Interview

Customer first thinking.

The B2B Journey Map

An Interview with Jim Tincher, President, Heart of the Customer

Jim Tincher:

Jim Tincher is the President of the CX consulting firm Heart of Customer and author of the book "Do B2B Better".

Make it – ship it - sell it.

That's pretty much the way B2B companies have operated forever. Usually product-centric and sales led, they view customers as "buyers" who are pigeonholed as decision makers, influencers or users. The only thing that truly matters: the size of the sales pipeline. How many marketing-qualified leads? How many sales qualified leads? How many proposals? How many conversions? And then, once the final deal is agreed to, the handoff to the "customer success" team whose job mainly is to make onboarding go as smoothly as possible.

According to this old-school selling model, the customer journey is the path to purchase. That journey typically ends with a signed contract. No one thinks too much, if at all, about the post-sale experience: what happens when things don't go exactly as planned. When products fail to work as advertised. When shipment dates are missed. When the customer urgently requires on-the-spot help. When product needs change. When questions come up that can't be answered through a routine service call.

Accountability for keeping the customer happy gets lost somewhere between sales, field support and service. And certainly it is never within marketing's purview, whose only job is to keep sales happy. On the executive floor, experience metrics like NPS and customer satisfaction are rarely part of the conversation, overshadowed by the latest market share and revenue figures.

All of that explains why most B2B companies are rated at or near the bottom of the CX Maturity scale, according to the XM Institute[1]. However, that has finally begun to change in the last few years, mainly due to B2B digital disruption.

The buying process has become infinitely more convoluted. A wider circle of stakeholders is now involved in decision making. Buyers no longer want to see a sales person until much later in the buying cycle. They prefer to communicate through digital channels. They are more research driven – more knowledgeable – more demanding – more inclined to shop around. Their expectations, before and after the sale, are based on their own personal digital lives.

As a result, marketing's job has changed: now B2B marketers need to create a richer digital experience for customers, giving equal attention and weight to all stages of the customer lifecycle. Sales is no longer the exclusive owner of the customer relationship. Marketing has a much larger role to play in securing customer loyalty by enhancing the experience.

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Around a decade or so ago the concept of journey mapping came into vogue as a way to improve the end-to-end customer experience. By visualizing the steps customers took in their interactions across touchpoints, while identifying their thoughts and emotions as their journey progressed, companies could design a better, more rewarding experience, making it easier for customers to do business with them. So journey mapping became a foundational step in addressing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The problem, of course, is that a lot of the time, those journey maps end up as just pretty wall posters due to a lack of follow-through. Transformation of the B2B experience can be a complex undertaking due to siloed organizational structures, multiple stakeholders, internal pockets of resistance and a lack of systems integration. It takes commitment and resources to fix pain points by working across functional lines and business units. Executive management has to be fully behind the effort, making CX a priority. And, above all, it takes internal champions with the courage and fortitude to be "changemakers", according to Jim Tincher, whose book "Do B2B Better" outlines how companies can take a more systematic approach to customer experience design.

SS **Stephen Shaw (SS):** You started your CX consultancy about 11 years ago, early days for customer journey mapping. What made you decide to make that entrepreneurial leap?

JT **JIM TINCHER (JT):** Well, to be honest, I got fired a lot! I had been at Best Buy, which was very customer focused, and at that point I thought that's how everyone does business. I then went to a large health insurance organization as a product guy and recognized that not everybody is customer focused. In that organization, nobody in marketing and product development had ever met a client. And yet we led the nation in sales. We also led the nation in churn. But when you're growing, that covers up a lot of sins. And so I got this idea about understanding more about the customer and started a blog.

I left to go to a consulting company, got fired, then went to a research firm. And while I was there I was asked to build a journey map. I had no idea what a journey map was. They said, well, here's a PowerPoint slide with some bubbles on it, use this. Well, you can't take a customer experience, toss bubbles on a PowerPoint slide and say that's it. It's got to be much more immersive, much more visual. And I didn't want to do it, but you know, it was my job, I had to do it.

I wrote in my blog about how I would do journey mapping: the top 10 requirements. And my blog was the ugliest website you've ever seen. It was bad. I had a friend of mine at church create my logo. It was ugly. But that ugly little blog post went viral. And then around the same time my boss came to me and said, we need you in sales, I said, great, okay, who's going to take on my projects? "What do you mean?", he asked . Well, I'm going to be in sales. No, no, you still have to do your projects. Okay, great: what accounts do I take over? No, no you're in "new" sales. Okay, where are my leads? Leads? No, no, you're in sales. Well, number of months later I was fired because I hadn't sold enough. But at that point I was number one on Google for journey mapping.

And so I thought maybe there's a business here. I've been fired twice in two years. I never wanted to be a consultant, but I found that our approach to journey mapping really resonated. And so we started doing that work and we really started to take off and grow.

SS One of the stats you cite in your book "Do B2B Better" is that 80% of B2B companies are stuck at the lower end of the CX maturity curve. Why is it so hard for B2B companies to get CX right?

JT There are three reasons. Gartner reports that the size of the committee making B2B decisions has more than doubled in the last few years. And so, one reason is you have that complexity. The second reason is that we like to talk about the net promoter score or customer satisfaction, but the rest of the business doesn't. And so, it's really hard to talk to finance because it's usually not a shared vernacular and they're scary people, so we don't talk to them. I did a survey a few years ago of CX leaders and the answer to the question of how often do you meet with finance was "once a year" and "never". But the "change makers", those who can show business impact, they're meeting with finance regularly.

The third reason is when I ask executives what they care about the most, the answer, universally, is growth. They don't see customer experience contributing to growth. Now, in my worldview, customer experience is the secret to organic growth. When you do a great job of customer experience, customers want to buy more from you, stay longer. Leadership may believe that's true, at a certain level, but the NPS score isn't proof of that. And eventually leadership says that CX is not that important.

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SS I wonder how much of that attitude has to do with the financialization of business decision making in corporations where the only thing that matters is next quarter results.

JT You're exactly right. Now when we look at programs that are really effective, they're actually able to connect customer experience to metrics such as net revenue retention improvement, order velocity, and margin per customer. But there's usually a lag. Even if you do a great job today, you won't make more money tomorrow. Executives want to see how the results play out with their own customer data. Watermark[2] has this great study that shows stock prices go up as a result of a better customer experience, but executives don't care. They're not going to get bonused because some other companies saw their stock price go up.

SS You mentioned Jon Picoult's company [Watermark]. His point of view about CX, generally, is that the aspiration should be to create a memorable experience. In B2B, is that necessarily the case? Or do B2B companies just need to make it easier for their customers to do business with them?

JT The research is quite clear here - the way you build loyalty is through an emotional connection. Now, a memorable moment is a good way of getting that to happen. I'm doing some analysis right now with a client and they asked customers to rate the importance of different facets of the customer experience. When customers were asked to rate the importance of the relationship with an account manager, it ranked 9th out of 10. But when you actually look at what drives intent to grow, it's the most important factor. Relationships, emotional connections, these drive behaviours. You need to look at the emotions you're creating in your customers because how we feel drives what we do.

SS You say the key is to find what you call an "emotional north star". Can you explain what you mean by that?

JT You start with understanding what leads to growth. It's typically an emotional connection. So through quantitative research you need to understand what emotions lead to the outcomes you care about and then you create an emotional north star. It could be confidence, enjoyability, trust. And then start exploring, where do we create that? What are the drivers of that emotion? Look at your operational behavioural data and see what's common to the customers who feel that emotion versus those who don't.

What we'll often do is we'll measure six to eight total emotions, and we start seeing what in the data creates those outcomes. What we found with one software company is that if the implementation process went past a certain length, the emotion generated was one of exhaustion. When customers feel exhausted, their intent to buy more from you is almost zero. And so we looked at the journey map. The most frustrating times were the points on the map where our client wasn't involved – they had sub-contracted to system integrators. And as a result that was causing frustration and exhaustion to their customers, which was causing them to be less willing to buy more software.

SS How do you actually end up zeroing in on one specific emotion?

JT We start with qualitative research and derive it from the interviews. We come up with 30 different possibilities. Some are more extreme, say, happiness versus delight. Then we look at the data. Who is growing with you? That's a sign of having a good experience. If they have a lot of complaints, that's a sign they have a bad experience. Then we take those 30 emotions and survey customers to find the ones most highly correlated with the outcomes you care about. You start to see that emotions become a leading indicator of what we care about because again, how we feel drives what we do. One of my favourite stats on that is from the XM Institute, which showed that if your customer has a positive emotional experience with you and something goes wrong, 74% of the time, three out of four times, they'll forgive you for the problem. But if they're not having a good emotional experience with you, that drops down to 19%, one out of five.

Pick a company you don't like – for me, that's easy, it's Comcast - your emotions are negative. When Comcast doesn't show up on time, I view them as a horrible company. But if my home vet comes to visit and he's late, I have a positive confirmation bias - I'm sure he was busy, things just happened. And so if you're not measuring the emotion, you don't understand what the biases of your customers are.

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SS You emphasize measurement quite a bit in the book. You recommend a couple of different types of dashboards: an overall CX dashboard and then individual journey dashboards. Can you give me a sense of the metrics that would appear in each?

JT Sure, the overall dashboard has metrics that are more outcome oriented. My favourite metric around customer experience is a combination of churn and buying more or buying less. A lot of our clients don't have a direct issue with churn. But they can lose business on individual products. So we call that SKU level churn.

When we do journey mapping, we will bring in the operational and behavioural data. Let's use an example of product availability and delivery. And so we'll look at data like when the customer calls in to place an order, are you able to say, "Yes"? For those companies using SAP, that's called "Availability to Promise", ATP. And it's a really good indicator of the overall customer experience.

And then we'll move on to, for example, on- time delivery. Complaints. And so what we're doing is we measure the customer journey from the customer's viewpoint. We then go inside the organization and say, what data do you have that reflects what we're seeing?

In the case of software implementation, a really good indicator of a bad experience is if the client changes their project manager. Well, that's going to cause the customer a lot more angst. And so again, we start with the customer, their journey, and then we work with subject matter experts inside to say, what data do we have to reflect what the customer is viewing? Let's use that and then build a dashboard around that.

SS In the book you state that your preference is to start with mapping the end to end experience, and then to move on to individual sub-journeys. When do you actually start with one versus the other?

JT We did a survey with hundreds of customer experience leaders and we found the "change makers" were 50% more likely to have done the end to end journey first. Now that's the research, that's the theory. But we've had clients say we really want to map, for example, a specific sub-journey. Like one client said we want to map the "asking for a sample" journey because if we win with the sample the order usually follows. They thought it was really important. And they invested all that effort to learn that there was nothing really to change. That's the risk of starting with a specific area. If you do the end-to-end first, you understand from the customer viewpoint where the real issues are and then you can go deeper into that. That is not the typical practice. Some of our clients do listen to the research and go end to end. It's a small subset because most of them are under pressure. If they're going to invest all the time, energy and money in journey mapping, they need to do something right away.

SS They need a win.

JT Yeah, I remember when we were working with a health insurance organization, and the chief operating officer said, I don't want to do an end to end journey. We're not going to spend all this money just to get a list of pain points. We have to fix something. All right, well that's pretty clear then. They then put out the RFP. And the first part of the scope of the RFP was "help us figure out what journey to map".

So most of our clients do start with a specific area of pain. Now one client, for example, they did a huge survey, 40 or 50 questions. And they took the area that scored the lowest and had us work on that. Okay, that's not bad. I mean, you know, it's customer pain. Better than just guessing. Many others will look at win-loss studies and say, when we lose, what did people have to say? Or more importantly, churn studies. We lost customers. What were their biggest areas of complaint?

SS What's the central organizing principle around an end-to-end journey map? Is it customer lifecycle?

JT The first thing we do is hypothesis mapping. We start with the inside out view. We get the employees together to say, what do you think the journey looks like? Then the important thing we do next is we throw that away. Not literally, we just set it aside and develop the discussion guide. We'll ask customers, what do you do first, what do you do next? And we look for the language of how they talk about the stages because they always have language for it. There's never a "selling phase". It's a "buying phase". It's got to be in the customer's language.

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SS But again, does that go through the relationship stages of first time buyer, repeat purchase, retention?

JT We'll work with clients to define that. Often we get involved either right at the moment of sale or right after. Because the problems to solve pre-sales are often very different. The problems to solve post sales - yes, there are issues with handoffs where your sales team goes away, and the account management team comes on. There's some there. But typically our clients start either at the sale or post sale.

SS Just with respect to sub-journeys - and I realize this is like asking how long is a piece of string - but typically how many sub-journeys would a company eventually map?

JT It can be three to 10. More commonly around 6, 7. It depends how granular you want to get. If we start bringing in UX journeys, well then you are in the hundreds. We don't usually go that granular.

SS And just to be clear, this isn't process mapping. This is what the customer is going through.

JT A hundred percent. We've had a lot of people confused by that. They say we've already done the work. What they've done is a hundred step process map. Now that's really important. But it's also very different. It's never from the customer's view.

SS Where do personas fit into this whole process?

JT They're front and center in the journey map. We worked with a distributor once and they had seven personas, and nobody could keep them straight. Just too complicated. We were able to consolidate the seven into two that really mattered. This was in the area of durable medical equipment. So think beds, wheelchairs. The customer was the company that sold the DME. Our client was the distributor who sold to the retailers and others. In this space, by the way, half of the companies had gone out of business in the last year. And we could foresee another half of them go out of business in the next four years. What we found is that most of them had been in business for 20 or 30 years trying to do the same things the same way, but with compressed margins, they were just suffering. But others came from the outside and would do one thing really well. Maybe they had a great website, maybe they're great at retail, maybe they chose a specific subset of customers. But they were the "innovators". And so we had the "maintainers" versus the "innovators" of the two that mattered. In the case of B2B our personas are based on roles.

SS Why roles?

JT We find it matters. We worked with a large company that was redoing their digital experience. Their belief was that we had to do the digital experience differently for every business unit they had. Our research showed that it didn't matter about the business unit, it mattered about the role of the person using the site. And so that allowed them to create one site for all their business units. Little tweaks here and there, but offering different experiences based on the role.

SS In that case where you have two personas, do you actually have two different journey maps?

JT It varies. So we often get asked at the beginning, how many journey maps will I get? The answer is I don't know. We will give you as few journey maps as possible to adequately tell the story. We'll "make it as simple as possible, but no simpler" -

I love that phrase. If we look at different roles, often the moments of truth are different, and so in that case we will create separate maps. It really comes back to what is the story your customers are telling us? And are the personas doing dramatically different things?

SS We've been talking a lot about current state maps. But creating a new experience involves future state mapping. What's your process for that?

JT So after we do the current state, we start to recognize that there are opportunities. Those opportunities often lead to a new vision of customer experience and strategy. My very favourite ever journey mapping workshop was with a financial services company. Typically those are two days long. We came in at Day Two and we started showing a few videos to remind them of the pain they're causing customers. And then one of the leaders said, let's stop for a minute. Let's recognize everybody here contributed to this pain our customers are feeling. And it's going to take everybody here to make it better. And that started this incredible collaboration.

One of the problems they had was a claims journey. Their claims documentation, written by legal, was impossible to read. In fact, we brought the VP of Marketing to

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a customer's home. And this person gave the claims paperwork to this VP, and asked her, can you tell me what I'm supposed to do? The VP read it, read it again, read it a third time and said, "I'm sorry, ma'am, you're going to have to call your claims expert. I can't tell you what this says".

What the VP did then was involve legal in the journey mapping work. They created two sets of documentation. The legal, all detail, but also a short summary in English that they could use then to help understand what to do.

SS What about a CX vision and charter? Without it, you've really just got a bunch of mapping projects going on. What brings it all together?

JT It's a separate work stream that's happening around the same time as we're developing the future state map. But again, it's starting with what you're doing today and then what you want it to be tomorrow.

SS If a CEO asked you what's the best way to organize around CX, what would your answer be?

JT How long is a piece of string? We came out with a white paper about creating your CX dream team. We did interviews with 30 different organizations on how they do it. We found four strategies. The first is hardly a strategy: it's keep costs low. It's usually one to three people. They spend all the time working on surveys and therefore they don't really create much impact. And so most of them stay small. That's the first one. Limit investment, just have a few people. The problem is they're trying to offer all the different disciplines of CX, with a handful of people, and they just can't do it.

The second is centralized where you have a center of excellence: high risk, high reward. You have a centralized team which can be up to 40 people which means you can do really organization changing work. But you'd better, because that's a big headcount and it's all overhead. And when I see companies that have just cut CX, it's almost always a centralized team because all they're doing is talking about NPS. They're not able to show they're driving the business.

The third is where you have somebody specifically assigned to each business unit. They're a generalist and somewhat of a relationship manager working with that business unit to advance CX. The good news is that they have somebody specifically to make that business unit shine. When we see this fail, it's because the people are typically hired from the outside and there's no trust by the business unit and they won't give them the time of day. And so in this model, it's typically better to hire somebody from the inside from that business unit who represents CX to that organization. Especially good if you have the same customers across business units because you're creating a consistent experience.

The fourth is a federated model which has a smaller CX team but also has representatives throughout the business units who are responsible for CX there. Now the benefits of this is that you keep a small, centralized team who can focus on creating standards and then you can have the work happening out in the business units. It also lowers your overhead. But there is a risk if you don't have strong governance, that every business unit does whatever they want and doesn't follow the corporate mandate. So you need really strong governance so that you come across as one company and not a Frankenstein experience.

SS What's the funding model? If it's just operational funds, they're at risk if the CEO stops believing in the importance of CX.

JT Pretty much, yeah. With the first three models, they're all overhead. With the fourth one, you have the business units funding their portion of it and a small team that's paid for centrally.

SS Is it important to have ultimately a chief customer experience officer who will be the champion at the board level for these initiatives?

JT You certainly need a champion who can be represented at the board. And that varies by organization. But you need somebody who can speak for customers.

SS It's funny, you haven't mentioned marketing once in this entire interview.

JT IBM did some research where they asked CEOs which executives they trust the most - who they rely upon. Can you guess what the top two were?

SS The Chief Finance Officer and the CTO.

JT COO, actually. CTO, third. Marketing was only mentioned by 18% of the CEOs.

SS That doesn't surprise me.

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JT Marketing is not usually good at connecting to ROI, to net revenue retention, to financials. If you're in marketing, you really have to work across the organization. You need to be working with executives across the organization or you're going to be a "hopeful" and you're going to be at risk.

SS Of all the "changemakers" you cite in the book, which comes the closest in your mind to getting CX right?

JT Well, we used to offer a conference "Do B2B Better". And I had Ricardo[3] from Dow speak at it. He had a challenging question asking him what's the role of inventory in CX? Ricardo did a great job of talking about how he turned inventory, which is just a pile of stuff, into a customer metric: "Availability to promise". He then talked about when ATP dropped, confidence and enjoyability dropped, two of the emotions they measure. When those dropped, he showed that order velocity also dropped. The first action of a CX change maker? Connecting the financials.

1. The XM Institute is a resource center for Experience Management (XM) professionals operated by the survey platform Qualtric.
2. Watermark is a leading customer experience consultancy led by Jon Picoult which produces an annual Customer Experience (CX) ROI Study.
3. Riccardo Porta is the Global director for CX at Dow Chemical Company.

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