



# Exhibition centres must embrace the customer journey

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre has made a concerted effort to change its focus as it bids to stay ahead of the competition

by Peter King

These days it is vitally important for exhibition centres to understand exactly who their customers are and what is important to them. With so many venues vying for the same business, a major effort has been made by the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) to focus on the ‘customer journey’.

Two years ago we introduced this specific initiative and it has been an absolute game changer. In fact, it has been a piece of work that has provided insights that impact all customer-facing business. The project has also generated a great deal of interest amongst other venues around the world.

It all began with the outline of a thorough three-year plan that encompassed all parts of our business. This resulted in a detailed series of goals, objectives and delivery strategies that were designed to help MCEC remain ahead of its competition. Of course this is nothing different from what many businesses are doing, however, in our view, one very critical element had been missing. And that was a focus on our customers.

Historically, we had always been primarily operationally focused and prescriptive in the way that we interacted with our stakeholders. We realised that this needed to change and we felt that we should become completely customer-centric. This meant that the needs and expectations of our customers would drive every choice that we made.

This change in thinking proved to be the most important decision we have ever made and it has transformed our entire business. It has overhauled our relationships, our understanding and our structure. Even the delivery model of our events.

The ‘customer journey’ project had a very clear scope and sequence, which began with accurately defining our key customers. We wanted to outline their needs, desires and influences with respect to events – effectively humanising them and providing consistency across the business. There was also a need to map out how they made decisions and assess the way they interacted with us at the MCEC. Then by using this information we were able to identify clear opportunities to improve the overall customer experience, be it through service, communication, content or even food and beverage.

Ultimately our goal was to deconstruct our customers and their needs with precision. This was so that we could determine the best way of satisfying all of their requirements. Faced with these challenges we took three significant steps.

First, we crafted a set of seven customer personas to create a common language and customer objectives within the business. Next, we mapped the various journeys taken by our customers in their interactions with us and lastly we identified ideas for improving their respective experiences. Each of the steps that we took included a series of detailed actions and as a result of our findings, we were able to reorganise and restructure to ensure we provided assistance and

support to our customers at critical times in their journey with us.

Since we made the change our team have received constant positive feedback and they now feel far more empowered to provide immediate solutions to satisfy the needs of our customers. Across the business, our post- event survey results are now at the highest levels we have ever seen.

Of course, the ‘customer journey’ project is an on-going one and we recently announced the launch of our customer portal – myMCEC. This was as a direct result of the findings from our work and aims to ensure that all customers continue to find it easy to do business with MCEC.

We will also soon commence the second stage of our ‘customer journey’ in a bid to gain an even greater understanding. This is vitally important as we all know that our customer and visitor expectations evolve quickly. Therefore we have to reset our teams and continue to challenge them in order to improve our delivery performance every year.

Standing still is not an option and by basing our evolving structure and practices on very specific customer perspectives, we have been able to ensure that all the changes we have made will benefit our customers the most. ◦

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In addition to his role as a Member of the AIPC Board of Directors, Peter King is Chief Executive at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre



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