

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN DENTISTRY

“The goal of a company is to create a customer that creates customers.”. Shiv Singh



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We are in the Age of the Customer. But sometimes the term client is not well accepted by health professionals.

In the private practice of the dental profession, dominant in Portugal and in most countries where the profession is more developed, the term client is adopted, from the outset for the inherent ability to choose.

The client may also be a user of health insurance or the National Health Service or, for example, the dental check. In another words, the one who uses a system.

This user, sometimes with the ability of choosing as seen before, can also present himself as someone healthy or sick. In the latter case, the more traditional term frames this capacity of patient and that of Anglo-Saxon terminology, patients, ‘pacientes’ in Portuguese.

But in Portuguese and English the term has two readings. That of a patient, one who presents a pathology, or who seeks to know his state of health, and that of a patient, who waits, waits, virtuously, without complaint. Virtue little cultivated these days...

There are still those who prefer the term consumer, broader in concept. More legally framed by rights and duties.

We could be even more comprehensive and consider the term citizen, that is, one that can potentially be seen in the role of each of these qualities, client, patient, patient, user or consumer, alone or in combination.

At the level of the concept I explain, the most accepted term in Portuguese gives per ‘cliente’ and in English per customer.

Nowadays, the economy of service delivery, including healthcare, has evolved into an experience aspect, which refers to all the interactions that a customer has with an organization, a brand, a company, in the provision of a service: the Customer Experience.

And does oral health care fall into this context?

Yes. For several reasons.

What are we talking about?

In the concepts of Value Based Health Care, which I have written about, the client is always at the center of all the attention of organizations.

As such, the totality of the journey in a health care organization, office, clinic, or hospital is an integral part of this experience: from the search of a provider on the internet, telephone contact, or online appointment scheduling, waiting time, clinical procedures, attendance, comfort, follow up, etc.

Customers are not only looking for the best product or service, but also for an “Experience” that adds value to it.

Customer Experience is thus the perception that the customer has after any interaction with your brand or company. Unfortunately, we often find that organizations operating in the healthcare industry are not essentially focused on excellence in Customer Experience.

What are the three fundamental pillars for building an exceptional Customer Experience?

In my opinion, the various players in healthcare need to focus on three essential aspects if they want to survive in this disrupted industry:

1. **Communication** between the client, health professionals and service providers;
2. **Confidence** that the best human resources are allocated to the client;
3. **Empathy** in health promotion and personalization of care.

It is essential that, along the properly mapped way of the client, and those who accompany him in an organization, there is good communication. Human resources capable of responding to the various requests and that contact, connection, empathy, generators of the indispensable trust, are present.

The service and response obtained by the customer are “points of friction”, subject to improvements with innovative concepts that add value, quality, satisfaction, lowering the cost involved in the provision of services.

The client’s contact with a health service, if made by a

health manager, in larger organizations or, in the case of an office, by a receptionist or even dental assistant, duly trained in the process, allows a personalized attention, from the appointment to the clarification of doubts, or referral of questions.

The digital aspect and the various formulations of artificial intelligence applicable are also essential aspects for an experience of excellence for the customer: better response at the right time, through interaction that increases trust. To this end, customer feedback, suggestions for improvement and its dissemination prove to be fundamental instruments.

Adopting a paradigm of interdisciplinary and more personalized health care delivery, adapting therapies to the hereditary, socio-economic and lifestyle conditions of the client, integrating the various regulatory components, safety, standards and processes involved and obeying professional and corporate ethical assumptions, the construction of exceptionalism in the Customer Experience is constituted in customer-centered care.

It is the sum of all the interactions that the client values, according to his expectation, the clinical results obtained and the entire process traveled.

I believe that dentists and their organizations should take into account that clinical competence is not enough if waiting time, conditions of care, hygiene, care, referral of many aspects are not aligned accordingly.

The Age of Customer and Experience privileges and values the entire environment underlying the provision of health care. Taking this into due account allows us to increase the social value of our services and meet the different and very demanding expectations of our customers, which is fundamental to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty to clinics and health professionals.

And what do health and disease clients want?

Information, access, security, protection, compliance with schedules, personalization of contacts and clinical results. Overall, greater humanization and personalization in the provision of care.

What about health professionals?

Excellence in Customer Experience also involves the organizational appreciation of the teams involved, particularly health professionals. They are often underpaid, overwhelmed by low-differentiation tasks, taking time and focus away from customer service.

A great challenge for professionals and organizations. ■

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