Leveraging Public Data to Improve CX During & After the Pandemic

Guidehouse

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In the span of a few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has completely upended what customer experience (CX) looks like across private sector and government organizations. As disruptive and as vital as these changes are, it is likely that many of these disruptions will have lasting effects. Customer journeys, or the many different touch points and interactions that customers have while interacting with an organization, product, or service, look a lot different than they did prior to the pandemic. As the practice of social distancing, working from home, and contactless exchanges have become mandated or standard practices in many cases, more and more customer interactions have gone digital or have become heavily reliant on remote interactions, such as telemedicine, the loss of physical office space, enhanced safety protocols, and cash-free transactions. Moreover, the pandemic has necessitated previously nonhealth-focused organizations to suddenly take on unprecedented responsibilities of serving societal public health.

The sheer number of people using the internet and social media, as well as the volume of open source data that those individuals are generating, has been unprecedented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, increasing numbers of people are doing things online that they previously did in-person or via phone. And whether these changes are online queries and searches, interacting with social media, or carrying out nearly every business function from scheduling to ordering to delivery through company websites, these digital interactions generate enormous amounts of data and other information that can be critical to understanding how CX is shifting in response to the pandemic.

For instance, according to the *New York Times*[1], social media sites large and small have seen unprecedented increases in their use in response to the crisis. The use of social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok have increased by two-digit percentages from their pre-pandemic levels (27%, 15%, and 15%, respectively). On more niche forums, such as local neighborhood forum site Next Door, usage has skyrocketed even more significantly at 73%.The increasing usage of these digital platforms—and the open source digital data they yield—can be researched and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to provide insights that shed tremendous light on how public sentiment is adapting and shifting to changes in CX.

Disruption to CX delivery also poses significant and acute challenges to organizations at the exact point in time when more and more people are spending time online and engaging with the organization digitally. Foundationally, organizations are resource-constrained. For instance, they are constrained in terms of available employees and available technology systems. This has then been met with the sudden demand to digitally transform their organizations and workflows in ways that can provide their customers with **seamless** high-quality services and products, often at a speed and scale unfathomable for technology implementations in the recent past.

Moreover, organizations still need to provide excellent and high-quality CX interactions, despite the significant upheavals to service delivery.

[1] Ella Koeze and Nathaniel Popper, "The Virus Changed the Way We Internet," New York Times, April 7, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/07/technology/coronavirus-internet-use.html.

As these foundational changes take root, it is critical that the voice of the customer (VoC) and real-time feedback are not lost on the receiving end. Efforts to reach and understand the challenges of the customer through these service disruptions will define which organizations are able to build resiliency to guide their customers through and beyond the crisis, and which organizations lose the trust and connection to their customers. To accomplish this goal, measuring success will not be the same as it was in the past. Decreases in in-person engagement combined with increases in digital engagement and in digital platforms mean that organizations will have to leverage digital data (i.e., social listening) more than what they may have done in the past to understand the perceptions, beliefs, and sentiment driving consumer behavior in this new era. Open-source information, such as social media data or website data, can provide a rich medium to collect insights through uncertain and changing circumstances.

In these challenging times, many leaders looking to balance budgets are finding that the ROI of CX initiatives has dramatically shifted during the pandemic as organizations are discovering that they are unable to resume "business as usual." In the face of a global pandemic and disruptions to routine, organizational investments in effectively serving customers ensures that the significant investments in technology and operational changes to meet the demands of the pandemic are not wasted and that organizations can continue to provide excellent CX both during and after the crisis.

In fact, it is proven that a strong and engaging CX:

Leads to connected, repeat customers that are more than two times as valuable than just satisfied customers.[2]

Reduces the cost and resource strain on customer service providers (e.g., call centers or technology support).

Ensures that investments are made to the right parts of program or service delivery to most improve customer satisfaction.

Increases public trust in the organization—a metric that is especially crucial to mission-oriented organizations, and even more important now as members of the public worry about the health and safety of themselves and their families.

These benefits to superior CX delivery are not new, but they are more important than ever. Organizations are shifting their delivery models and need to not only continue to provide excellent experiences in a time when many past practices have become more difficult or nearly impossible to carry on, but also bear the collective burden of protecting the public health of employees and customers.

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[2] Alan Zorfas and Daniel Leemon, "An Emotional Connection Matters More than Customer Satisfaction," Harvard Business Review, August 29, 2016, https://hbr.org/2016/08/an-emotional-connection-matters-more-than-customer-satisfaction.

Why Pandemic Era CX Initiatives Need to Prioritize Digital Data

> " While surveys remain one of the leading methods to understand their customers, this method alone is inadequate. CX professionals need detailed insights that offer more than sampled responses from yes-or-no surveys, and a speed of data collection that is faster than the weeks it takes to conduct more in-depth focus groups or surveys. While social media has always been a rich source of customer information, data on social media platforms is especially primed to take a leading role during this time as usage rates and activity across the digital platforms have surged. "

While the benefits of CX still apply, successful CX initiatives will not be able to transition seamlessly from what they were. Understanding VoC metrics will be a crucial piece of the equations to manage the transition. Organizations should not assume that new processes put in place in response to the crisis will immediately be adopted and understood by the customer base. CX professionals will have to **evolve** their methods for collecting information about their customers. This adaptation will need to include virtually instantaneous and real-time data collection, a prioritization of digital experiences, and the provision of timely, empathetic responses and service calibrations to the high-level emotions of their customers. Up against these operational challenges, the collection and analysis of digital data like social media discussions, internet search activity, and website usage patterns offer strengths to provide experience updates hour-by-hour and with great depth.

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Beyond the sheer volume of insights that can be gathered, **social media offers the opportunity for organizations to collect unprompted, first-person expressions from customers.** The benefit of this approach is that it allows organizations to derive deep insights about their customers without the limitations or biases of survey data. These data points about what people are saying online, combined with machine learning and natural language processing (NLP) technologies, allow for the exploration and synthesis of customer sentiment and experience, revealing everything from how customers feel about or are interacting with services, what geographical areas customers are responding from, and even how customer behavior may be changing as a result of the pandemic or new service delivery. **As society, customers, and organizations deal with new uncertainties in the pandemic, understanding the short-term and long-term changes to consumer perception and behavior will be essential for organization leaders who are navigating the crisis.**

How Guidehouse's Social Media & Digital Capabilities Benefit Your CX

Guidehouse's experts have the tools, automation, technology, methodology, framework, expertise, and experience to identify, evaluate, and analyze CX insights related to our clients' services, and provide guidance to our clients on how best to respond. Our services include:

▶ **Experience Mapping and Evaluation**
Conduct current-state analyses into CX challenges. Specifically, we leverage expertise, and open-source and digital information to analyze how customers are searching for services, publicly discussing services, or engaging with digital/online platforms.

▶ **Continuous Monitoring of Customer Feedback and Sentiment**
Integrate advanced analytics, machine learning, NLP, and artificial intelligence to allow for the monitoring of insights at scale and provide regular and impactful data to show what is happening to customers and their experiences in near-real time.

▶ **Rapid Response Implementation and Optimization**
Implement tactical response and mitigation plans that include processes for responding to customer inquiries and reporting ongoing opportunities and threats to programmatic leadership using data-driven insights. Identify and implement strategies to optimize CX and inquiry of services on digital platforms. Services like these extend far beyond social media monitoring—they translate the power of social media into tangible, high-impact action and responses to use alongside other operational data to drive decisions.

▶ **Crisis Communications and Management**
Provide triage support to clients seeking to enhance public trust and accountability. Identify, track, and mitigate perceptions or even misinformation about program services that may be hindering CX and trust.
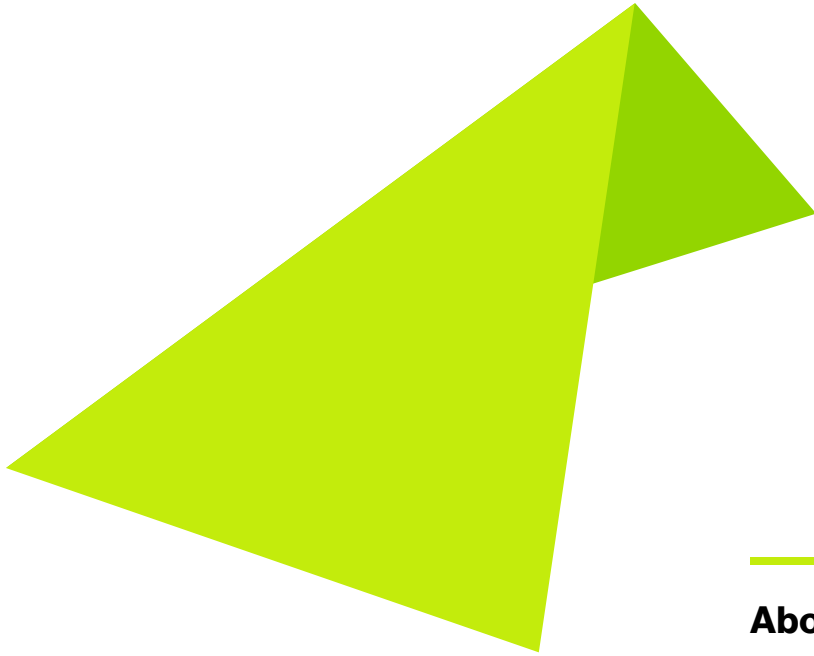
▶ **Advisory Services**
Develop a CX strategy that not only identifies pain points within the customer journey, but also identifies mitigation options that offer highest impact and connection with your customers. As experts in implementing high-stakes customer-centric programs across government and commercial sectors, Guidehouse can help to reimagine or create CX strategies that meet the challenge of engaging and interacting with customers digitally and in a meaningful way.

How Guidehouse's Open Source Solutions Team Can Help

Guidehouse delivers actionable solutions that allow our clients to meet and defeat threats in real time. Our focus on quality through execution brings forth the best and brightest minds to support projects that drive meaningful change. This, in turn, fosters insight and innovation to meet mission objectives based on the ever-changing threat landscape. Our clients rely on Guidehouse not only because we provide strategic and operational recommendations based on reliable, real-time data, but also because our guidance leads to informed decision-making, action, and high-impact solutions.

Guidehouse provides best-in-class capabilities to organizations seeking to solve their most critical challenges and integrates advanced technology with the expertise of subject matter and technical experts. The Guidehouse Open Source Solutions team leverages a full spectrum of sources—social media platforms, online forums, blogs, company records, government databases, proprietary internal Guidehouse databases, global business electronic filings and databases, and the darknet—allowing the team to create a common operating picture of potential opportunities and challenges facing our clients and their customers. The Guidehouse Open Source Solutions team is continually evaluating and adding new technology, tools, and sources based on the needs of our clients, and our team has the flexibility to incorporate custom sources, as needed, for specific and often sensitive projects.

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About Guidehouse

Guidehouse is a leading global provider of consulting services to the public and commercial markets, with broad capabilities in management, technology, and risk consulting. We help clients address their toughest challenges and navigate significant regulatory pressures with a focus on transformational change, business resiliency, and technology-driven innovation. Across a range of advisory, consulting, outsourcing, and digital services, we create scalable, innovative solutions that prepare our clients for future growth and success. Headquartered in McLean, Va., the company has more than 8,000 professionals in over 50 locations globally. Guidehouse is a Veritas Capital portfolio company, led by seasoned professionals with proven and diverse expertise in traditional and emerging technologies, markets, and agenda-setting issues driving national and global economies. For more information, please visit: **www.guidehouse.com**.

For more information,
please contact:

Rodney Snyder
Partner, Open Source Solutions
rsnyder@guidehousefederal.com

Jason Dury
Director, Open Source Solutions
jdury@guidehousefederal.com

Amanda Wilmore
Manager, Open Source Solutions
awilmore@guidehousefederal.com

Paige Cooper
Senior Consultant, Open Source Solutions
pcooper@guidehousefederal.com

Email: opensource@guidehouse.com   **Web:** guidehouse.com   @guidehouse   linkedin.com/company/guidehouse