



Going the Distance for Customers

According to **Stephen Ingledew**, former Managing Director, Customers and Marketing at Standard Life, improving customer experience is a marathon, not a sprint

Customer experience improvement is a key focus for many businesses at the moment. Higher consumer pressure, driven by ubiquitous and intuitive technology, are increasing everyone's expectations of what good customer experience looks and feels like.

However, business leaders will need to recognise that delivering the optimum end-to-end customer experience cannot be achieved in a 'sprint'. This is especially true in large mature enterprises that

already have established journeys, processes and structures for engaging with customers.

My recent preparation for a marathon prompted me to reflect on the fact that the approach to training for the 26.2 mile race is very similar to that of improving customer experience.

Here are six examples of the strong parallels between the two very different activities:

1. Strategy

To start with, both activities require a clear strategy at the outset, including an overarching vision of what you want to achieve, measurable objectives and a plan for how to go about it.

Of course, the implementation of the strategy will need to be broken down into bit size actions which form part of the overall plan. No one overall action will transform customer experience alone >



and, as with marathon training, there will need to be a focus on incremental gains.

In other words, there is no silver bullet and focus on detailed actions is essential in making real progress.

2. Capability

For both activities, a range of capabilities are needed. For example, marathon training requires a mix of short intervals to improve speed, as well as long easier runs to improve stamina and tempo. This is also true for improving customer experience, as a combination of analytics, digital channels and UX design among other capabilities will be required.

The development of these capabilities will need to be supported across the whole enterprise, including finance, HR and risk, and cannot be done in isolation by the marketing and customer functions.

In much the same way, marathon training is not just about running, but about nutrition, stretching, resting and mental well-being.

3. Insight

The execution of the strategy will need to be based on empirical evidence and not subjective assumptions on how best to improve the end-to-end customer experience.

Similarly, running performance data should be used as a basis to decide the objectives for each run, so as not to over-stretch targets and cause injury.

In many ways, complaints are the equivalent to an injury and it's very important not to ignore them.

Detailed analysis, followed by corrective action, are the way to turn insights from both into a positive result.

4. Measurement

Ongoing measurement and the use of analytics to decide the next best action are absolutely vital to building sustainable improvements both to customer experience and marathon training performance.

Being very clear on the range of metrics used to measure progress, as well as alignment across the business on these is needed at all times.

This understanding and sharing of metrics can be assisted by the visualisation of key data, which can then play a role in showing how progress is being made.

5. Experimentation

The next best actions to take in executing the strategy are not always obvious, even with data, and therefore experimentation plays a big role. Using real-time data as a base, a test and learn approach can really drive improvement.

Even the best runners and customer-led firms will experiment as they seek to continually improve performance and experience, and it's important not to be complacent. Of course, mistakes will happen and injuries will occur, but unless you are very unlucky they happen for a good reason.

The most important thing is to learn what caused them and change something to mitigate that going forward.

6. Collaboration

Marathon training can be very lonely, so it's important to collaborate and learn from others in order to achieve goals, whether that collaboration be with a coach, physiotherapist or fellow businesses. Learning from and working with others can add enormous benefits and there are many experienced organisations and professionals out there that can help drive positive change, especially when it comes to the use of new technologies.

In summary, sustainable success cannot be achieved by a quick sprint to the finish line, it requires a long term commitment and a continuous invested approach. But, with a 'marathon mind-set' the rewards can be enormous, it can enable you to beat the competition and proudly point to achievements as well as sustainable progress. ■



Stephen Ingledew

Former MD
Customers & Marketing
Standard Life

Stephen has over thirty years' experience in senior roles with large and medium-sized financial corporations, including roles at Barclays Wealth, AMP, Frizzell and Berkeley Berry Birch.

In his executive role at Standard Life, Stephen was responsible for transforming the company's marketing and customer functions with a new digital, data and innovation driven culture.

He has also held a number of non-executive roles with professional bodies including the Institute of Financial Services and Chartered Insurance Institute.

Contact Stephen through:
www.criticleye.com