



**How to Grow  
Your Business by  
(Over)Delivering**

**the 3 Things  
Customers Truly  
Care About**

**T**he pandemic has of course dislocated everything. But one of its most impactful and important changes is that it has modified how, why, and where consumers make purchases. Increasingly, buying decisions are made not based on the quality of the product or service, or even on the price of that offering. Instead, consumers, both B2C and B2B, make choices based on customer experience.

In this guide, I'll examine some of the shifts in consumer behavior that have made customer experience more vital than ever, and demonstrate how you can outflank your competition and build your business by delivering—or over-delivering—what customers want from you.

Throughout, I'll rely significantly on data and analysis from my friends at Podium, a fantastic customer interaction management platform that makes it easier than ever to understand what customers need and serves it up, often through low-drama mechanisms like text messages and web chat. I'm a big fan of the Podium solution. You can see it for yourself at no cost at [Podium.com/Starter](https://Podium.com/Starter).

In addition to a customer interaction management system, you may also be interested in taking the ideas included here and putting them into practice via ongoing consultation, a strategic plan, or a detailed workshop for you and your team. My team and I at Convince & Convert do precisely that for many of the world's iconic brands. If you'd like a hand crafting your own Coveted Customer Experience, please let me know at [ConvinceAndConvert.com/17-problems-we-solve](https://ConvinceAndConvert.com/17-problems-we-solve).

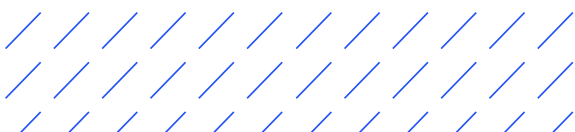
Thanks for your interest, and very best wishes as you begin, extend, or optimize your customer experience journey.



**Jay Baer**

Founder, Convince & Convert

Author of six best-selling books including *Hug Your Haters* and *Talk Triggers*





# YOUR OPPORTUNITY IS ENORMOUS

Nobody is, of course, pro-pandemic. It's the worst. But it has also created a scenario—and I believe this sincerely—that presents you with perhaps the single best opportunity to grow market share that you will ever see in your entire career.

This is because customers (yours, mine, and your competitors) are simply more willing to make different buying decisions. They are willing to ride a different horse in a way that would have been unthinkable pre-pandemic. If you thought customer loyalty was beginning to atrophy circa 2018, COVID-19 took the last vestiges of loyalty and squashed them.

In fact, according to data from Podium, 54% of consumers say that they have made a purchase from a business for the very first time since the pandemic; a purchase from a provider of goods and services that is all-new to that customer. Furthermore, 89% of those consumers say that they plan to stay with this new provider.

You may think “Of course. The pandemic put huge economic strain on millions of people. They will naturally migrate to the low-cost provider.” But that's not really what the data shows. In fact, according to Podium,

→ **28% of consumers say that price actually matters less since the pandemic!**

This fact that customers are more willing than ever to make fresh buying decisions presents the ultimate double-edged sword: it's a big opportunity for you to sway your competitors' customers over to your side; but your competition has the same opening to recruit YOUR customers.

You have to thread the needle: to not only protect the customer relationships that you've enjoyed for as long as you've enjoyed them, but also to now use this rare opportunity to go out and create brand new customer relationships.

How do you do that? Well, it's probably not price. And it's probably not having some sort of breakthrough product or service that gives you a defensible advantage in your category. Sure, you may bring an innovation to market that tilts the table in your direction initially, but secret sauce doesn't stay secret for long, in most cases.

Most likely, what will protect your existing customers and attract new ones is customer experience. In fact, according to Podium, 84% of companies believed that in 2020 they competed mostly on the basis of customer experience.

# INTRODUCING: A COVETED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Despite the intense interest in the topic from the business community over the past several years, I think we overcomplicate customer experience. Customer experience is how we make our customers feel. But those feelings are not objective. They are based on the expectation equation. The expectation equation says that your customers bring their own set of expectations with them to every single interaction with your business.

Our perceptions of customer experience are not objective, and do not exist in a vacuum. They are dictated by the difference between the expectation and the outcome. When you, as a business, can exceed expectations in one or more powerful and palpable ways, that's where a great customer experience resides. When you fall short of those expectations, that's where you get a poor, or negative, or bad customer experience.

Why does this expectation equation matter? Well, 86% of customers say that they will pay more for an excellent customer experience.

But what is an "excellent customer experience"? How can you define it, and then deliver it? I believe a better way to describe what you need to strive for in your organization is not "excellent customer experience" but a Coveted Customer Experience.

→ **A Coveted Customer Experience is an experience that customers WANT, not just one that is unobjectionable or tolerable. It's an experience that exceeds expectations so much that price and perfection are no longer required.**

If you're not the cheapest, that's okay. And if you make a mistake, they will give you another chance. What the Coveted Customer Experience buys you is one of the most critically important things in business that is almost never discussed: the benefit of the doubt.

You might think a Coveted Customer Experience is unnecessary for your organization. You may believe that customers in your category will not hold you to a very high standard, giving you an inherent advantage in terms of the expectation equation. And at some point, you may have been correct. But not any longer.

Today, customers do not care what kind of business you have, or in what category. You don't get a "customer experience pass" because you inhabit an industry that has historically foisted mediocre experiences onto its buyers. It's true that customers used to literally say: "You know, that's a pretty decent experience FOR A HOSPITAL." Or, "That's an acceptable experience FOR A BANK." Today? They don't care. The expectation equation is largely the same, regardless of category.

In fact, 73% of customers say an experience with one business changes how they feel about experiences from ALL OTHER BUSINESSES.

# THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH ABOUT CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE—AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Did you know that 70% of customer experience initiatives fail to produce a positive return on investment? Why? Customer experience initiatives fail almost universally because they are simply too big.

→ In reality, “customer experience” doesn’t actually exist.

It isn’t really a thing you can touch and see. Customer experience is the culmination of dozens or hundreds of specific touchpoints. What does your website say? What do your Google reviews say? How does somebody greet the guests when they walk into the restaurant? And on and on and on and on and on and on and on. It’s dozens, or in some cases hundreds, of individual decisions that you make in your organization that either meet, exceed, or fail to reach expectations for that intersection point.

→ In truth, “customer experience” is just a nickname.

We’ve all agreed to use it as an artful term to describe this colossal list of decisions that we make every minute of every day that impact customer attitudes and market share. When you are asked, either internally or externally, to improve the customer experience, that is an impossible quest because there really isn’t any such thing. It’s not one thing: it’s ALL the things.

You may be thinking: “But if there are dozens or hundreds of different customer intersection points, which ones should we focus on?”

Well, between the work that we do at Convince & Convert and the work being done by my friends at Podium, we’ve concluded that there are three keys to a Coveted Customer Experience. Three things that your customers, my customers, and your competitors’ customers care about disproportionately, above and beyond the rest of the criteria. Thus, these are the three places where you should direct your attention in your customer experience optimization efforts to have the maximum impact and put you on the way to delivering a Coveted Customer Experience.

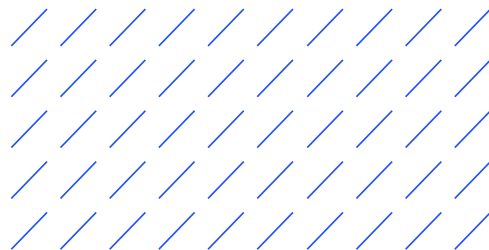
First, your customers want you to be **Quick**.

Second, they want you to be **Clear**.

Third, they want you to be **Kind**.



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# COVETED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PILLAR: QUICK

Speed expectations are unrelenting. I started in digital marketing in 1993 when domain names were free. And across that epoch, I've never, ever heard a customer say, "I've been thinking, and it's okay if your company handled that more slowly." Speed expectations never stop. They are like an escalator, not stairs.

What was fast three years ago is commonplace today. And of course, your younger customers have even more heightened expectations around responsiveness, as they know only a "right now" world.

Here are three elements you can address to exceed customer expectations for Quick, putting you on the road to that all-important Coveted Customer Experience.

## → Commit to Rapidity

The first step in being faster is believing you can be and that it's worth it. And the reality is that Quick is one of the few elements of customer experience that is genuinely viable for all businesses, even those in industries not commonly associated with speed.

Bogdanoff Dages, for example, is a small accounting firm in Indianapolis that provides the same services for the same prices as just about every other small accounting firm in the country. But, Bogdanoff Dages has embraced Quick as its avenue to success.

Bogdanoff Dages replies to all clients, at all times, within five minutes, and it BLOWS PEOPLE'S MINDS. They have far more Google reviews than most small accounting firms, and nearly every review mentions how quick the firm is to respond.



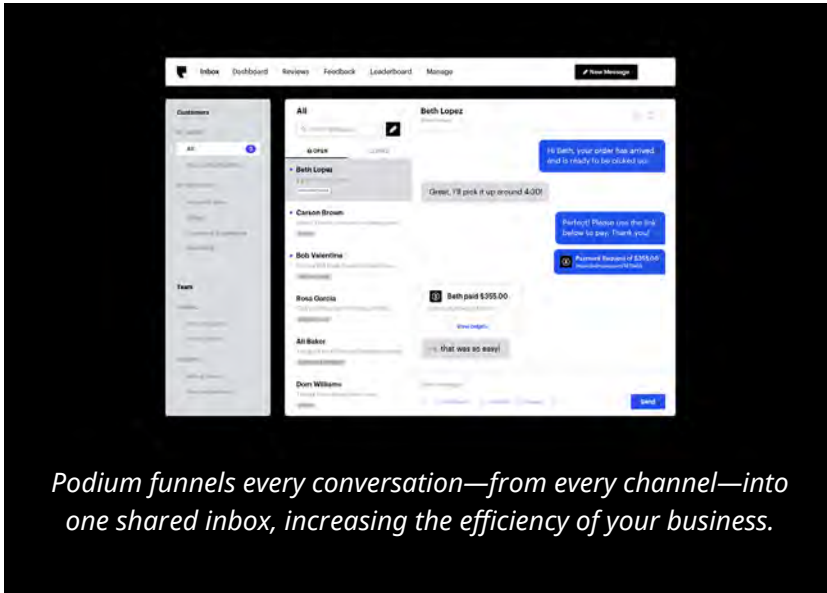
**S Vlogs**



We are very happy to have found such an excellent accountant. We hired Tim to do both our personal and corporate taxes. He does an amazing job getting everything done quickly and accurately. Whenever we have a question, he is quick to reply with great advice. We highly recommend their services.

How can you be that fast in a complex category like tax and accounting? You have to engineer or re-engineer your internal processes around responsiveness. Model your scenarios. Create backup schemas so if one person is busy, someone else can respond.

Even in my own company, we endeavor to exceed expectations with Quick. Our consulting clients have access to a special email address that routes to our entire team. It's like a "bat signal" for digital marketing and customer experience assistance!



Podium has an interesting solution that can help with Quick as well. Their platform allows you to combine all your customer interactions (text messages, web chat, reviews, feedback surveys, video calls, mobile payments, and more) into a unified inbox, for fast sifting, sorting, assignment, and response.

## → Answer Even If You Don't Have the Answer

A second step along the road to a Coveted Customer Experience is to answer even if you don't have the answer. It's very common that a customer asks you a question, and you don't know the answer off the top of your head. So you go find the answer; whatever you need to do to make that happen. Then you come back and provide the response. Stop doing that. Customers hate it. Eighty-eight percent of them expect an immediate response when they have a question, and you aren't providing it.

The better approach is if a customer has a query you cannot address instantly, you immediately respond with, "Good question. Such a good question, in fact, I don't know the answer off the top of my head. I'm going to find out. As soon as I do, I will let you know." That satiates the customer. They know that you are on top of it, and this little twist dramatically increases customer satisfaction on responsiveness.

## → Embrace Quicker Interaction Mechanisms

My third recommendation for Quick is to implement as many interaction mechanisms as possible that are truly faster than the legacy alternatives.

I am gobsmacked by this statistic: according to Podium, 86% of customers expect companies to be MORE convenient since the pandemic. Far from giving your organization a "COVID pass" on responsiveness, customers actually anticipate that you'll be faster than ever. Wow.

This is why I recommend that you implement the technologies that reduce interaction cycle time, like text messages, web chat, and even the opportunity for customers to pay via text. Podium gives you the ability to set these up very easily, and tens of thousands of companies of all sizes have already done so.

# COVETED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PILLAR: CLEAR

The pandemic has dramatically curtailed customers' knowledge of how your company (and all businesses) operate because it's all changed so much! There is a tremendous amount of information asymmetry now, whereby you know vastly more about how your products and services can be purchased than your customers do.

Companies that can cut through this fog and confusion will reduce or close this critical uncertainty gap. And when customers are uncertain, they don't buy.

Here are three elements you can address to exceed customer expectations for Clear.

## → Watch for Clarity Warnings

When it comes to customer communication, most businesses are tuned to look first and foremost for complaints. But you also should watch for clarity warnings. This is the first responsibility when trying to exceed customer expectations around lack of confusion.

A clarity warning is every time a customer says or writes something like: "I don't know" or "I'm confused" or "How do I" or "What about..." Each of those phrases indicates an uncertainty gap. And the more you find those clarity warnings, analyze them, and categorize them, the easier it will be for you to begin to close the uncertainty gap with information.

## → The Ultimate FAQ

Once you've ascertained where your uncertainty gaps exist, it's time to build out the ultimate frequently asked questions program. Sit down and write out EVERY question your customers have (and there are a lot more than ever before), and your best answers to them.

Then, put all of those questions and answers on your website in an easily findable place. But also collate this FAQ into a resource that is printable, savable, and shareable so your customers and prospects can, if they prefer, review in a more leisurely fashion than huddled around a screen. A PDF file may be best in this regard.

Joe Manausa does this. Joe is a Realtor in Tallahassee, Florida. He sat down and wrote a sixty-three page, totally free, downloadable PDF called "How to Sell a Home on Your Own in Florida." It is exactly that. Step-by-step, who to call, what to do, what paperwork to fill out. It's everything you need to know. It's truly the ultimate FAQ.

It's also his number one source of customers. Once people see just how much legwork is involved in selling a home on your own in Florida, their interest in doing it drops significantly and Joe gets the call.



## → Prioritize Reviews

As we've discussed in this guide, how customers buy and why has shifted dramatically since the start of the pandemic. Because the historical priorities for making a purchase have changed, and there is so much information asymmetry simultaneously, customers are seeking every opportunity to self-educate before buying.

This is why online reviews are absolutely vital to just about every business now.

In fact, Podium's newest data found that a whopping 70% of consumers say that online reviews are more important to them than ever.

How important? How indispensable have reviews become? Twenty-four percent of consumers have read an online review in the past day, and 60% have read reviews in the past week.

Why the big jump? Lack of clarity. Is it any wonder that four in ten customers say that looking at reviews about businesses' mask-wearing policies are among their top three informational priorities?

Fundamentally, you need reviews of your business that give prospective customers important clues and cues from your prior customers. And you need NEW reviews. Because is any review written pre-pandemic valid in today's environment? Not likely.

Podium's ability to create a steady stream of new reviews is without peer. Their approach is to request a review from a customer immediately after provision of the product or service, and to make the ask via text message. Approximately 12% of customers immediately accede to the request. Remarkable!

The image displays a dashboard interface for Podium. On the left, a smartphone screen shows a text message: "Thank you for choosing Valley Healthcare. Would you leave us a review?" with a "Leave us a review!" button and a Google review snippet for Charlie Jensen. The main area shows two review cards: one for Carson Brown (5 stars) and one for Rosa Garcia (5 stars). Below these are three summary cards: "Site Ratings 4.8", "Total Reviews 79", and "Review Invites 102". At the bottom, there are three more cards for "Google 4.8", "Facebook 4.7", and "Yellow Pages 4.9".

*With Podium, you can send review invitations via text to increase your success rate. Then, you can manage, track, and respond to all of your reviews from the same dashboard.*

# COVETED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PILLAR: KIND

Let's look at kind. We are living in an era of empathy deficit. Customers no longer anticipate that they will be treated with kindness, dignity, and humanity by companies. It's no longer the default setting. This is a tremendous opportunity for you to exceed expectations with empathy.

Empathy doesn't mean that the customer is always right. Empathy doesn't mean that you do whatever the customer demands. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. Here are three elements you can address to exceed customer expectations for Kind.



## Focus on Feelings, Not Facts

When customers are confused or concerned, they care more about empathy than information. Demonstrating that you are sympathetic to how they FEEL is far more powerful than facts and figures. This is one of the ways in which your Kind playbook differs from your Clear playbook, you see?

In 2020, Major League Baseball teams were unable to play with fans in the stands in their home ballparks. The Pittsburgh Pirates used this as an opportunity to exceed expectations for kindness.

When a foul ball was hit to a season ticket holder's vacant seat, the Pirates staff gathered the ball and mailed it to the fan with a note reading: "We're so sorry you couldn't be at PNC Park today. We're certain you would have caught this one. See you next season: The Pirates."



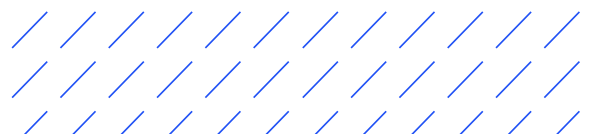
## Embrace Complaints

Did you know that among every one hundred dissatisfied customers, just five will complain to the business? This means that the overwhelming majority of unhappy customers never let you know about it, they just stop giving you money.

Complaints are the canary in the coal mine of customer experience.

Let's recognize that customers who complain are literally taking their time to tell you what you might be able to do better. And that's a gift.

Thus, your unhappy customers are actually your most important customers. Yet, we almost never treat them that way, which is why embracing complaints is a key to unlocking a Coveted Customer Experience.



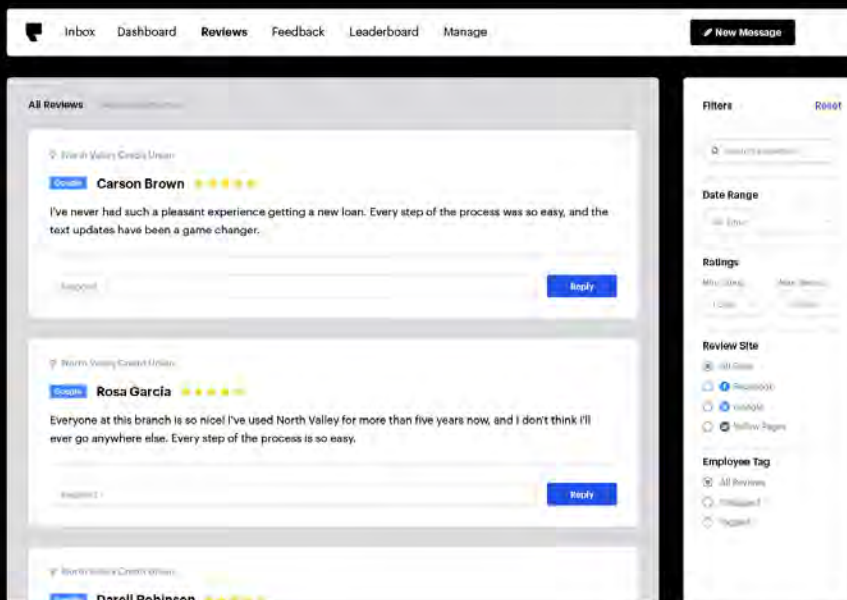
## → Always Answer

In my book, *Hug Your Haters*, my research found that answering customer questions and complaints increases customer advocacy every time. Conversely, choosing to not reply decreases advocacy, often making a bad situation worse. As my friend Shep Hyken says: “a customer you ignore is a customer you should be prepared to lose.”

The best approach is to endeavor to answer every customer, in every channel, every time. And this is especially true with online reviews. My research found that customers’ response expectations differ by channel. They almost always expect a response to an email (eventually). They expect a response to a review less than half the time.

This is another massive opportunity for you. Remember that a Coveted Customer Experience relies on EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS. If they don’t anticipate that you’ll respond to their review quickly, thoroughly, and with kindness, then that is precisely what you should do!

In practice, many businesses respond to reviews when they get around to it, not at all, or circumstantially. You can—and should—be better than that. The Podium platform makes it easy by enabling you or designated team members to monitor and reply to reviews via text message, and/or within the same unified inbox mentioned above. No logging in to a bunch of different websites. Find review. Answer review. Next review.



*With Podium, you can easily respond to reviews from Google, Facebook, and industry-specific review sites in a fraction of the time.*

## DO THE WORK: DESIGN YOUR 9

Quick. Clear. Kind. These are what matter disproportionately to your customers and to mine.

I've asked you to focus on these keys as you build a Coveted Customer Experience that buys you that critical benefit of the doubt in the hearts and minds of your customers and prospects.

But a Coveted Customer Experience isn't about attitude. You need that, yes. You have to believe that you can exceed expectations before you actually do so. But a Coveted Customer Experience needs much more than mindset: you have to actually do the work.

My challenge to you is this: within the next ninety days how can you be 15% more Quick, 15% more Clear, and 15% more Kind?



To make this work, you'll need to actually stop, start, or change some things in your organization. To make this easier to implement, I want you to Design Your 9.

Design Your 9 means that for each of the Quick/Clear/Kind categories, you identify three things that you will stop, start, or change because they will bring you toward your objective of 15% improvement in each area.

## YOU CAN DO THIS—AND YOU MUST

Picture ten of your customers in your mind. Now, realize that for more than eight of them, customer experience is as important as the products or services you sell. Fundamentally, customer experience IS the differentiator between you and your competition. This is why a Coveted Customer Experience isn't a luxury, but a necessity.

But remember, "customer experience" isn't actually one thing: it's all of the things. To have an impact, you have to break it into pieces, and focus on the elements that matter most. Those elements are Quick, Clear, and Kind.

We are in circumstances that haven't been true since the invention of the Internet, whereby customers are willing to make different buying decisions. It's a blank slate. This is quite possibly the greatest opportunity you will ever have in your business career to grow market share. But it starts—and possibly ends—with customer experience.

If I can help you in any way, if my team at Convince & Convert can help you Design Your 9, please do let us know. And I very much encourage you to look at the Podium platform, as it will have a material impact on your success.



Check us out online. [ConvinceAndConvert.com](http://ConvinceAndConvert.com)

Jay Baer is the founder of Convince & Convert, a marketing and customer experience strategy consultancy that helps the world's most iconic brands gain and keep more customers. How can Convince & Convert help you? Visit [ConvinceAndConvert.com](http://ConvinceAndConvert.com)

Jay is also an inductee into the professional speaking hall of fame, and works with companies, organizations, and associations to inspire and educate their audiences. How can Jay help you deliver a program (online or in-person) that will have your team talking for weeks? Visit [JayBaer.com](http://JayBaer.com)



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