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## The X in the CXO: Three steps to attract the best customer experience officers to your firm

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**76% of executives say improving customer experience (CX) is a high or critical priority, and nearly 90% of companies now either have a Chief Experience Officer (CXO) or equivalent. What are the key characteristics to enable success in this role, and how can you attract a standout CXO to lead this critical function for your organization?**

The vast majority of organizations are increasingly placing CX at the center of their operational and commercial decision-making. This involves considerable investment in understanding the entire customer journey, from brand recognition and loyalty, to the quality of their interactions with the firm (both offline and online), to the speed and quality of the service or product they receive, and everything in between.

The world has moved beyond customer satisfaction and retention; it is customer experience – in its entirety - that is separating the successful companies from the also-rans.

Research from [Gartner's Customer Experience Management Survey](#) shows dramatic growth for either Chief Experience Officer (CXO) or Chief Customer Officer (CCO) roles. In 2017, more than a third of organizations (38%) reported that these roles did not exist in their firm. Just two years later, however, this figure dropped to just 10%. Perhaps more importantly, nearly 50% of organizations claimed they can track the financial benefits of CX projects.

### **What Defines CXO Success?**

The core function of a Chief Experience Officer is to assess, manage and improve the overall experience of an organization's customers, and ensure their interactions with the firm is as efficient and enjoyable as possible. That responsibility embraces the design of systems and technology interfaces, seeking and acting on customers' views and opinions, and shaping customers' expectations.

The CXO is charged with bringing holistic, customer-centric systems and processes to the boardroom, and making it an intrinsic part of the company's strategy and culture. It is therefore important that the skills and knowledge of the CXO must also be applied to align with internal employee experiences, cultural outlook, operational systems and technology towards exceptional CX.

The key characteristics for CXO success include:

- sitting across product design and development, sales, marketing, support, operations, technology, finance and HR functions
- being a voice – advocate - for the customer in the development and deployment of projects and strategies
- empowering employees to take customer-centric decisions
- increasing leadership’s understanding of the experiences and needs of their employees and customers, and championing their perspectives in the company’s strategic decision-making
- creating innovative ways to elevate the customer experience
- working closely with marketing to improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, advocacy and brand value
- measuring and tracking the impact of CX initiatives on the company’s KPIs
- overseeing customer service teams, CX practitioners, designers, developers, and researchers dedicated to improving customer experience across various platforms, touchpoints and channels.



### **Technological Transformation Has Empowered Both Customers and Companies**

There is no doubt that in many ways the organizational focus on the customer is nothing new, particularly in the private sector. It was more than 130 years ago that Indian social activist, freedom fighter and writer Mahatma Gandhi said, "A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. S/he is not dependent on us. We are dependent on her/him. S/he is not an interruption of our work. S/he is the purpose of it. S/he is not an outsider of our business. S/he is part of it. We are not doing her/him a favor by serving her/him. S/he is doing us a favor by giving us the opportunity to do so."

Yet in recent times, customer experience has surpassed price and product as a key brand differentiator and income generator. Technology has both empowered the customer and enabled firms to understand their client-base better than ever before. Prospective customers can find a large amount of forensic information from a multiplicity of sources about a company that they are thinking of purchasing from with little more than a few Google searches. Purchases are increasingly being conducted online, with no possibility of any salesperson influencing the decisions face-to-face. This trend has only been exacerbated by COVID.

Concurrently, user experience (UX) has evolved into a fine art and exact science, which enables organizations to learn about and develop critical insights regarding their customers, including buying tendencies, demographics, loyalty and lifecycles (retention or churn dynamics), preferred purchasing channels, personalization preferences and communication methods and frequencies. Customer behavior can be highly influenced by CX as they engage with the brand and associated products/services.

This development has been empowered further by a wide number of CX-centric AI and data platforms that have become increasingly sophisticated. This goes way beyond Google Analytics insights about a company's website or standard data metrics around a particular email campaign. Software available today enables CXOs to develop seamless, high-quality, client-centric CX insights and performance metrics across all of the touchpoints within their ecosystem.

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### **Three Key Elements for Hiring an Exceptional CXO for Your Business**

We are seeing increasing demand for CXOs from many of our clients, and a good number are also looking to both restructure and reprioritize their CX function in a competitive post-COVID climate. In order to hire the best CXO to take your firm forward, it is recommended that you:

1. *Avoid slotting yourselves into a silo* – just because you might necessarily be, say, a B2B industrial plastics manufacturer, or a luxury fashion retailer, does not mean that you should be looking for a CXO who has that sector-specific experience. Instead, consider CXOs from any industry (including both B2B and B2C) who bring fungible skills. More importantly, it is advisable to target CXOs who have effectively implemented measurable CX programs and projects that have resulted in quantifiable improvements in lifetime-value-per-customer, loyalty, advocacy and satisfaction metrics.
2. *Prioritize cultural fit* – related to the previous point, it is more important to search for a CXO who has worked with organizations with a similar culture to your own. This obviously requires a detailed understanding of what your own organizational culture is. The importance of a match in this area cannot be understated.
3. *Align EX with CX* – more recently, CXOs are combining CX with employee experience (EX). If an organization separates leadership of CX from EX, disconnects between CX and EX are likely to arise, even if those roles are part of the executive team. In her book *Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*, Denise Lee Yohn demonstrates that separating the CX and EX functions leads to competition between the two for resources and attention. Your CXO should have a very solid understanding of EX, and how the two can - and should - interrelate for maximum benefit.

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