

Understanding Customer Journey Stages And Touchpoints



There's no doubt that customer journeys are more complex than ever. But by putting yourself in your customers' shoes, you can make great strides in both [customer experience](#) *and* business success.

To get to grips with the customer journey, it's good to first understand the general stages a customer goes through when making a purchase. Whether buying a physical or digital product, signing up for a service or making a booking, these steps are universal and apply to every industry out there.

Here's everything we'll cover in this article. To skip straight to a specific section, just click on the link below and you'll be taken straight to it.

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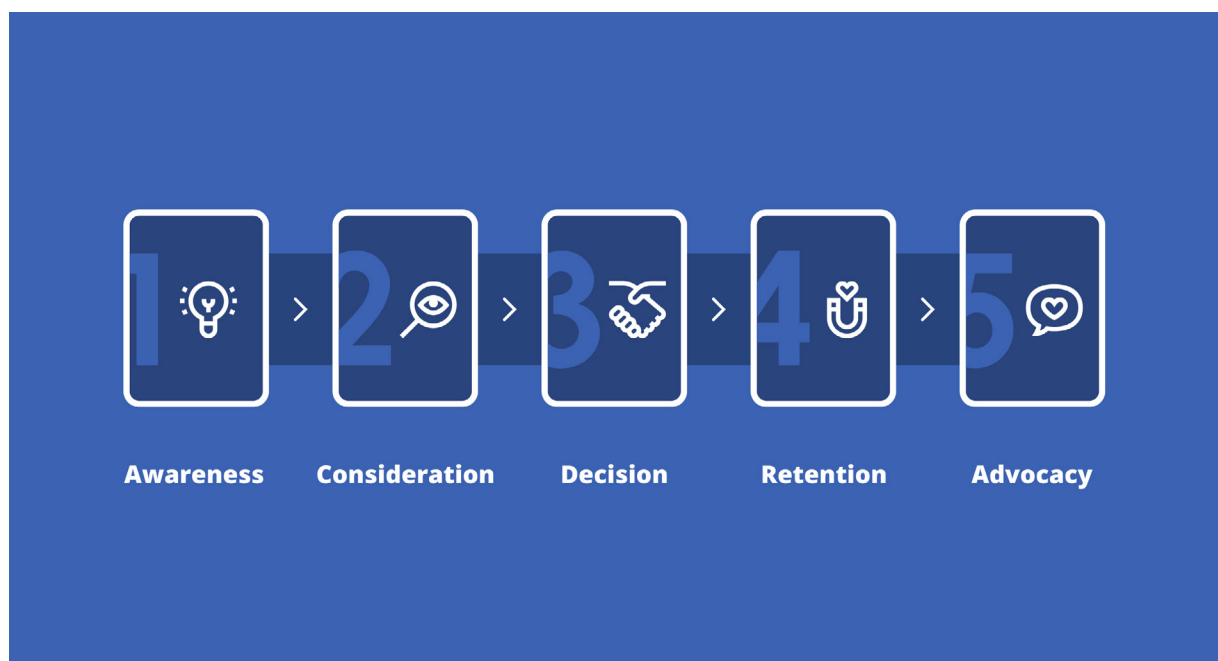
What Is The Customer Journey?

First things first. What do we really mean when we talk about the customer journey? **The customer journey** describes the customer's path to making a purchase and beyond. Customer's very rarely decide to buy on a whim. Instead, they work through a series of steps to become aware of, consider and evaluate their options before making a decision.

Understanding your customer journey is essential for any business. Why? By knowing their goals and expectations every step of the way, you can do a much better job empathising with your customers *and* perfectly positioning your product or service.

The Customer Journey Stages

There are many different variations of the customer journey. However you'll most commonly find it split into five main stages: **Awareness**, **Consideration**, **Decision**, **Retention** and **Advocacy**. Let's take a closer look at each of them.



Stage 1: Awareness

This is where someone first encounters your brand, usually when they are looking for a solution to some kind of problem.

For example, if someone wants to plan a trip to Paris, their first step will likely be to search online for [hotels](#) or apartments in the city. By clicking on things like booking portals, travel blogs and individual hotel websites, they become *aware* of different accommodation options.

What's important to know is that at this stage the customer is not ready to make a decision. Rather, they are becoming familiar with what is available.

Your goal here is simply to communicate what you have to offer.

To be discovered during this early phase, online visibility is key. Things like [online reviews](#), blog posts, social media posts and optimising your website for SEO can all help you show up in search results.

Stage 2: Consideration

This stage is where the customer begins to more seriously evaluate their options as opposed to casually browsing. They will be more specific about the features they are looking for in a product or service and will also begin to compare companies or products.

Your goal here is to convince your target customers that your product or service can resolve their problem (ideally in a way that your competitors can't). It's a really important stage, because it's one where you're most likely to have your prospect's full attention.

With that in mind, it's a good point to really focus on providing the best possible [customer experience](#). Think about content and interactions that will not only answer your prospects' questions but also make sure they feel valued.

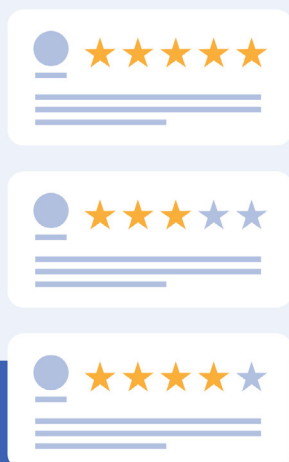
Not sure where to start? Getting [feedback](#) from your existing customers is a great way to get real-life insights and see where you can improve.

Stage 3: Decision

The stage we've all been waiting for! The customer has now done the bulk of their research and is ready to take the plunge. But don't get too excited just yet! It's still possible to lose your customer at this stage.

As a business, **your role here is to make the purchasing process as easy and convenient as possible**. This applies not only from a user experience perspective but also in terms of what you can offer your customer. Things like free demos, trial periods and introductory discounts can be enough to clinch the decision.

Another huge factor here is online reviews. Why? Nearly **nine out of ten consumers read reviews before making a purchase**. To make sure you are getting a steady stream of fresh opinions, a [review management](#) tool is the way to go. It will not only help to automate the process but will also provide you with valuable analysis that you can use to grow your business.



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Stage 4: Retention

Remember, the customer journey does not finish as soon as they've made their purchase. Research shows that **a 5% increase in customer retention can produce more than a 25% increase in profit**. That's why it's essential to keep the contact going at this stage of the customer journey. But how?

[Surveys](#) are an essential part of the retention stage for any business. They are a fantastic way to get honest opinions from your customers and the insights you need to make sure they stick around.

Metrics like the [Customer Effort Score \(CES\)](#) or [Net Promoter Score \(NPS\)](#) are a great indicator of customer loyalty and are really easy to implement. If you want to read more about these and other key metrics, you can have a read of our handy article: [How to measure customer satisfaction KPI: NPS, CSAT, CES, & CLI](#).

Just bear in mind that to see real change, you not only have to collect customer feedback but also act on it! Individual follow-ups to any issues that arise can go a long way in turning things around.

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At this stage, **keep the focus on strengthening the relationship with your customer and ensuring they have the best possible experience**. Do that, and chances are they'll keep coming back for more.

Stage 5: Advocacy

This is the stage where happy customers turn into brand advocates! They let others know about their experience by leaving online reviews and generate more business through word of mouth marketing.

The core concept at the advocacy stage is **creating a community around your brand and making your customers feel appreciated**. Of course, not every customer will reach this stage, but those that do are invaluable to your brand.

The advocacy stage should always include [proactive ways of managing customer feedback](#). This means not just collecting customer feedback but also responding to it in a personal and timely way. In other words, show your customers that their opinions really matter!

Incentives are also key here. Personalised rewards, offers and referral programs are all great ways to encourage customers to spread the word.

How Customer Journey Stages Work In Practice

It's all well and good explaining the customer journey stages, but perhaps now you're wondering how they really work in practice. Let's have a look at one together!

Take the example we used earlier of someone who wants to plan a trip to Paris.

Here is an example of how they may work their way through the customer journey stages.

1. Awareness - They begin by doing a basic online search for '*hotels in Paris*'. They click on a few different links and become aware of some accommodation options. While searching, they also read a few articles on some of the best things to see in Paris and the best neighbourhoods to stay in.

2. Consideration - Following on from their initial search, they decide that they want to stay in a hotel in the Montmartre neighbourhood. Ideally they would like to stay somewhere with a hotel bar that offers breakfast as part of the rate. With this in mind, they begin to narrow down their options, comparing amenities, prices and reviews.

3. Decision - The guest finds two hotels that fit their needs. The prices are almost exactly the same, so they take a closer look at the reviews for each. Option A has good reviews, but the latest is from several months ago and so they're not sure how relevant it is. Option B, on the other hand, consistently gets good reviews, with one left as recently as last week. Because of this, the guest makes the decision to book option B.

4. Retention - The guest has a great stay at the hotel. They can check in easily online, make requests to the front desk straight from their device, and the service and amenities exceed their expectations. They are offered a 5% discount on their next stay and feel happy about booking again for their next stay in Paris.

5. Advocacy - When they get home they receive an invitation from the hotel to leave an online review, which they do gladly. Back at work the following week, their colleagues ask them about their trip and they tell them all about the hotel and how excellent it was. One particular colleague was thinking about planning a trip themselves, and asks them for a link to the hotel website where they later make a booking.

Customer Journey Stages Vs Customer Touchpoints

When looking at the customer journey, you may also come across the phrase customer touchpoints. While the phrases sound similar, there is a key difference between the two that it's important to understand.

Customer touchpoints are the individual interactions that someone has with your company *during* each customer journey stage. For example, in our hotel example, touchpoints might include:

- **Following the hotel on social media**
- **Asking a question via live chat**
- **Checking prices or looking for information on the website**
- **Reading hotel reviews**
- **Checking in at the front desk**

Note that touchpoints can be both on and offline, so it's important to think about both throughout the customer journey.

How To Define Your Customer Journey

So, now you know the basics of customer journey stages and touchpoints. But what should you do with this information?

Customer journey mapping is an incredible tool for plotting your customer's entire experience from A to B. It not only includes every stage but every individual touchpoint. Along with every interaction, a customer journey map also outlines any pain points your customers may encounter *and* details

the emotions they feel along the way.

The Benefits Of Customer Journey Mapping

Visualising your customer journey has many benefits for your business.

It allows you to:

- **Get a better understanding your customers goals and expectations**
- **Identify and eliminate pain points to make customer journeys smooth as possible**
- **Get rid of ineffective consumer journey touchpoints that may hurt your conversions**
- **Work out what customers actually receive vs. what customers want**
- **Assign ownership of touchpoint to increase the accountability of your employees and departments**

Customer journey mapping helps make [your customer experience management](#) the best it can be. Look at it like this. The more you understand your customers, the more you can increase [customer satisfaction](#). And the more happy customers you have, the more will reach the advocacy stage and introduce even more people to your brand. Cool, right?

If you'd like to learn more about customer journey mapping (including step-by-step instructions for getting started), head over to our article: [How a Customer Journey Map Helps you Offer Unique Experiences](#).

Conclusion

Just like customers are all unique, so is the customer journey for any given company, from a [small or medium sized business](#) to an international

[enterprise](#) brand. Though the five stages we've shared with you are the most common way to segment the journey, feel free to do so in a way that works for you! The main thing is that you have a solid understanding of your specific customer and the journey they go on with your brand.

By doing so, you'll be better equipped to offer unrivalled [customer satisfaction](#), boost your revenue and turn everyday customers into raving fans. Of course, mapping out your customer journey is easier when you have the right tool for the job.

Any good [Voice of the Customer program](#) should include a way to visualise the customer journey. At Customer Alliance, our customer journey feature gives you a holistic view of satisfaction every step of the way, plus smart analytics that enable you to compare data across individual touchpoints.

Want to find out more? Join us for a free, personalised demo and one of our experts will be happy to show you what we can do.

SCHEDULE A FREE DEMO

Sources:

1. Canvas8, 2020 'The Critical Role Of Reviews In Internet Trust'
2. Bain & Company 'Prescription For Cutting Costs'