



DATA CENTER

Frontier

SPECIAL REPORT

The Importance of Digital Customer Experience (DCX)



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The Importance of Digital Customer Experience (DCX)

The Digital Customer Experience (DCX) is an all-encompassing term for every interaction a customer has with a business via its digital presence. In today's business environment, this extends beyond a traditional website or email. Digital marketing campaigns have transformed how customers perceive and engage with new and existing brands and, in some cases, have even challenged brand loyalties.

DCX has revolutionized customer interactions through chatbots, websites, and social media. While a robust website was once the hallmark of a positive DCX presence, customers now frequently expect extensive personalization options on websites, secure access to account information, and, when appropriate, dedicated mobile apps for interacting with a business.

The Changing Customer Expectation

Jaxon Lang, president and CEO of AFL — a global leader in providing fiber optic solutions, engineering expertise, and integrated services to various industries, including the data center market — offers the perspective that customer expectations in the data center industry continue to evolve. This evolution is driven by the customer's demand for speed, density, and technology leadership. Lang underscores the importance of innovation for maintaining a competitive edge while also acknowledging the challenges posed by a standards-based environment that can limit differentiation opportunities.

Statistics from McKinsey & Company reinforce a growing focus on customer-centricity. They suggest that enhancing customer experience can result in lower customer turnover and increased win rates.



The data center industry is transforming, driven by the increased need for advanced infrastructure for artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in the hyperscale segment. Lang identifies hyperscalers as key influencers in creating demand for next-generation technologies and setting industry standards. The actions of these hyperscalers ripple across various aspects of the data center industry, such as colocation facilities and IT support ecosystems.

Lang stressed the importance for vendors like AFL in the data center industry to continuously innovate and adapt their offerings and service models to meet and exceed their customers' evolving expectations. He also highlighted AFL's approach to customer experience, which involves leveraging cutting-edge technology, expanding regional manufacturing capabilities for quicker response times, and focusing on increased sustainability. By emphasizing AFL's commitment to evolving service models as customer needs change, Lang underscored the ongoing journey towards improving customer experience.

Lang's vision for AFL's future aligns with the broader industry perspective, which has shifted discernibly toward favoring a more personalized, efficient, and interconnected customer experience.

The Difference Between DCX and Traditional Customer Interaction

The transition to a successful DCX model for a business does not mean abandoning existing customer relationship models and techniques. Rather, it suggests updating them to align with how vendors and customers want to engage in the most efficient manner possible.

BENEFITS TO THE CUSTOMER

The key differences and benefits of the DCX approach lie in the methods of interaction between the customer and the business. Primary interactions now mostly occur digitally, such as through email, website, social media, or mobile applications. Visiting a physical location or making phone calls are no longer the preferred choices. Customers expect 24/7 access to their vendors, and technology enables this. 24/7 access can be easily provided, even if the hours for direct human interaction via chat or email remain limited.



Extended hours of online operations allow many companies to reach a wider audience. Although global access may not be a specific requirement, the internet never sleeps, significantly increasing customer accessibility in the DCX world. As a result, customers

now have better access to information, can place orders, and track shipments with improved availability from their vendors.

BENEFITS TO THE BUSINESS

Businesses often emphasize the importance of the information they collect. By adopting an advanced DCX model, companies can use customer data to enhance their experience. Leveraging tools like big data, analytics, digital metrics, chatbots, and other automated services — along with precise metrics — can boost engagement levels and conversion rates. Providing customers with better access to business information can improve their overall customer experience and satisfaction.

It is important to note that the primary purpose of the customer experience does not change when transitioning to DCX. The aim is still to satisfy and retain customers. Migrating to DCX simply offers greater efficiencies in digital innovation. It provides additional opportunities to better understand customer needs and demands, such as increased customer engagement and improved analytics on the customer journey.

Improving customer engagement can give a business a competitive edge, leading to improved customer loyalty and a stronger brand reputation. Ultimately, better customer interaction, improved brand reputation, and increased customer loyalty all contribute to higher customer satisfaction and favorable purchasing decisions.

Businesses must develop systems and capabilities that support their customers. They should also establish methods to measure their performance against these DCX systems and leverage feedback to continuously enhance their customer interactions to “exceed our customers’ expectations on an ongoing basis,” as stated by Lang.



DCX addresses customer expectations

DCX is becoming increasingly important in the data center space. Data centers are evolving from traditional IT and hosting facilities to offer more integrated and service-oriented solutions, following the lead of hyperscalers. The impact of DCX can be significant for both data center operators and their customers, as these data centers become mission-critical business partners rather than mere hosting facilities. Let's examine the top five considerations for DCX and data centers:

1. Customer Interaction:

Virtualized Tours, Demonstrations, and Presentations: The latest generation of data centers can offer their customers a wide variety of capabilities. Providing a virtualized look at what the data center can do, along with virtual demonstrations and presentations, allows the customer to get a better feel for the data center's capabilities. Both hosted and self-guided tours can offer these capabilities, catering to the customer's preferred level of guidance and enabling them to focus on the capabilities that interest them the most. New customers can become familiar with the data center's potential, and existing customers

can be introduced to previously unused services, new capabilities, and an expanded range of data center services.

Marketing: Leveraging customer analytics from individual clients and the broader industry can enable data center operators to provide more targeted solutions to their customers. By incorporating additional, refined, and optimized marketing programs, marketing departments can receive enhanced feedback on the services offered to both existing and potential customers.

Self-Service Portal: Enabling customers to oversee their own services and resources, as well as monitor the performance of their contracted services, improves self-service capabilities and reduces the need for costly interactions with data center staff. Self-service portals have been proven to enhance customer satisfaction by granting clients control over their operations.

Automating Support: Self-service portals provide customers with better options for managing their data center investment. Virtualized demonstrations open up new avenues of operations for the customers. Automated support for those services completes a trifecta that gives customers complete control over their operations in the data center.



This requires minimal interaction with data center staff and enhances control over the investment in data center services.

Customized Services: Through the utilization of DCX's range of digital solutions, we can craft personalized options for new and existing customers that align with their specific needs and usage data. Tailored solutions benefit both the business and the customer and can also improve the perception that the data center is a partner in the customer's business.

Personalization: The foundation of personalized service offerings is the utilization of data insights. Data centers can leverage these insights to justify the services being offered, ultimately enhancing the customer experience. This may include features such as customized dashboards for different customer roles and comprehensive self-service portals, bringing the data center's available services to the user's attention.

Feedback: DCX platforms simplify the process of gathering customer feedback, encouraging interaction with customers and fine-tuning both data center operations and customer interactions.

2. Operations:

Task Automation: Automation tools, as an extension of self-service portals, can manage maintenance tasks, allocate resources, and handle capacity management. They operate based on conditions set by human operators to define data center operations parameters. The more functions that can be automated, the fewer tasks require direct human intervention. This maximizes the availability of scarce IT human resources for tasks focused on planning and operational improvements, rather than ongoing maintenance and support.

Business Process Integration: Integrating digital customer experience solutions, such as SAP, Peoplesoft, CRM, ERP, HR, and Accounting, improves customer workflow and provides tighter integration than external solutions not tailored to work with the provided DCX.

Proactive Monitoring: Providing real-time analytics, clear reporting on infrastructure performance, and predictive analytics helps guarantee high service availability and better identify potential problem areas.





Operating at Scale: Given the widespread availability of on-demand services and capacity options, providing customers with an interface that customizes their service requirements according to their operational needs enables more cost-effective utilization of the data center resources.

3. Security & Regulatory Compliance:

Regulatory Compliance: Whether it's GDPR, HIPAA, or any other regulatory compliance issue, regulatory compliance checks and the ability to explore industry-related issues are in-demand options for DCX interfaces.

Enhanced Security: As multi-factor authentication becomes the standard for site access, customers need to be able to add these services as necessary. This is especially important for customers who offer public-facing services, and managing these services can be a crucial aspect of DCX interfaces.

Transparency: Transparency is essential for building trust and satisfaction with customers. Data Center DCX systems should prioritize this by giving customers appropriate visibility into their operations.

A comprehensive DCX interface for data centers offers clear advantages, especially for colocation data center operators who are likely to provide a range of services to their customers. Establishing a strong relationship with the customer increases the likelihood of retaining them and offering additional services as they grow. With the growth of hybrid IT, workload repatriation, and dedicated AI services, data center operators who offer the most integrated customer experience will likely stand out as key differentiators in the future.

How can the transformation of the customer experience align with the goals of the customer's digital transformation?

Evaluating the deployment of a complete DCX can reveal to most businesses that they have room for improvement. To ensure a successful process, it is important to prioritize consistency through operational excellence. This journey evolves alongside the growth of the business and its customers, particularly with the integration of more AI-driven processes in the customer service experience.

It is no secret what needs to be done to prepare for the eventual integration of AI. The first step is to

standardize the process to ensure that the data is clean and understandable, and that the performance goals are well-defined before beginning to automate the process and apply AI learning.

As highlighted by Jaxon Lang, continuous improvement is a core principle for AFL. AFL focuses on leveraging the modernization of tools to continually advance its customer support services. Like any successful company, AFL must prioritize a user-friendly and comprehensive DCX to meet evolving customer expectations. AFL can point to the work they have done on their customer portal not simply as a first step, but as a testament to their commitment to continuously improve their customer's digital experience.

Is customer experience the last frontier in vendor differentiation?

Many technologies are rapidly advancing, as evidenced by the significant impact of AI across various industries. In the data center sector, DCX is poised to play a crucial role in retaining and attracting business.

The average customer now expects closer integration with providers of major business services, such as data centers. Providing a comprehensive DCX can be a critical differentiator within the industry. On the flip side, the value of the data a vendor can glean from their DCX solution is significant.

Analyzing this data allows a business to target and personalize its services more effectively. Vendors offering dedicated customer service portals can better define and meet the needs and demands of their customer base. It is important to note that a well-designed DCX strategy often forms the foundation for building a stronger brand reputation and visibility. The DCX experience is an outward-facing tool in your customer management toolbox, and one that customers find useful and integral to their operations, increasing the demand for your business solutions.

DCX is not the only factor customers consider, but it is becoming increasingly significant. Whether it involves providing transparency in vendor processes, 24/7 information availability, streamlined ordering, automated operations, or simply fostering a stronger customer-vendor relationship, a high-quality DCX solution can be a deciding factor in customer purchasing decisions. A consistent focus on innovation and adaptation to evolving market conditions and industry needs should be evident in your commitment to customer relationships.