Building Customer Loyalty Through Great Reporting

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Introduction

Picture this: You're responsible for a key customer account. This particular customer has decided not to renew their contract because they don't value the information and reports you provide them. The data might be valuable; however, they aren't able to use it effectively. They feel that they were promised your expertise, but still have to figure out conclusions on their own. Aside from the information you share, everything else you provide — customer service, products, and account management — are high quality, but your reports make you a commodity. So now what?

As a business leader, you know that keeping customers happy is key to retaining their loyalty. Customer retention is paramount on so many fronts. It impacts the cost of sales, reputation, stock price, you name it. Serving existing customers is the main focus of most businesses. The facts about the value of loyalty, retention and renewals are well known.

"[IT research firm] Gartner says 80% of a company's future profits come from 20% of its existing customers."
Sales Force [1]

"According to [management consulting firm] Bain and Co., a 5% increase
in customer retention can increase a company's profitability by 75%."
Forbes [2]

If you've ever been in this position of potentially losing a customer or fearing you might in the near future, then keep reading. If your competition has upped their reporting game and is stealing your customers, then speed read.

In this ebook, we cover practical methods to build and maintain customer loyalty by improving how you approach the unsung hero of your service: providing data and information to customers. We call this often overlooked part of serving your customers the information experience™. We will explore how you can shift your reporting to a people-first mentality and deliver a top-notch information experience that keeps customers satisfied and thirsty for more.

[1] Marsh, Bob. "4 Musts for Serious Customer Success in 2015." Salesforce. 16 Jan. 2015. Web. 9 Aug. 2015. < https://www.salesforce.com/blog/2015/01/4-musts-serious-customer-success-2015-gp.html >
[2] Lawrence, Alex. "Five Customer Retention Tips for Entrepreneurs." Forbes. 1 Nov. 2012. Web. 9 Aug. 2015. < http://www.forbes.com/sites/alexlawrence/2012/11/01/five-customer-retention-tips-for-entrepreneurs/ >
[3] "Loyalty: Is It Really Working For You?" Forbes. 1 Dec. 2011. 21 Aug. 2015. < http://www.forbes.com/sites/mckinsey/2011/12/01/loyalty-is-it-really-working-for-you />

Establish the Loyalty Connection

Maintaining customer loyalty is at the core of your business strategy. In fact, US companies spend $50 billion a year on loyalty programs [3]. It's very evident that customer satisfaction leads to renewals and repeat purchasing, which lead to loyalty, referrals, references and, ultimately, more revenue. So what makes up the positive customer experience?

Let's circle back to that big customer you're on the cusp of losing. Put yourself in the shoes of that customer and ask yourself what are all the touchpoints they have with the company? Like the table indicates, touchpoints can be verbal or nonverbal — anything from your website, online reviews, online chat or customer support reps and salespeople, to live demos, apps or portals.

Before purchase	During purchase	After purchase
Social Media	Store or office	Billing
Ratings and reviews	Website	Tansactional emails
Testimonials	Catalog	Marketing emails
Word of mouth	Promotions	Service and support teams
Community involvement	Staff or sales team	Online help center
Advertising	Phone system	Follow ups
Marketing/PR	Point of sale	Thank you cards

Reporting!!!

From Survey Monkey

Can you create a list of touchpoints that your typical customer has throughout the buying cycle and customer lifecycle? This list of touchpoints begins to map the customer's journey with the company. What we've realized through this exercise is that most companies miss the data-related touchpoints. Thus, reporting on this data is often neglected as a part of the customer experience and retention-building strategy.

The Loyalty Gap: Where Companies Fail Their Customers

More and more reports have become the modern day equivalent of a phone book for the customer's information experience. They're static, information dense, awkward to use and involve a lot of effort to answer a simple question. When is the last time you looked up a number in a phone book?

Customers rely on reports for many reasons. They can show how effective a product or service is, reveal trends and areas for improvement, or serve as a guide in making important decisions around strategic direction. These glimpses into the market, revenue and user carry importance related to the success of customers' businesses, not just for you and your relationship with them.

What you give to your customer informs them on what you think about them. A useless report is no different than making them wait 30 minutes on hold for your "next available agent." A great report or dashboard shows that you want them to be successful and that you know and understand their business.

Are you delivering to your customers valuable insights or phone books?

> "Only 1 in 10 companies achieve sustainable, profitable growth. These successful companies
> have twice the level of customer advocacy as their competitors."
>
> **Bain & Company** [4]

[4] "Customer Loyalty and NPS." Bain & Company. 2011. 21 Aug. 2015. <www.bain.com/consulting-services/customer-strategy-and-marketing/customer-loyalty.aspx >
[5] McCartney, Scott. "Which Airline Apps Make Flying Easier?" Wall Street Journal. 1 Jul. 2015. Web. 10 Aug. 2015. <www.wsj.com/articles/which-airline-apps-make-flying-easier-1435772320 >

Bridging The Loyalty Gap

Now let's look at an example in which a company has addressed the loyalty gap for its customers. As a businessperson, you likely travel around the country or world to reach your clients. So you probably have joined many airline mileage programs in search of the best deals or shortest flights. But when it comes to deciding on which airline to use, you consider other factors, such as customer service and how easy it is to travel with that airline. At the core of how easy it is, you have the information experience.

Avid travelers benefit from using airlines' mobile apps. They're like personal travel agents in customers' pockets that show them their upcoming trips, flight status, seat and ticket details all in one place. Large airlines have made heavy investments in the mobile space to provide dashboards that give the customer the specific information they're looking for. Focusing on the customer's information experience, these airlines have successfully created apps that help the customer aggregate important data about their trips so that they can make the best decisions on how to use their time and money. These apps mirror the real-time flow of information, too.

Smaller airlines have struggled to create such a seamless information experience for their customers. Travelers can choose who to fly with and will ask themselves, who makes it easier for me? Their loyalty will go with the airline that has the best customer service and information experience™ [5].
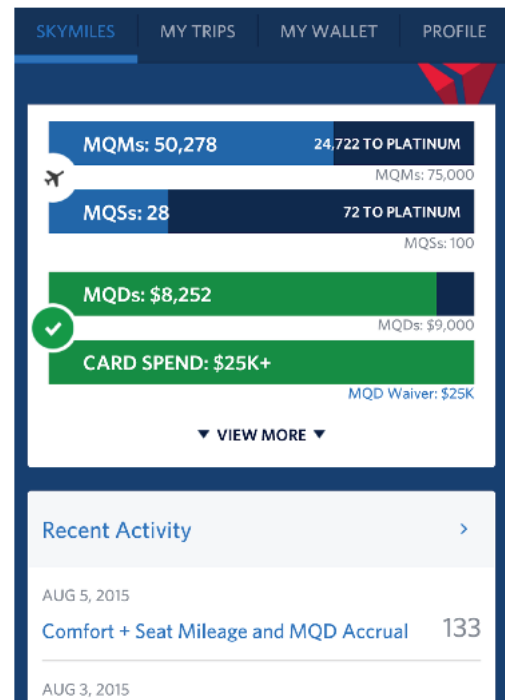
Create an Amazing Information Experience™

As we mentioned earlier, there is a gap between customer loyalty and providing customers with your valuable data. The magnitude of oversight is three-pronged. First, if your report is not helpful and easy to use, it does not provide them any value. Second, if you are giving them old-school reports, it tells your customers you're behind the times. Finally, if the first and second are true, your customers will be led to believe you don't care about them, and they may consider taking business elsewhere.

Think about this. As an individual consumer, you purchase products or services every day. You choose the products you like based on a number of factors, e.g., whether you trust the brand, if the price point is right, if the quality is good, if the product features meet your needs, if you like the service that comes with the purchase.
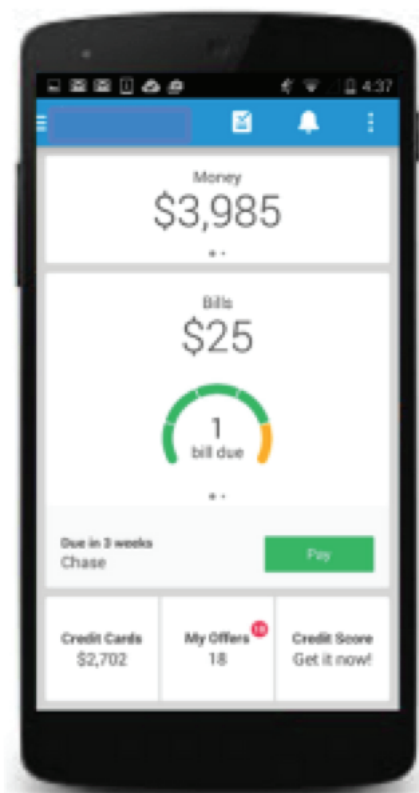
Let's say you carry a credit card because it gives you an ideal interest rate and some travel perks or cash back. But an aspect that you likely didn't consider while choosing your card is a cutting-edge customer portal. This portal would give you access to view your purchases and check your balance without making a phone call or waiting for a monthly statement. You could even make payments or dispute charges from there! This customer portal would also crunch numbers for you and organize your purchases by major categories. You could also view past statements, graphs on spending habits by category or trends over time. With all this neatly displayed data, you think, "Wow, I really understand what kind of consumer I am!"

This is what we call the information experience™. Although it may not be the reason you selected the card, this simple experience with your spending data keeps you loyal to the card. It is a strong touchpoint. Consider other services or products you have and the information experiences™ that come with them — factors such as online banking, a health insurance portal or even your Fitbit app. Companies that understand the importance of the information experience™ have invested in making reporting useful, simple and the very best for their customers.

What do your customers think about your data products or services? Now here's a thought: What if we started delivering delicious information experiences™ instead of those old-school reports?

Provide Information Experiences™ Instead of Reports

We believe that by rethinking your approach to providing data to customers, you can move beyond the archaic notion of static reporting and move into offering valuable information experiences. Visualizing data is not just a skill set, it's a mind-set of empathy and understanding.

The following are six principles that you can incorporate into your information experience. Each concept builds on each other to ensure that you truly scrutinize how the customer experiences your data products and services. By following these principles, you are not only investing in customer loyalty, but providing real value and showing that you care.

Shed the attitude that "OK reporting is good enough" and embrace providing an amazing information experience™. Your customers will get fresh insight from your data and will thank you with repeat business.

Principle 1: Put Your Customer First (aka, People First)

Always putting your customer first is a basic principle of doing any kind of business, right? The same holds true when you examine your customers' information experiences. A satisfied customer will be a loyal customer, so put yourself in their shoes when providing "performance information."

When the information-sharing experience (i.e., any data given to customers) is difficult to understand, the user gets frustrated. This leaves your customer feeling confused or agitated because they now have to spend extra time figuring out your output. How do these monthly bills make you feel looking at them? What differences do you notice?

Energy and cable/Internet bills can provide customers useful information.

In the world of information sharing where a simple mobile app can offer so much, providing a static spreadsheet of numbers to your customer sends a message of mediocrity. Would you want your client to feel just OK about their consumer experience with you? Also, just because you understand the data doesn't mean they do.

Customer-first design, when implemented in dashboards, creates a positive interaction for the user. At one glance, the customer will be able to understand and analyze information presented.
Take your utility bill, for example. Like any well-laid-out dashboard, you would be able to look at the bill and see all the information important to you. If you believe the usage is wrong, you can compare what you paid the month before or look at the bar chart to see what you paid a year ago. Valuing your customers' limited time and creating an information experience that easily conveys the necessary data will keep your clients coming back year after year.

## Principle 2: Focus on the Important, Filter Out the Rest

Focus. How many times have you heard this word? In the classroom, on the court, in a meeting. We live with a constant bombardment of information and options with very little time to process it all. In fact, studies show we often become paralyzed when faced with too many choices and end up making the wrong decisions. [6]

Less is more. This should be the focal point of your attention when sharing information. What is important for the user to know? Start there. Creating a report takes time and energy. Why not invest that time and energy into an information-sharing experience that will be useful to the customer and ignite action?
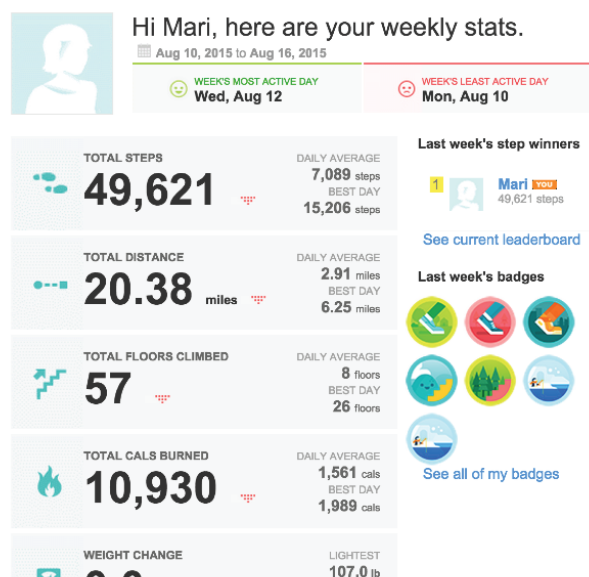
A random image from Google and Fitbit Weekly Email

[6] "Too Many Choices: A Problem That Can Paralyze." The New York Times. 26 Feb. 2010. Web. 7 Sep. 2015. < http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/27/your-money/27shortcuts.html >

Overwhelming your customer with all the possible information they might need is an information nightmare. Beware: The keep-it-simple approach is not intended to be a data dump into a spreadsheet. This will not solve your client's concerns or problems. By focusing on the right information, you will create dashboards that produce valuable results.

The Fitbit is an example of a useful dashboard that makes achieving your fitness goal realistic:
- Clearly identified objective
- Easy to read
- Focused selection of data and metrics

When you bring in too much data, you lose your audience. Just like how too many options in the cereal aisle make you want to skip breakfast altogether!

Principle 3: Make the Design Matter

Design shapes the consumer's perception of quality. Apple knows this concept well. When you walk into an Apple store, you see products that are thoughtfully laid out, beautifully designed, stylish and simple to use, and you think, "Wow, I gotta have this." Design changes the game to no longer be just about the product but how it makes you feel.

The Good
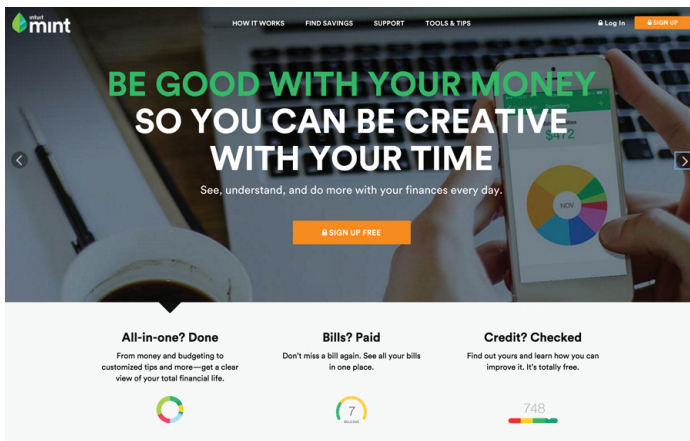
www.mint.com

The Bad

www.dasolar.com

Just as modern web design has evolved to find a union of utility, usability and beauty, so must your displays of data in business. Data, when presented correctly, should be a point of connection between you and your customer. It's not just about looking pretty.

Providing data reports and dashboards has become a standard business tool. Yet in the flurry of technology and data, little attention has been paid in the design of thoughtful and user-friendly information-sharing experiences. No matter how great your data may be, if it can't be understood, interacted with and, most importantly, acted on, the purpose of information sharing has not been achieved.
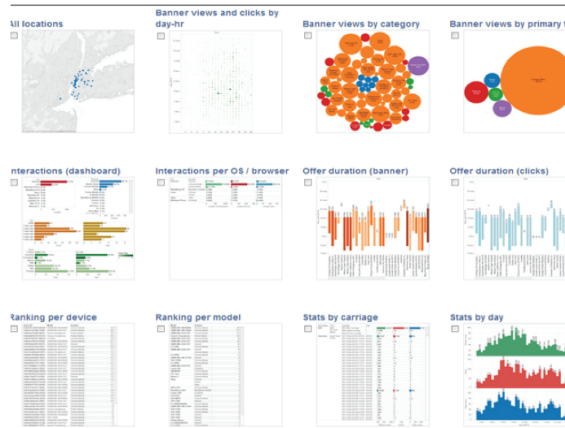
For more information on using the dashboard design, check out our white paper, A Guide to Creating Dashboards People Love to Use, and our blog article on emotional dashboards.

Principle 4: Be Practical

When it comes to providing useful data, productivity should outweigh the sophistication of the product. Think of it like this: If your data product or reports have so many bells and whistles built in — such as extra charts, graphs, data filters and extracts — that don't contribute to the customer's ability to solve their problems, then is it really helping?

Be practical and give your customers a data tool or report that enables them to get to the point and get their job done faster than before. According to Nielsen, users generally prefer a design that is faster and easier to use [7]. This means taking a critical eye and eliminating the elements that slow a product down or don't add real value. For example, with a dashboard, it's not about giving all the latest data visualization gadgets. This simply slows them down or dilutes the story. In general you have a user's attention for about 15 seconds [8]. So give them just the right balance of performance and usability.
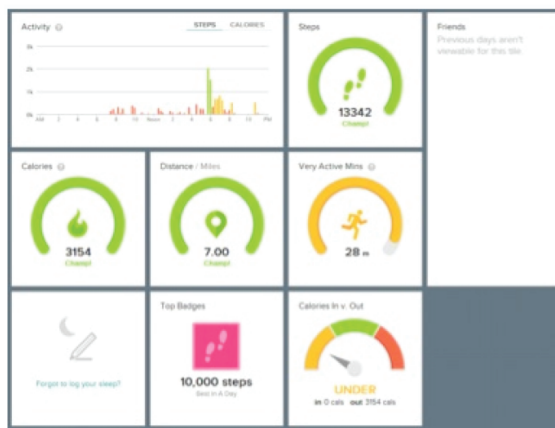
A random image from Google and Fitbit Dashboard

For more information on using the simplest and most effective visualizations, check out this design principle from the Juicebox collection.

[7] Nielsen, Jakob. "User Satisfaction vs. Performance Metrics." Nielsen Norman Group. 8 Oct. 2012. Web. 4 Sep. 2015. < http://www.nngroup.com/articles/satisfaction-vs-performance-metrics/ >

[8] Haile, Tony. "What You Think You Know About the Web Is Wrong" TIME. 9 Mar. 2014. Web. 4 Sep. 2015. < http://time.com/12933/what-you-think-you-know-about-the-web-is-wrong/ >

Principle 5: Allow for Self-exploration

The idea that self-persuasion is more effective than direct persuasion plays a key role in your data presentation [9]. Typically, we find that reports either provide so much information that the user goes into analysis paralysis, or the report skews the data presented so that the user can come to only the author's desired conclusion. Neither of these methods are recommended!

Any two people can look at the same information and have different questions and conclusions. The smart companies will provide those users a path to explore the data so that they can have their own eureka moments. The data should guide them to a certain point, but still allow them to self-serve for the answer. Then, your customer will be much more aligned with their own insights than if you told them what they were supposed to take away from the information.

We cannot emphasize it enough — the success of your dashboard will come down to your ability to allow the user to interact with the data and self-explore.

Think about giving customers the relevant filters and sorting capabilities so that they can review the information and find what they need. Take the online shopping experience, for example. When you shop online, you can use filters such as price, brand and rating to narrow your results from thousands of possibilities to a select few. And when you can interact with the data, like reading reviews and adjusting your filters, you come up with the best set of answers.

Autotrader.com

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[9] Aronson, Elliot. "The Power of Self-Persuasion." American Psychologist. Nov. 1999: 875-884. Print.

Principle 6: Give Them Guidance

The customer journey at a macro-level is all about how the customer interacts with your brand, service or product, from awareness all the way to customer service. You've likely mapped out the typical customer journey so that you can ensure each customer has a positive experience. If you are not guiding them, there is a big risk they could get lost and not see the value in your brand, product or service overall.

The data product or dashboard is no different and takes on its own form of this customer journey. Your users should not not feel like you just opened the gates to an amusement park and let them loose to figure out where to go on their own. It's your job to guide them along the right path!

Take time to think about the users and where they're trying to get with your data. After considering them, their needs, and the data, you can create a strategy to map where users are and guide them through the right path. They are looking at you to be the expert, after all.

When it comes to creating that journey through your dashboards and reports, you will want guide your users like this:

1. Provide a starting point. Set the context of the data your user is about to review. Think of it like a book — you wouldn't start a story in the middle or at the end.

2. Gradually reveal more. Give them the big picture with high-level summaries with the ability to drill down if they need to. Make it easy for them to skim through and see all the major topics without getting buried in detail. Let the user decide when they want to see more detail. They can self-explore and get the additional details based on their individual needs.

3. Use visual cues. Think about giving the users breadcrumbs to let them know where they are or using colors to group similar concepts. This let's them know where they are with the data and how to continue moving forward or backward as needed.

For more information on providing guidance, check out this design principle from the Juicebox collection.

Next Steps

Let's return to our very first scenario where you are about to lose a big customer to poor reporting. Before losing this business, you can apply your newly acquired insight and consider the customer first and how the reports could be reworked into a useful information experience.

The net result is a beautifully designed dashboard that provides customers a guided tour through the data with simple and focused graphics that not only tell a story but allow them to explore and make their own discoveries. The dashboard you show them is now much easier to consume and sparks a lot of internal discussion. They really see the value in the information experience you've given them and decide to renew the contract after all.

Before this scenario becomes a reality for you, here's a list of additional resources to design the best information experiences for your customers. These best practices and tips will ensure that you are on your way to bridging the customer loyalty gap and providing an amazing customer and information experience.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, don't worry — Juicebox is here for you! Reach out and schedule a free 2-hour report design session where we can work with your specific needs, give you tips and suggestions, and answer your questions.

And here's even more useful Juicebox resources to check out:

Our full list of design principles
Our book, Data Fluency
Our white paper, A Guide to Creating Dashboards People Love to Use
Juicebox on Twitter