

## UNDERSTANDING THE CLIENTS – THE ESSENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING

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*In modern thinking, the concept of “manager in charge with understanding the client” is the person who leads a brand new department, which combines the marketing research and the clients’ database. Some organizations consider “the understanding of the clients” just a new name for the marketing research, probably sustained by the data obtained from databases. Understanding the clients can take two form, on one hand in can be a moments inspiration or a revelation which can lead to certain opportunities and on the other hand it represents the ability of clearly perceiving a hidden truth about the consumer and the market and which helps the decision making process. Basically in the client orientated organization, understanding the client is a determining element.*

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### **Introduction**

The accurate understanding of the client, forces the organizations to rethink the way the clients perceive the organization and interact with it. Starting from these premises, we have to explain two important concepts: the client’s experience and the client’s evolution. In the context of permanent changes, the client changes his needs and desires and of course he changes his consumer behavior. The appearance and the development of the new communication technologies has raised a series of challenges for the organization and for the way he deals with present and potential clients. In order to better sell the organization’s goods or services, we have to have a proper understanding of these concepts.

The development of these new communication technologies and the marketing development towards these new ways of reaching the clients will have a strong influence on the strategies developed by the organizations for their clients.

### **Managing the client’s experience**

*The clients’ experience* can be defined as the combination between the actual performances of the organization and the feelings generated by it. The organizations efforts are compared and evaluated by the client intuitively, with regard to his expectations for all the contact point that exists between the two parts. The *contact point* can be defined as the *clients’ evolution*. They represent a series of cumulated experiences, by which the client has contacted or interacts with the organization, which moves constantly in accordance with the expectations of obtaining loyalty, sustaining and promotion. An organization’s reputation, its brand, is not formed only with the help of mass-media. The reputation or image is build by interacting with the clients at the contact point, with the help of the new communication technologies, like the Internet, the e-mail, instant messaging or short text messages by phone.

Every time the client enters in contact with an organization, the clients feel how it is to interact with that entity and they immediately form an opinion about it. The experience is the main valued factor for the client. This element has a major influence on his future behavior and consequently it has an important potential value for the organization.

The way the client “*feels*” the brand at every interaction and every channel will become a new and durable source for a competitive advantage. The capacity of offering to the client’s rich and qualitative experiences has become a differentiating factor in a world in which the products or services are more and more similar to one and the other. In this time when the competition is stronger by the minute, the organizations must offer an unforgettable experience, and its planning and managing is of great importance for the marketing. A bad experience is a first step in losing a client or even more clients if the experience is presented to others by “word-to-mouth” process. On the other hand a good experience can encourage repeated acquisitions and will finally lead to the transformation of the client into a loyal customer.

A stronger focus on the clients experiences are an opportunity of profitable development, of an increase of clients’ loyalty and of the shareholders capital. All this will become possible if the organization better integrates: the concept of *client understanding*, the distribution channels, the employees, the means of communication, the new

information technology systems in her activity and will focus with the same measure on the emotional experience and the functional dimension. In order to be able to manage the experience, the organization must collect and monitor the subjective information. The subjective information is often considered irrelevant for the client – organization relationship or to difficult to collect with the help of existing systems (figure 1).

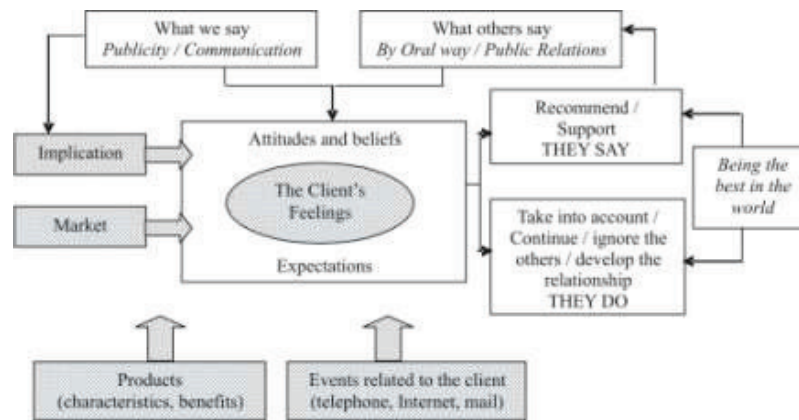


Figure 1. The Client's experience  
 Source: Paul R. Gamble, Alan Tapp, Anthony Marsella, Merlin Stone, *Revolutia in Marketing*, Editura Polirom, Bucuresti, 2008.

From the client's point of view, every experience is offered by every manifestation of the brand values, the organization's, the product's and services personality and by providing the services and with the interaction with the community. The unique combination of these elements creates a unique experience for the client; unique because every client will have his own perceptions. As it can be seen in figure 1, the client's experience is a combination between the products or the services and the "good feeling" generated by a series of stimuli resulted from the contact points with the clients.

The main objective in planning and managing of the client's experience is the limits overtake of the expectations in the field or area that matters for the client, and barely fulfillment of the other expectations. In figure 2 is presented the activity of positioning the client's experience planning system.

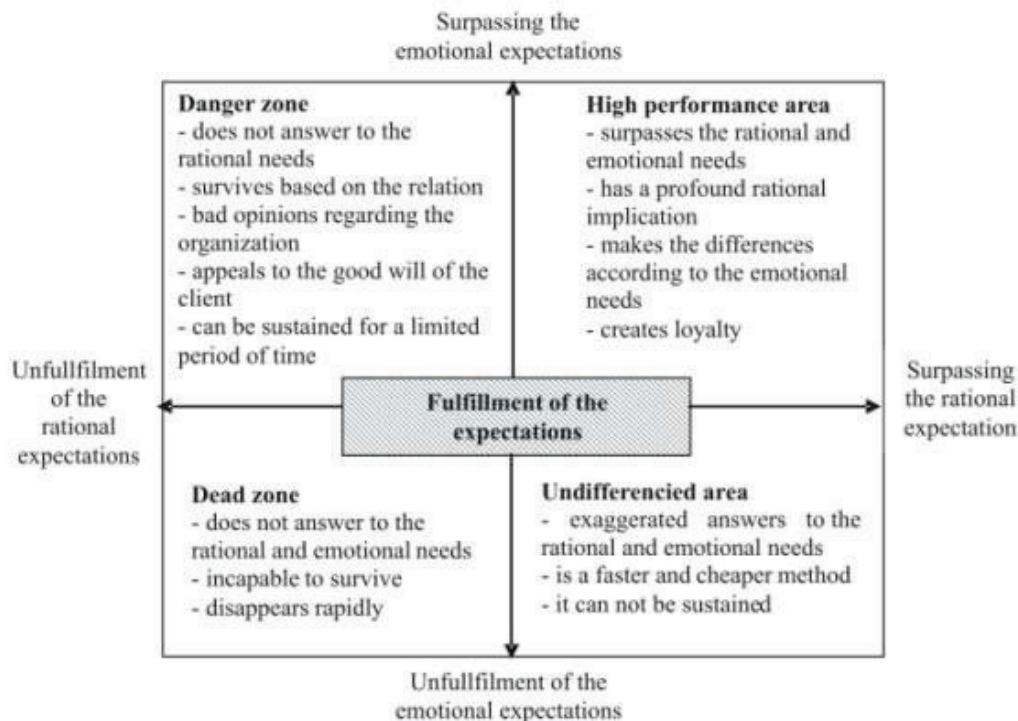


Figure 2 The Client's Experience Areas

As it results from the above figure, the main objective is maintaining a balance between the rational expectations and the emotional ones, where the rational expectations are fulfilled and the emotional experience is positive.

The main stages in planning the client's experience are:

- *Demonstrating* with the help of researches that the *brand values of the organizations and its image* are appreciated by the clients and are considered different from the ones of the competition. What are the employees and the managers of the organizations thinking?
- *Developing the means of understanding the client* for a better identification of the way the consumer sees the experiences right now, what are his expectations and what is his most important interest when the interactions work;
- *Identifying the key – moments of the truth* from the interactions with the client by using a combination between the analysis of the contact points, the consumer's life cycle interaction processes and the diagram of the known factors that determine the relations;
- *Identifying the moments* when the experience has the most positive and the most negative impact on the consumers;
- *Analyzing the difference* between the wanted experience and the perceived experience of the client at the key - moments of the truth;
- *Analyzing the employees experience* at every key – moment of the truth;
- *Planning and testing the experience* for the consumer and the employees;
- *Recruiting, training, guiding and stimulating* the personnel in order to sustain and support the clients' experience;
- *The creation of a measuring tool* which will allow a sufficient evaluation of the client's experience;

The client's route is pointed out in the above context in the *Client's Experience Model* – figure 3.

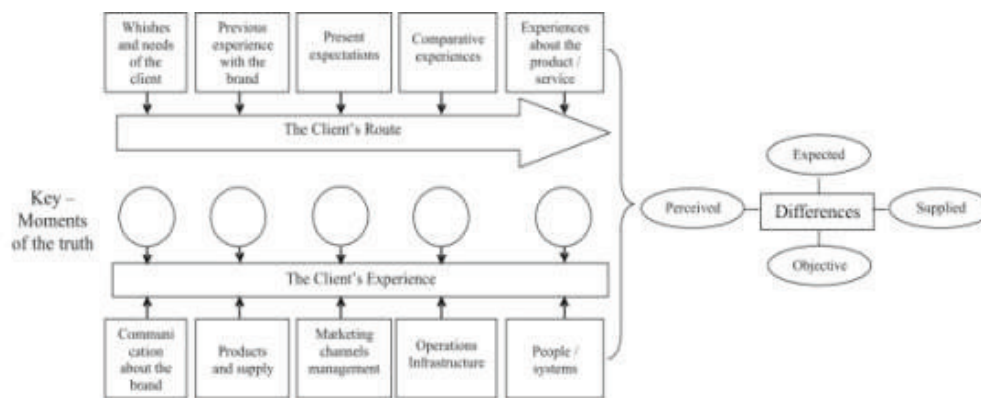


Figure 3 The Client's Experience Model  
Source: Paul R. Gumbli, Alan Tapp, Anthony Marsella, Merlin Stone, *Revolutia in Marketing*, Editura Poliform, Bucuresti, 2008.

In practice, the management of the client's experience has two important parts: the *strategic planning and the continuous improvement*. The *continuous improvement* is possible with the help of the clients' feedback or by the presentation of his experience. The feedback allows the organization to solve the complaints and to improve the daily experience of the client. It can have an immediate effect on the business by the reduction of the discarding degree of the organization's services and its risks, and in the same time it can lead to the increasing of the possibility of expressing some favorable opinions.

The feedback can reduce the number of the ones who give up the organization's services with approximately 2-3% per year. There are a grater number of possibilities of collecting the feedback like: surveys, research projective techniques, customer relationship management (CRM), free phone lines (green phone lines), the analysis of the phone interactions, the Internet and the discussions that take place within the groups of service users.

The client's experience is important for continuing the development of *an emotional loyalty* for a long term or the attachment of the client for an organization. The client's experience is the main valued factor for the client and has a major influence on his next behavior. A bad experience represents a step towards loosing a client and for

expressing of negative opinions. A good experience will lead most likely to repeated transactions, to the promotion of the organization and to a greater loyalty from the part of the client.

The clients are prepared to recommend an organization immediately after an important interaction. The more loyal the client is, the easier it is, in such moments, to encourage him to talk about his experience and organization to others. Consequently the organizations that create emotional loyalty have an important advantage from the other organizations interested only in the rational satisfaction of the client.

Managing the client's experience can offer four important benefits:

1. better references made by opinion leader or other important persons;
2. improving the client's loyalty;
3. increasing the differences with regard to the competition;
4. improving the retention percentage.

### **Conclusions**

Right now the management of the client's experience is the check point of many projects that are part of the top organizations of the world, and it is considered as the "peak of the client's satisfaction". The total client's experience management is based on how the organizations manage all the factors that contribute to the client's experience with regard to the: organization's products, the associated services, the promoting campaigns and with regard to the brand name under which they all sold. This is an integrative perspective that crosses the boundaries between marketing, sales, services and the different distribution and communication channels. Focusing on the clients experience implies a strong attention to be given to the client itself.

In light of the new and rapid developments of the Internet and of the Internet based strategies, the organizations have to act quickly, and with the help of the new communication technologies and the integrated systems that are at their disposal, in order to reach a bigger number of clients from all over the worlds and fulfill their needs and desires and in the same time enrich and improve their experiences.

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