

Digital Factors Influence Customer Experience

But traits like integrity and effort are also respected

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Customer experience has become one of the biggest areas of business focus across industries, and it might be even more vital for retailers to foster the buyer-merchant relationship.

Companies are asking themselves a slew of questions: "What do customers want?" "How do we meet expectations across all phases of the path to purchase?" "Is tech the answer for improvement?"

According to an April 2018 [Salesforce](#) survey, 79% of consumers worldwide say experiences are as important as a company's products and services, and 64% say their standard for good experiences are higher than ever. Most companies aren't imagining a growing pressure to deliver.

An annual [KPMG](#) study about customer experience ranked US companies on the following factors: personalization, integrity, empathy, expectations, time and effort and resolution. Personalization (21%) turned out to be the most influential factor for customers when choosing to do business with a particular company. Integrity (18%) and time and effort (17%) were also important.

The grocery industry was tops for consumer experience, earning the highest score of any sector among consumers surveyed, and three of the top 10 overall companies were grocers: H-E-B, [Publix](#), Wegmans.

These regional supermarkets have devoted followings. H-E-B is involved with the community and donates 5% of pretax profits to charities; Publix is known for friendly customer service and staff who loads groceries into shoppers' trunks; and Wegmans is lauded for its vast selection and enjoyable shopping experience, which includes in-store restaurants and bars at select locations.

While KPMG focused on high-level pillars for good customer experience, Salesforce zeroed in on more digital influences. Fully 54% of consumers in the Salesforce survey said companies need "cutting-edge digital experiences to keep my business," and more than half actively seek to buy from the most innovative companies. These figures should not be ignored, but it's also not an overwhelming majority with these high expectations.

When asked about technologies that will transform expectations of companies, Salesforce found smartphones were the only offering viewed as having already achieved that to a larger degree than being in progress. Mobile apps (40%) and the internet of things (40%) were considered the most actively transforming expectations, while artificial intelligence (36%) was thought to be the most transformative in the next five years.

Internet Users Worldwide Who Believe Select Technologies Will Transform Their Expectations of Companies, April 2018

% of respondents

	Already transformed	Actively transforming	Will transform within 5 years
Smartphones	49%	32%	12%
Social media	38%	33%	13%
Mobile apps	37%	40%	13%
Cloud computing	27%	38%	18%
Voice assistants	19%	37%	25%
Cybersecurity	18%	43%	24%
Internet of things	18%	40%	26%
3-D printing	17%	34%	30%
Drones	16%	33%	29%
Chatbots	14%	34%	26%
AI	13%	36%	36%
VR/AR	13%	33%	28%
Cryptocurrencies	12%	29%	27%
Blockchain	9%	27%	31%

Source: Salesforce, "State of the Connected Customer," June 5, 2018

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Consumer perception of AI was mostly welcoming, according to the Salesforce survey: 61% said it presents positive opportunities for society, and 59% were open to its use in improving the customer experience. AI-driven applications aren't all science fiction either. Top marks were given to both credit card fraud detection and spam filters, which were "liked" or "loved" by 86% and 81% of consumers, respectively.