

How to achieve seamlessness if there's no structural overhaul



By [Herb van der Raad](#)

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Global firms are looking to create seamless customer experiences for their customers, regardless of where they are, what language they speak, channel choice, or device choice. But, so far, are your customers far from convinced by your seamless experience? Here's why and what you can do about it.

The gap between customers' expectations and most business realities gets wider every day. Customers want things to be simple and expect instant gratification. For example, it was good when I could find and play any song I wanted on Spotify and press play on my phone, but it's great when a playlist is automatically queued up for me based on my mood and preferences, and all I have to do is say: "Play music." My expectations are raised, and this experience leaks into how I want banking to work, how I want to do my online shopping, and how my next business trip is planned and booked.

At the same time, creating a seamless customer experience is still very much aspirational for many organisations. Many still fall flat in their attempt to create one. Why?

The harsh reality is that most global organisations still aren't structured in a way that makes it easy to succeed. Where customers see things purely in terms of the transaction from beginning to end, many organisations are still structured to view experiences through the vertical lens of product lines, channels, and touch points.



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Customers can have a good experience—but only if they stay in the same company silo. Dare to cross the invisible company boundary lines, and a customer is sure to be disappointed as their experience becomes fractured and complex.

While marketers try to improve customer experience, the result is that any seamless experience they achieve across silos can only be on a superficial level. This typically takes the form of localised versions of “company.com” or “brand.com.”

Customer experience at the level that *really counts* — at the point of transaction or value exchange — remains locked in the existing product or market silos where budget and decision-making powers reside.

A stepped process of change

So what's a marketer to do? Customer experience itself may be high on the executive wish list, but that doesn't mean that every CEO will agree to ripping apart and rebuilding the entire organisation to become completely (culturally and structurally) customer-centric.

But there are ways forward. There are ways to achieve a far greater level of seamless experience across structurally entrenched silos, without having to raze company structures to the ground.

One such innovation is the introduction and increasing mandate of chief customer officers and customer journey managers —senior people “with teeth” in the organisation charged with looking at how customers interact across channels, product lines, and internal organisational constructs. They are there to not just shape, but drive solutions that answer the questions “how should this work for the customer” and “how do we make this simpler, more seamless, and more personally relevant?”

Additionally, digital platform vendors are rapidly innovating the features and the fundamental architecture of their solutions to better enable a horizontal, customer experience-centred view.

It's now possible to have a single point for managing content, tracking behaviours, developing insights, and generating profiles, independent of channel.

Got both of those? Still not truly seamless? There's more to do yet.

It's the *introduction* of these two new capabilities that needs to be handled carefully, and this is where most attempts to create a truly seamless customer experience can come undone.

This is, counter-intuitively, where it's wise to bring in new people and platforms with as *little* initial disruption as possible to existing silos.

No big bang, no breaking down of silos. Initially, you install a central platform that allows creative freedom for the multiple parts of the business to craft, deliver, and manipulate their own touch points — much as would be the status quo.

The tipping point for change is actually now. With the right central roles in place and the other underlying platform capabilities, you now have the means to start measuring behaviours and building up insight across the business. Getting insight into the hands of centrally based experience or journey managers is singularly the most powerful asset to then start challenging and driving change across organisational boundaries and geographies and executing at scale.

Just as Spotify used my information to improve my experience and drive up my expectations, so insights can be served up as services to different channel or touch point owners — as information provided by a central team that helps them improve their own touch points first, so their expectations for customers increase. The more this happens, the stronger the analytics and insight become; insight drives change, which, in turn, drives deeper insight.

It's a stepped process of change, with interim states designed for flexibility and learning. Product or channel owners remain liberated to drive experience improvement in their own part of the journey. They are aided with valuable insights to do this, without having to build themselves all the sophisticated capabilities they need.

The greater the scale and adoption, the stronger the insight at the "centre." Journey managers then know exactly what to change to make the *overall* customer experience better. This is the first foundational capability to then facilitate setting centrally defined "standards," making organisational changes and implementing cross-channel solutions based on fact and clear business logic.

In summary, for those organisations that are willing to make the big, painful structural shifts to deliver truly integrated and seamless customer experience, the technology is there, ready and waiting. But for those companies, where these major changes are some way off, the road ahead isn't necessarily blocked.

Establishing the right central capability can build up enough insight, clarity, and confidence to help "oil the cogs." This, in turn, makes the structural shift possible, and catalyses the move towards genuinely great customer experiences.

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