic in B2B relationship success, that works on a multi-level context on both sides of the relationship; we believe this whole heartedly and have had our research academically approved.



CO-CREATING TRUST-BASED B2B RELATIONSHIPS FOR MUTUAL VALUE

Internal capabilities and external relationships do not work in isolation, so we will work with you to embed trust into the way you operate; join up your capabilities; train your staff; align account teams; evaluate customer trust; and then develop more trust-based relationships for sustained mutual value.

MEET THE TEAM



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