

Great CX Means Sleeping With The Enemy

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Ring video doorbells light up your smartphone with images of your doorstep in real time. Uber Taxi lets customers know when a local cab is nearby. Airline alliances allow you to redeem your frequent-flyer miles on a different carrier from the one you earned them on. Third-party sellers on Amazon share the same core platform to sell competing items. Sonos music is easily piped through Alexa wireless speakers. As consumers, we don't bat an eye at these occurrences, but each of these scenarios is an example of one competitor inviting another into a partnership to enhance customer experience (CX).

Until fairly recently, most companies wouldn't even entertain the idea of collaborating with their competitors. Rather, the chosen path was a lonely one, a race to an ever-on-the-horizon finish line, often while wearing blinders to what the rest of the world was creating. But as social media and crowdsourcing took hold and customers started weighing in as never before, the demand for products and services to be integrated to suit customers' desires skyrocketed.

One famous example of this shift comes from the automotive industry. Up until about 2014, automakers tried to incorporate their own communications, music and GPS technology, which always felt light years behind what customers were accustomed to on their phones. Clunky navigation systems, outdated music interfaces and cumbersome dials on a dated dashboard — for people used to one-touch screen immediacy, suddenly even luxury cars were feeling a bit like wagons.

"Today's experience with a technology drives tomorrow's desire," said Kristin Kolodge of [J.D. Power](#). "Consumers are challenging the level of usefulness that some automotive technology provides, including whether it's needed at all."

Eventually, automakers realized that if they wanted to sell cars, they had to yield to their customers' wants — and what customers wanted was iPhone and Android technology at their fingertips. Ferrari, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo were among the first large car manufacturers to buddy up with Apple five years ago, and voila! Today, Apple CarPlay is on display in new cars from all the major vehicle manufacturers. Not only did this result in a better overall product, but it [delighted customers](#). But don't just take my word for it. Phil Mason, a user experience (UX) leader at Ford Motors, recently [recounted his employer's epiphany](#) about drivers' proclivities. "People want their stuff. If they use Spotify, they want to use Spotify," he told The Atlantic. "More than anything, they want to use their own digital ecosphere. Or else they're just going to stick the phone on the windscreen."

Collaboration between companies isn't just [great for business](#); it just might be the greatest way to provide superior customer experience (CX). Just ask LinkedIn and Twitter, which caught on to this idea back in 2009, when the two social networks agreed to include both sharing options when tweeting or posting. "Why?" LinkedIn [wrote at the time](#). "Because when you're trying to get something done, you want Twitter and LinkedIn to work together. Like peanut butter and chocolate!"

That's just it: Customers don't care if your company is battling another for eyeballs or revenue. All they want is a service, product or solution that fits seamlessly with their lives. They want a solution that works for them because it was made with their interests in mind. If this excellent product, service or combination happens to be a patchwork quilt woven with best-of-breed technologies from a variety of competing companies, so be it. As long as what they've paid for is superior and they have a clear line to your company for support.

If this idea of collaboration resonates with you, you're in good company: Approximately [85 percent](#) of executives feel strategic partnerships are crucial for their businesses. But how do you put that in play? Here are a few tips for thinking about creating an external partnership that will boost your CX and result in a faster growth and greater revenue:

- Mesh your CX ecosystems:** While you might have a mapped out network of all your customer interaction touch points, your partnering company may or may not have its own complex ecosystem. If you're working together to create a new crossover product, service or solution, be sure to mesh the combined customer interactions and clearly convey to each other who is available for customer service at each point along the way.

- Ensure the CX love is shared:** Never assume your partner values CX as a differentiator, let alone the major differentiator. If you have an ecosystem established for your complex network of customer touch points, your internal teams are incentivized and encouraged to make every connection with a customer a feel-good moment, and you have a stellar reputation on social media — don't lose this when a partner enters the picture. Conduct CX collaboration workshops with your partner. Create a social media blog where the two companies mutually share great moments

working together. And consider offering the other company [incentives](#) to bring in as much happiness to your collective customers as you aspire to.

•**Overcommunicate with your customers:** Be crystal-clear and upfront about the partnership with your customers, and make sure you are there for them. You are the line of communication, so make they can talk to you if anything goes amiss — or if they want to praise the new solution. Consider creating a safe environment for sharing this vital feedback with your partner so everyone wins. That's great CX!

Maybe it's too late for Coke and Pepsi, but collaboration between competitors is the way forward. It brings about superior products, services and solutions that drive customer-oriented innovation and creativity that matters. And that will surely raise CX to ever new heights.