



# Connecting the Dots Along Your Customers' Journeys

7 essential elements that unite expectations among employees, distributors, and customers for measurable business results

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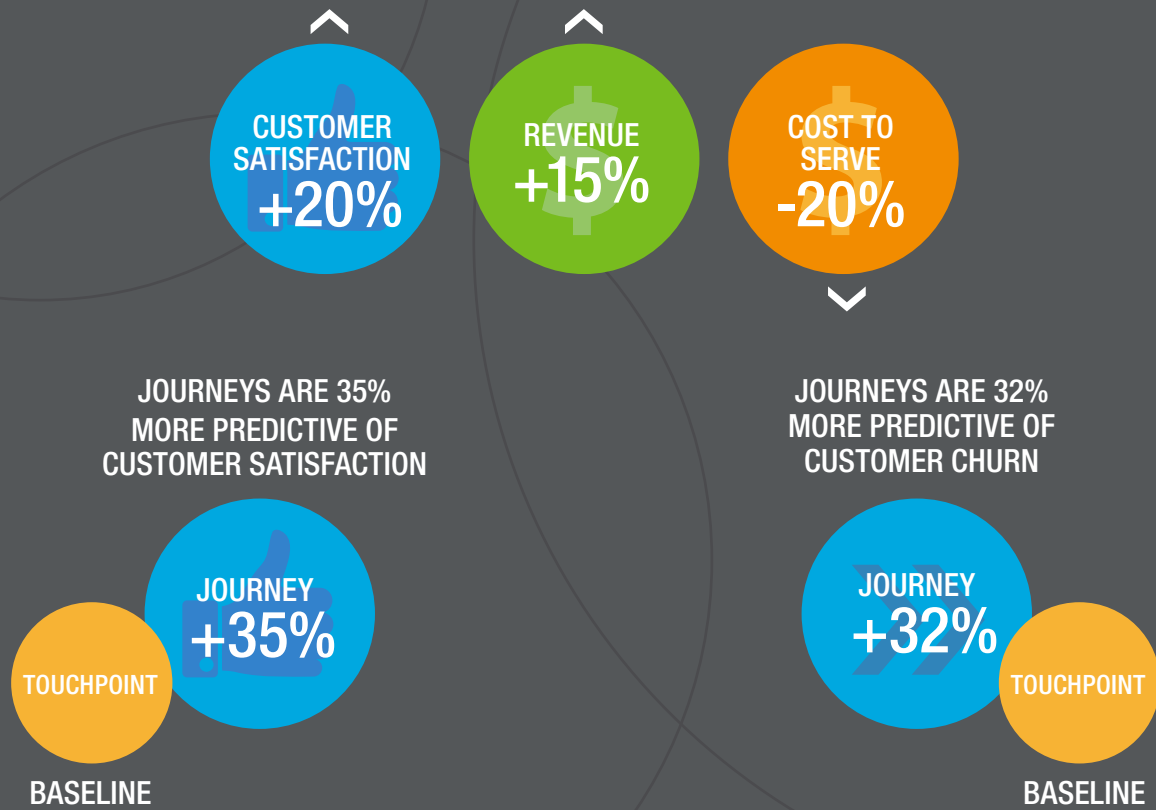
*After you've completed your customer journey map, what's next? How do you connect the dots along the end-to-end customer journey to unite expectations around your brand at every touchpoint? Strategic content programs with a holistic storyline can activate your investments in customer journey maps.*

## IDEA OVERVIEW

The true dimensions of “customer-centricity” are often elusive to organizational leadership, even after documenting the customer journey. Focusing solely on the journey of external customers without including the journeys of employees and channel partners leaves many organizations missing the financial and cultural rewards of engaging and aligning the entire ecosystem. This white paper addresses a transformative approach to “amping up” customer centricity through strategic content programs that integrate the entire ecosystem along the customer journey.

## CUSTOMER JOURNEYS ARE MORE PREDICTIVE THAN INDIVIDUAL TOUCHPOINTS.

### JOURNEY ADVANTAGES



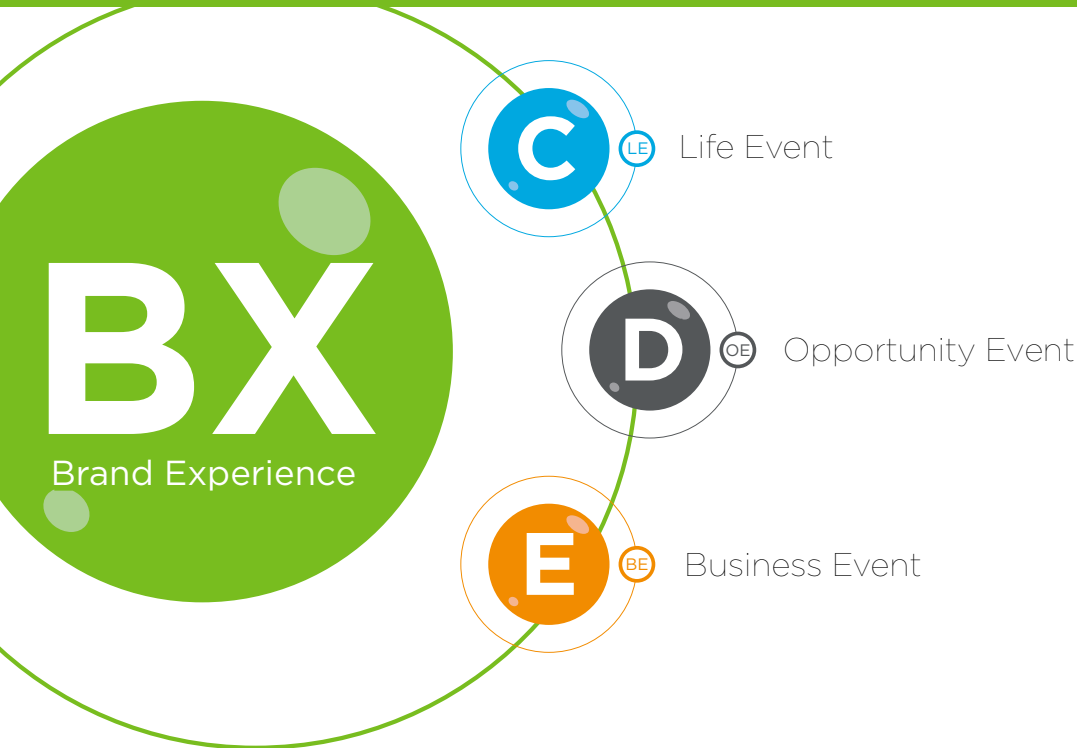
## FROM TOUCHPOINTS TO JOURNEYS

New insights along the customer journey are transforming the way organizations think about employees, distributors, and business processes. Today, organizations need to go beyond mapping the customer journey and addressing individual touchpoint experiences. They need to connect the dots between customer touchpoints to address the cumulative effects of the journey on revenues, margins, and loyalty. Organizations can gain a substantial competitive advantage by broadening perspective to a multi-channel, multi-touchpoint journey beginning when a need is triggered and resolving in a transaction and loyalty loop.

Some studies indicate that journeys are 35 percent more predictive of customer satisfaction and 32 percent more predictive of customer churn than individual touchpoints. Other research reveals that measuring satisfaction on customer journeys is 30 percent more predictive of overall

customer satisfaction than measuring happiness for each individual interaction. Research also supports direct top and bottom line financial rewards: Maximizing satisfaction with customer journeys has the potential not only to increase customer satisfaction by 20 percent but also to lift revenue by up to 15 percent while lowering the cost of serving customers by as much as 20 percent.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup><http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/when-the-customer-experience-starts-at-home>

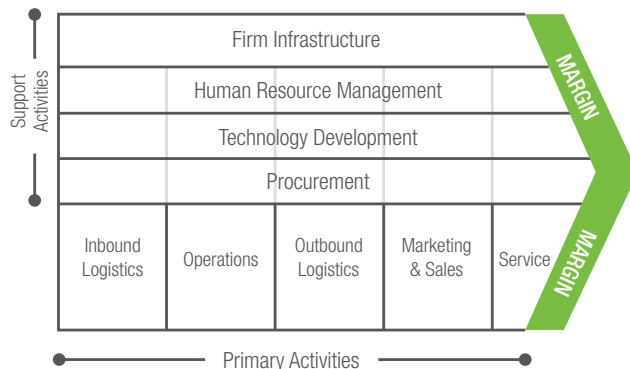


Uniting the expectations of customers, distributors, and value chain employees along the customer journey can deliver higher value and increased efficiencies.

### FROM JOURNEYS TO ECOSYSTEMS

Though customer journey mapping has become popular among customer-focused organizations, expanding the practice to an ecosystem scale has not. A Forrester study revealed that although 81% of customer experience (CX) professionals reported they were currently mapping experiences from their customers' perspectives, only 21% use customer journey maps to coordinate across colleagues, partners, and customers<sup>2</sup> (aka "the ecosystem"). Is this lag due to perceived complexities and the inability to execute against them?

Recognizing that employees and distribution partners are important influencers in the customer journey opens new pathways to improve overall customer experience. Setting mutual expectations among these groups for the ideal customer experience paves the way to trust and transactions. With expectations in place, processes, products, and technology more readily align to support them all. This dynamic leads to reduced costs, improved margins, enhanced productivity, and overall better brand alignment.



**Uniting the expectations of value chain employees along the customer journey can deliver higher value to customers as well as increased efficiencies to the company**

### Inside the Ecosystem: The Value Chain

Organizations underestimate the power of aligning employees within the value chain to enhance customer value throughout the customer journey. Instead, many leaders see the value chain only as an opportunity to wring out more and more efficiencies. With a shift in perspective, uniting the expectations of value chain employees along the customer journey can deliver more value to customers and increased efficiencies for the company.

Of the many forces affecting the integrated customer journey, the value chain plays an essential role. Michael Porter, creator of the concept, defines the value chain as the six critical functions inside a business that transform raw materials, talent, or IP, into a product or solution offering higher value for customers than the raw inputs alone. These functions include inbound logistics, operations/manufacturing, outbound logistics/channel distribution, marketing, sales, and customer service. Each of these functions ideally adds value to raw inputs that results in a product with more value than it costs to produce it, thus providing a profit margin for the business.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/when-the-customer-experience-starts-at-home>  
<sup>2</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_2Dnu6\\_nlc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2Dnu6_nlc)

$$EX_1 = EX_2$$

When customer **EX**pectations equal customer **EX**perience, brands thrive, transactions flow and loyalty surges.

## FROM ECOSYSTEMS TO CULTURAL ACTIVATION

While the customer journey is still all about the customer, it's highly influenced by the perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors of all the employees and partners within the value chain. Because they're all customers of each other.

Employees and partners travel their own unique journeys around the brand—and have their own unique brand experiences. Together, customers, employees, and partners in the value chain balance the ecosystem.

Each of these journeys starts with an event, such as a consumer life event, a distribution opportunity event, or

a business event at brand headquarters that can affect employees company-wide. For example, a consumer event is created by the expectation of a new baby, or buying a new home, an illness or a death in the family. A distributor event could be caused by the introduction of a new product or line introduced by one of its manufacturers. A business event affecting a manufacturer could be caused by changes in regulation, competition, geopolitical events, or shifting customer trends or demographics.



As an example, let's imagine a hypothetical customer, Jill. She's 27, lives in a condo with her husband, and just had a baby who's just triggered a whole new set of needs in her life... from baby food, to life insurance, to a new SUV. She's in a completely different mind set and likely interacting with brands differently than she was a few months prior.

New Product Development



Then there's John and his product development team at a life insurance company. It's his team's job to develop products for Jill that result in her satisfaction and her family's financial security. But there's a big gap between Jill realizing these new needs and buying the products that John develops.



Business Growth

That leads us to Brooke in distribution and Marcus in sales at the same insurance company. They're both faced with some pretty aggressive quarterly volume and revenue goals. Is their focus on selling insurance to meet company quotas? Or instead are their motivations more customer centric, being there for Jill along her journey to educate and facilitate, shaping her expectations? Finally, there's Holly in marketing, trying to support everyone in the value chain while setting brand expectations with Jill.

Though they're all having different experiences through different internal and external touchpoints, they're all really just seeing different perspectives of the same thing: their individual relationships with the insurance brand. The influence each of these stakeholders has on shaping the customer journey is invaluable, potentially reducing costs, improving margins, enriching transactions, and improving customer satisfaction. To achieve these synergies, the central task is to create a journey-driven culture within your value chain. A journey-driven content program can be a highly effective strategy to accomplish this task.



## BUILDING A JOURNEY-DRIVEN STRATEGIC CONTENT PROGRAM

So how is it possible to integrate all these stakeholders into a journey-driven content program that's practical and "evergreen" to accommodate growth? What kind of universal, yet relevant approach can be used to set expectations of all stakeholders at once in order to build trust, gain efficiencies, and improve margins and alignment?

Model customer-centric companies, such as Disney and Virgin, leverage the power of a common vision across highly engaged workforces to produce optimal customer journeys. These companies' operations in themselves are natural platforms for journey-driven cultures because their brand values and personalities are visible in everything they do.

But how can companies not inherently in "the experience business," permeate their ecosystems with the same level of focus and energy around the customer journey?

Forward-thinking organizations are implementing strategic and entertaining content programs to simultaneously share the vision and customer journey with internal, channel, and external stakeholders. These programs are designed to engage and unite expectations across the ecosystem and customer journey touchpoints.

Within the communications slice of the customer journey is a world of rich opportunity to execute in a way that aligns expectations across the board. How should the touchpoint experience look? What does the desired end-to-end customer journey look like and how can that vision be shared with employees so they can make it happen that way? How do conceptual benefits look in play or in visualization? How should employees act, respond, and interact? These are all questions that strategic content programs effectively address while presenting role modeling to align behaviors.

## 7 Essential Elements of a Strategic Content Program

The integrated customer journey map—including all ecosystem touchpoints—is a primary input for strategic content programs. To make the most of this asset, implement these seven essentials.

### 1 UNIVERSAL VISIBILITY

Creating a program with universal visibility allows internal, channel, and external stakeholders to access the same content. This simplifies the messaging hierarchy and breaks down silos to enhance everyone's visibility into the ideal brand experience along the customer journey. It sets expectations all-around for each touchpoint experience, and shows how touchpoint outcomes, or even a series of outcomes, should look. Through assets such as video and animation episodes, interactive graphics, and gamified content, sharing the same content strategy, 360 degrees of stakeholders can be prepared for what to expect from each other during the course of the customer journey. This approach can be extended into a platform for continuous deployment that includes governance, such as GroPartners TouchPath™360.

With universal visibility, Jill can see how everyone in the value chain is supporting her new family. It also allows John, Marcus, Holly, and Jill to share each other's journeys to see how they can best align to meet the brand vision.

### 2 ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

Organizations that have developed a customer journey map already have a good feel for trigger events, touchpoint channels, messages, objectives, and customer empathy. Some journey objectives may be ad hoc, targeting specific aspects of the customer experience, such as flagging loyalty responsible for falling revenues. Others may be proactive, using journey mapping as a systematic tool; a lens that can be used by employees as a matter of process to look at their brand from the customer perspective.

In either case, assessment data from the journey mapping exercise is imperative. But what may be unavailable is ecosystem information. This information helps assess how value chain employees perceive their roles as stewards of the customer journey. In short, it indicates their customer journey "ownership score." Taking care to augment the customer journey map with input from value chain employees and partners is an important step in developing effective content.

### 3 PERSONA-BASED APPROACH

In order to develop effective on-target content, you'll need to develop personas. Start with your top three or more archetypes in each segment, including customers, partners, and the six value chain functions. Taking an inventory of existing customer personas and adding new personas from employees and channel partners is essential to optimize the impact of the content program.

### 4 INTEGRATED STORYLINE

Engaging the entire range of stakeholders in the brand ecosystem can be a daunting task. This can be simplified by creating a unified storyline that addresses all. Storyline content should be based on real experiences along the customer journey, using enough "creative license" to make it entertaining. The storylines can depict experiences shared by everyone in the ecosystem as they together, and independently, strive to create more value for customers. Each employee, channel partner, and customer can be represented in the storyline as they interact at key touchpoints along the customer journey. To be engaging and succeed in affecting behavior, the storylines should be polished and entertaining. They are, after all, on some level competing with today's content-rich environment feeding an endless hunger for entertainment. And they represent how your brand envisions the customer journey.

A highly evolved integrated storyline might look something like a sitcom, dramedy, or documentary series. Early television shows were sponsored and created by brands to promote brand values. The Hallmark Channel, Texaco Star Theatre, and Alcoa Hour are examples of these early "branded content" programs. Today, digital channels have broken down barriers of the earlier broadcast paradigm. It's easy to see how strategic content platforms could soon evolve into more value-driven entertainment than overt brand promotion. Is this history repeating itself? Or simply emphasizing an undeniable human affinity for entertaining stories? It's a matter of perspective.



## 5 EDUTAINMENT AND THEMING

When you think of Edutainment you might think of Bill Nye the Science Guy, Blues Clues, or Dora the Explorer. But under the fluffy, kid-friendly exterior is a powerful tool to help brands harness the customer journey. Edutainment is education wrapped in an entertaining package—a storyline, set up, or issue. It provides a dimensional and engaging content environment for explaining complex or intimidating concepts and products, transforming selling into buying, and instantly aligning organizations and their customers.

Edutainment can portray situations, attitudes, inner thoughts, correct and incorrect behaviors, and emotive scenarios with more impact and memorability than other learning approaches. And Edutainment assets created with strategic content can be effective with all 360 degrees of stakeholders in the ecosystem, simplifying and conforming both messaging and delivery. Today, some brands are beginning to view Edutainment as more than just tactical execution. Instead, they see it as a true content strategy.

A strategic, rich media content program with an engaging storyline and relevant theme can fluidly connect the dots along the customer journey. Dramatic, sit-com, or docu-drama genres deliver “information with a personality,” resulting in heightened engagement and retention. Role models presented in video episodes can inspire emulation and evoke emotion. Animation and virtual reality can open minds to new ideas, and quickly communicate complex concepts. Theming can position values as a backdrop for decision-making. Done well, each Edutainment asset can be deployed among a wide range of stakeholders with equal relevance and impact.

Because visuals communicate 60,000 times faster than text, and audio/visual media engages multiple senses, rich media stories can communicate more information faster and more deeply with greater retention than, for example, typical website content, PowerPoint bullets, or pdf files. Journey-driven stories can teach by example and analogy; and engage with humor, suspense, competition, and drama. And rich media can express brand personality in a way that is most likely to be emulated and shared with others.

A study by Changing Minds found that after three days, users retained only 10-20 percent of written or spoken information. In contrast, the same users retained nearly 65 percent of visual information.<sup>3</sup> Visual learning can improve comprehension by more than 400% while anchoring learning in the roots of emotive context. That's powerful stuff.

<sup>3</sup>[http://changingminds.org/explanations/learning/active\\_learning.htm](http://changingminds.org/explanations/learning/active_learning.htm)

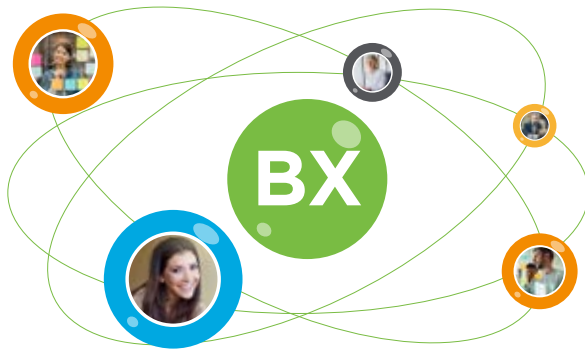
## 6 OPERATIONALIZED DEPLOYMENT

When an activity is operationalized, metrics are placed between related operations and their components like connective tissue that creates a “neural network.” With this in place, visibility of business investment performance increases. In the case of journey-driven content strategies, metrics can be placed at touchpoints and along sections of the journey, and response data sorted by stakeholder segment. These data can be used to diagnose problems and observe behaviors along the entire customer journey to fuel continuous improvement efforts and measure ROI.

For example, when GroPartners produced an edutainment-style compliance e-learning course for a leading insurance company, engagement metrics revealed the edutainment strategy significantly boosted engagement. The insurance company reported that although the mandatory completion timeframe for the training was 90 days, within 4 days of the training launch, nearly 20% of the targeted distributors had either completed or substantially engaged with the course. In the end, 99.8% of the target population completed the course. This result was far better than the company's historic data on compliance education engagement.

## 7 360 EFFICIENCIES

Edutainment assets produced within a strategic content program can often be universally relevant to internal, external, and channel partners. This results in scale efficiencies from multi-faceted appeal and relevance built into each asset. Like *The Simpsons*, or the *Cars* movie franchise, and others, there's something engaging for different levels of audiences in skillfully devised content. Connecting multiple stakeholder groups with a single storyline promotes alignment while creating scale-like efficiencies.



## HOW TO EMBARK ON A STRATEGIC CONTENT PROGRAM

Since a single customer journey is affected by all parts of an organization's value chain, it makes sense to form a task force of cross-functional representatives. This team can define the strategic content program objectives and identify partners to develop the programs. As the programs are defined, the team may transition into a permanent role over time. Engaging outsource partners who focus on customer journey strategy and execution may be beneficial to provide perspective, integration, and other expertise not available internally.

### CONCLUSION

Strategic content programs can help brands connect the dots along the end-to-end customer journey and among the brand ecosystem. There are great opportunities for education and empathy, insights and innovation, and synergies within the brand ecosystem.

Skillfully designed programs can educate the entire ecosystem in a way that relates to real life situations... with entertainment appeal. Assets can be multi-faceted to address 360 degrees of stakeholders, from employees to distributors, to consumers. Content can cover product categories, contrasting product types; brand differentiation; touchpoint interaction modeling, transaction expectations, and post purchase experiences...all in an engaging format that follows an integrated storyline. Results can range from strengthened alignment to faster adoption and increased loyalty.

What does a journey-driven strategic content program look like for your brand? Contact GroPartners Consulting for a free consultation.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg French is founder of GroPartners Consulting, a Chicago-area firm that helps brands unite expectations along the customer journey through innovative strategic content programs. He is the author of "Getting There from Here: Bridging Strategy and Execution," available on Amazon.

TouchPath™360 is a GroPartners proprietary solution that leverages customer journey investments with focused execution. Contact GroPartners Consulting for more information on the integrated customer journey and strategic content programs.

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