

# TAKE A WALK IN YOUR *CUSTOMERS' SHOES*



By Ryan Przybylski

As I travel from store to store throughout my territory, one question remains at the forefront of my mind: *Are all the customers who shop here getting the experiences they deserve in their hearth buying journey? If not, how can we fill in the gaps?* We usually only get one chance to impress each customer, so we have to make it memorable. Given that reality, let's dive deeper into how we can ensure that customers receive the buying experience they deserve.

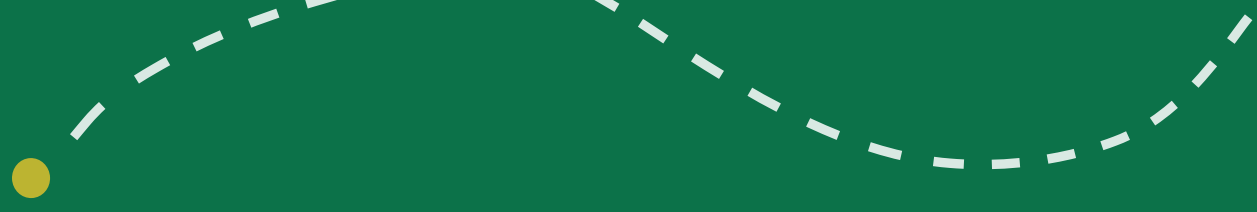
When was the last time you walked through your customers' buying journey—not just thinking

about it, but physically going through it from start to finish? If it's been a while, then now is the time to go on that journey again. This process should start with opening your phone to find your store and end with a follow-up call from your salesperson to confirm you had the best buying experience possible. After all, first-hand experience is the best way to identify gaps in your customers' buying process.

Before embarking on this journey, it's important to define what you mean by a "great buying experience." This will probably look and feel a little different for each business. Sit down with your team to define the terms of a great customer buying journey and ensure you get feedback from each team member. That way, you'll have clear expectations and set strategic goals for meeting them.

With these expectations set, you're ready to begin evaluating the experience from the very first step: finding your business. This will likely be through a digital search. Given that, you should start by doing a quick Google search to see if you're even showing up where your customers' buying journeys begin. I suggest doing this on both your phone and

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your computer to see if there are any differences. Remember, Google’s algorithms are constantly changing, so it’s a best practice to consistently check how you’re showing up in searches. Search your local area using key phrases like “fireplace stores in ‘X,’” or “stove shops near me.” Are you first on the list? Are you last? Do you even show up? If you do, how are your reviews and stars? Do you have updated photos on the main search page? Customers pay attention to all these small details as they narrow down who they’re going to visit first.

Once you know how your business appears online, you can focus on ensuring your website provides the right first impression. Scroll through your site as if you’re a customer and it’s your first time visiting. How easy is it for you to navigate? Is it modern and clean, or does it look outdated and cluttered? After answering these questions, pretend you’re looking for a gas insert. Can you easily find gas inserts on your website? Is there information about what a gas insert is and whether it’s the right product for your project? Can you get a quote online? Are there chat functions available where you can easily be assisted? Is basic contact information (including the company’s phone number and email address) easy to locate? These are all things you should take into consideration because they’re all part of the overall experience. If your website passes these tests, your customers

are more likely to take the next step: visiting your store in person.

Now it’s time to view your showroom from your customers’ perspective. Pull up to your store and be really observant. Is the signage easy to see from the street? How clean is your parking lot? Is garbage picked up, are the bushes trimmed, and are the windows clean? These external details all matter because they’re the first physical impressions for your customers, so they set the tone before they even enter your store.

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As you step inside, take note of the overall atmosphere and customer impressions. How does it look, smell, and feel? Is there clutter that makes it feel overwhelming? Is there adequate wayfinding so you can find what you’re looking for without help? Is there a comforting vibe that welcomes you? Soft music, scented candles, and holiday decorations help hit those comfort senses. After all, this unit will likely be installed in someone’s home, so providing a similar atmosphere to that home is ideal. If the environment is welcoming, customers are more likely to feel comfortable working with your business.


Now that you’ve settled in, it’s time to observe the sales process. Does your sales team follow a stan-

dard sales process—one that’s consistent no matter the salesperson? If not, this would be a great opportunity to implement one. Make sure the salesperson you’re working with understands your problem before providing a solution (and make this a little challenging). After the team member finds a solution to your problem, do you get an actual estimate or just a brochure and a business card? If you get an estimate, how long does the write-up process take? After you get the estimate, does the salesperson email it to you and schedule your in-home appointment? Considering these questions can help your team create a consistent and efficient sales process that builds trust and ensures that the sale moves forward smoothly.

Once the sale is made, the journey isn’t over. The installation and follow-up processes are just as important. I’d highly recommend that you take a few days to participate in installation and service jobs to understand the customer experience your team is providing. Is everything being explained in detail to the customer? Is there a high level of professionalism? Are team members asking customers for reviews? Do customers know who to follow up with if they experience issues? These final questions are key to ensuring your team leaves a lasting positive impression.

Though this may seem like a lot to manage, we owe each of our customers an above-and-beyond experience, and we don’t know if we’re giving them that great experience if we’ve never fully walked through it ourselves. By regularly walking in your customers’ shoes, you’ll gain insight that will help refine your buying process and keep your business competitive.


I write this from a sales rep perspective because I have seen my fair share of websites, showrooms, and sales processes, and I believe that we’re often falling short of giving our customers buying experiences that are worth talking about. The good news is that you can rectify this in your own business by constantly asking yourself, *What type*



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*of experience would I want to have if I were in my customers’ shoes? If you do that, you’ll probably uncover plenty of things you could do to make the buying experience better. At that point, you shouldn’t try to tackle everything all at once. Instead, you should simply focus on improving one area at a time, trusting that your commitment to constant improvement will produce positive results in the long run.*

In the end, regularly walking in your customers’ shoes will help you constantly improve the buying experience, ensuring that your business remains the one they recall and recommend. Remember, we only get one chance to impress each customer—so let’s make it count!



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