

The ever-changing consumer

By [Dave Nemeth](#)

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When it comes to trends, too many companies are fixated on tactile and aesthetic trends that will shape their business, but these trends are all heavily weighted on the attitudes and habits of the consumer.



Dave Nemeth, CEO Trend Forward.

When we consult with businesses, one of the first questions we ask is who is your customer and what are their habits? We often find that the customer the client had five years ago has changed and if the demographic hasn't changed, the way in which they shop or interact with brands certainly has.

From our research, as well as working with a broad spectrum of industries, we have elaborated on the most dominant changes in consumer behaviour.

Consumers no longer have patience waiting

The need for speed has never been greater than it currently is, whether you are selling a product or providing a service. With technological advances, everything is available on our mobile devices, searching for a recipe, booking tickets, ordering a product or banking are all done with the click of a few buttons regardless of location.

Consumers no longer have patience in waiting, be it for a quote or a car to be repaired, the expectation is that it happens in shortest space of time. The years are gone where customers were happy to wait in queues with little or no complaint and it is common place to see shoppers leaving their trolleys or baskets and exit a store if the wait is going to be unreasonable.

Humanise approach and interactions

Companies need to humanise their approach and interactions. Technology has placed us in front of screens day in and day out, with communication taking place via email, SMS or WhatsApp. It is not uncommon for sales reps to have never physically met with their existing and prospective clients.

You cannot make a memorable impression if there is no real communication and in many instances, we have forgotten how to pick up a phone or even deliver a quotation by hand. As archaic as this approach may seem, it will certainly leave a lasting impression on a customer.

Taking a 'human-centered approach' to all business touch points will be a strong factor that separates successful businesses to those that carry on in an impersonal way.

Integrate customer experience

Most businesses have come to understand that consumers need a great experience and the term customer experience has become a bit of a buzzword with few being able to actually execute a unique and different journey.

It is certainly not about adding technology or digital into the mix, although when integrated with physical elements this can create a great dynamic. It is more about creating a great path through every brand touch point with common elements that link everything together.

This includes things like social media, websites, the physical space, as well as the service levels of the staff (as well, as the way they interact with customers) that will ultimately end up dealing with the customer. This journey should continue long after the customer has made the purchase or used your service.

There is no longer brand loyalty and it is increasingly vital to continually engage with customers and seeing them as part of your company and brand. It is not only purely about price and offering but rather creating a well-packaged offering taking all aspects into consideration.

Treat consumers like individuals

With a backlash to mass production and contrived products and services, consumers want to be treated like individuals and are continually enticed by custom offerings. It is not just about customising products, as we are currently seeing many retailers doing, but rather being flexible and being prepared to change protocol or best practice in order to suit a

customer's needs or requests. This is exceptionally complex and something the bigger organisations will struggle with, but an important part of the business going forward.

Educate your staff

Consumers continue to educate themselves prior to purchasing from or using the services of a company. A company that has misleading advertising or messaging will quickly be caught out and most likely taken to task on social media.

The current consumer often knows far more about the product and service they are buying than the person selling it and for this reason, staff education and training need to be at the forefront of the business model.

Explaining the 'why and how' to customers has never been more important. A good example of this is stating that products are green or eco-friendly –this kind of marketing might have worked a few years back but today's consumer wants it substantiated.

Expect the unexpected

People across all demographics are sick and tired of the *status quo* and rebelling against almost everything, be it politics, gender inequality or simply product packaging and a brand's advertising campaign. Everyone is a critic and, due to the popularity of social media, a critic that quickly gets noticed.

This is making the existence of brands even more complicated as they realise they cannot be everything to everyone. Business needs to plan with a view to expecting the unexpected and in many cases needs a reactive marketing strategy just in case things go wrong or they upset consumers.

Having a delayed reaction or reacting in the wrong way can quickly damage a company. Consumers will continue to be outspoken and ensure that their voices are heard.

In order for businesses to strive and even survive in many instances, it is vital that they take on a 'human-centered' approach to every aspect of their business and invest more time and effort on truly trying to understand their customers.

It is no longer good enough to simply apply everything that studies and reports are showing, but to rather spend time physically engaging with their customers.

ABOUT DAVE NEMETH

A leading blue chip international company recently identified Dave as one of the top creative influencers in the country. Dave Nemeth is a qualified designer who has held a variety of senior as well as executive positions with some of the countries leading retail groups, spanning a career of twenty years. Email Dave at daven@worldonline.co.za, follow @davenemeth on Twitter and connect on Facebook.

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