

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Tips for accelerating satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy on tolled roadways

➔ Free-range, vegetable-dyed, certified organic, gluten-free, 100% recyclable tolling? Maybe not, but think about Whole Foods. When people pay more for a product or service based on a perceived value, they are on their way to becoming brand advocates. According to the Forrester Research blog, 73% of consumers trust the recommendations of friends and family, and 13% will share a bad experience with 15 people or more.

Frequently the decision to use a tolled roadway comes down to a trade-off between time and money, but a faster commute isn't the only factor that drives consumers these days. Every time a vehicle crosses a gantry, a value judgment has been made. "On a toll road, drivers will, consciously or not, rate the level of service received based on their driving experience," said independent transportation consultant Bob McQueen.

DEFINING EXPERIENCE

In recent years the tolling industry has increased its focus on customer service, which is an important part of the overall picture. Roadway condition, reliability and safety are important too, as are transaction accuracy, customer service and ease of use. All of these play a part in shaping how customers perceive a toll operator – in creating a customer experience (CX).

While customer service is routinely measured in single touchpoints – such as a call to a service center – CX is described as the result of the cumulative interactions over the duration of the customer relationship. Leading marketing and research companies have begun to point to it as the most important factor in business success. The American research and advisory firm Gartner refers to CX as "the new marketing battlefield" and says that "growing your business will depend on your ability to deliver convenience and delight consumers in today's connected economy".

In tolling, positive public perception is key to business potential. It not only drives repeat users on existing roadways, but also fuels bond offerings necessary for growth.



Studies show:

1. As experience ratings rise, so do satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy
2. News of bad customer experiences reaches twice as many ears as good ones
3. Companies with poor customer experience see increases in payment delinquencies

Studies show that as experience ratings rise, so do satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy. So how does a toll authority embrace CX management? Experts call for a holistic approach in which organizations align all aspects of their operations toward CX optimization. In tolling, that means getting vendors and partners on board.

ACCURACY IS ESSENTIAL

Etan Industries understands the impact that good and bad CX can have on tolling. Its answer is FASTLane – the tolling industry's first customer-focused back-office system for financial accountability. FASTLane was designed with accuracy, usability and experience in mind. "We see it in every industry we serve. It has to be correct, easy to use, and it has to be a positive transaction," said Etan's president, Steve Levine.

Drivers demonstrate trust in a toll authority when they allow a transponder to be linked to their credit card or bank account. Billing errors shatter that trust and customers are resentful when they have to

spend time to fix problems they didn't create. In the past year, investigative reports about billing errors in tolling have hit the news in California, Texas, Washington, Kansas, New York and Florida, and bond rating companies like Moody's and Fitch are listening.

MAKING IT EASY

Financial quality is at the heart of FASTLane. Designed by accountants, FASTLane's comprehensive reconciliation system provides transparency down to the transaction level. With automated journal entries and refund and exception processing, it helps unite the financial and operational aspects of the business, resulting in more accurate billing and more timely and comprehensive reporting. "The toll transactions we manage balance to the penny every month," says Levine. FASTLane gives authorities the ability to build confidence in both consumers and bond holders, paving the way for future growth and success. Today's customers want to be able to choose



Far left: A representation of positive and negative influences on customer experience

Left: FASTLane customer service creates convenience, improving user experience

how they interact with companies. While quality live-agent support is still important, intuitive websites that give customers the direction and tools to accomplish tasks on their own are imperative. From ordering a transponder to clearing a registration hold – anything that can be offered on the website should be.

In a Nuance Enterprise study, 75% of respondents said they prefer managing their accounts or getting answers to their questions via self service rather than by engaging with the customer service agent on the phone. Nine in ten indicated they would use a FAQ or online knowledge base.

Understanding that toll authority interaction is an additional burden that drivers don't face when using non-tolled roads, FASTLane creates a culture of convenience in all aspects of customer

service. Billing communications are optimized for clarity and efficiency and designed to answer questions before they are asked. Telephone and web communications are built to anticipate customers' needs. In fact, most inbound calls can be resolved within the 24/7 interactive voice response (IVR) system before they reach an agent, and even more information and options are offered through branded web portals that integrate with toll authority websites. Every touchpoint is engineered to create a positive CX and to make it easy for drivers to use toll roads.

EVERYBODY IS A CUSTOMER

There are always going to be some drivers who use toll roads without a transponder. In toll talk, they are often called 'violators'. Across the USA they represent roughly 20%

of toll way transactions, however they consume about 80% of administrative resources in billing, payment collection, processing and customer service.

A strong focus on CX is the key to converting infrequent toll travelers to regular riders with an autopay mechanism in place. FASTLane reframes these relationships by treating these drivers as customers, not violators. When billing thresholds are met, drivers receive toll notices or invoices instead of violation notices. In this way, the interaction shifts from a negative touchpoint to a customer service opportunity.

A visit to a kiosk or a customer service call can result in a positive interaction and a satisfied customer at a single point in time. But it takes more than that to turn a satisfied customer into an advocate. By focusing on CX, toll authorities can harness customer opinion and use it to promote their brand. Toll operators, like all successful businesses, have to create an outstanding customer service experience. Only then can they begin to control the conversation. ❌

Diana Dubois is director of marketing at Etan Industries

➔ **FREE READER INQUIRY SERVICE**

Etan Industries inquiry no. **505**

To learn more about this advertiser, visit: www.ukipme.com/info/tol