TSIA Technology Services World 2016:
Customer Experience Emerges as the All-Star
An Overview by
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While customer experience has been on the radar for a while now, at the TSW conference in Las Vegas October 17 - 19, it emerged as the all-star, both in the formal programming and throughout the hallways and Expo.

Though this was my first time attending TSW in Las Vegas, I've followed the conference closely over recent years as many Waterstone colleagues and clients have actively participated. If you are unfamiliar with TSIA, it is a well-regarded source for benchmarks and industry trend data that is organized around nine well-defined and deeply detailed focus areas: Support Services, Professional Services, Managed Services, Field Services, Education Services, Expand Selling, Service Revenue Generation, Customer Success, and Service Technology.

What struck me throughout the three-day conference was how the presentations and conversations elevated from their functional, focus-area context to include much more cross-functional considerations. Specifically, these elements were often described and discussed relative to their impact on the overall customer experience.

Many of the keynotes reflected this overarching customer experience focus. In particular, TSIA President and CEO J.B. Wood's keynote *Aligning from Growth and Outcomes* drove home the connections and correlation of customer experience to profitable growth. Building on this was the keynote by Maria Martinez, Salesforce's President of Global Customer Success, which was titled *The Strategic, Financial and Organizational Journey*. Maria's examples and theme provided compelling evidence for the integration and coordination that is required across an enterprise in delivering the customer experience.

The central importance of customer experience didn't end at the keynotes. A scan of the panels, breakouts, and case studies presented shows Customer Success as a highly recurring topic across all three days of programming. This is impressive when you consider that Customer Success is a relative rookie to the mix, having been formally added as a stand-alone focus area just two years ago.

My colleague Dhaval Moogimane's session, *Implementing & Delivering Customer Success: It Takes a Village*, provided a very practical and pragmatic set of frameworks and process for enterprises to deliver a scalable and repeatable experience. Starting with a premise that design of the customer experience, organizational alignment, design for scale, and alignment on goals and metrics are the four execution imperatives for Customer Success, his session included a wealth of examples and a rich and interactive Q&A—impressive given that his session took place right before the Tuesday evening happy hour!

An excellent complement to Dhaval's session was a case study session presented by Allison Pickens, VP, Customer Success and Business Operations at Gainsight, and David Chia, Regional Manager, Strategic Customer Engagement at Red Hat. As one of the top-attended sessions of the entire conference, it was clear that practical guidance for implementing customer experience is in high demand.

One of the main takeaways that Dhaval and I took from the conference is that while many companies have taken steps to define the ideal journey that they would like their customers to experience, it can be very challenging to actually bring this journey to life. The organizational changes and cultural shift that need to occur to deliver such journeys can be very tough to make.

If you are struggling to close the gap between your "as-is" and "to-be" experience, you can find some practical advice on the subject in a webinar that I recently participated in for the Software and Services division of SIIA that was titled *Building Your Desired Customer Experience: Pitfalls and Accelerators*.

What are your thoughts? Is the all-star status being ascribed to customer experience deserved? Are you struggling bringing your desired journey to life, or having success with a particular approach? I'd welcome your comments and perspectives – please email me at jzuk@waterstonegroup.com to start a conversation.