How Business Missed the Power of Experience Management

Reform experience management—or become obsolete

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For over three decades, "Customer Experience" has been America's favorite business phrase—a trillion-dollar industry built on dashboards, surveys, design activity, and consulting. If you Google "customer experience," you'll find more than 2 billion results. Yet despite record investment, trust, loyalty, and emotional connection continue to erode across nearly every sector.

Something essential has been lost. Customer experience is not meant to be a fad, it's the basic building block of value creation in business, personal relationships, employee relationships, it will never go away.

The problem is not that organizations stopped caring about customers.

The problem is that they started managing what people do instead of understanding how people think.

What was missed

There is a distinction the field largely overlooked, and it matters more now than ever:

• Experience Management became a practice of fixing broken things, continuing to do what we have always done.

• Engineering Experiences is focused on customer-back versus company-out. It designs from first principles, intentionally orchestrating the signals that shape meaning, emotional resonance, and memory.

True experiential value is not created at the moment of transaction. It's created later, in memory. What people remember defines what they believe happened, how they feel about it, and what they choose next. As Daniel Kahneman famously observed, "We don't choose between experiences; we choose between memories of experiences."

That insight should have reshaped management practice. Instead, it was mostly quoted and rarely operationalized.

When experience became economic—and then stalled

In the late 1990s, Joe Pine and Jim Gilmore set the business world ablaze with a powerful idea: experience itself can be a source of economic value, not just a byproduct of service delivery. They gave leaders permission to stop treating experience as "soft" and start treating it as strategic.

But what followed was a partial adoption of that insight.

Many organizations embraced the language of experience while skipping the discipline required to build it as a system. The work drifted toward theater, touchpoints, and surface-level improvements. The deeper question went unanswered:

How do we intentionally engineer experiences that create emotional resonance and lasting memory—and then hold that system accountable to real business outcomes?

Process Obsession

Over time, we confuse process with perception. And focused more on what customers think versus how they think. We perfected the operations of efficiency while neglecting the architecture of meaning.

Neuroscience confirms what instinct already tells us: emotion drives memory, and memory drives behavior. People who feel emotionally connected are more likely to forgive mistakes, pay premium prices, and remain loyal, especially in commoditized markets.

Yet most organizations still treat emotion as incidental. Something to be measured after the fact. Not something to be engineered intentionally.

We need to unlearn and think differently as this will create the fusion of academic research, alignment, and distinctive approaches, as opposed to individual platforms and certifications of tools and skills that are borrowed from the industrial age.

How CX drifted from its impact

In the early 2000s, pioneers such as Bruce Temkin, Jean Bliss, and others did important work professionalizing Customer Experience Management. They built visibility, credibility, and momentum for a new discipline.

But as the movement borrowed , it also institutionalized its limitations.

The field became dominated by scores, surveys, and "best practices" borrowed from industrial-age quality and service models. Vendors optimized dashboards instead of meaning. Voice-of-the-customer platforms expanded, but few learned to listen for the unspoken signals that reveal what people actually carry forward.

The industry did not lack intelligence or intent.

It lacked a unifying system and a shared standard of rigor.

Most critically, it missed what the earliest articulation of the field pointed toward: engineered experiences. Multisensory design created around a desired emotional end-state. Built to create memory and attachment, not just a smoother process.

Instead, experience management too often became synonymous with "manage the process and make it better." That does not create distinctive economic value.

The road not taken

Our industry didn't simply choose a different approach; we continued on the road most traveled. And that choice made all the difference. Instead, we should continue to unlearn and take the road less travelled.

If you want the cleanest way to describe what happened, it's this:

- did not unlearn.

- We did not think differently.

- So we kept doing what we always did—and expected different results.

We also created a culture of survey fatigue. We turned Net Promoter Score into a trophy. And we mistook internal scorekeeping for real-world value creation.

To be clear, this is not "an NPS problem."

It's a discipline problem.

The evidence is embarrassing—and getting worse

Independent research has been signaling trouble for years. The National Customer Rage Studies show that customer anger is rising, not falling. By 2023, an estimated $887 billion in U.S. revenue was at risk due to poor customer care and unresolved complaints. Wall Street Journal reporting in 2025 revealed that 77% of customers experienced a product or service problem in the prior year—up sharply from prior decades.. More recent reporting shows that more than three-quarters of customers experienced a product or service problem in the last year alone.

That should not be possible in a world where CX investment is higher than ever.

This is not a tooling problem.

It is a system problem.

The Experience Management Reformation™

I am provoking the Experience Management Reformation™ , this is not an association, a certification, or a personality-driven movement. It is a community-level correction. Systems over personalities. Contribution over celebrity. Behavioral science over folklore. Shared rigor over recycled thinking.

At its core, the Reformation insists on several non-negotiables:

• To move beyond fixing broken processes toward creating experiences that enrich and endure.

• To elevate Experience Management to a discipline as rigorous as finance or strategy.

• To ground our designs in human emotion, memory, and meaning—using evidence from behavioral science, psychology, and experience design.

• To fuse the art and science of experience into a system that senses, responds, and continuously learns.

If you want to know whether emotional resonance is real, the answer won't be found in a dashboard.

Look instead at what businesses live or die by:

Churn. Repeat business. Referrals. Pricing elasticity. Trust. A sense of belonging. Brand ethos.

If your experience efforts cannot connect to those outcomes, it is window dressing. It may keep teams busy but it will not keep the business alive.

Commit to the Experience Management Reformation™ Movement

If this resonates, don't just nod along. Help build what comes next.

Engage in the Community

This is not another association. It's a working community for people who are done with fragmentation and ready to compound progress together. Engage Today.