

Differentiate Your Customer Experience With Signature Moments

Localizing Customer Experiences, Part 3

by Ryan Hart
September 11, 2015

Why Read This Report

Customer experience (CX) can be thought of as the series of interactions a customer has along a given journey with a brand. The holistic brand experience looks at the sum of these interactions; in contrast, each interaction is made up of a series of microinteractions. Firms often overlook microinteractions, but this is a mistake: The details are precisely where companies have opportunities to localize and differentiate their customer experiences. These small-scale opportunities, when carefully tied back to the brand, give birth to what Forrester calls “signature moments.” This report explores the what, how, and where of signature moments and how CX professionals can carefully design them and infuse them into broader customer journeys to delight and resonate with local customers.

Key Takeaways

Break Down Customer Journeys Into A Series Of Interactions And Microinteractions

Customer journeys consist of a series of microinteractions that hide huge opportunities to differentiate and localize the brand experience.

Turn Microinteractions Into Big Signature Moments

Firms can turn well-planned, well-executed microinteractions into signature moments that pack big value and brand experience mojo, wowing customers for the long term.

Assess The Impact Of Signature Moments To Move From Clever Idea To Reality

Leverage Forrester’s impact assessment framework to appraise the quality of a signature moment and win support before it goes live.

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Forrester spoke with a number of vendor and user organizations in preparing this report.

Related Research Documents

[Augment Customer Journey Work With Expectation Mapping](#)

[Brief: Use An Ethnographic Approach To Enrich Personas For Local Markets](#)

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Meticulously Plan And Design Your Customer Experiences

More often than not, customer journeys are a haphazard byproduct of a company's limited resources; they focus too little on customer impact and may be simply a combination of internal factors mashed together and served up as CX. This happens because most firms still approach product and service design from the inside out — an approach that fails to consider what the customer wants and expects from the experience. The result is often a disconnected series of interactions that leave the customer confused or frustrated. In contrast, companies that do recognize the business imperatives around CX improvement realize that creating high-quality customer experiences means leaving nothing to chance. Matt Watkinson, author of *The Ten Principles Behind Great Customer Experience*, summarizes it best: "To create consistent, smooth customer journeys, every interaction needs to be considered, planned, and designed. There is no detail that is too small to consider."¹

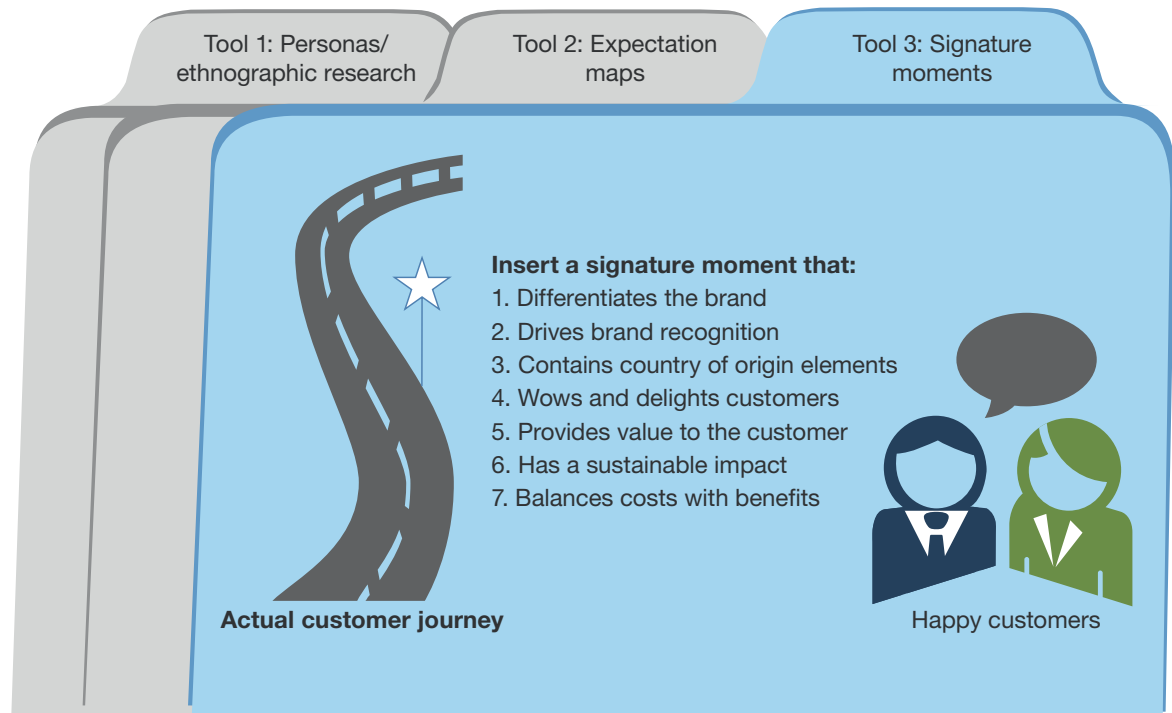
Microinteractions Must Resonate With Your Customers' Expectations

CX pros can design products and services that resonate with customers by adopting design thinking, which puts the customer's expectations at the core and then goes outward, experimenting creatively toward a solution (see Figure 1). Break down customer journeys into a series of interactions and further into microinteractions and you'll find targeted, high-impact, but often overlooked opportunities to wow customers, promote the brand, and deliver lasting impact. CX pros should realize that:

- › **Microinteractions must align with the brand.** Every so often, customers return to their hotel rooms to find a piece of inexpensive chocolate on their pillow or receive some mints with the bill at a restaurant. While both demonstrate attention to detail, they fail to capitalize on the ambiance of the situation, making it more a box-ticking exercise than brand alignment. UBS takes the idea but does it one better, catering to the affluent tastes of its private banking clientele by serving fine Swiss chocolates at every meeting. Not only does this instill a small feeling of luxury, it ties back to UBS's 150-year-old heritage as a Swiss bank.
- › **Playful brand messaging can delight customers.** For those fortunate enough to have flown Virgin Atlantic business class, the cute airplane-shaped salt and pepper shakers may have caught your attention. For those people who may have inadvertently deplaned without remembering to return them, the airline has stamped a tongue-in-cheek message into the base of the shakers: "Pinched from Virgin Atlantic" (see Figure 2). The colorful language aligns well with Virgin's playful brand messaging and provides lasting customer impact — you'll always remember where you got them. There's even a resale market on eBay.

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FIGURE 1 Customer Experience Localization Strategy Files

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FIGURE 2 “Pinched From Virgin Atlantic” Salt And Pepper Shakers

Source: Virgin

Turn Microinteractions Into Signature Moments

Microinteractions punch above their weight: They're small in size but can have a big impact. By taking a granular look at the microinteractions of a typical customer journey, CX pros can uncover opportunities for their companies to create high-impact signature moments. Forrester defines signature moments as:

Memorably crafted and branded microinteractions that deliver delight and value to customers in an often subtle yet definitively recognizable way.

Signature moments are valuable because they:

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- › **Can live beyond the brand.** Heavily branded signature moments abound in the online world. Google's clever doodles, Microsoft's Start button, and Facebook's iconic Like button all demonstrate how even the smallest details embedded in the user interface can become far more than ever intended, providing long-term brand equity. Twitter's fail whale is another example of a signature moment that identifies a microinteraction with the brand (see Figure 3). Signature moments can also come in the form of actions, such as Tinder's swipe-right gesture — which has worked its way into the modern lexicon as a way to express interest.²
- › **Appeal to all of the senses.** Signature moments don't have to be visual; auditory and olfactory cues also have long-term impact. Few will forget AOL's famous "You've got mail" audible email notice. SK Telecom appeals to the ear by playing a signature ring tone whenever you dial one of its customers in South Korea. And Ethicon Endo-Surgery generators play a distinctive melody to indicate to doctors and nurses that a surgical procedure is complete.³ Hotels, offices, and retailers appeal to the sense of smell to create a welcoming customer experience; for example, Abercrombie & Fitch diffuses its trademark scent throughout its stores.

FIGURE 3 Twitter's Fail Whale Notifies Users When The Service Is Overloaded

Source: Twitter

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Go Local With Signature Moments To Be More Memorable And Have Even Greater Impact

Carefully crafted, well-thought-out signature moments not only bolster brand identity, they also offer the opportunity for the brand to connect with the local culture of the city or country in which it offers the product or service. These localized connections go a long way toward appealing to indigenous customers, demonstrating awareness of the local culture or customs while marketing to familiar preferences. For example:

- › **Japan's MK Taxi goes above and beyond to cater to customers.** Japan is well-known for its high standard of customer service. However, MK Taxi of Kyoto takes it to the next level by ensuring that drivers always greet customers outside of the taxi, help them with any luggage, and meet them at their door with an umbrella if it so much as drizzles (see Figure 4).
- › **KLM goes local with Delft Blue houses for business-class drinkers.** Genever, or Dutch gin, is the national drink of the Netherlands; every business class passenger on a KLM flight receives genever in a miniature replica of a Dutch house.⁴ The collectible gift, which serves as a remembrance of the KLM experience, is not only a tradition dating back to the 1950s, but also a novel signature moment that ties in the rich heritage of KLM in the Netherlands. Frequent flyers often have a shelf full of the little houses, which change every year to model a different home (see Figure 5).
- › **Air New Zealand teams up with the All Blacks for its latest safety video.** Air New Zealand has a tradition of releasing epic, cinematic safety videos, and its latest video is no exception. It features New Zealand's national rugby team, the All Blacks, lampooning the Columbia Pictures film "Men in Black."⁵ In what has become a signature moment of the Air New Zealand flight experience, the newest video ties in key references to the country's beloved game of rugby while keeping it light and engaging, thus encouraging travelers to tune into this important safety announcement (see Figure 6).
- › **Uber and Twitter celebrate Singapore's big anniversary with branded icons.** Singapore recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with grand parades, fireworks, and air shows. Uber celebrated the event in its own way: by placing Singaporean flags on all of available Uber cars travelling around in its app space (see Figure 7). Twitter launched a special icon as well, placing a small Singaporean flag or "SG50" logo next to tweets with the hashtag #Singapore or #SG50 over the National Day weekend.

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FIGURE 4 MK Taxi Provides Door-To-Door Umbrella Service As Its Signature Moment



Source: <http://tsubakihinme.blog99.fc2.com/blog-entry-1800.html>

FIGURE 5 KLM Gives Gin-Filled Delft Blue Dutch Houses To Business Class Passengers



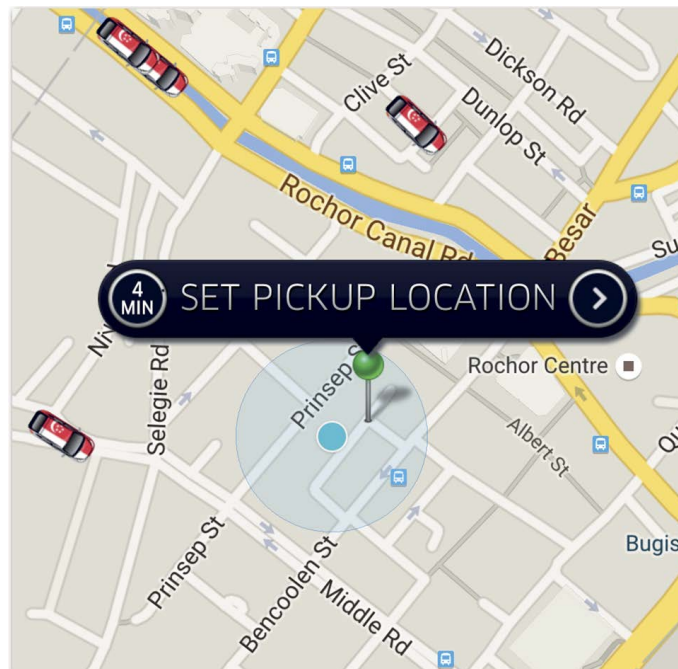
Source: KLM

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FIGURE 6 Air New Zealand Uses The All Blacks Rugby Team To Promote Air Safety

Source: Air New Zealand

FIGURE 7 Uber Adorns Its Cars With The Singaporean Flag To Celebrate The Country's 50th Anniversary

Source: Mashable

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Evaluate Signature Moment Quality With An Impact Assessment

Hours of collaborative ideation and design later, you may have several brilliant ideas for signature moments that you're giddy to roll out to your focus groups to get customer feedback. Before jumping at the chance to put the idea in front of customers, it's good practice to assess the overall quality of the signature moment. The following questions provide a good barometer to assess the quality of the idea and the impact it will have on your customers; assess them as high, medium, or low (see Figure 8). The higher the total score, the greater positive impact the interaction will have on customers.

- › **Is the signature moment differentiating?** Assess whether the proposed microinteraction is like a literal signature: unique to your company and not easily replicated by others in the market. Appraise whether there is any chance that customers might confuse it with another brand, product, or service. No one will think that the Virgin salt shakers (high) came from any other brand, whereas Starwood's local flavor recipes (low) could come from any hotel (see Figure 9).
- › **Does the signature moment identify with the brand?** Check that the microinteraction contains elements of your brand identity or messaging that customers can easily link back to your company. Customers easily recognize SK Telecom by its ring tone (high), but the warm scented towels on a Singapore Airlines flight may or may not spark an immediate brand association (medium).
- › **Does the signature moment connect with its origin?** Assess whether the signature moment expresses any information about where the company is from, where the product was made, or the local market in which it is sold. If not, rethink how it might encapsulate local elements. KLM's Delft Blue houses absolutely connect the experience to the Netherlands (high), whereas Facebook's "Like" button has no recognizable connection with the US (low).
- › **Does the signature moment deliver a "wow" experience?** Think about how people would rate the level of surprise or excitement the interaction elicits. Question whether the signature moment delivers a uniquely positive emotion or not. Aim for "Wow, this company really understands me!" or "Wow, I've never seen anything like this before." For example, AOL set the bar high with its delightful notification that "You've got mail," while Microsoft's Start button fails to elicit a similar reaction (low).
- › **Does the signature moment deliver high customer value?** Evaluate the level of value that the signature moment offers the customer. Ask yourself if it's something the customer will keep and remember or if it's something that they will quickly discard. Air New Zealand demonstrates its commitment to passenger safety by investing in the production of a very engaging safety video (high); on the other hand, it's very difficult to ascertain what value the customer gets when they enter a scented Abercrombie & Fitch store (low).
- › **Does the impact of the signature moment live on?** Ideally, a signature moment is something so awesome that it propels a customer to share the experience on social media or tell friends or family about it. Consider whether the experience will be memorable for the customer after a week,

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a month, or even a year. The longer a positive experience stays with a customer, the better. KLM's Delft Blue houses and Virgin's salt and pepper shakers are something people hold onto to cherish the experience (high), whereas customers at UBS rarely keep any uneaten chocolates (low).

- › **How much will it cost?** As with every project, the decision whether to implement an idea or not often depends on cost. It's important to factor in the initial cost to create or develop a signature moment and the ongoing cost to deliver the experience consistently every time. Adapt the three criteria (low, medium, and high) to the parameters of the given budget to compare costs with the benefit forecast.

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FIGURE 8 Forrester's Signature Moment Impact Assessment

Criterion	Question	Impact of the signature moment (choose one)	Point scale	Score
Differentiation	Is the microinteraction like a literal signature, unique to your company and not easily replicated by others in the market?	High: Is unique; unlike anything seen in the market. Medium: Some similarities exist in the market; not entirely unique. Low: Elements of this are seen elsewhere; not unique.	High = 3 points Medium = 2 points Low = 1 point	
Brand recognition	Does the microinteraction contain elements of your brand identity or messaging that customers can easily link back to your company?	High: Clearly identifies with the country of origin or market sold. Medium: Vaguely identifies with the place of origin without additional branding or messaging. Low: Cannot be linked back to the country of origin or market sold.		
Identity of origin	Does the signature moment express information about where the company is from, where the product is made, or the local market?	High: Clearly identifies with the country of origin or market sold. Medium: Vaguely identifies with the place of origin without additional branding or messaging. Low: Cannot be linked back to the country of origin or market sold.		
Customer wow factor	Does the signature moment deliver a uniquely positive emotion?	High: Engenders a unique reaction of delight or surprise. Medium: Engenders a reaction of something experienced before. Low: Fails to generate any notable reaction.		
Customer value	Is the signature moment something that the customer will treasure, or something they will disregard as worthless?	High: Provides clear value to the customer's well-being or happiness. Medium: Provides some or questionable value to the customer. Low: Provides little or no value to the customer.		
Sustained impact	Will the experience be memorable for the customer in a week, a month, or even a year?	High: Memorable; something the customer wants to keep long-term. Medium: Somewhat memorable; customer may keep or discard. Low: Not memorable; customer soon discards or forgets.		
Total score		(Add up the six criteria scores. The higher the total score, the higher the quality of the microinteraction.)	Total score =	

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FIGURE 9 Example Assessment Of Signature Moments Introduced In This Report

Signature moment	Company	Assessment criteria					
		Brand differentiation	Brand recognition	Country of origin elements	Customer impact: wow factor	Customer impact: value to customer	Sustainability of impact
Scented retail experience	Abercrombie & Fitch	Medium	High	Low	Medium	Low	Medium
All Blacks safety video	Air New Zealand	High	Medium	High	High	High	High
"You've got mail"	AOL	High	High	Low	High	Medium	High
Like button	Facebook	High	High	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Delft Blue miniatures	KLM	High	High	High	Medium	Low	High
Start button	Microsoft	High	High	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Door-to-door service	MK Taxi Kyoto	Medium	High	High	Medium	High	Medium
Scented hot towels	Singapore Airlines	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Low
Ring tone	SK Telecom	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Low
Local-flavor recipes	Starwood	Low	Low	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Swipe right to like	Tinder	High	High	Low	Medium	Medium	Low
Fail Whale	Twitter	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low
Singapore flag-branded cars on app	Uber	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Low
Swiss chocolates served during each meeting	UBS	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Low
"Pinched from Virgin Atlantic" salt and pepper shakers	Virgin Atlantic	High	High	Medium	High	Low	High
Google Doodles	Google	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Low

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Recommendations

Experiment With Signature Moments To Win Hearts And Wallets

Equipped with an awareness of what signature moments are and how firms can use them to differentiate and localize products and services around the world, we recommend that CX pros:

- › **Go granular with journey maps to identify what interactions are ripe for improvement.** It's good practice to revisit your journey maps to keep them current and relevant. Next time, spend more time flushing out the details of interactions along the journey to identify which microinteractions are ripe to be localized and branded as a signature moment.
- › **Assess the impact of prospective signature moments before rolling them out.** Appraise the quality of your signature moments before going live with them. Socialize the idea with key stakeholders in the company to gauge their reaction and get their feedback.
- › **Experiment with localized signature moments to get a feel for placement.** Holidays and special events provide the perfect opportunity to test and refine your signature moment strategy. Experiment with different media, channels, and delivery methods to fine-tune a more sustainable microinteraction that resonates with your local customers. Adopt an iterative approach to dial in the right microexperience.
- › **Consider whether it's easier to apologize than ask for permission.** For designers, it might be easier to create a signature moments online or buried somewhere in the customer journey — much like an Easter egg — than it would be to get approval for developing a signature moment in the first place. If the outcome of your efforts passes the impact assessment with a “high,” then apologizing might be the right choice.⁶

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Endnotes

- ¹ Source: Matt Watkinson, *The Ten Principles Behind Great Customer Experiences*, FT Press, 2013.
- ² A phrase (verb) used to describe your acceptance of something. The term was originally a reference to the Tinder app. On Tinder, swiping right means you approve of a male/female after seeing a few pictures and a short bio. "Swipe right" can be used anytime you make a good choice or approve of something. Source: Urban Dictionary (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Swipe+right>).
- ³ Source: "Cutting through surgery room noise," *Smart Design* (<http://smartdesignworldwide.com/work/ethicon-endo-surgery-generator/>).
- ⁴ The Delft Blue miniature houses are replicas of actual homes in the Netherlands. A new model comes out each year to keep the experience fresh and the items collectible. Source: "KLM's Solid Real Estate," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 2008 (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB120973966710362859>).
- ⁵ Air New Zealand was one of the pioneers of the alternative in-flight safety video and has garnered particular success with its Hobbit-themed versions. Previous Hobbit-themed videos got more than 12 million views on YouTube. Other videos have included Bear Grylls, the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team, and rap artist Snoop Dogg. Source: Jolyon Attwooll, "Air New Zealand launches 'epic' new hobbit safety video," *Travel*, October 23, 2014 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/australiaandpacific/newzealand/11181643/Air-New-Zealand-launches-epic-new-hobbit-safety-video.html>).
- ⁶ Source: Dan Saffer, *Microinteractions: Full Color Edition: Designing With Details*, O'Reilly Media, 2013.

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