

# Balance Technology and Human Touch for the Ultimate Customer Experience

by Jeff Seeley - CEO, Carew International

## New Business Reality in the Consumer World

Back in the days of “long ago,” say 1995, there was not much thought given to how business was going to be transacted. There were few organizations that did not have sales professionals. Whether the sales force was 10 or 10,000, it was the sales professionals on the streets “making it happen” for their customers and their companies. Then this little thing called the Internet entered the scene, promising (or threatening) to change the business world overnight. Its arrival felt positively revolutionary.

Indeed the Internet and related technology did change the business world, but the change turned out to be more evolution than revolution. The Internet story continues to unfold today as part of a broader migration to combine technology and human touch to create a very powerful competitive advantage.

One of the leaders in the silent Internet evolution has been Amazon.com. Amazon.com revolutionized how consumers purchased books, but that was just the first step in a much broader vision that included providing consumers with everything from A to Z (hence the logo image), while providing excellent customer satisfaction.

The logo for Amazon.com, featuring the word "amazon.com" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. A curved orange arrow starts under the letter 'a' and points towards the letter 'z', resembling a smile.

*(notice the smile from A to Z)*

During this same era, we saw Barnes and Noble and several regional groups boldly changing the face of bookselling at the retail level. Huge bookstores with comfortable seating, coffee bars and extended hours were expanding at a fairly aggressive rate. The comparison of these two organizations is striking in both its similarities and differences – similar business (selling books) and target market, but drastically different sales and marketing models. In the years since Amazon.com’s birth, the organization has migrated closer

and closer to the retail book store model in terms of the customer experience provided, yet there is still not one Amazon.com retail location in existence.

This migration of Amazon.com is illustrative of the business world at large. Amazon’s original business model did not account for the need for human or social interaction as part of the book purchasing experience. What Amazon and others are now trying to do through social media and customer service interaction is to incorporate a much-needed human element to their business models. While online businesses seek to incorporate more human elements in their approach –reviews, recommendations, Facebook interface, wishlists, like or dislike, online chat with an assistant – they are looking for function in the virtual world to replicate personal interaction and meet the basic human need for dialog (versus monologue).

## The 2.0 Effect

Business 2.0 was largely developed as an efficiency model for the customer. But at our very core, we are social beings. Online businesses have begun to embrace the human condition for contact, interaction and social network to create authentic touch points in their customer experience. For the first time, we are starting to see the full potential being realized by leveraging all things 2.0 for the efficiency benefits while addressing the human condition to create a true customer experience. This integrated approach will become a significant strategic advantage as the customer experience becomes the paramount focus.

As we consider the future of business, one significant issue is our ability to communicate on the human level. The world of Twitter and SMS (text) has left us trying to “communicate” in 140 characters or less. Outside of ordering lunch, has anyone in business been able to articulate their needs in this cramped context? As we become more 2.0/technology enamored, we must be vigilant not to reduce our customer experience to a 140-character experience.





Apple's success is not accident. There are several key steps in this path to the ultimate customer experience.

## Realizing the Full Potential of Your Relationships

The first thing to understand is that building a relationship involves more than small talk and offering your customer a cup of coffee. For example, my customer experience at the bank actually deteriorated as a direct result of their efforts to improve my experience. I used to get in and out of the bank quickly and efficiently – no lines, no holdups. Recently the “experience” at my bank changed. The staff now greets me, offers me a beverage, talks about the weather or the local farmers’ market etc., and then they direct me to the individual who can help me. They have lengthened my process time without adding any real value. I wonder what customer experience consultant sold them on this idea? Now if I walked into the bank and was greeted with a summary of breaking investment trends or regulation changes that impact me, that would be a much more authentic and valuable customer experience. In this scenario, the bank would strengthen their relationship with me by creating value beyond the traditional bank-customer relationship, essentially by using 2.0 technology and human touch to create a superior customer experience.

## Touchpoints

Consider your touchpoints at your customers’ organizations and their touchpoints within your organization with two facts in mind. First, customers need interaction. Second, the customer experience is not limited to the sales professional. There is tremendous opportunity to improve the customer experience when touch and tech are combined throughout the numerous customer touchpoints at your organization. Whether it is operations, customer service, design, engineering, technical service and/or support, all of your organization’s touchpoints have information about your customer and information that is of value to your customer. It is critical to focus your efforts on making the customer journey through your organization as productive as possible. Technology drives the data to make this happen. The communication skills of your people drive the positive or negative delivery of that information.

Likewise, the sales professional should always strive to increase the total number of touchpoints by increasing the breadth and depth of the relationships inside your customer

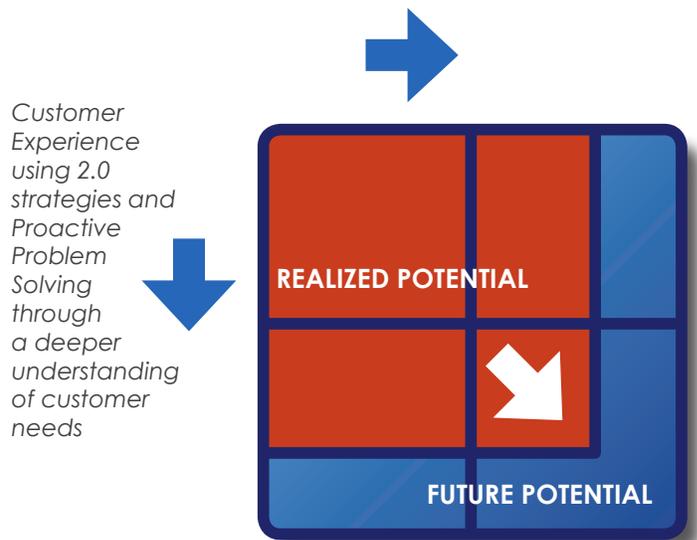
organizations. Knowledge literally becomes power for both you and your customer. Increasing and establishing creative touchpoints raises the standard to which the competition is compared.

## Does Your Ecosystem Support the Experience?

Your organization ecosystem has to support all key elements of the customer experience. Your 2.0 systems must support the relationship. Your relationship must leverage your 2.0 capabilities. Along with the technical aspects, your organization’s culture around communication, problem solving, technical support/service, design and innovation must support the optimal customer experience. If it doesn’t, the 2.0 world of social media will soon point your deficiencies out to world.

The combination of 2.0 technology and human touch has power that creates sustainable competitive advantage. The combination of a balanced approach and the human touch creates synergy.

*Present solutions that meet the needs of the customers that are supported by your organization ecosystems*



*Balanced implementation creates synergistic approach to value creation and competitive advantage.*

Customer experience is not some cliché-ridden corporate speak. The optimal customer experience occurs with the combination of technology utilized for ease of business, usable business intelligence for both you and your customer, value and supply chain efficiency, and the ability to build connections with your customers using in-person and virtual social venues to do so. Competitive advantage is produced by creating value beyond the capabilities that your customer has internally. Sustainable strategic advantage is going to be realized in the new business reality for organizations that embrace 2.0 strategies with the human touch to create a superior customer experience.

---



Jeff Seeley  
CEO, Carew International

*Carew International is a leader in sales training and leadership development; specializing in comprehensive, proven training programs for sales, sales management and customer service excellence. For over 35 years, Carew has earned its reputation of delivering increased productivity and profitability to our valued clients world wide.*

