

Customer centricity is queen – why the global language of customer-first economy speaks volumes in Africa

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- The fusion of data-driven marketing and differentiated customer experiences is a strategic necessity in Africa.
- Data-driven marketing gains additional significance with the rise of mobile technology and internet penetration.
- Differentiated customer experiences in Africa go beyond digital interfaces, incorporating personal relationships and community ties.



Candice Thomas

In Africa's dynamic business landscape, the call for customer-centricity resonates louder than ever for startups and small to medium businesses (SMBs). As the continent embraces rapid technological advancements, the fusion of data-driven marketing initiatives and differentiated customer experiences goes beyond trends. It's a strategic necessity.

Answering the call for insights

The sheer array of cultures, languages and economic challenges across African markets call for a nuanced approach to customer-centricity. Reflecting on her own experiences in this arena, according to Candice Thomas: "Understanding the local context becomes crucial in navigating the intricacies of consumer expectations. From the bustling streets of Lagos to the tech hubs in Johannesburg, there is an increased focus on data-driven marketing and relatable customer experience, which is driving unprecedented growth. Additionally, on a continent where mobile phones are an extension of ourselves, the data floodgates are wide open."

Data-driven marketing initiatives, while vital globally, take on additional significance in the African context. With the rise of mobile devices and increasing internet access, the volume of consumer data is fast expanding, presenting an opportunity for businesses to tap into rich data, providing insights into consumer preferences and behaviour.

This has led to companies such as telco operators, including MTN enabling African businesses to embrace FinTech in empowering ways. MTN Mobile Money (MoMo) was launched so businesses and individuals, could access a secure electronic service to store funds, send and receive money, make payments and do a number of other transactions using a mobile phone. The approach has gained swift traction with more than 63 million MTN active subscribers already using the platform in some form across 16 African countries*. This type of innovation enhances financial inclusion for the unbanked and offers advanced financial services to address the rapidly evolving digital financial needs of individuals and businesses operating in Africa.

Making the data deliver

African startups and SMBs often encounter challenges related to data infrastructure, making it essential to develop innovative and cost-effective solutions. Collaborations with local tech hubs and leveraging cloud-based services can help bridge the gap, allowing businesses to seamlessly harness the power of data. For startups, this means access to developers and software engineers and the latest tech trends at a fraction of the cost. This is a business enabler that enhances customer experiences.

Streamline tech platforms spanning e-commerce, cloud computing, and entertainment services, provide users with a unified

and convenient experience. As technology continues to advance, hubs are becoming increasingly sophisticated, serving as the cornerstone for the interconnected and digital landscapes of today's world. Of course, differentiated customer experiences in Africa extend beyond digital interfaces. Balancing customer empathy such as personal relationships and community ties play a significant role in consumer decision-making. Startups and SMBs that integrate cultural nuances into their customer experience strategies are better positioned to build trust and brand loyalty.

Getting heard in the right places

In many African markets, the concept of word-of-mouth marketing remains powerfully potent. Social connectivity is a driving force and businesses that understand the importance of community engagement and word-of-mouth influence can amplify their customer-centric approach. By leveraging local influencers, community events and grassroots initiatives businesses can significantly impact brand perception. Technology, as a clear enabler of customer-centricity, plays a needle-shifting role in overcoming logistical challenges that businesses face in defined regions. It empowers businesses to do more with greater impact such as:

- **Global supply chain optimisation:** A manufacturing company could use real-time tracking and data analytics to optimise inventory levels, minimise lead times and alleviate disruptions in the supply chain. This ensures efficient delivery of products to customers across geographical locations.
- **Localised customer engagement platforms:** A retailer could develop a mobile app tailored to the specific regional needs and preferences of customers. The app could provide personalised product recommendations, real-time updates on promotions and local language support, all of which enhances customer satisfaction.
- **Predictive analytics for demand forecasting:** An e-commerce platform operating in a diverse market could make use of machine learning algorithms to analyse historical data and even predict future customer demand. This is a proactive approach which allows the business to stock inventory efficiently and ensure that products are readily available, even in challenging logistical environments.
- **Customised logistics solutions:** A transportation company could also implement route optimisation algorithms to navigate complex terrains. Additionally, the addition of internet of things (IoT) devices in vehicles allows for real-time monitoring and safer transport of vulnerable goods.
- **Remote customer support and training:** A software company may provide virtual training sessions and also remote technical support to customers in distant or difficult to reach areas. This not only ensures that customers receive timely support but also demonstrates a dedication to their needs.

Ultimately, data-driven initiatives must be wielded responsibly and differentiated customer experiences should strongly consider cultural nuances.

“SMMEs and startups that not only embrace technological innovation but also prioritise understanding and meeting customer needs within the unique African context, will find themselves at the forefront of the industry. Importantly, it is an opportunity to become deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of their diverse consumer base,” concludes Thomas.

Candice Thomas is a South African retail marketing expert and digital native based in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Candice engages with technology and managed service provider (MSP) clients to identify their marketing requirements and support them setup processes to optimise business operations.