

6 Strategies for Improving Customer Engagement

To start improving customer engagement, you need to start thinking like a customer. That is, when you interact with an agency as a constituent, not as an employee, what works for you and what doesn't? And what would make those interactions easier or more effective?

The importance of taking that customer perspective was the foundation for [a recent GovLoop virtual event](#) in which leaders from government and industry shared strategies for improving customer engagement and the overall customer experience (CX).

Here are six takeaways:

STRATEGY #1

Know When You Want Engagement (and When You Don't)

It's often assumed that the more constituents are engaged, the better you're doing. But that's not always the case. As a rule, "the public actually doesn't want to engage with you," said Summer Xiao of the city of Houston. "It's really about providing your services, so they don't have to engage with you."

Xiao suggested three ways to approach constituent engagement:

1. **Zero engagement.** The goal here is simple, if difficult to attain: Get services working so well that people don't need to contact you. This is sometimes referred to as "engineering to zero."
2. **Public engagement.** This is where you want feedback on a particular issue, such as a capital planning proposal or a new policy that is being considered. "When that happens, you want to provide the tools and the ways and the mechanisms for the public to engage," Xiao said.
3. **Silent engagement.** Beyond public engagement, you can keep an eye on the news, social media and other public forums to get a feel for the general sentiment on public issues or services, she said.

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Endi Silva, Director of Program Development, Texas Department of Information Resources

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STRATEGY #2

Know Your Customer's Pain Points

Where are your customers getting stuck when accessing information or services? And what are the business workflows or technology behind that interaction? "It's those pain points that we need to start with when we're looking to modernize, when we're looking to meet constituents where they're at," said Endi Silva of the Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR).

This is where the concept of journey mapping comes in, Silva said. Before modernizing a service, map out the customer's experience from beginning to end. That provides a baseline against which to measure any changes in either technology or processes, she said.

STRATEGY #3

Know Your Own Pain Points

But as you consider modernizing your technology or processes to address those pain points, look for ways to address long-standing inefficiencies in your operations, said Bob Benstead of Infor, which provides cloud-based enterprise software.

This is especially important when services cut across the territory of multiple departments. By bringing in modern automation solutions, you can both improve the customer experience in the short term and save money over the long haul.

“I think it’s imperative that you tie all of these CX efforts to long-term efforts that really move the needle,” he said. “Are you reducing your costs to provide those services?”

STRATEGY #4

Understand How Different Processes Are Connected

Understanding the relationship between different processes is especially important when it comes to interdepartmental or interagency services. It’s not enough to look at the efficiency of the processes within each office or agency. You also need to review the overall process from end-to-end, said Xiao.

As an analogy, consider an online food delivery app, she suggested. That service involves three core components: the app through which people order the food, the people who prepare it, and the drivers who deliver it. To provide good service, it’s not enough to prepare high quality food or to have good drivers. You need a smooth process from beginning to end.

“I think sometimes we can get lost in the individual parts of CX,” she said. “We need that kind of 360-degree approach.”



STRATEGY #5

Get Everyone on Board

In many cases, the IT department, which provides the tools for constituent engagement, serves as the de facto CX advocate. But the real goal is to “drive your organization to really think about how we are interacting with customers...to build a customer culture from within,” Silva said.

To that end, Texas has created the Customer Experience Group (CXG), which includes various stakeholders and subject matter experts from across state agencies and divisions. The overarching goal is to ensure that the customer-first perspective informs all interactions, from external communications and outreach to public events.

DIR also has created a CX maturity model to guide the work across different agencies. The model provides an eight-step approach to improving CX, from defining your customers and creating personas to doing journey mapping, process mapping and selecting tools and other resources. “So, as we mature, we’re bringing the entire agency along with us,” Silva said.

STRATEGY #6

Start With Achievable Goals

Given that there are so many ways to drive better engagement and to improve the user’s experience, how do you know where to begin?

First, think about your organization’s larger goals, said Benstead. What are the priorities of your executive leadership, and how can you support those priorities through better CX? Then identify goals around engagement and CX that are specific and achievable.

The larger agency objectives can serve as a compass of sorts as you work on your CX strategy, Benstead said. Once everyone agrees on the overarching goals, “it’s okay to have discussions and differences, opinions on the strategy to get there,” he said.

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