Guide: How to effectively incorporate customer journey mapping into your marketing strategy

30-second summary:

- A customer journey map is a visual representation of every interaction between you and your customers. Proper customer journey mapping can make a huge difference in conversions and help you create a more customer-centric marketing strategy.
- Customer journey mapping starts with identifying your user personas. This way, you'll know exactly which customer segment to market.
- Next, you identify and map out every touchpoint or experience along the customer journey. This will help you learn and later predict customer behavior and buying decisions.
- Chief content writer, Connie Benton guides you through the customer journey mapping process outline with some great examples and tools to help you.

When it comes to building a robust marketing strategy, most beginner entrepreneurs have nothing to start off with except expert advice they find on digital marketing blogs, let alone the idea of customer journey mapping. While this alone will last you a long way, ultimately, you're borrowing experiences from somebody else's business, not building on your own. This is why large corporations spend so much on big data and analytics.

But it's not just the corporations that do that. According to

OnePath, 67% of SMEs spend over $10,000 a year on analytics. Why do they pay this huge price?

The answer is simple. You can only go this far using somebody else’s analytics. At some point, you should start gathering and interpreting data yourself. Without this, you can’t possibly expect to understand your thousands of clients.

If you’re looking for a point where you can start, you can postpone getting into behavioral segmentation and other advanced analytics, and follow a strategy that can yield great results on a shoestring budget. Create a customer journey map. Here’s all the information and tools you’ll need to create one.

How to create a customer journey map

A customer journey map (CJM) is exactly what it sounds to be. A map of the path that a customer makes from their decision to make a purchase or any other action, to successfully making it. Here’s an example of what it looks like from the NNGroup.

Source: NNGroup

You can create a customer journey map for most processes that involve customer decisions and use this map for different purposes. A detailed map of going from the latest stage of the sales funnel to making a purchase can be used to improve conversions. A map of making purchases after the initial conversion will help you increase customers' lifetime value.

For now, we'll concentrate on the basics and look at how to create a general customer journey map that covers a customer's path from being interested in your product to making a purchase. It will help you improve your overall marketing strategy.

The first thing you'll need to do is to set the frame of the customer map, where it should start and where it should end. Since we're making a general map that covers the whole funnel, let's set the start at being interested in the market, and the

end at making the first purchase.

The most important thing, though, is to find the right path to trace. Most businesses have different types of clients that have different journeys. Let’s start by defining your user personas.

1. Define user personas

Needless to say that a user looking for online shopping websites will differ from someone in search of the best online business ideas. That’s why defining user personas is so important for successful customer journey mapping.

Before you trace the customer’s journey, you need to have an idea of who’s making that journey. To do this, you need to know at least these four core data sets about your customer:

- Demographic information (for example, age, gender, country)
- What problems do they solve with your product
- What do they value from the product
- Where do they get information

With these points, you’ll be able to learn more about the customers themselves and their journey. Here’s how you can gather this information.

Tools to use

- Sign-up forms
- Google Analytics
- Facebook Analytics
- Pop-up surveys (Hotjar or similar)
- Email surveys (MailChimp or similar)

You can easily gather the most basic demographic information on your leads with the sign-up form. When they’re registering on the website or grabbing a freebie, ask them to fill a bit

more than their email address, and you already have a decent database. While you're at it, you can also gather employment information, which is extremely helpful if you run a B2B company.

If that's not an option, gather that data with Google or Facebook analytical tools. You can also get an insight into what your users are interested in by looking up Affinity Categories in Google Analytics.

Most likely, you have not one but several main demographics. Look for the largest age and sex groups and run Affinity Category reports on them. You may find that say, men and women in their 30s that buy from you have different interests on average.

The answers to why people buy from you and what do they value the most can only be inferred from user surveys. Do it via pop-ups or send surveys to your newsletter subscribers.

That said, these are just the basic tools that will cover most needs. Feel free to use any advanced analytics tools at your disposal.

2. Identify touchpoints

Once you know who your customer is, it's time to begin tracing their path towards the purchase. You'll need to track the touchpoints they have with your brand as they go through every step of the sales funnel.

Asking them how they ended up on your website may not be the perfect idea as a lot of touchpoints will be forgotten before the purchase. Here's how you can do it more efficiently.

Tools to use

- Google Analytics
- Lead scoring software (HubSpot or similar)

- Sign-up forms

Let’s start by looking at the off-website touchpoints. These are the touchpoints that lead a customer to your website: social media, ads, blog articles in Google search, and other similar online portals. You can gauge these easily by looking at where the traffic comes from in the Google Analytics panel.

Don’t forget to add UTM markers to different links you leave around the web to make sure you’re getting the full picture.

You can also get an approximate picture by including a question like “How did you find us” in your sign-up forms. However, this only shows the bottom of the funnel, and won’t provide the full picture.

The idea behind it is to award more points to actions that lead to conversion. You can use this system to first track what actions do lead to a conversion.

This way, you’ll know what set of actions a potential buyer performs on the website. The other method to learn is to use the ‘Reverse Goal Path’ in Google Analytics.

This tab lets you take a goal from your campaign and see what actions did a person who ended up converting did on the website. This shows you the majority of the on-site customer journey.

3. Draw the map

Now you know who your customers are and what set of actions do they perform before making a purchase. All you have left to do is to actually draw the customer journey map.

You can do it whatever way you want, just make sure it will always be handy for future use.

Tools to use

- Drawing tool of choice: A piece of paper, an online mindmap, Photoshop, or any such platform that you're comfortable using

Start with defining the user persona for the map you're drawing. Since different user personas may have different journeys, you may need to draw several maps.

For now, let's assume your customer is a 25 to 35-year-old male or female who owns an online store and is looking for SaaS software to help run it. Let's call them Jessie since it's a good gender-neutral name.

Start with what drives Jessie to make the purchase. Point out their motivation in this search. Then, track their behavior off-site. Maybe they search for the product reviews online or see several ads before they finally click on one of them.

Follow their path on your website based on the data you received from website analytics, and end the journey on their first purchase. Make sure to state how many users leave at a certain touchpoint and do not covert further.

In the end, you'll have something like this.

Source: Digital.gov

How to improve marketing strategy with CJM

There you have it, you've successfully created your first customer journey map. Now, let's dig into how you can use it to improve your marketing efforts.

1. Search for insights

No customer journey map is complete without the insights, or potential opportunities for improvement, as noted in the map above. Gather your team if you haven't already, and brainstorm the opportunities for improvement that you can infer from the map.

There's no single way to go about it and it all depends on the situation you have on the map. For instance, if you see that a particular touchpoint has a conversion rate far below the

rest, it’s probably something you should address.

Do more research on it, come up with a hypothesis as to why it underperforms, and try to improve it.

2. Improve messaging

Your customer’s motivation to make a purchase is a huge factor in how they decide what company to stick with. If you find that what your customers are looking for is not what you advertise, it’s a clear sign you should improve it.

3. Focus tangential interests

If you’re doing content marketing, your findings from the ‘Affinity Categories’ could be of good use. Some users can discover your product while reading articles on topics connected to it. For instance, Jessie’s journey to discovering a SaaS tool they need may have begun from reading an article on SMM.

Look up the data on affinity categories, and you can add a few more topics to your content marketing arsenal.

4. Focus on high-converting channels

While we’re on the topic of content marketing, customer journey mapping also allows for figuring out what marketing channels work best. Look at what channels are the most prevalent in the first half of the customer journey and figure out why they work best.

From then on, you have two options. You can either try to fix the channels that do not bring you enough customers or double down on the ones that already bring you the best ROI.

5. Improve on-site conversion

CJM provides some of the best analytics on the on-site actions

of your customers. This gives you an opportunity to see what exactly are your customers doing on the website before they convert and improve the whole process.

This goes far beyond just improving the touchpoints you have. You can also change your on-site conversion strategy and add new touchpoints.

For instance, you may notice that people who grab freebies or attend webinars convert much more than regular visitors. You may start including these converting assets in pop-ups, or on the bottom of your blog posts.

If the issue is that your sales reps can’t keep up with the number of customers, you may need a sales funnel software to automate some of the tasks and work with bigger loads.

Improve every business aspect with customer journey mapping

A customer journey map is a tool that helps you visualize so much data about your customers and their path to conversion. Create a map that reflects how customers really do, not what you think they’re doing, and you can see all the mistakes your business does in attracting them further to conversion. Gather the data continuously and update the map to see how customer behavior changes, especially during unusual situations like a pandemic.

But it doesn’t stop there. You can improve most business processes that involve customers taking a set of actions towards a goal with a customer journey map. All you have to do is to set another frame and go through every process in this guide again.

This way, you can improve anything from increasing viewership on your blog to reducing customer churn.

Connie Benton is a chief content writer, guest contributor, and enthusiastic blogger who helps B2B companies reach their audiences more effectively. You can find her on Twitter at @ConnieB34412379.

More about:

- *Guide: How to effectively incorporate customer journey mapping into your marketing strategy*