

## **Authors**

*Edwin Best*

*Ian Golding (CCXP)*

*Neil Skehel*

*Georges Essama*

*Imad Hazeen*

*Liz Berks*

*Faran Niaz*

*Renata Liuzzi*

*Praveen Nijhara*

*Ian Stokol (CCXP)*

*Michael G. Bartlett (CCXP)*

*Gabe Smith (CCXP)*



# CX journey around the globe

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Past, Present, Future





April 1th 2022 is the date of celebrating my **12.5 years in the CRM & CX business;**

Moments of reflection, looking back & forward of my personal-professional CRM & CX consultant journey.

*Edwin Best* ..... CRM & CX

The idea arose for a *global* CX moment of reflection; storytelling with the personal-professional CX journeys from fellow consultants around the globe. So, I have approached fellow consultants to share their CX journey in the last decade and to share their CX vision. The reactions were overwhelming; everybody was enthusiastic and said yes!

I am honored and proud to present the stories from fellow CX professionals around the globe! Both independent consultants and internal consultants, in this white paper you will read the stories of: Edwin Best (The Netherlands), Ian Golding (U.K.), Neil Skehel\* (U.K.), Georges Essama (Cameroon), Imad Hazeen (Palestine), Liz Berks (Saudi Arabia), Faran Niaz (Dubai), Renata Liuzzi (Dubai), Praveen Nijhara (India), Ian Stokol (Melbourne), Michael G. Bartlett (Missouri), Gabe Smith\* (Ohio).

*\*Special journeys, journeys from CXPA (Gabe) and CXA™ (Neil)*

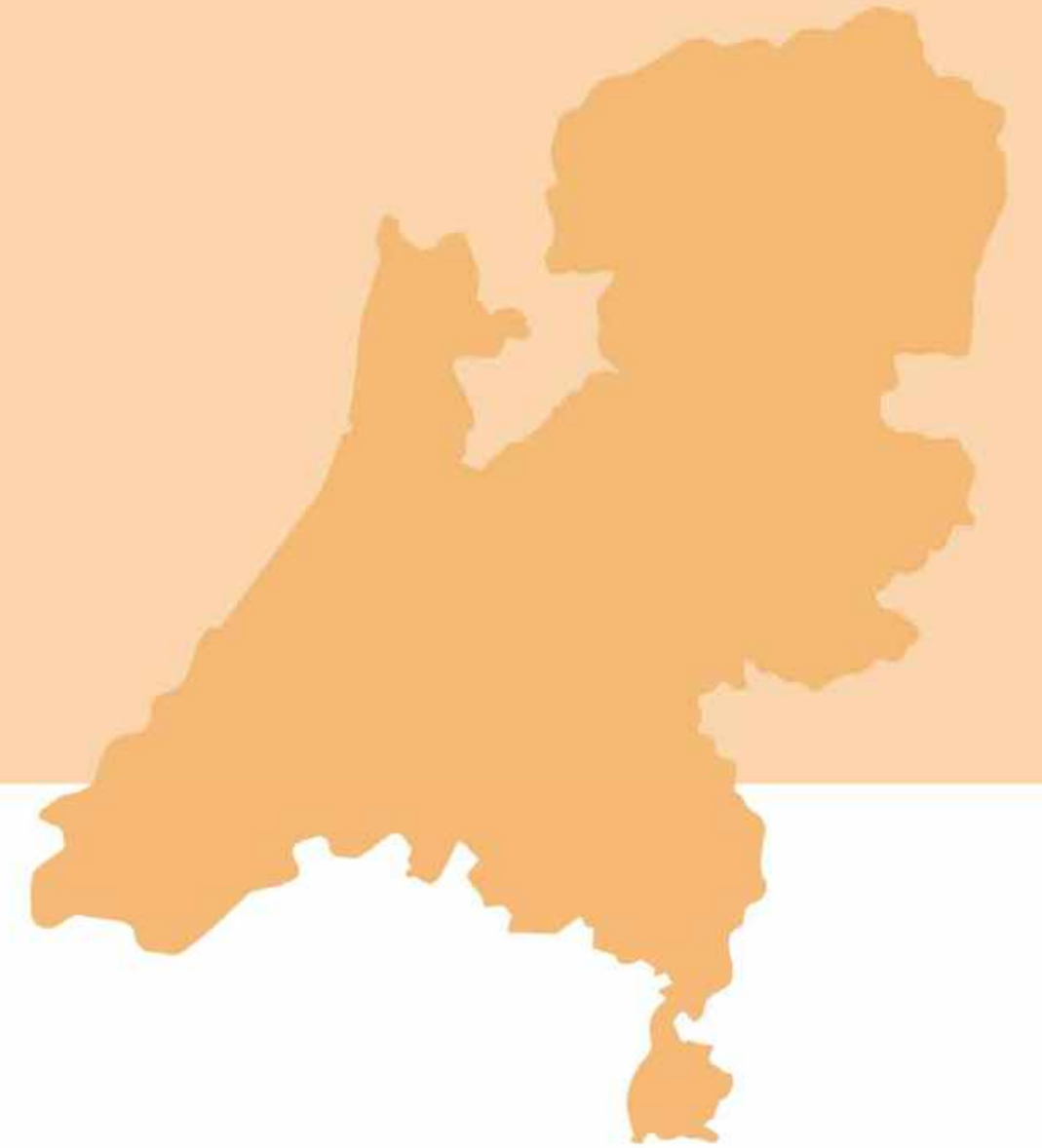
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# 1. Netherlands



Edwin Best



Customer experience & CRM trusted advisor  
@ The Best CRM & CX



## Early career



My early career was quite Agile. I started my professional career as an employee. The idea was to gain experience in the corporate world for the next phase: entrepreneurship. (Entrepreneurship in any kind of business, at that time I had really no set idea.)

The original plan was to fill this kind of role for about 10 years. In the end, I had worked for about 25 years in the corporate world before starting my entrepreneurial career. Why 25 years? In short, I loved my work. Always working hard for a good salary and interesting work with a lot of opportunities:

I have worked for several corporations in a lot of national and international roles. In the first 10-15 years in general management roles, in the next years in more specialized roles; business development in new (international) markets.

The common theme in my early career was working with clients in general and CRM & Customer Experience specifically. During this journey, knowingly or unknowingly, I learned the fundamentals for my entrepreneurial career. In 2009 I started my new career as an independent professional.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



In my working life as an employee I learned a lot. What I like and what I don't. In particular, what my values are and how to stick to my values in complex politically-driven organizations. I have learned the fundamentals of CRM and Customer Experience - over my professional career both as an employee and as a consultant - from both an IT and an organizational point of view.

I discovered the impressive results you can achieve with an outstanding strategy in the three elements of 1) employees, 2) customers and 3) (CRM) technology. At the same time, I

have experienced and overcome the major challenges to achieve success.

The first years in entrepreneurship were very exciting. Freedom, finding out what works well and what doesn't. How to make money with compelling propositions. It took me a couple of years of learning, struggling, and trial and error to develop a sustainable business: business model "phase 1".

Phase 1. In this phase my business activities were selecting and implementing a CRM solution, including the CRM strategy.



An approach based on Why, What and How CRM. The CRM strategy for answering the “Why CRM” question; what is the purpose of CRM? The “What CRM” question; what are the design and goals? The “How CRM” question; what is the action plan and how to execute the defined way of working with CRM?

I worked with clients in B2B, NGO, B2G on projects for a fixed price. In this phase I learned a lot about CRM solutions and how to deal with bridging resistance; a new strategy with a new way of working with a new tool.

After about 5 years of being an entrepreneur, I shifted to business model “phase 2”; once again

in the corporate world, but as an independent professional, guiding organizations to make the shift to customer-centric business. Job title: Trusted Advisor for Customer-centric Business.

In this phase, I combine the disciplines of Tech and CX to create a unique mix that is adapted to the context and issues specific to the company. The tech discipline is about selecting and implementing Tech/a CRM system; connecting all (digital and physical) customer touchpoints with CRM and driving customer-driven processes through CRM. In this way, CRM is the placeholder for all customer data. The CX discipline is about customer-centric business; depending on the context and needs,



a strategy based on an outside-in (CX) approach or an inside-out (CRM) approach.

In this phase I have joined the Customer Experience Professional Association (CXPA). For the preparation for the “Certified Customer Experience Professional (CCXP)” exam I have followed the CX masterclass from Nienke Bloem and Jaap Wilms. I have read the books Outside In (Harley Manning and Kerry Bodine), the Ultimate Question 2.0 (Fred Reichheld), and CCXP Exam preparation (Michael Barlett).

Another very important institute which I have joined in this phase is Customer Experience Awards™. Since 2018, I have been judge, chair

judge, and ambassador for both the Gulf Customer Experience Awards and International Customer Experience Awards. Through the judging process – reviewing and interacting with the finalists - I learn a lot about the best of the best CX cases.

At the same time, the CX Awards are a great opportunity to “meet and greet” both fellow judges and finalists from around the globe.

To celebrate 10 years in business, in 2019 I wrote my CRM and customer experience management book about Customer-centric business. It was my first book and a very interesting journey writing a book.

Nowadays I serve B2B, NGO and B2G clients in Europe, North America, South Africa and the U.A.E. In this phase I have learned a lot about CX on a global scale.







## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



Bottom line, the aim of doing business (whether it is B2B, B2C, B2G or NGO) is to achieve the budgeted targets. To summarize it briefly for B2B and B2C businesses making money; for NGO organizations driving the fundraising processes; and for B2G businesses it depends on their services.

A CX strategy is a competitive advantage to achieve these results; dare to be different, even dare to be disruptive. A great place to work, companies like to do business with them. This requires a clear CX ambition and vision, an articulated strategy and successful execution

with a long-term customer and employee approach. Instead of short term stakeholder-driven results.

This is complex, even hard, from different points of views. Breaking down the silos, a CX-driven leadership from the board, a culture based on collaboration and driving continuous improvement based on customer feedback.

The issue I face is, the developments in tech (e.g., artificial intelligence) are happening fast. But, the developments from an organizational point of view are going slowly (e.g., companies



are still silo driven, no co-creation with customers and employees). Especially for longer existing companies. Except for innovative disruptive businesses and most of the startups.

From another perspective it is also complex; that of the marketplace. The CX world and Tech/CRM world are different worlds. I call it the Warm (CX strategy, collaboration) and Cold (CRM, processes and data) worlds. I see companies who are making great steps with CX, but struggling with the Tech/CRM part. This is a risk for a negative Customer Experience, e.g., having bad experiences because the processes are frustrating to deal with.

Without having a clear CX ambition and being willing to overcome the (tough) hurdles for making the transformation, organizations will be doomed to be average companies with average results. That's the choice: dare to be different or blend into the mainstream.



*Edwin Best*



## 2. United Kingdom



Ian Golding (CCXP)



Global Customer Experience Specialist and  
Certified Customer Experience Professional

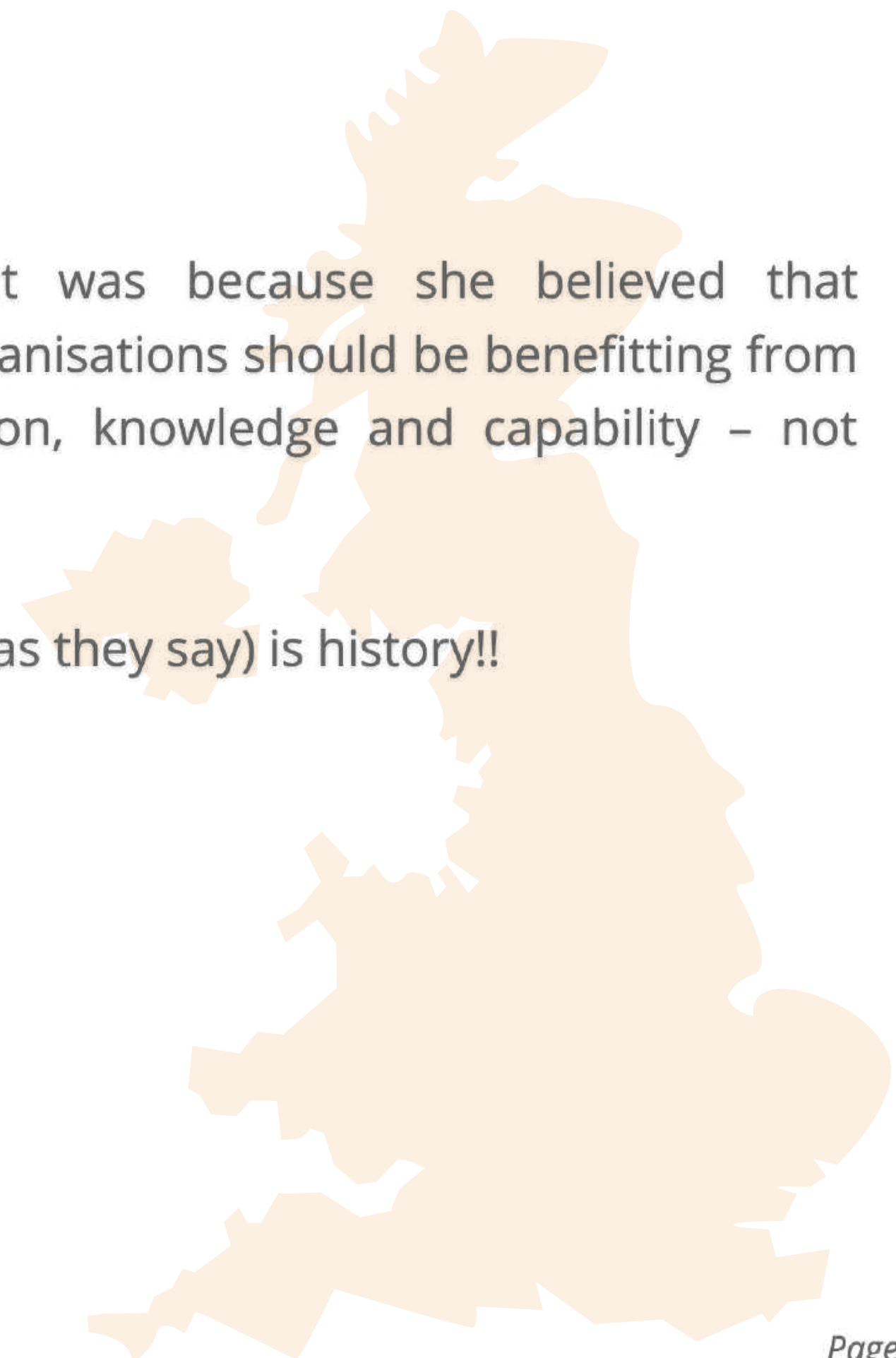
## “ Early career ”

How did you get into the field of customer experience consulting? This is a question I am asked on a weekly basis!! For years my wife had been encouraging me to do it, but my risk averse, corporate brainwashed mind would continuously stop me from making the move.

However, I am a huge believer that things happen for a reason – in February 2012, that reason came. My role as Head of Group CX for a major online retailer came to an end – it proved to be exactly the opportunity I needed to give consultancy a chance. The reason my wife had encouraged me to become a

consultant was because she believed that many organisations should be benefitting from my passion, knowledge and capability – not just one.

The rest (as they say) is history!!







## Professional CX development in the last decade



Ten years later, I have worked with hundreds of companies in more than 50 countries around the world! It has not been easy though! Going into consulting having worked as an employee for my entire working life was a very steep learning curve. Whilst my colleagues knew who I was, no-one else did – so creating awareness was vital. I started to write about CX – something that proved to be the most important decision I made to establish myself as a thought leader on the subject. Yet to establish awareness, you must be relentless – I wrote one article a week, every week for five years!!!

At the same time, you need to determine how you are going to put food on the table! In the beginning, I collaborated with those who had already established their consulting businesses. This again proved to be a sensible move. It meant that I was not always doing the work that I wanted to do, but it was essential to help me understand how to be an effective consultant.

To this day, I still believe that collaboration is vital for anyone wanting to develop a career in consulting – whether it be specifically in CX or another specialism.



The most important lesson of all though is something that I believe in passionately – and that is the need for sincerity and authenticity. My biggest concern moving into the world of consulting was the need to ‘sell’ – sell me; my ideas; my services. This worried me – a lot. Money has and never will be my primary motivation. The thought of ‘reaching out’ to prospective clients and trying to sell to them terrified me!

So, I decided that is something I would never do. To this day, I have never actively reached out to a company to try to ‘win’ their business. Instead, I decided that I would share my views, opinions and approach to CX publicly. I would

write and I would speak. If a company liked what they read, or heard, then they could reach out to me. I want my clients to buy into my philosophy themselves, rather than trying to convince them.







## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



Since I went out on my own ten years ago, the number of CX consultants has grown significantly – and that is a good thing (most of the time). Despite what many organizations think, CX and EX (Employee Experience) are still in the early stages of evolution – the more practitioners who can guide organizations to become truly people led, the better!

The consultants that will succeed will, in my opinion, be the ones who do what they do for the right reason – because they genuinely want to help organizations – not those who want a big paycheck.



# 3. United Kingdom



Neil Skehel



MBA, CEO and founder of Awards International in the UK, Serbia and UAE. Owner of CXM, (Customer Experience Magazine). NED The Future Shaper Media Company.



## “ Early career ”

I am proud to tell you that my career in business began as a crew member working on the tills in McDonald's in London Road, Brighton in 1985.

I have also to confess it was hard work and I was new to the world of work. My path into business is a strange one, since at the time I was a student at Brighton Art College, studying a BAHons in Fine Art. This meant I was a painter and sculptor. So every day that is what I did, I made paintings and sculptures and mixed with other art students, whose heads were not in the cloud, but were not on the mundane. We

talked about philosophy, about great artists and great art. Our idea of fun was to meet with artists who had established careers and visit art galleries.

My manager from Brighton and I, met some years later at one of the management conferences and he reminded me, what I looked like when I turned up for the interview for the job. I wore a pair of faded, torn, denim dungarees and they were splattered with paint. Being an art student, I thought this was a great look. I used to paint with a palette knife, and I made a point of cleaning the palette knife on



my trousers, to add to the effect. However to the non-artist, this of course looked like someone just covered in paint, and probably a mess. It did not deter him from offering me the job. I remember I earned something like £1.69 per hour.

I worked for the McDonald's company until 2006, some 21 years. I am lucky, I loved it, I learned a great deal about business in the broadest terms. I worked in many roles, as a manager of a branch, as an area manager and in a national role in the UK. I worked with many colleagues in many countries and of course McDonald's franchisees and suppliers, organizations such as Coca Cola, Cargill, Kerry

in the food industry and across the whole supply chain including kitchen manufacturers, construction companies and so on.

Between 1990 and 2000, I was part of a team which opened 100 McDonald's per annum, being somewhere in the mix, as we made headlines for opening restaurants within four weeks of laying the foundations.

McDonald's really is a premier brand, with some of the smartest people in business working at every level and has made a huge difference to the lives of millions of people around the world, not just the customers but their employees, suppliers and franchisees.



McDonald's attention to detail in every aspect of their business was apparent to me in 1985. As a model of how to run a business, they were way ahead of the curve then, as they are today. The founder Ray Kroc was attributed with many quotes, along the lines of "our aim is to perfect every aspect of every detail of our business" were commonplace.

And to document it! Many people dismiss the food as unhealthy but faced with the corporation's enormous success have to admit that there must be something about them. They say McDonald's is famous for its training. And rightly so it was. The system of motivation for new employees was fantastic and I got the

bug and there was training at every level of management.

But also the documentation and analysis. In the late nineties they created a huge laboratory in Chicago to test how to improve every aspect of the customer offering from the food to the flow of customers, to the standards of service and hygiene. This was about putting the employees and the customers at the heart of everything they did.

The supply chain was also involved in this. McDonald's insisted the supply chain contributed to learning about the employee and customer and helped to improve the experience for both.



In 2001 I was in a national head office role in London. I had a team working for me on the McDonald's menu and I sought out customer insight from category managers at suppliers like Sun Valley and British Bakeries. This was fascinating. I learned a great deal about planning production of food years ahead and how customer insight and global food trends formed the basis of these plans.

I managed the team which ran the mystery shopper programme in the UK and was a member of the team setting the model for the global programme.

Since I had all the mystery shopper scores, I created a management dashboard aligning

financial performance and restaurant metrics for all UK restaurants and franchisees. Aligning financial, customer and employee scores on such a scale was something of a first.

In 2003 I started a project working on automating many of the restaurant management processes, which was designed to improve the overall operation of every restaurant and the system of providing feedback, keeping records and continuity in managing people and results.

The following year 2004, I was co-opted onto a global team to implement a system, for which I had written the business case and created a



prototype, which was to be implemented in 30,000 restaurants worldwide.

The project was complex, it had absolute top down buy-in, so it was funded and implemented, and it was accompanied by a guidebook. The guidebook articulated that the purpose of the programme was increased sales and profits, from an improved customer experience.

This was the first time I recall seeing customer experience in writing and the connection between a positive customer experience, increased loyalty, sales and profits was the mantra of the global implementation team.

In 2006 the IT team who worked on the project in the UK was nominated for an Award at the British Computer Society Awards. I was the project sponsor and we won an award for innovation at the ceremony in the Park Lane Hilton in November that same year. It was a nice touch, especially since I had left the company in August that same year.

And that is where my career with Awards International started. At the ceremony I was seated on a sponsors table and happened to be sitting next to Don Hales. Don was the chair of judges and had helped to organize the event. We got chatting, discovered we lived 10 miles from each other; shared an interest in

golf and two years later we set up Awards International. We now operate the Customer Experience Awards in 7 countries with customers from 50 countries, with 15 major events. We also operate CXM (Customer Experience Magazine) which has 25000 subscribers.

I was keen to build on my experience in business in the subject matter of customers, and rather than launch a new service award, I decided to launch the UK Customer Experience Awards.

That was 2009 and the first event was held in 2010 at the Connaught Rooms in Long Acre, near Covent Garden, London.







## Professional CX development in the last decade



Having left McDonald's in 2006, I very quickly found myself being offered large day rates for people to use my knowledge and experience. It was nice in the short term, but I didn't enjoy the model and wanted to operate a business with employees and services, that was what I was good at. From my experience I had developed an innate understanding of customers from a front line and innovation perspective. I had studied innovation on my MBA in 2000 and innovation flowed through my veins. Nevertheless between 2006 and 2013 I held a number of positions as an interim or consultant, from which I also learned a great

deal. I worked for CACHE, a not-for-profit organization, consolidating a part-time disparate workforce into a new customer center, staffed by full time employees. I worked for Nationwide Building Society, who wanted to implement Net Promoter across all channels; Shell who wanted to improve the standards of customer experience across their forecourts and BP Castrol, amongst others.

In 2013 I had enough of the feast and famine world of contracts and having set up Awards International in 2008, I began to work full-time as the MD.





## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



In the years since I have seen the growth to ubiquity of the term customer experience or CX. I have seen many models and of course read or heard many case studies in organizations changing or transforming their businesses to become more customer focused and now more recently more employee focused. Where Waitrose and Marks and Spencer, in the UK were innovators in this space, others have since followed, and it is gratifying that many organisations now recognise that if you want to create an outstanding customer experience one of the places to start is with the employee experience.

During my last couple of years with McDonald's I came across a very special phrase and one which is not used nor understood very much. It is a phrase which is at the foundation of my beliefs and why I started Awards International.

“What gets measured gets managed, what gets rewarded gets done”.

It was poignant for me, because running a large mystery shopping programme the goal is to try to motivate people to do a better job, for the customer or for the company. I have seen first-hand how this works and sometimes



doesn't! I have seen how data may be used by management to try to control the result and fail on the one hand and on the other what lengths staff go to, in order to affect the result to their advantage, both are at odds with each other. In such a scenario, a lot of people actively try not to be at the top, or the bottom of the league table. They try to inhabit the middle ground. They don't want to stand out, for fear perhaps of loss of peer credibility or personal values. And they don't want to be lower down the rankings because that may lead to a lot of difficulties! So they manage what delivers results. They may do the minimum, they may find ways to assure a score or a result, but the effort is on managing not excelling or doing the

job to the greatest of their ability. When people are rewarded for doing a good job, that is what they do – a good job. Particularly if systems are fair and reward is appropriate. To me that is the art of positive recognition. Ensuring that the feeling of achievement is glowing and the acknowledgement of it specific and accurate. That is what motivates people and that is what gets results.

I think you can see from my short piece, I have worked in customer driven businesses all my career, and I have innovated in many ways in many roles concerning the employee and the customer, but these days I spend most of my time thinking about our employees or as we



call ourselves, the DreamTeam. I could turn this short story into a book, since I have many great stories to tell and lessons in business and life during my career many of them very powerful. I am very fortunate to have been witness to some wonderful moments and some amazing disasters in my career.

But there is one thing I think more about than anything else these days, it is the employee experience. We are employers and we are only as good as our people. We are striving at Awards International to deliver a great customer experience, and one of our main initiatives is called DreamTime. This is about helping us grow, by being your best and

fulfilling your potential and the rewards are promotion, and career opportunities to set up our company in new countries. So far we have about ten employees whose lives have been transformed through their career with us, either because they are now MD or COO or because they are regional managers in US or Middle East for example.

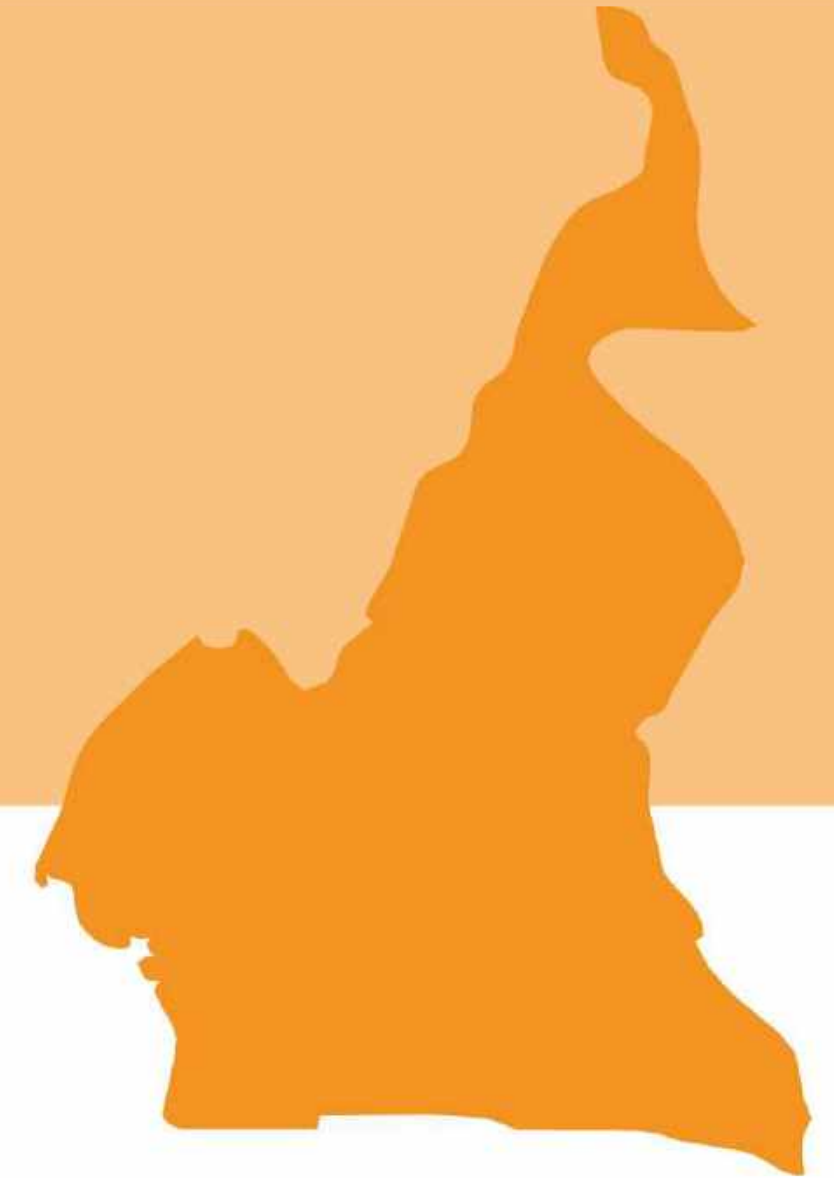
Delivering a great customer experience comes from a great employee experience. Not only that, but we can learn so much about our customers from our employees. When I used to work on the front counter in McDonald's in 1985, having served hundreds and hundreds of customers day in day out, I knew a huge



amount about the customer. I have used those experiences over the last 35 years to inform me how to run our business, how to work with our DreamTeam and to find out more about customers. It is so important to remember that every business, every insights team or business manager can save time and engage employees by asking them about the customer experience and how to make it better.



# 4. Cameroon



Georges Essama



Head of Customer Relations | Global CX Award  
Finalist | CX Contributor & Expert | CXPA Member



## “ Biography ”

Georges Essama is a passionate CX professional with more than 10 years of experience. He works as a Customer Relations Manager in a public Telco company in Central Africa. He is a Global CX Impact Award Finalist 2021, CX Expert and Top contributor.

He joined CXPA (Customer Experience Professional Association) in 2020 and now is a member of the CXPA Leadership Council for Africa. He is a Global Judge for the CX Innovation Award. Husband & Father of 3 amazing boys.



## “ Early career ”

I started my CX career 11 years ago as a Sales & Customer Care staff for a public telco company. I occupied various operational positions before managing the Customer Relations team and acting as an internal CX consultant for my employer. I think it is a privilege to begin in a position offering you direct contact with customers.

They are the ones for which companies work and through your behavior, you express clearly the values, the pros, and the cons of the business. 3 moments matter the most in my early career.

The discovery, the awakening and the confirmation.

In the beginning, I discovered I had a passion for service and care for people. This passion was transmitted to me by one of my mentors (Simon Mairo). He always told me to do what I'd like someone else to do for me. He didn't just tell me but he did it as well. I think people working in CX should be passionate about serving and caring for others.

Empathy is a quality I feel will always be necessary for CX professionals to develop.



Instead, it happens that some events remind you that providing good CX goes above passion. That it is a mission that can deeply change people's lives and even save them. I came to realize that providing bad CX can make people lose their job, cause them to miss incredible opportunities and close businesses.

A story that happened to a friend deeply changed my view of how important my job as a CX professional is. His younger son felt sick. He went out in the middle of the night to find a hospital and a specialist to care for him. Unfortunately, he went to many hospitals with no doctors available. In every place he went, he was treated rudely and unprofessionally by

people he met. No empathy at all for him and his son in his hand. He had all the money necessary but couldn't find a place where people would care for him and do all to save his child.

So guess what? The worst happened. His son died.

When reading such a story you may think "this can't happen here!!!", or blame the health care system. But the truth is that wherever you go when you need someone's help for a product, a service or an issue you have to get it. The experience you have in such a situation is life marking and anyone would surely need an

organization, which would do all the best to respond to its needs.

These events more than passion gave me a mission. “Become a catalyst for organizations to help them provide the best reliable experience ever to their customers and employees”. And I started with my employer, a Public Telco company. We built the foundations of operational governance focusing on the interest of the customer and employee.

We defined CX strategies, transitioned to a Customer-Centric Culture through targeted communication, measured and improved Customer and employee Satisfaction with CX

projects, and more. We became a reference inside and outside the company in applying best CX practices with clear positive results and were rewarded for our efforts.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



In the last decade, 3 aspects sound important for me in my CX development: The Skills, the Network, and the Experience on duty.

First, I worked to increase my CX skills. To be an accomplished CX professional you need to have the skills and expertise that go with it. This includes behavior and knowledge. You can get these through the reading of various books and contents (articles, webinars ...etc.) on CX related topics. Recognized CX certifications are also a good fit to increase your skills and prepare to face CX challenges.

Second, I connected with other professionals and built a network. You need to connect with other CX advocates and experts to build a network of people with whom you share the same passion and engagement. You have to identify leaders in the industry and people who are committed. Engage in conversations and share experiences. CX is a global issue and a team sport. So connect with fellows from all over the world.

Third, I developed my experience on duty by catalyzing my professional environment. You

need to maximize your learnings of the operational execution of CX practices, and how effective and tangible this might be. CX leadership is not just about giving orders on how to do things. I found that it's about knowing how to execute it operationally and coaching your fellows while they're acting. The most experience you have in touching things from the ground, the better it is.







## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



### **The need for CX professionals is increasing.**

Organizations need a catalyst to change the game of their business. CX professionals are those game-changers helping businesses to focus on their customers and employees. Many organizations have not yet realized it. They are still missing the chance to act with a focus on what matters the most. This should change.

### **Technology is necessary but reliability is much more.**

Today various technologies are available to help companies solve customers' problems. But through my experience, I realized that

many issues can be solved simply through process improvements, behavioral transformation or people management. Having good technologies for fun without digging deeper into customers' and employees' needs and acting on them is not profitable for anyone.

**CX will remain a leading differentiator for more times.**

“The truth doesn’t lie”. The more you care for people, the more they’ll care for you. The more public or private organizations will focus on providing solutions that improve customers' and employees' lives, the more they'll gain positions in business rankings. This is not just about the profitability of the business, but it's about common sense, facts and simply being human.





# 5. Palestine



Imad Hazeem



Xpert in Customer Delight I Customer Service &  
Customer Experience Speaker/ Trainer I CXA Judge I  
Marketing Management I Events Management

## “ Early career ”

Before 20 years I started my Career Journey with the biggest bank in Jordan, Actually I don't know exactly where want to go or what I like to do or what fit with me, until I joined service quality team and I believe it was my Kick off my career and start to focus on development of my knowledge and skills to be service oriented person, at that time I believe that "Life is Service" because once we deliver good service, it will effect on our life quality.

I decided at that time my career will focus on customer service management and I was so lucky that I work in different service industries

start of Banking, Consulting and Training, Events Management and Insurance that rich my experience that made of me very good speaker and trainer in customer service field and now am celebrating by training more than 6000 employees with different 40 clients in Arab region and now am certain that am Customers' Delight Expert.



One of my success stories in early career, in 2009 I decide to found a Events Management company in Palestine and I approved that if you deliver a good Customer Experience, the word of mouth will help you to promote your company without any effort because of within 8 years I organized more the 125 events for most of Palestinian private companies.



## Professional CX development in the last decade



In 2008 I decided I started my journey toward to my vision that be one of the best Customer Service Experience Speaker and Trainer in Arab Region that required from me to work very hard on my knowledge, practical experience, values and new trends in the market that help me to achieve my vision and build my brand as Imad Hazeem, Customers' Delight Expert.

One of the milestones in my life was my participation in Gulf Customer Experience Awards 2016 that made me think a lot about Customer Experience in Palestine because it was a very new concept for our market, it was

an opportunity for me to start my journey of CX inspiration in Palestine.

So I keep my commitment to join Gulf CX and International CX Awards on yearly basis till now and am proud to be the Ambassador for both of awards in Palestine, that required of me Developing a content for to educate the people about CX and encourage them to develop their CX to be qualified to compete the international companies and to put Palestine on international CX map. One of my happiest days in my life was when I trained the first CX training in Palestine for one of Telecom



companies and to put Palestine on international CX map. One of my happiest days in my life was when I trained the first CX training in Palestine for one of Telecom companies, in addition to encouraging them to participate in CX awards last year and they were one of the winners.



## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



Nowadays the culture of CX has been started in Palestine, I noticed that from the concern of some Palestinian companies requests but still we need the following:

- 1) Support of Top Management to adopt the concept of CX.
- 2) Application of CX approach in good Manner.
- 3) Employees and Customer Experience are two sides of the same coin of Succession in delivering Good CX.
- 4) We should care about Technology, Staff, and Processes at the same time.

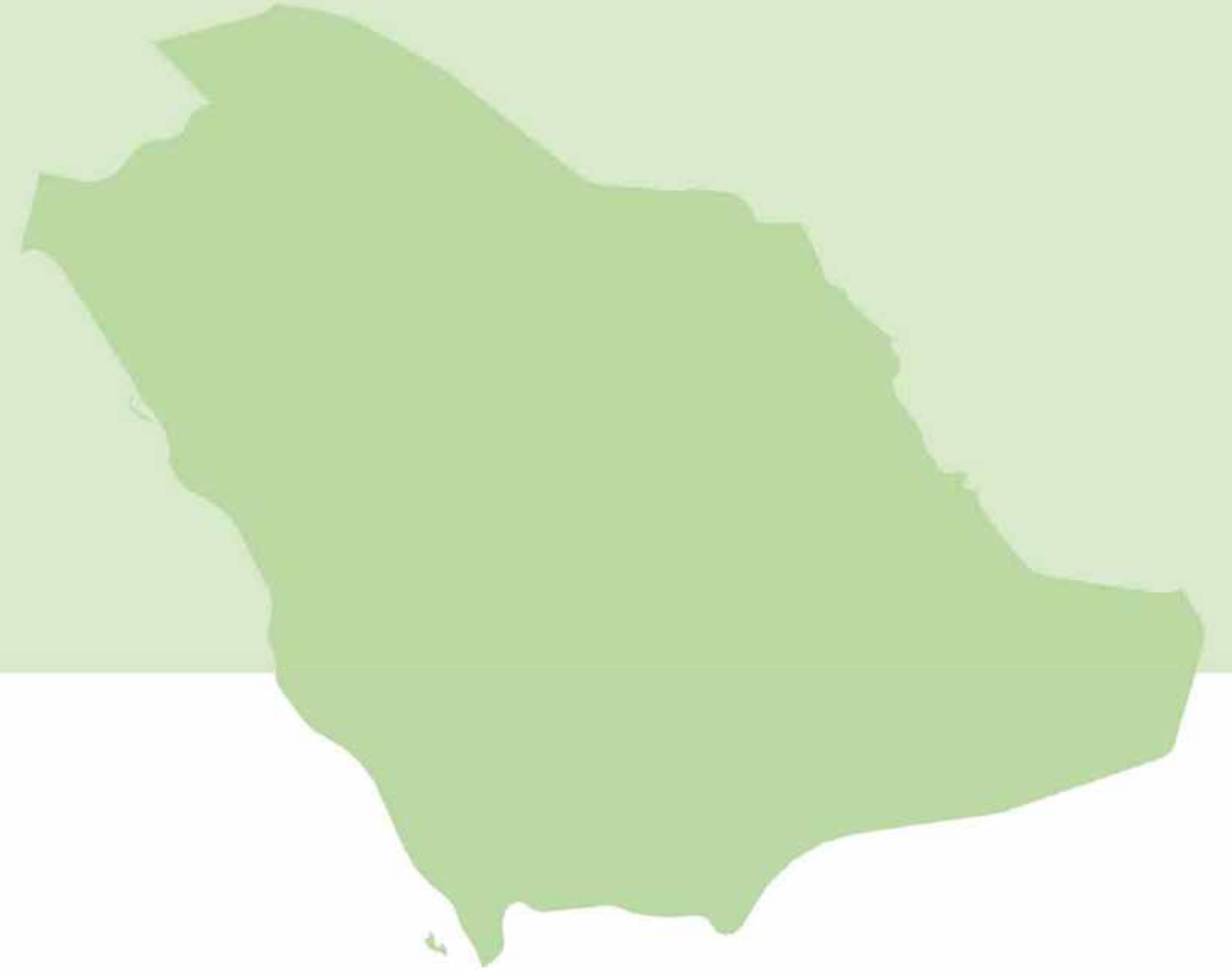
It takes time but to be optimistic we are on a good track to compete in a very professional way and share our success stories with the world.



Imad Hazeem



# 6. Saudi Arabia



Liz Berks



Co-Founder & CEO  
@ 4SiGHT CX

## “ Early career ”

When talking about the start of my career, I will often start with the first permanent full-time role I had as a graduate. However, in reality my career as a CX professional was forged much earlier. Like many teenagers in the UK in the 90's, I supported my record-buying with casual weekend work. From working in a village shop, to being a chambermaid in a small hotel, to waiting in a restaurant, bar work, supermarket assistant, cashier at a bank and many more. I worked on the frontline of customer service for a decade before even starting a full-time job. It was during this decade that I established my understanding of customers – their

different needs, how best to deal with them, and how to create great experiences – I just didn't realize it at the time!

But back to my 'official career', after a stint working in the non-profit sector in Edinburgh, I moved to London to work for a global market research agency. My first role was to run customer and employee experience studies for Government clients, embedding in me an appreciation for the importance of understanding customer and employee satisfaction, and how to learn from the feedback provided.



From London I moved to Hong Kong, beginning my life as a serial expat. While here I continued to work in the customer insights space before moving client side to work for Cathay Pacific in the in-flight product team, defining and implementing the customer experience for the premium cabins.

After more than 4 wonderful years in Hong Kong, I decided to go on the move again, this time finding myself in Sydney. Here I had the opportunity to work with clients on implementing customer insight communities into their business and embedding the customer voice into their decision-making process. But the expat adventure was to

continue, this time with a move to Singapore! Here I headed a wonderful consultancy, where again I worked with clients and their customer insight community, helping them to transform their business to align with customer needs and deliver improved business performance.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



My last move was just over two years ago, taking me from Singapore to Saudi Arabia where I currently reside in Riyadh. While moving to a new country right before the onset of a pandemic probably wouldn't have been how I would have planned it, it turned out to be a blessing in disguise! I was given the time and opportunity to reflect on all the work I had been doing over the prior 15 years, and consolidate the learnings I had gotten from working with businesses to help them understand their customers, identify what they were doing well and where they needed to improve, and how to build that knowledge into

a longer term customer strategy for their business.

In particular what I learnt from these different clients over the years was how successful companies have built a CX strategy that ties directly to their business goals and objectives. How this strategy lays out a road map for what they want to do. How spending time understanding their customers in-depth gave them insights into how and where to innovate.



How gathering feedback from customers at the right time and combining this with employee feedback on internal barriers with systems and processes helps to pin point how and where to troubleshoot issues. And how building a conversation about customers, starting at the top and trickling all the way down to those working on the frontline, builds a customer focused culture where real change and impact can happen.

This all led me to my current role as Co-Founder of 4SiGHT CX. Saudi Arabia is an incredibly interesting place to live and work right now. The pace of change is breathtaking, and businesses in both the public and private

sector are embracing the need for CX and EX management within their organization.

Through mutual connections I met my Co-Founder Anand Nigam and 4SiGHT CX was born! I love being able to bring everything I have learnt from different markets globally to clients here in Saudi, and work with them to build the customer voice into their business.





## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



My number one passion area with CX is how to make the programs that businesses already run be more effective and impactful. I do feel that the global rush to implement VoC/CSAT programs, surveying customers on every little thing they do and then tracking a metric up or down for years on end has done a bit of a disservice to CX management. I'm still a fan of these programs, but I believe a lot more needs to be done to take companies away from a 'measurement' mindset to one of focus on continual improvement.

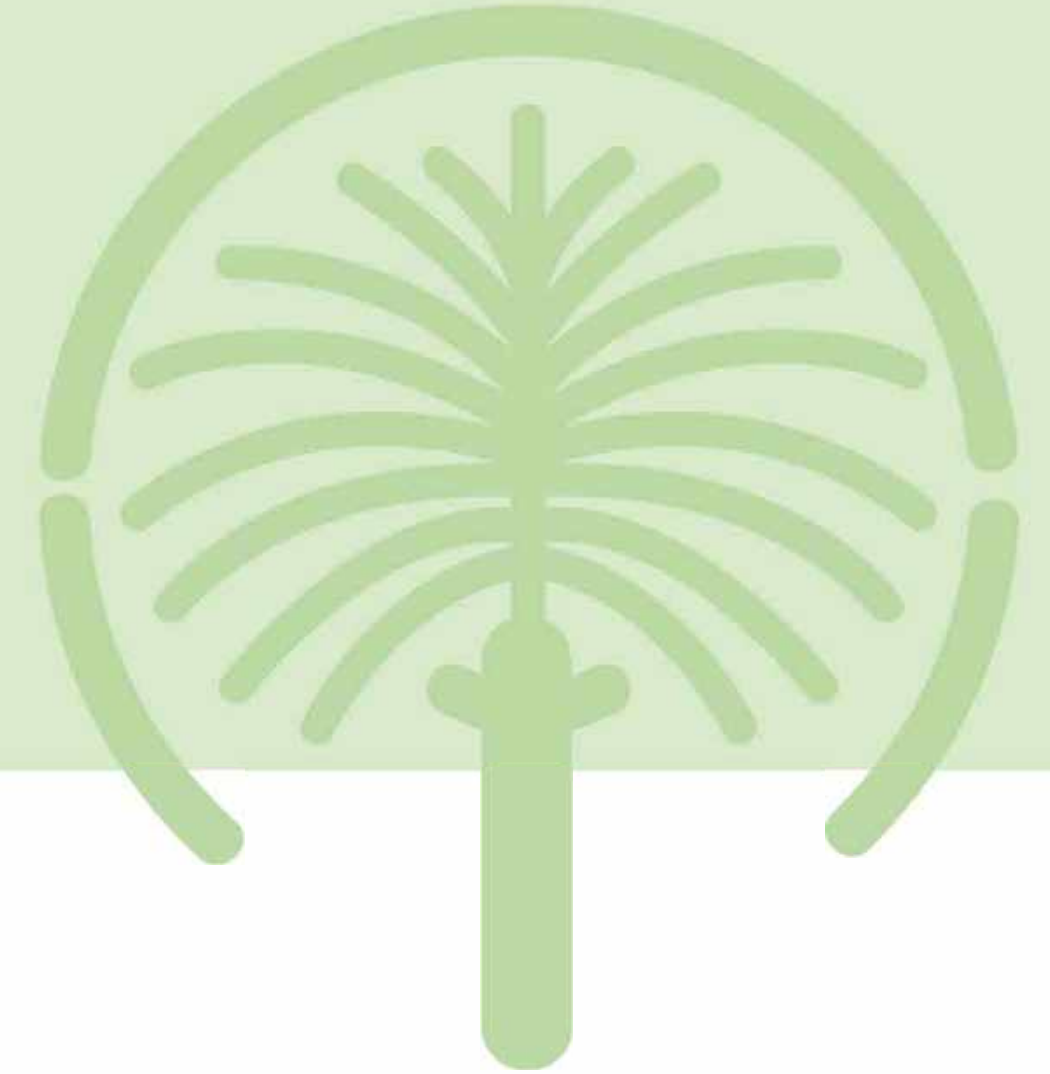
I also feel that the lure of technology often distracts from the core of CX – understanding

the human side, be it customer or employee. Focus (and budget) is given to exciting new technologies that promise the world (or at least improved experience scores). In reality, technology is there as a tool to be used not the whole focus of CX management. I truly believe that if as much time, effort and budget was placed behind really understanding who different customer and employee groups are, their needs and motivations, then companies would see far greater benefits from being able to innovate on their products and services and create better action plans for pain point areas.

Liz Berks



# 7. Dubai



Faran Niaz



Customer Experience Practitioner & Consultant |  
Top 100 Global CX Thought Leader 2021 | Helping  
Companies Enhance CX to Maximize ROI & 7 STAR  
Ratings | CEO & Founder - CX FUTURE | Int'l CX  
Awards Judge | Keynote Speaker

## “ Early career ”

I feel amongst those very blessed who have enjoyed their passion as their profession, for all 25 plus years of my career where I have seen Customer Experience (CX) dramatically evolve from Service to Hospitality to Happiness to Human Experience (HX).

It is said that fate directs you to your destiny. Expected to be an engineer, I ended up finishing my Master degree in Finance and Internship with Standard Chartered Bank.

However, I do remember profoundly dreaming about working for Citibank, However, I do

remember profoundly dreaming about working for Citibank, every time I passed by their Head office each evening on my way back home. How can I forget that day when I got the call to join Citibank as a member of the call center.

Yes, I started my career in the call center taking over 100 calls a day. I am sure that's when I realized that I love to talk to customers, I found immense satisfaction in helping them with their queries and especially their complex issues and found innovative ways to solve their complaints.



Since then, my career has all been about people. Customers, colleagues, employees, team members, management, whichever form they exist. I fully understood how critical it was to understand the challenges, the needs and the development of the front line, the ones who represent the organization and actually serve the customers. I studied the bosses, analyzed what makes a good leader, a motivator – the one who cares about their staff and guides them to passionately serve the customers.

Took me just over a year to become the regional call center Manager of Citibank that I had joined as an agent. Just another year and I

got promoted to Country Call center Head for Citibank Pakistan moved to Head office and ultimately Head of Quality, a role that truly introduced me to the vast world of service tools & techniques such as Six Sigma, Controllable measures, Vital few etc. of collecting, assessing and analyzing customers through their voice and data collected from various sources and then implementing the findings to improve the processes and journeys. That role helped me look at the bigger picture, bringing stakeholders together & introducing service metrics & KPIs.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



An unexpected training session in Istanbul, Turkey that I almost missed, where I met the HR Head of Citibank Russia amongst the group, resulted in me moving to Moscow as 'Head of Customer Service' for Citibank Russia. What an amazing, unforgettable and cherished 3 years of my career and my life where I built one of the most profitable Customer Service unit and Call Center in Europe from a small group of 10 members to building a 300 plus group of amazing service delivery team managing Citibank Russia's Call Center, Telesales, Retention and Complain Management units. Very special team that I am still in touch with,

after more than 15 years I left that place. My career took another giant leap as I got headhunted and moved to Dubai in 2006 as 'Head of Customer Service & Alternate Channels' for one of the largest Banks in UAE, Mashreq bank. The move not only cemented my path firmly in the Customer Service field but also nurtured me as a dynamic leader that managed large scale service units covering multiple geographies, business units and staff of over 500 members and an integral part of organizations strategy. During the next 3 years we moved Banks call center from a mere office building to a stand-alone state of the art and



one of the best call centers in the country and we set new Customer Service Benchmarks as Mashreq got recognized as one of the best in the industry and its service and quality units won multiple regional and International awards.

Market started recognizing my achievements and in 2009 I was picked up directly by the CEO of another dynamic upcoming Bank – ADIB (Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank) with the responsibility of creating and implementing CX strategy for the Bank in 7 countries it operated in and covering all units including Retail, corporate, consumer, private and business banking along with supporting internal

business units. I specifically remember CEO telling me during our first meeting “Faran, our Bank’s service is very poor, come fix it. We want to be No.1” Joining the bank with this vision, I quickly realized that the task was both challenging yet extremely exciting as I saw huge improvement opportunities.

Challenging because astonishingly, when I joined, ADIB was ranked amongst the lowest at 23rd out of 27 Banks in Customer Service in UAE according to the yearly independent survey reports published by ETHOS Consultancy. Exciting as I could envision working towards reaching the goal of being the best.



The journey to the top required a 360 degree culture change within the organization, process reengineering, creation of omnichannel service units, VOC and social media sentiment analysis, bridging the gap within the units and bringing them to a single vision, transformation where required ensuring a strong human touch, persona development and strategy to manage each accordingly, running hospitality and service skill training for over 1,500 front end staff members along with developing service mindset amongst the leaders and most importantly specifically focusing on employee experience who are the true champions of service, the face of the organization hence creating a unique service culture within the

organization that worked like a well-oiled machine. I brought hospitality into Banking by getting front end staff trained through Jumeirah Institute that trains staff of Emirates Airline and Jumeirah Hotels group. Took a team of key business leaders on a Customer Experience learning mission to Disney Training Institute in Disney Florida and then to one of the Top CX organizations in the world – Zappos! All these learnings brought back and implemented along with other Customer Experience tools such as Agile and Journey mapping of key processes, CX Metrics and KPI's across the board resulted in ADIB fast climbing the service ladder with NPS moving from low 52 to high 81 within 3 year's time and CSS and



Mystery shopping scores for Branches and other service units achieving above 90% mark consistently.

### **A proud and record achievement - Best in Customer Experience**

All this hard work paid off as in just 3 years' time in 2011, ADIB won the No.1 Bank in Customer Experience Award in UAE along with the Best Call Center and Best Branch service awards too and continued to stay on Top for 7 consecutive years (an extraordinary record) with winning multiple other service and performance awards too including the prestigious SKEA Gold Award (Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award) – the highest award for

performance by UAE Govt. Winning became a habit as every person in the Bank from top to bottom valued its proud achievements. That's what happens when customer centricity is deep rooted within the organization.

An achievement made possible for one key reason – your employees are your biggest asset, value and nurture them and they deliver the best.

COVID hits and lives changed. I took the brave step of hanging my corporate boots and started my own consultancy 'CX Future' where I work with all type of organizations to help develop a culture that ensures not just for customers to come back retain them, but help

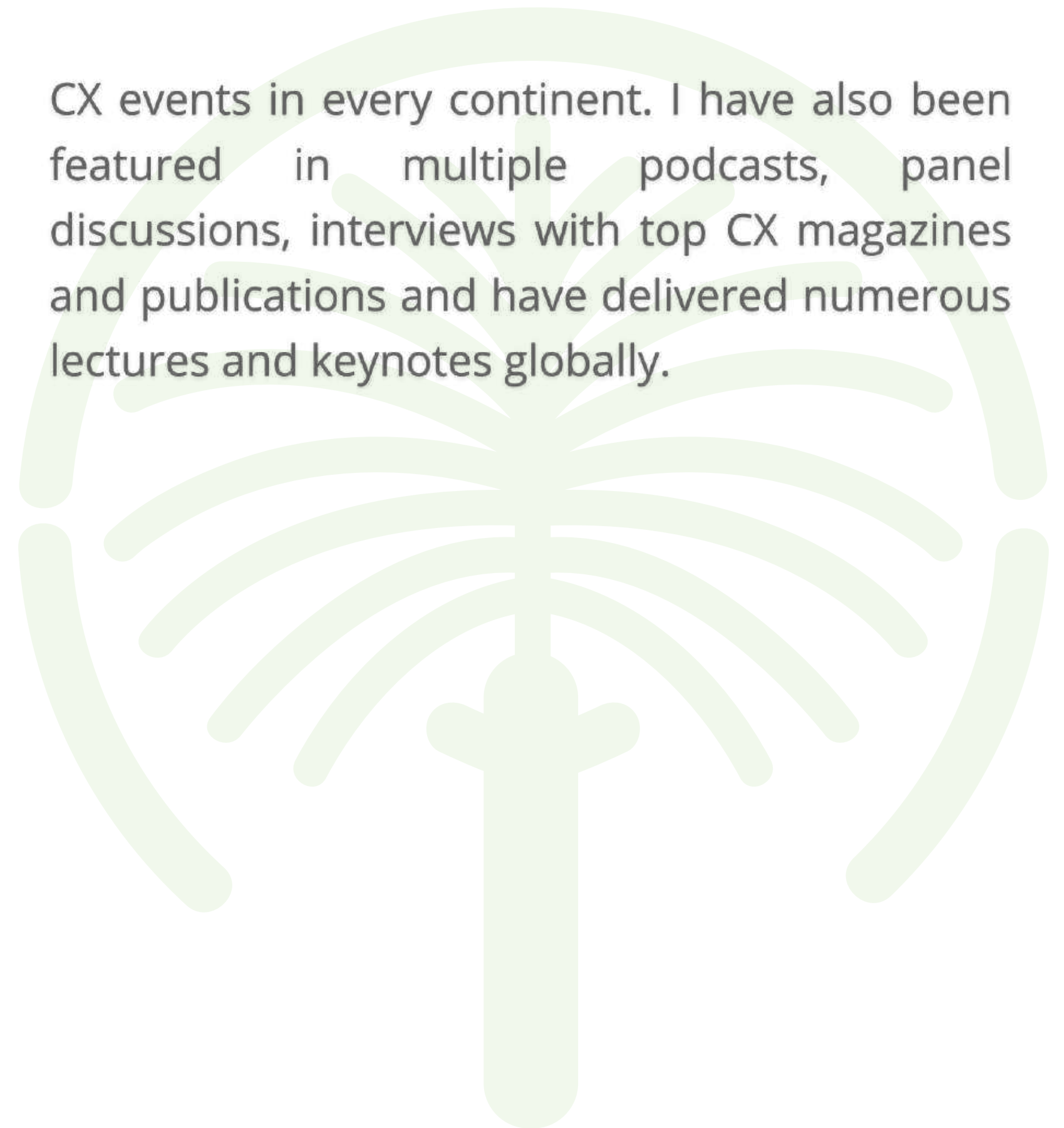


create deeply loyal customers and how to deliver great & exceptional experiences.

### **I rediscover myself - Global CX Recognition**

During the last year and a half, I rediscovered myself. From being seen as a CX professional for some of the best financial institutions I am now Globally recognized as a one of the Top Customer Experience practitioners. Listed amongst the 'Top 100 Global Thought Leaders' for 2021, I am also proud co-author of Amazon best seller 'Customer Experience 4 - CX4' launched early this year. With over 25 plus events under my belt as Chair Judge, I have been awarded by 'Awards International' as the most experienced judge in the world covering

CX events in every continent. I have also been featured in multiple podcasts, panel discussions, interviews with top CX magazines and publications and have delivered numerous lectures and keynotes globally.







## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



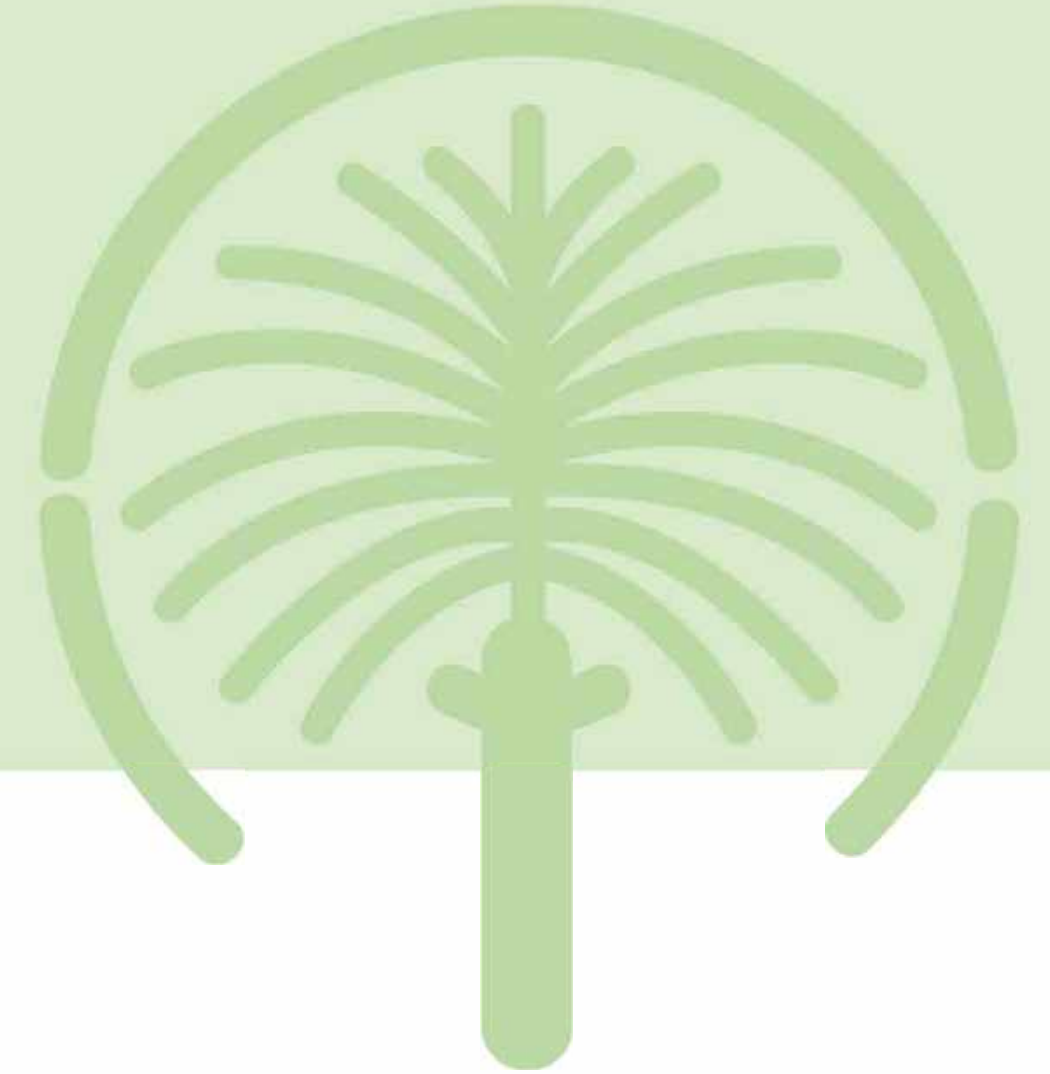
World of Customer Experience is evolving fast. Fred Reichheld in his latest book 'Winning On Purpose' has come up with the new CX Metric 'Earned Growth' as he is not happy how NPS currently is being misused to evaluate staff performance. Similarly, Ron Kaufman predicts that 'CARE' is the future of Service. He emphasizes on ensuring the well-being of ourselves and each other, of our colleagues and partners and well-being of the world and future generations.

Digital transformation, AI, AR and now the new buzz word – Metaverse are all future of

Customer Experience, yet it will take some time before everyone gets on board and gets acquainted with these fast-changing dynamics. Till then, as I always emphasize in all my writings and speeches, technology is an enabler and not experience itself; organizations must find the right balance between technology and human experience to deliver that exceptional service where empathy and smile and personal care and attention still holds its value!

*Faran Niaz*

# 8. Dubai



Renata Liuzzi



Founder & CEO, Axis Partners | Award Winning  
CX professional | Start-up Mentor |  
Driving Innovation | Keynote Speaker



## “ Early career ”

I am a Mechanical Engineer with specialization in Motorsports. We used to apply Design Thinking and Innovation methodologies to design and improve the Formula car that we designed and built to attend a yearly global competition in the US by the US Society of Automotive Engineers.

My business experience started almost 20 years ago with Accenture, working with AI-based solutions (in that time, they were called "Genetic algorithms") oriented to understand and predict consumer behavior. We used those systems to optimize CRM's, marketing

campaigns and also to do Supply Chain optimization.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



Before CX existed, it was a combination of Customer Service, analytics and design thinking. I led the world-wide transformation of Airbus Military Customer Service (from Madrid) and did the same for Jaguar-Land Rover Globally (from London). Those 2 projects shaped a strong expertise in CX and global transformations.

Since I arrived in the Region I have been leading key Innovation and CX projects, working for Government entities as well as top Real Estate companies. I was the Group CX Director for Emaar and then for Dubai Holding

(Real Estate). I launched Axis Partners 3 years ago, with the aim to continue to provide my expertise in the region as well as develop more CX professionals (especially female ones) that want to add value through customer-centric innovative solutions. My aim is to create human-progress by creating collaboration and generating awareness that in CX, there is a real impact in human's lives.





## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



I believe CX will continue to get traction world-wide and in the future, it will shape business strategies. 10 years ago, it was an unknown or very new practice - but in the last few years, it has been developing into key areas of businesses with full-blown departments and mandates. Now a "Chief Customer Officer" is becoming a critical role for organizations.

Today, CX is becoming a key component of business strategies and it is helping to shape sustainable growth - in the short and in the long term.

It is no secret that the most successful companies are customer-centric companies - businesses that innovate and deliver services targeted to specific customer needs. Take as an example Amazon - Jeff Bezos always says that if you focus on your customers (and not on your competitors) you will create a successful growing business that will evolve as your customers do, but also, will go beyond its competitors. The companies that took advantage of a crisis like covid, are the ones that pivoted their business, using the customer as their Axis.

I believe there is an exciting CX future ahead.CX will become the main pillar of business strategies and business operations.

Customer-centric businesses are set to conquer an ever-changing market driven by fast-evolving customers, their behaviors and needs.





# 9. India



Praveen Nijhara



Chief Executive Officer | 50 Most Impactful  
Customer Experience (CX) Professionals - 2019

## “ Early career ”

I started my professional career in London with Market & Opinion Research International (MORI). A year with MORI was very interesting professionally, but also gave me a completely different perspective at a personal level. The time I spent there provided me with learnings which I find extremely relevant even today.

Despite this stint, I did not have any long term plans of spending the rest of my professional life in market research. I had an interest in branding and marketing, having completed my post-graduation in management with a marketing specialization. However, an opportunity with IMRB International (Kantar),

India's largest and most respected market research company was too hard to let go. I have since then been in market research for the past 25 years. While it was never intended to be the field in which I would make a career, I have enjoyed every bit of these 25 years.

Having worked in one organization, for most of this period, and a short stint on the client side has been extremely rewarding. Working in a market research firm gives you the opportunity to meet different clients across various sectors and product categories. The exposure and learning is immense.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



My stint in CX began very early on. On joining IMRB International, the business vertical I was allocated to was to drive a newly established business – Customer Satisfaction i.e. CSat (we never called it CX back then). CSat was a very new subject in those days (1999). Many market researcher friends discouraged me from joining this division saying “Its too niche; it doesn’t give you a holistic experience of market research; brand research is more important to know if you want to be a market researcher etc.”. Having worked in brand research for four years already until then, I decided to join the CSat business vertical of the company.

Today, I look back at the last 20 years with a sense of immense satisfaction (no pun intended!) and learning. Added to this, CSat, or CX as it’s now called, is one of the biggest drivers for most businesses and metrics on it are tracked by no less than the CEOs of various client organizations.

CX has evolved tremendously over the years. In the late 1990s we had to actively speak to organizations explaining the need for understanding that the experience a customer has with your organization is necessary to track.



In a time when clients were focused more about launching new products, testing campaigns and advertising, measuring customer experience seemed like a 'nice to do' activity but not 'necessary to do'.

I, however, continued in the customer experience arena as I enjoyed the fact that it was different from what the others in market research were doing. Gradually, it became such an area of interest for me personally, that I never considered anything else. It had become a passion to see how companies react to customer complaints and finer things that differentiate one organization from its competitors.

I also had a stint with a client organization driving the CX agenda. The organization had failed in three earlier attempts to set up a CX program which continuously measures customer experience. While this was a different exposure, to be on the client side of things, it was a challenge as well to set up an annual continuous customer experience program for an organization that had failed in three earlier attempts.

One year down the line we had succeeded in setting up a program that measures CX once a year as well as the continuous customer interactions during the year. In due time, I moved back to the market research agency



side as I had started to miss the interactions with client organizations across different sectors. I personally felt it was more rewarding to observe how various organizations across different sectors approach customer experience. That was 12 years ago. I continued to lead customer experience research & consulting in IMRB International (now Kantar) for the next 11 years. During this time, I have been fortunate to partner with numerous organizations in setting up CX programs, driving CX initiatives and helping them succeed in their initiatives to delight the customer. Some of the interactions have been with Board members of companies in discussing customer related strategies.

I continue to be invited to discussions with many of them in critical customer related strategy meetings which also keeps helping me grow as a CX professional.

In 2019, I moved on to the role of the CEO at my current organization, Hansa Research Group, a leading market research company in India. Of course, in addition to market research across various streams, we also have our own customer experience practice within the organization which works with several clients in India and internationally across diverse sectors.

In 2019 I was selected as the 50 most Impactful Customer Service Professionals at the

Customer Experience Engagement Loyalty & Awards. In the last few years I have been part of numerous customer engagement awards and events in India and outside India, as a jury member. Currently I am also on the Steering Council of Awards International, a leading organization internationally which holds several awards events in customer experience and many other areas. Additionally, I have been nominated as the Chairperson of the Asia CX Awards to be held in September 2022.







## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



CX has significantly increased in importance over the years. It is clearly seen as the key aspect on which every organization can differentiate today given that product differentiation is no longer easy to do. Most competitors have similar product quality and specifications. CX is where the competitive advantage can be achieved.

Business entities are also realizing that in order to achieve their business goals, growth and profits, focusing on CX is equally important, even if the direct link of CX spend to business metrics is not always easy. Many companies

are also devising their own linkage between CX and business metrics to ensure that CX efforts are in the right direction. However, today, fewer companies debate on the need for CX. CX must be driven from the top. The top management of every organization must be driving all CX initiatives for the rest of the organization to focus on positive customer experience. Many organizations link CX metrics to key performance indicators of managers across the organization. There has always been a debate whether this is advisable. However, it does reflect the seriousness with which companies are focusing on ensuring



experience of customers is top class. Many initiatives in CX, though well intended, can be extremely fruitful if customers are responded to after their problems are solved. Close looping of resolution of pain points is necessary as it gives the customer just that little more attention and a feeling that the company cares. Another significant trend that has emerged in the last few years is that of linking feedback data generated from customers with internal transaction data of the same customers. This provides immense insights and can often provide very accurate action points to significantly up the customer experience. Also, in the last few years, given the increasing importance of social media, many

customers express their experience with companies online. Most organizations now have internal teams keeping a close watch on any mentions about the company, positive or negative. These, if not resolved immediately can have a long lasting impact, especially if the feedback is negative. In some extreme cases, the damage can be irreversible. Companies recognise this and their internal social media teams are quick to provide resolution to customers.

Various departments within organizations measure customer interactions and how well they are delivering to the customer. While many departments across organizations



manage to improve experience, where many of them fail is to plug the gaps that exist between departments. For example, the sales team of a company may do a great job of selling and this may be reflected in the feedback of the customer to the sales team. Thereafter, when the welcome kit and documents go to the customer, these too may be delivered on time, according to the TATs defined by the welcome kit team. However, if the sales person has over-committed the time within which the customer will get the welcome kit, or if he has delayed logging in the sale for some reason, this will not be known. The sales team will say they have done a good job of selling and the welcome kit team will say they delivered on time. The gap

lies in the delay in logging in the sale or over commitment of time. This gap is not tracked proactively and gets noticed only if a case of this arises and a customer complains. These also do not get known during regular tracking of delivery metrics by each department. This siloed nature of working needs to be broken down to ensure seamless delivery to the customer.

Today, CX is also getting more and more technology driven. This is good. From a lot of customer experience research conducted, we have also seen that customers are happier when they can get transactions done themselves without having to depend on the company individual (e.g. withdraw money from



the ATM or pay charges online). This is only possible with use of technology. However, it is unlikely that the human element can be entirely eradicated. Customers are ultimately human and at some point will need the human touch, especially in problem situations. While the role of CX has increased, there is a lot more that needs to be done. We have often heard that CX is a mindset, not just a department. Indeed, CX is entirely a mindset. Organizations need to imbibe this in their interactions with customers. In many sectors, customers are still required to adjust to the processes of the service provider rather than the other way round. Even technical jargon used in the sector is still used in advertising and communication

to the customer expecting the customer to understand what the company is trying to say. This makes it difficult for the customer to interact with the company and in extreme cases even avail of the product or service. Organizations must have a CX mindset. The customer is the king and will always remain. The company exists because of the customer and not the other way round. This must be imbibed by every employee in the organization so as to ensure the customer is also made to feel good. Just delivering the product or service well may not be enough. CX is indeed a mindset – a mindset that the customer must be left delighted in every interaction with the organization.

*Praveen Nijhara*



# 10. Melbourne



Ian Stokol (CCXP)



Head of Design Studio | Digital Foundry |  
Computershare: (CX awards judging, webinars,  
blogs, vlogs and podcasts promoted on LinkedIn  
are done in an independent capacity.)

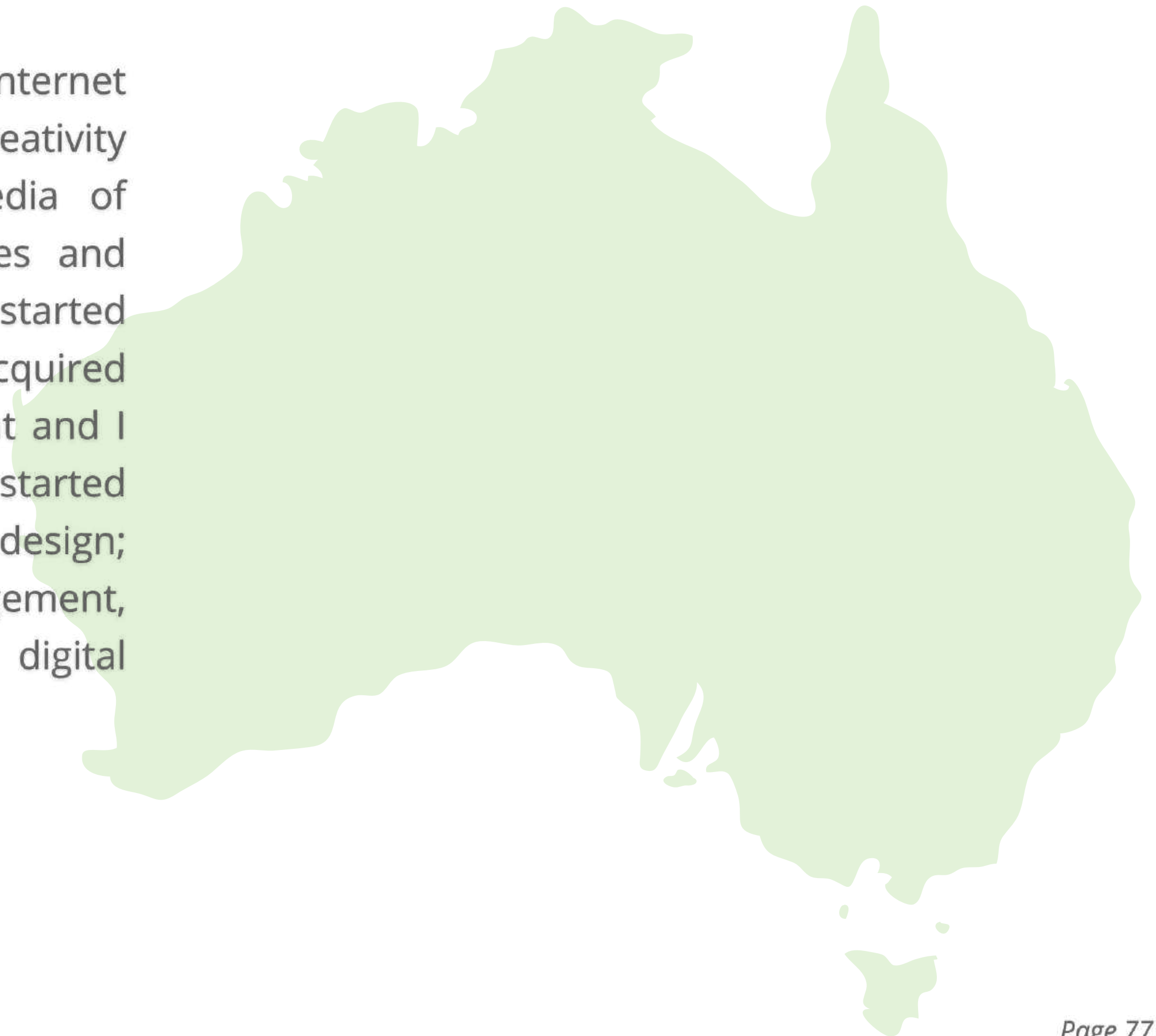
## “ Early career ”

My career path was not intentional. I loved music and art, but in the mid- to late 70s, these weren't considered serious career paths. So, I went to university to study electronic engineering in the hope of becoming an audio engineer and failed that. As a young man and military veteran, I had an idea about what I liked or didn't like and a vague idea of what or who I wanted to be. Trying to do something remotely artistic, I pursued a job in the television industry and became a lighting director. On the job, I learned a lot about proper planning, production values, efficiencies and, to my surprise, how to create things that

people loved. I left the TV industry to become a graphic artist with a friend who was formally educated as one. Together, in the mid 80s – at the beginning of the personal computer revolution – we started a small computer-aided graphic design studio. During that time, I met Robert Kiyosaki at a seminar. He told me I should do something I love. I told him I didn't know what I loved. He said, “Then do something about the things you hate.” I thought, “What do I hate?” All I could think was I hated mediocrity and carelessness. I thought, whatever I do, it has to be as magnificent as I can make it and committed to excellence in



everything I do. In the late 90s the Internet became main-stream and our creativity transitioned from the traditional media of print, radio and television to websites and interactive media. Without realizing it, I started to learn UX design. Our biggest client acquired us as an internal marketing department and I became the Global Head of Marketing. I started to learn new skills other than graphic design; skills like leadership, project management, business development and digital transformation.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



As the early 2000s started to roll out, I rolled along and became an independent marketing, design and project management consultant. The diversity of clients I consulted with gave me broad-spectrum experience across the range of industries, personality types and behaviors. I discovered that technical skills, important as they are, are not nearly as important as interpersonal skills – at all levels of business.

Around 2012, I decided to go back to school. I formally studied project management through the Project Management Institute (PMI), and, in parallel, UX Design at the Interaction Design

Foundation (IxDF). Studying again, I discovered just how much I already knew and just how little I knew. You can gain a lot of organically-derived experience in life, however, if you're learning the wrong things, your experience doesn't mean much. On the other hand, knowledge alone is not nearly enough. The ability to 'read the room', as the Japanese say, and understand all the people affected by what you do, is just as important as what you do.

The power of learning standardized frameworks is that you develop interoperable skills. What this means is that you can take



your skills anywhere and apply them in most situations. So, I became what my colleagues called a 'certification addiction'.

In preparing for the CCXP exam, I attended Anita Siassios and Lynn Hunsaker's outstanding course. I used Michael Bartlett's CCXP Exam Prep book and online CCXP Exam Simulator several times over. I watched every video on his website four times and wrote out each lesson twice. I also listened to Jean Bliss' "Human Duct Tap", the Forrester's 'The CX Cast' Lynn's 'CX Show', and 'The Intuitive Customer' podcasts. I also read and listened a lot of books. I also purchased Jean Bliss' book, 'Customer Experience Officer 2.0' - which is excellent.

An essential book is 'Mapping Experiences: A Complete Guide to Customer Alignment Through Journeys, Blueprints, and Diagrams', by James Kalbach. I took 6-months to study and, looking back, that was pushing it too hard. The required body of knowledge for the CCXP exam is huge. I passed the CCXP exam with a score of over 90%.

I'm one of around 30 Certified Customer Experience Professionals (CCXP) in Australia and the only one to have won the prestigious CXPA Impact Awards in 2019. Among my 47 other certifications are the PMI Project Management Professional (PMP®), PMI-ACP®, AgilePM®, (DSDM) and Certified Lean Six

Sigma Green/Black Belt Professional. I also moonlight as a design league coach for the IxDF, a CXPA CX-Pro mentor and serve on the 2022 CXPA Regional Leadership Council. I'm a keen student and practitioner of Behavioral Economics and Complex Systems Design. I've also been a judge, chair of judges and host on several international CX, DX and Business Awards since 2020.

Privately, I read a lot and listen to lots of books and podcasts on my early morning beachside walks to stay current and inspired.







## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



I think the biggest challenge with the CX industry is 'customer experience' does not describe what we do. 'Customer Experience' happens whether we do something or we do nothing. Customer experience in itself is not a good or bad – it just is. On the other hand, project management, design or even medicine, implies something specific that is done by someone with an outcome for someone else. CX doesn't imply anything that's done. CX just states an obvious reality; we experience something – good, bad or indifferent – as a result of being a customer of some organization. No wonder people are confused

about what it is we do! Contrariwise, customer service and customer success both imply something that is done.

So, if we struggle to define what CX is, then we are going to struggle to create a framework we all agree on. On the subject of agreement, even that is unlikely. When anybody tries to establish a standard we will always get opposing views. Even though the idea of project management was established in the early 1900s and matured in the 1950s, people are still arguing about which project management methodology is best.



In the design world, people are still confused between visual, graphic and interaction design and, to complicate things further, we now have service design, enterprise architecture and business model re-engineering – all of which are all forms of design.

When you examine the disciplines of the CX professional, they cover such a broad range of skill sets from strategy, marketing, operations, human-centered design, human resources, change, project and process management, digital transformation, data and analytics. That is an incredibly broad-spectrum of skill-sets and it is hard to believe that any one individual has a grip on all of them. If Shakespeare was

right when he said, “a jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one”, then a CX professional is best described as a generalist and synergist of these subjects. However, that’s not how it is taught or understood.

From a personal point of view, I’ve always been driven to do something that I’m proud of and that brings joy or makes a meaningful difference in someone’s life. Let’s face it, life is hard and designers are people who look at the world and exclaim, “Surely it can be better than this!” The thing is, the world is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous and, when we endeavor to fix things with all good



intentions but no deep understanding, we discover the law of unintended consequences. Everyone has an opinion, even scientists. Yet, the scientific method has consistently proven to be the best approach to problem-solving. Like in most disciplines, there is a science to CX and there is equally an art. The art of any discipline comes from our humanity and compassion. The one thing technology and science cannot do is make moral and ethical decisions. At the core of CX is the intent to do the right thing. This is an art, not a science.

Currently there are three main schools of thought in customer experience frameworks. There is the CXPA, a non-for profit organization

whose independence is sometimes obscured by its sponsor relationships. There is the original Forrester training that has recently undergone a revamp, and it is expensive as well as time consuming. In Australia, the Forrester brand is very strong particularly in the retail sector. And lastly there is the XM Institute established by Bruce Temkin for Qualtrics. There are also several universities in small educational institutions offering micro-credentials in CX.

However, it is very difficult to determine which is the benchmark standard by which all others are measured. This may come in time, if the practice can survive expectations of the C-Suite.

Overall I'm hopeful for CX, and I expect that like most other disciplines there will be different flavors of it taught and practiced all over the world. At least the heart of CX is the intention to put customers, employees and the business needs on equal footing. The trick, of course, is to balance this equitably. Maybe the CX message should be like the Hippocratic Oath: "in the pursuit to extract or create value, do no harm."

Ian Stokol

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Stokol', located in the bottom right corner of the image.



# 11. Missouri



Michael G. Bartlett (CCXP)



Author of  
The Dark Side of CX

## “ Early career ”

I always knew that one day I would direct a feature film. I don't know how, exactly, I knew this, but I did. I knew it with certainty. My skills, however, were always in software. I started writing computer games aged 8 and became so good at Artificial Intelligence that I completed my 2-hour college exam in 25 minutes and aced it with distinction. I studied computer science at university. I didn't really enjoy my course, so I tried to drop out mid-way through and go to Film School.

Unfortunately, the financing was not available, and I could not find any jobs coding AI (This

was back in 1999). So, I decided to temporarily commit myself to a life of corporate drudgery and build my film career on the side. And that is exactly how my early career played out. I moved through various jobs where my creativity was under-utilized.

I worked at Accenture and at Europe's largest Space Agency. Some of the jobs were OK, some not. There was always something that soured it – be it bait-and-switch tactics with job descriptions, change of managers, being under-paid ... but mainly it was me. I was just not doing what I loved.



On the side, I worked hard in the evenings and weekends to build a parallel life. I was successful and my debut feature film ended up being one of the highest grossing films at the American Film Market (AFM) in 2007 when it sold to The Weinstein Company. At that point I gave away all my IT books to Accenture and went out on my own as a film director and producer.



## Professional CX development in the last decade



During the Cannes Film Festival in 2007, I got to see how the marketing engine worked in the film business. I suddenly became much more interested in that than the film-making process. I always quite enjoyed the psychological side of business as I had developed a super-power of being able to read people. I was a huge fan of the work of Derren Brown and the trick he played on the marketing executives always stuck in my mind.

After I moved to the USA in 2011, I shot one final film and then started to realize that film directing on low budgets is a young man's

game; I was in my mid-thirties and could feel it. The general trend was lower revenues, lower budgets and filmmakers being forced to continually cut corners. My body was struggling with the 16-hour days, and I was so exhausted I began hallucinating. I decided to give up filmmaking in 2015; at the time I had two movies that were both in redbox at the same time and one playing on Sky Premiere in the UK alongside Hollywood blockbusters, so I felt I had gone as far as I could and bowed out gracefully.

During this period of time, I was working for a small start-up that got taken over by some



investment companies and the new leadership began running the company into the ground. I started to become obsessed with trying to understand what was happening. I began reading books on human motivation and leadership. This then led to other areas and eventually I found my way to Customer Experience.

In the end I got fired as I spent more time trying to figure out how to improve processes than doing my actual assigned job, which I found to be nothing more than whack-a-mole and treadmill work. I am that classic person you hear about who you tell to mow a lawn and they end up spending the day trying to build a

better lawnmower. Despite the setback, the Customer Experience passion was now alive and burning inside me and little did I know – the universe was pushing me forward.

When I looked back over my career, I was able to connect the dots and see that I had been heading in this direction all along. For example, creating experiences was a huge part of what drove me whether I was designing usable software or designing tension in a movie scene. I then moved to the local school district as their User Experience Manager. When I eventually left to start my own SaaS company (CCXP Exam Simulator), I was given a round of applause by all the librarians who said of my work: “It was

like someone finally listened to us.” I then moved to JMARK, which is the best company in the world to work for. I had many conversations with the CEO, Thomas Douglas, and his vision is unlike anything else I have ever seen. Tom is the perfect combination of a visionary and a realist and he hired me specifically because of my skills in Artificial Intelligence, programming and Customer Experience. If Google or some other Tech Giant offered me a \$600,000 dollar salary I would not leave JMARK. Finding a CEO who truly valued me for my unique abilities literally changed my life.





## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



CX has sadly begun to fizzle out in recent years. It has become overrun by well-meaning people pumping out the same old platitudes. I see very little innovation. Which explains why the needle seems to never move in the real world.

It is starting to border on the cult-like mentality of many “get rich quick gurus” who say success will be yours if you follow their 10-step program. We must accept that CX is complex.

You won't learn much reading “CX” books or articles anymore. I tried to condense down three years of research in my last book and I

feel there is almost nothing left to say. People need to expand into psychology, behavioral science and complexity theory. That is the future. My recommendation is to follow thought leaders like Rory Sutherland and Dave Snowden.

*Michael G. Bartlett*

## 12. Ohio



Gabe Smith (CCXP)



Content Manager & Associate Director at  
Customer Experience Professionals Association



## “ Early career ”

My journey into CX began in 2007, though I didn't know it at the time. As a straight-out-of-college customer service agent at the American Cancer Society, I took pride in my day-to-day work, but was challenged by my lack of authority and influence to solve root-cause issues affecting customers and donors. As part of my responsibility within the contact center, I had the opportunity to partner with a newly-formed CX team on a project, and my eyes were opened to the ability of a small, mighty team to affect transformational, customer-centric change. I wanted in!

When a role opened on the team in 2014, I jumped in with both feet—but found that I was out of my depth at first. I had the desire and the support from my team to learn and grow, but lacked a broader community and context to my work. I became a part of the Customer Experience Professionals Association (CXPA) community and was buoyed to learn that not only were there people like me and my team members, but there were concrete tools and methodologies that successful practitioners had employed to drive real change in their organizations.





## Professional CX development in the last decade



In many ways, I track my own growth as a CX professional with the growth of CXPA and the CX profession as a whole. In the beginning, there was a thirst among CX professionals to connect and to experience a sense of camaraderie with others doing the same work; it is, after all, a lonely profession. That desire for connection and a safe space to learn and grow still remains (the CXPA open forum remains a source for fast, insightful answers to difficult questions), but it's also evolved into something more: a discipline with independent, consensus-based definitions and certification. A respected profession that is practiced by

some of the world's most recognized and profitable companies—Microsoft. Apple. Amazon. An integral part of modern business success.





## Professional-personal view on CX nowadays



As the CX discipline continues to grow and expand, particularly outside of the United States, it is more critical than ever that CX professionals continue to connect and share to advance the work of CX in their organizations. During my time with the American Cancer Society, I'd often tell our staff that for us, customer experience was not just a financial imperative, but a moral one, too.

After all, didn't we have a responsibility to create easy, successful, emotionally connected experiences for people going through some of the most challenging moments of their lives?

At the time, I thought this edict was unique to our non-profit work. But as time has passed, I believe it applies to all organizations, because we all have the ability and the responsibility to make our customers' lives a bit better through our work.

I'm still up for the challenge, and have never been more excited for the future of CX. I hope you are, too.

*Gabe Smith*









+31308771370



edwin@edwinbest.nl



<https://edwinbest.org>



Jutphasestraatweg 14, 3434 BM, Nieuwegein, The Netherlands