Brand experience mapping

Help me maintain / repair / upgrade

Inspire me with possibility

Help me get the most out of using

Help me choose with confidence
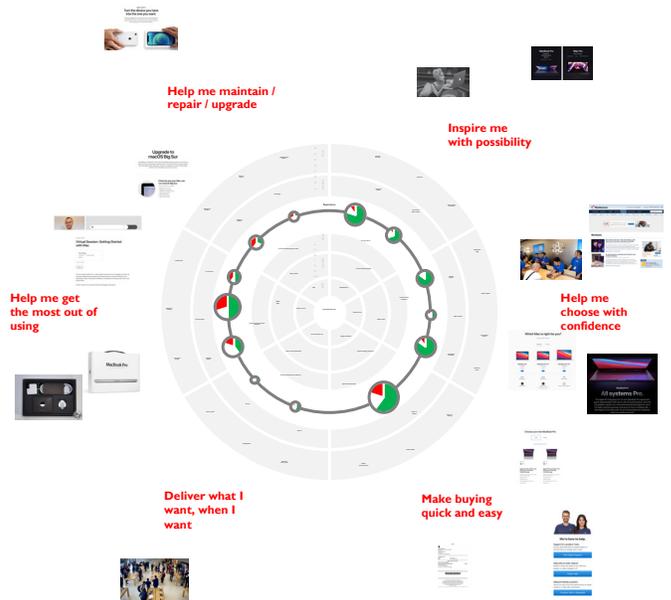
Deliver what I want, when I want

Make buying quick and easy

BARON SAUVAGE

"The world in which we live and work continues to change and become more complex. Vast and far-reaching changes are occurring in the nature and structure of the social and economic systems in which people live, and the industrial and occupational structures where they work. Individuals' values and beliefs about themselves and their society are changing as are the ways they look at and understand their own growth and development. This includes their career development as well. More people are looking for meaning in their lives, particularly as they think about the work they do, their situation as a family member and as an individual, their involvement in their community, their role in education and training, and their involvement in leisure activities."

This observation was made by Norm Gysbers, one of the United States' foremost scholars in education and career development. Although it could have been made yesterday, Gysbers wrote this in the 1980s: a time when scholars, economists and journalists in the US were preoccupied with the effects of de-industrialisation on work and society. Much of the discussion about the shift from agriculture and manufacture towards services focused on potential negative consequences: fears about moving away from a society based on 'tangibles' towards one reliant on 'intangibles'.

In many senses, it's surprising that this fear existed in the 1980s. Labour data shows that the US had already been a service economy for somewhere between 60 and 30 years: in the 1910s, the service sector overtook agriculture and manufacturing to become the largest employer in the US; by the 1950s over half of Americans were employed in the service sector; and by the 1980s services accounted for around 70% of all jobs. The fear of de-industrialisation also largely ignored the fact (well established by the 1980s) that a strong and vibrant service sector was closely associated with economic progress and increases in per capita GNP.

So where did the fear come from?

A large part of the negativity can probably be explained by a human aversion to change. And we are particularly resistant to change we don't understand: the tangibility of farms, factories and the goods they produce is reassuring... We can count chickens! As early as 1911, Frederick Winslow Taylor had established a scientific set of principles through which industrial processes and outputs could be measured and managed. By the 1980s, these principles of scientific management had been evolved and embedded in industrial processes and working practices. But the same wasn't true of the service sector. The January 1984 issue of Harvard Business Review featured an article by Lynn Shostack, who had spent much of her career working in the financial sector and was frustrated by the relative lack of rigour and analysis in service development. While the production of goods had been distilled to a science, in Shostack's view:

"Many believe that good service results from the style of an individual entrepreneur or company and is therefore highly idiosyncratic."

Lynn Shostack's response was to create the 'Service Blueprint': a pioneering attempt to apply a more scientific, analytical approach to service design and improvement. The blueprint was designed to help an organisation visualise and manage many of the issues inherent in planning and delivering a service:

- Identifying processes: the first step in the blueprint involves developing a flow diagram of the processes that collectively constitute the service, so that these can be analysed and improved.
- Establishing line of visibility: an important aspect of this visualisation is to include the processes that are hidden from the user's view, but can have a significant impact on how efficiently and effectively the service is delivered.
- Isolating fail points: once visualised, the service designer can identify potential (or actual) points in the process where the system may go awry and then design fail-safe processes to correct these possible sources of error.
- Establishing time frame: since time is often a major determinant in the cost of providing a service, the service designer should also establish a standard execution time, as well as an acceptable degree of deviation from this time.

- Analysing profitability: the service designer can use the standard execution time and variance to model and improve profitability

The diagram below is an adapted version of Lynn Shostack's Service Blueprint for a shoeshine business. It's a relatively straightforward flow chart, which breaks down the stages of a shoeshine into four simple steps: brush, apply polish, buff and pay. But there are also crucial activities that need to happen in the background to facilitate this process: materials need to be selected and purchased, and a payment mechanism needs to be established. The diagram also highlights a potential fail point and establishes a fail-safe process to correct the error (it's reasonable to wonder at this point if the service designer might have found a way to mitigate the error, rather than simply try to correct it).
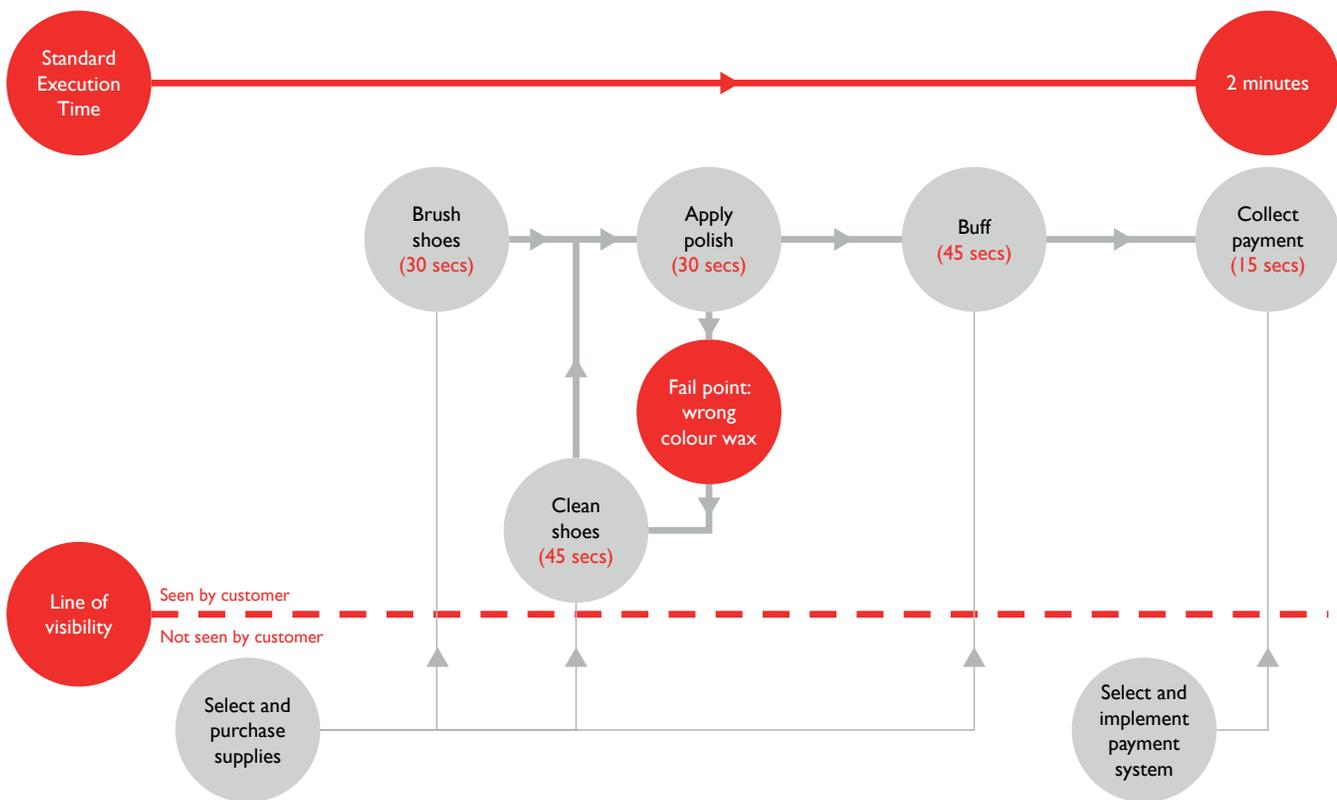
The Service Blueprint designer suggests a standard execution time of 2 minutes to complete a shoeshine: based on the current UK minimum wage (£8.91), this would equate to a time cost of around 30 pence per shine. Applying the wrong wax adds 45 seconds of time and about 11 pence of additional cost. Armed with the Service

Blueprint, the service designer can model the impact of different demand, pricing, time and cost assumptions to work out the likely profitability of the business. The designer can also model the potential impact of service innovations: what unmet customer needs exist and how can these be met in a way that is efficient, reliable, profitable and satisfying?
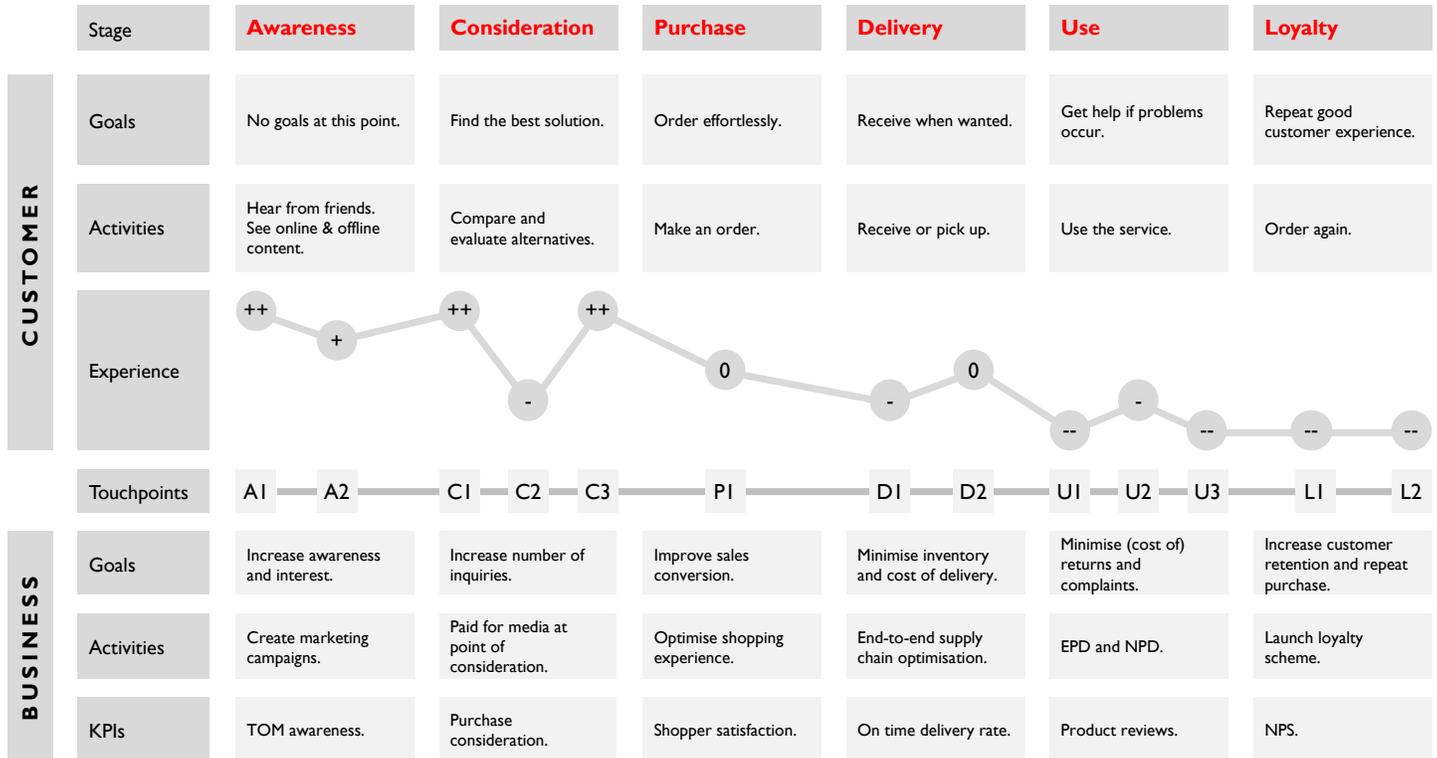
Business consultants Karl Albrecht, Chip Bell and Ron Zemke were inspired by Lynn Shostack's Service Blueprint, but they identified a significant shortcoming: it's a great tool for understanding a process, but not for understanding how customers actually experience that process. For example, should the shoe shiner engage the customer in conversation? Does this positively affect the experience, or simply add to the time and cost of providing the service? These are important trade-offs to consider, but can't be captured in a Service Blueprint. In response, Albrecht, Bell and Zemke developed what would come to be known as the Customer Journey Map.

In Albrecht's, Bell's and Zemke's view, each of the stages in a service process is a 'moment of truth' for the customer: an opportunity to score points in the customer's mental report card. And when moments of truth go unmanaged, the quality of a service experience regresses to mediocrity. The Customer Journey Map builds on Lynn Shostack's Service Blueprint, but reframes the steps in a service process as an inventory of 'moments of truth'. The journey begins with the first point of contact between the customer and an organisation, ends (temporarily) when the customer considers the service to be complete, and begins again when the customer chooses to come back for more.

Conceptually, the process of developing a Customer Journey Map is relatively simple:

1. Identify a target customer or persona
2. Define 'stages' of that customer's experience by dividing your service experience into the smallest possible increments or steps that make sense conceptually.
3. Then begin to identify the 'moments of truth' that happen during each stage of the experience.

These guidelines allow tremendous room for interpretation, which is both good and bad. On the positive side, it means that Customer Journey Maps can be customised to reflect the specific beliefs, interests or aims of any organisation: there are lots of 'right' ways to put together a Customer Journey Map. On the negative side, many of the maps I encounter tend to run contrary to the spirit of Albrecht's, Bell's and Zemke's work. The (extremely simplified) Customer Journey Map below is a fairly typical representation:

Stage	Awareness	Consideration	Purchase	Delivery	Use	Loyalty
CUSTOMER Goals	No goals at this point.	Find the best solution.	Order effortlessly.	Receive when wanted.	Get help if problems occur.	Repeat good customer experience.
Activities	Hear from friends. See online & offline content.	Compare and evaluate alternatives.	Make an order.	Receive or pick up.	Use the service.	Order again.
Experience	++ +	++ -	++	0 -	0 --	-- --	-- --
Touchpoints	A1 — A2	C1 — C2 — C3	P1	D1 — D2	U1 — U2 — U3	L1 — L2
BUSINESS Goals	Increase awareness and interest.	Increase number of inquiries.	Improve sales conversion.	Minimise inventory and cost of delivery.	Minimise (cost of) returns and complaints.	Increase customer retention and repeat purchase.
Activities	Create marketing campaigns.	Paid for media at point of consideration.	Optimise shopping experience.	End-to-end supply chain optimisation.	EPD and NPD.	Launch loyalty scheme.
KPIs	TOM awareness.	Purchase consideration.	Shopper satisfaction.	On time delivery rate.	Product reviews.	NPS.

In many ways, the example above represents a successful evolution of Lynn Shostack's Service Blueprint:

- **Identifying processes**: it breaks down the customer experience into the granular touchpoints, or 'moments of contact' that collectively constitute the service, so that these can be analysed and improved.
- **Establishing line of visibility**: by including the business goals, activities and KPIs, all of the underlying processes that are hidden from the customer's view remain within scope.
- **Isolating fail points**: measuring the quality (and, ideally, variance) of the customer's experience at each touchpoint indicates which aspects of the service are falling furthest below

expectations. Combining this with an evaluation of the impact of each touchpoint on satisfaction or NPS is a useful way to establish which parts of the customer journey to prioritise for investment.

- **Establishing time frame and analysing profitability**: these can be accommodated in the business goals, activities and KPIs, along with a broader set of success criteria.

However, there are a few critical areas in which the above example falls short of Albrecht's, Bell's and Zemke's ideal:

User-centric

A Customer Journey Map by definition should be user-centric and built around the outcomes of the person or group of people the experience is designed for. Often, customer journeys and brand experiences are structured using the outcome the business hopes to achieve (awareness, consideration, purchase, repeat purchase). The example above falls into this trap: 'awareness' and 'consideration' aren't customer goals; they are corporate goals. The majority of the Customer Journey Maps I see are structured using stages from out-of-date brand funnels (an issue I've written about here). Not only does this violate a fundamental principle of user-centric design (that it should be centred on the user), but it makes the assumption that the goal of a brand experience is to manoeuvre people in the direction of a specific business outcome. This isn't what Albrecht, Bell and Zemke had in mind at all: great brand experiences achieve business objectives by helping customers achieve their own objectives.

Non-sequential & non-linear

Albrecht, Bell and Zemke initially referred to their mapping approach as a 'cycle': great customer experiences often have no defined beginning or end, but the customer journey example above suggests that the customer experiences a linear sequence of stages, culminating in a point of 'loyalty'. Most businesses I work with appreciate that people tend to encounter touchpoints in an unpredictable order. There's no point trying to force these experiences into a sequential journey, which is why I tend to prefer the term 'experience mapping' rather than 'journey mapping'. And I

avoid where possible representing how people experience a brand as a linear sequence of steps. Instead, my inclination is to revert to the original idea of a cycle: a potentially infinite loop with no defined beginning or end, made up of individual points of contact.

The customer journey example above raises a number of other itches I think are worth scratching:

Prioritising touchpoints

It's common to measure the extent to which needs are satisfied at each touchpoint, but at some point the team responsible for designing the brand experience will need to make difficult decisions about where to invest. It makes sense to focus on fixing the touchpoints that customers tend to be least satisfied with, but there are other factors to take into consideration: for example, how influential the touchpoint is in driving overall satisfaction, NPS, or other desired outcomes.

All touchpoints are not created equal: years ago, I worked with an international hotel chain on improving their brand experience, alongside a new brand positioning. Fortunately, they had reams of customer satisfaction data, which we could use to model the impact of specific touchpoints (such as reception experience, concierge, room cleanliness, food quality, etc.) on desired outcomes such as satisfaction, advocacy and RevPAR (Revenue per available room). We identified that the concierge experience had the most significant impact across all the desired outcome variables. Verbatim feedback suggested that the most satisfied customers valued the local knowledge concierge staff were able to impart: providing valuable insight into the locale and suggesting 'authentic' nearby experiences. The entire brand was repositioned with this idea in mind, and innovative 'hallmark' touchpoints were designed to bring the positioning to life.

Even if you lack the data to model the impact of each touchpoint, the Kano model is a powerful way to use qualitative feedback or internal workshops to think systematically about which touchpoints are most worthy of attention.

Thinking beyond the customer

Another reason I prefer to think in terms of 'brand experience mapping' rather than 'customer journey mapping' is that brands are typically experienced by more than just customers: brands affect potential and current employees; alumni; investors and analysts; partners and suppliers; media contacts; and the general public. Although experience mapping was initially designed for customers, it can (and arguably should) be applied to any group of people a brand can positively influence to create value. Businesses that use a consistent approach to mapping and designing the ways that internal and external groups experience their brands are far more likely to create thoughtful, seamless, efficient experiences that demonstrate an empathy for their users and create value for everybody involved.

Making the experience visual

One of the weirdest things about most of the customer journey maps I see is that few ever include examples of what the customer actually sees. How can you redesign an experience if you don't know what the user is looking at, or interacting with? What's the point of creating a slick recruitment campaign if the careers section of your website is chaotic and onboarding for new joiners is a crappy PowerPoint presentation? Visualising the experience map by including a users'-eye-view of the brand is an easy way to detect points of inconsistency and identify quick-wins.

Here's an illustration of what the example customer journey map above could look like if we adopted these design principles:

Although the example is enormously simplified (with visuals shamelessly robbed from Apple), it nonetheless brings together a lot of information in the same space:

- Headlines that break the experience down into a set of user-centric objectives, goals and activities
- Visuals that indicate how consistently and clearly the brand is represented throughout the experience
- Pie charts that are sized to indicate the importance of each touchpoint and illustrate how positively or negatively they are perceived
- Business goals, activities and objectives that underlie each part of the brand experience
- And at the centre of the experience, a value proposition statement that acts as a central organising principle for making decisions about experience design.

Of course, this is just an example. No two brand experience maps look the same or follow a uniform template. But I've found the principles laid out above are helpful for developing maps that build available insight into practical systems for identifying performance gaps and developing imaginative responses. From a practical perspective, I generally find it helpful to build the map in stages and from the outside in:

1. Beginning with the user group, their objectives, goals and actions.
2. Then lining up touchpoints against these actions and assessing (through data or other means) their relative importance and how well they meet the user's ambition.
3. Establishing the business objectives, activities and KPIs that sit below the line of visibility.

I also find it useful to work through these stages to build a complete picture of the 'as-is' experience, before starting to develop ideas for how to improve the experience. Once the 'as-is' map is complete, we can work through a similar logic to develop a 'to-be' future experience:

1. Have we understood everything we need to about the user group? Have we captured the most motivating objectives, goals and actions? Is there anything we've missed? What can we learn by understanding their broader attitudes, interests, relationships, motivations and activities?
2. Have we got all the right touchpoints? Are there any we could rationalise to simplify the journey? Where are the pain points? How can we resolve or mitigate these? Where are the pleasure points? How can we amplify these? And where are we missing touchpoints? What can we learn from how brands in parallel categories help their users meet similar user objectives?
3. How can we be more efficient in delivering the experience? Where should we be focusing investment? Which activities will have the greatest impact on the experience? Are there any quick wins we can deliver? What should we stop doing? Continue? Evolve? What should we start doing? And are we measuring the right things?

The final thing to say is that this is best approached as a team sport. Lynn Shostack created the Service Blueprint with a 'service designer' in mind, but I've never come across a brand experience that was the responsibility of a single person. Without exception, great brand experiences require collaboration and communication across multiple teams within an organisation. This is where these maps really come into their own: they can be a great way to get different experts within an organisation to focus on the same challenge. All the steps described above can be delivered as a series of workshops and thanks to digital collaboration platforms like Mural and Miro, the maps can be living, evolving digital representations of user experiences, which teams can routinely review and improve. As Norm Gysbers observed: people's values and beliefs about themselves and their society are constantly evolving; the experiences that brands create for those people should evolve accordingly.