

Experience This! Show Podcast
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ExperienceThisShow.com

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Episode 68:

[SHOW INTRO]

Welcome to experience this where you'll find inspiring examples of customer experience great stories of customer service and tips on how to make your customers love you even more. Always upbeat and definitely entertaining, customer retention expert Joey Coleman and social media expert Dan Gingiss serve as your hosts for a weekly dose of positive customer experience. So hold on to your headphones. It's time to Experience This!

[EPISODE 68 INTRO]

Dan Gingiss Get ready for another episode of the Experience This! Show.

Joey Coleman Join us as we discuss: the role of gender in artificial intelligence, explaining a printed piece of paper using a video, and taking an online store into the mall.

Dan Gingiss Choosing, perusing, and browsing. Oh my!

[SEGMENT INTRO][CX PRESS]

Joey Coleman There are so many great customer experience articles to read, but who has the time? We summarize them and offer clear takeaways you can implement starting tomorrow. Enjoyed this segment of CX Press where we read the articles so you don't need to.

[CX PRESS: Removing Gender Roles in A.I. Voice Assistance]

Joey Coleman As an early adopter of Siri and Alexa, I've been interacting with voice based assistance for quite a while, Dan. But I realized something the other day that frankly I'm a bit embarrassed to admit.

Dan Gingiss Let me guess, your kids are better at using Siri and Alexa than you are.

Joey Coleman Well that is absolutely 100% true and I would freely admit that. But that wasn't my realization. What I actually realized was that Siri and Alexa and Cortana all come preset to speak with a female voice. I realized this when I came across this episode's CX Press article on FastCompany.com. The article is written by Mark Wilson entitled, "The World's First Genderless A.I. Voice is Here. Listen Now." In the article Mark describes a joint project between the creative studio Virtue Nordic, the Human Rights Festival Copenhagen Pride, and social scientist Julie Carpenter. It's called Q, and it's pretty remarkable. I could tell you all about it but I actually think it's better if I let Q speak for itself.

Q Hi I'm Q, The world's first genderless voice assistant. Think of me like Siri or Alexa, but neither male or female. I'm created for our future where we are no longer defined by gender. But rather how we define ourselves. My voice was recorded by people who neither identify as male nor

female, and then altered it to sound gender neutral. Putting my voice between 145-175Hz, a range defined by audio researchers. But, for me to become a third option for voice assistance, I need your help. Share my voice with Apple, Amazon, Google, and Microsoft. And together we can ensure that technology recognizes us all. Thanks for listening. Q.

Dan Gingiss Well you know, Joey, I am not entirely sure what I think of this just yet. It is really interesting that you point out that all of the audio assistants are female. I haven't thought about that before and even as I think about like how my car talks to me it's always a female voice so I think that's pretty interesting. I'm wondering whether the answer then becomes that it shouldn't be male or female? Or that we should have a choice or what. But this certainly was intriguing.

Joey Coleman Well what I think is interesting is we do have a choice. Most people don't realize that you can go into the settings of Siri and Alexa and Cortana, and even most cars and change the voice to hear a male speaker. And in some instances you can even add accents and things like that. But I think the fact that it defaults to a female voice is worthy of a discussion about assumptions that might exist in our society today and frankly that do exist in our society today. Because many people believe that women are expected to carry the burden of remembering schedules and birthdays and phone numbers. Is that why the voice is female? Or is it because women are seen as the more caregiving sex and we want a guy to nurture and serve us? Is that why they chose a female voice? Or is it because A.I. increasingly helps us with directions and men are stereotypically bad at asking for directions? Or is it just the case of technology developing at a rapid pace with teams that grossly lack any gender diversity that the leading A.I. tools all default to these female voices? I think it's a conversation and a question that most people don't think about and, I'll admit like I said, I was a little embarrassed. I haven't thought about it before reading this article.

Dan Gingiss I think we can end this segment right now. This is definitely about the directions and asking for direction. That makes the most sense as an answer to me. But the work that the team did in creating Q actually goes beyond a discussion of bias toward female voices as they created a non binary voice. So I wonder if our listeners would have the same experience that I did when I tried to listen for a masculine or feminine tone. I really couldn't find either or at some points I found both.

Joey Coleman You know I had the exact same experience, Dan, and that's probably because when they developed Q, the team sampled several real voices from non binary people. They then combined them digitally and created one master voice that cruises along between 145 Hz and 175 Hz. That's right in the sweet spot between male and female normative vocal ranges. So then they took that and tested the voice on more than 4600 people who identify as non binary from Denmark, the UK, and Venezuela, and asked them to rate the voice on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being male and 5 being female. And then they kept tuning the voice with more feedback until it was regularly rated as being a 3, or gender neutral.

Dan Gingiss Now I want to stop you there for a second, Joey. Just in case some listeners are confused when you talk about non binary people you're referring to people that don't identify as either male or female?

Joey Coleman Correct. Correct. So this is something you may have seen more recently in the news, folks. There's a character on the TV show *Billions* that is non binary. It's basically an individual who says regardless of the biological anatomy that they have, they don't associate with either a male gender or a female gender. And then sometimes gets referred to as gender X. Right? In fact I went to the DMV here in Colorado yesterday to renew my driver's license. And one of the things you can do in Colorado is you can select male, female, or X for your gender. So I think what's interesting is if the DMV is making shifts and your business isn't even thinking about these topics or thinking about, you know, the gender biases or even the gender aspect of non binary and how that may play

in your business or in your customer base, it's probably not a good sign. The way our assumptions about customers can potentially alienate our customers or even cause them to stop doing business with us is something that more businesses are being called the pay attention to. And the best in class businesses are addressing these topics head on today. Having a voice like Q might be a good place to start.

[SEGMENT INTRO][MAKE THE REQUIRED REMARKABLE]

Joey Coleman Just because you have required elements of your business doesn't mean they need to be boring. It's time to get creative, have some fun, and make people sit up and take notice. Get your customers talking when you make the required remarkable.

[MAKE THE REQUIRED REMARKABLE: Using Video to Help Customers Understand Their Bills]

Joey Coleman Years ago when I had a branding and customer experience design agency, I worked with a company in the energy industry that had a call center, and they asked me to explore ways that they might be able to reduce the volume of calls and hopefully save some money in the process. So I spent some time looking at the data and guess what I found, Dan?

Dan Gingiss That a significant percentage of their calls were about a single issue or concern.

Joey Coleman Exactly. The answer was right in front of us. It was in the data. Any guess as to what the calls were about?

Dan Gingiss Well, if I could take my experience in the credit card industry I'm going to say that it has something to do with the bill they receive every month.

Joey Coleman You guessed it, brother. Indeed. Customers called in because they didn't understand their monthly bill. Now I know that may seem odd, but the volume of calls from people that didn't understand either what they were being charged, or why they were being charged, or even how much they were supposed to pay was absolutely staggering.

Dan Gingiss OK. So we usually focus on the positive here on the Experience This! show, Joey. So what makes you bring this particular issue up?

Joey Coleman Well I was reminded of this past experience because this month I received my regular monthly energy bill from the energy company I have now. And along with it I received an email. Now this came from Xcel Energy, the company we use here in Colorado to light and heat our home. It included an explanation video about my bill. Now we're going to link to the video and the show notes for episode 68 at ExperienceThisShow.com. But to give you an idea of what the bill covered, here's the audio that runs on the video.

Xcel Energy Audio Welcome to your video bill explanation. We analyzed your electric and natural gas use for this month. Setting aside bill adjustments like credits or other charges, your usage compared to last month is lower. This has caused your bill to be lower by the amount shown. Typically the cost to heat and cool your home accounts for the largest portion of your bill. You may have noticed over the past month the weather was colder, which can have a significant impact on your bill. The weather this month caused your heating system to run longer, and therefore cost more. There may have been other factors that caused your bill to change this month besides the weather and those items previously mentioned. These factors could include changing thermostat settings, changes in appliance use, and changes in the number of people in the home. Or could even

signal an equipment or system problem. Visit our website on ways you can save energy and money on your next bill. Please give us your feedback on this video bill explanation below.

Dan Gingiss So I think this is totally, totally cool. And I'm proud of you, buddy, because not only did you use less energy but you saved forty seven dollars that month.

Joey Coleman I saved \$47.00, It was nice. Yeah. So folks when you listen to the audio it says you saved money. On the video they actually flash up the amount so they don't have to rerecorded the video for every saving. But the fact that they say, hey look you saved money and then they show you how much you save? Like to be candid and maybe I should do a better job of this, if my energy bill is within a band it's just auto pays. You know what I mean like I know that it's going to fluctuate over the seasons. But to me as long as it's within a certain range I don't pay a lot of attention to it. So I didn't necessarily notice that it was \$47.00 lower that month. It would have auto paid and then I might have noticed a month or two later. But the fact that they called it out was kind of nice. I also thought it was cool because as it turns out we were out of town for 10 days. So that explains the reduced usage. But I thought it was interesting that they commented on the colder temperatures that might have made my bill more expensive. Now while this created a little bit of confusion because my bill was actually less expensive, I give them props for trying the video explainer. Obviously we see that their logic tree could use a little more tweaking and a little help so as to not include that discussion about the higher temperatures or the colder temperatures resulting in more energy use. But at least they were moving in the right direction.

Dan Gingiss Yeah. And this is really I mean these videos are done with these variables that are inserted in and it seems like what happened here is that an extra variable was included, or maybe you know the higher temperatures or lower temperatures did affect your bill negatively. It's just that the fact that you weren't home more than offset that. Right? So just because the net was a savings this probably did help you, but I also liked how they called out these potential factors that can contribute to a change so that you can A) be more knowledgeable and then B) do something about it. So you know it was them guessing or at least calling out on things that could impact the bill but I liked how they said that it could be indicative of a piece of equipment that wasn't working properly for example because that's not something you would think of immediately. This feels like a great example of proactively anticipating a potential mechanical failure. It feels like they're trying to help you diagnose that before the bill skyrockets or the equipment fails. Joey, didn't you write about explainer videos like this in your book, "Never Lose a Customer Again?"

Joey Coleman You know I did, Dan, and the example I talked about in my book was Comcast. So as part of a four year billion dollar investment in improving their customer experience, Comcast took a hard look at the billing systems and found many of their customers were confused by complicated and complex bills. Again folks this is a problem in pretty much every single business. Now Comcast not only simplified the look of their bills but they created these personalized explained my bill videos similar to the one that I received from my energy company and these videos are generated every time there's a change in the customer's behavior. So if the customer signs up for a new service, they buy more pay per view, they cancel the service, et cetera it generates one of these videos to explain, "hey here's the new bill here's how the pricing is going to be impacted." This effort to enhance the customer understanding reduced call volume at Comcast by 10%. Now they give you an idea you know some people here 10% that like it's kind of decent but you know it's barely double digits. They eliminated six million phone calls a year about billing matters. And that was in the first year of the program alone. This saved Comcast customers 2.5 million hours of call time and countless amounts of frustration. Not to mention making for a lot better experience for their call center agents who weren't answering the same question again and again. How much do I owe, and why is my bill this price this month?

Dan Gingiss And you know we talked about this last episode but I love when solutions benefit both sides of the coin. In this case, this is great for the customer because it's more explanatory, it's a better it's a better experience, but it's also great for the company because think about how much money you can save by eliminating that many calls in that many hours of call time. So that's great for both parties which I love. I would be remiss also if I did not tell you that we also talked about Comcast in episode 55 and their voice remote.

Joey Coleman The episode savant, Dan Gingiss, folks. Yeah their voice remote which is another commitment that Comcast has made to enhancing the customer experience. Yeah I totally agree with you and I think what my big takeaway from these videos was that sometimes the best way to enhance your customer experience is to look at the required elements of your business, like sending bills and invoices, and find ways to make it easier for your customers. I think these type of things exist in pretty much every business on the planet. In this case there's just trying to give you money. It shouldn't be that challenging for them to figure out how much they owe you and how to easily get the money to you.

[SEGMENT INTRO][DISSECTING THE EXPERIENCE]

Joey Coleman Sometimes a remarkable experience deserves deeper investigation. We dive into the nitty gritty of customer interactions and dissect how and why they happen. Join us while we're dissecting the experience.

[DISSECTING THE EXPERIENCE: Amazon's 4-Star Store Brings Their Website To Life]

Joey Coleman I actually found myself in a shopping mall the other day, Dan.

Dan Gingiss A shopping mall, Joey?

Joey Coleman Yeah I know. I remember you might have seen this in the movie, kids. Yeah it's you know a collection of stores all built under the same roof. Well the reason I was there is an important. But I did see something that I was super excited to talk about on the podcast. I came across my very first Amazon 4-Star store. Have you seen one of these in the wild before, Dan?

Dan Gingiss So no I have not seen one, although I just recently saw like a little Amazon pop up store but it was only for their products like for you know the Alexa products for example.

Joey Coleman Right. Right. So Amazon's experimenting with a lot of different ideas right now. They have Amazon bookstores, then they have the Amazon stores where you can walk in and whatever you put into your car you know it's often food type things. It charges you automatically when you walk out. This is yet another experiment I feel like in the retail space and let me describe what the store looks like and don't worry if you want to see pictures go to episode 68 show notes on our website at ExperienceThisShow.com and you'll see a bunch. But the store is located in a traditional store front at the mall and to be honest is laid out like a regular retail establishment with shelves along the outer walls and a bunch of tables and displays set up throughout the space. Now here's where it gets interesting. There were parts of the setup that I loved but there were parts that I definitely felt could be improved.

Dan Gingiss Well so not enough for I love it, I can't standard assessment though?

Joey Coleman No not full on. OK it wasn't that bad but I definitely had some preconceived notions about what a retail space might be. And it ended up in some ways living up to those and in some ways not. And I just thought it might be interesting for us to talk about.

Dan Gingiss Well yeah and especially preconceived notions when the name Amazon is on it which I would imagine would change your expectations quite a bit.

Joey Coleman Exactly. Exactly. So let's let's talk about some of the positive things first. I loved that Amazon is trying some real world in real life physical stores where I can go and see the items that have received four stars or higher. So that's the criteria. Everything in the store has received reviews of four star or higher. So you know it's quote unquote their best products. They also had this really interesting thing where they have digital price tags on all the items that update in real time to match the website. I found this fascinating and intriguing and there were multiple people in the store that were kind of watching the price tag and seeing if it would change. Now it's obviously not changing every second but the fact that they can change all the pricing in the store to match online kind of addresses one of the major issues that a lot of retail places are facing which is you know I go into a store lots of times a book store and I'll look at a book and I'll open the Amazon app and see how much it costs on the Amazon app and as a general rule it's usually significantly cheaper. So I take a photo of the book and I ordered on Amazon when I get home.

Dan Gingiss Wait you do that too?

Joey Coleman I do that too. Everybody does this, right? And so I think the fact that they just kind of acknowledged this that they put the digital price tags on it eliminates that which is no surprise because they are the biggest store in the world. Right? In that regard. The other thing that I thought was really fantastic was that the staff was super friendly. They were very welcoming they actually were explaining the concept of the store. They asked if I needed anything and what was interesting is when they didn't have the thing I asked about. So I asked you know do you have those little security covers for the laptop camera because they had a whole section of tech stuff. The sales associate said we really should have something like that and I'm surprised we don't. Well what's great is that he showed empathy kind of missed an opportunity to say something like I'll suggest that to management or I'll see if we can get that in in the future. But the fact that they were just striking up a conversation and being friendly really stood out especially given most retail experiences that one would have in a mall where it seems like the sales staff is almost irritated that you've come into the store.

Dan Gingiss Well and also what's fascinating about this is that this is what you don't get with the traditional Amazon experience right. You don't get that human element because it's all online and that can be great because it's fast and it's cheap and all that. And I was wondering when you introduced this story about what the staff was going to be like because we know that Amazon does a great job of customer service and customer experience online but very few of us have ever talked to a human being at Amazon. And so it stands to reason that they would also be good at hiring in real life.

Joey Coleman Yeah. One would hope. And at least in my experience that was the case which I thought was great. And that part definitely lived up to the Amazon brand. If I may I'd love to segway into some of the things that kind of didn't live up to the Amazon brand at least in this initial visit for me.

Dan Gingiss Well as always, Joey, you do not need my permission.

Joey Coleman Yeah well I appreciate that but I you know I want to be very clear I'm not being critical. By the way I'm an Amazon stockholder, right, so I want Amazon to do well. But I think they're experimenting, and anytime a brand is experimenting we want to give them time to enhance the experiment, right? And improve the experience. So when I walked into the store, first of all, and

you can see this in the photos I definitely encourage folks to go check out the photos on the show notes. There is a ton of stuff in this store. I mean a ton of stuff. And it didn't really seem that organized or categorized well. It was kind of weird. Like, the books were next to the cooking materials and you know the tech stuff was all the way in the back. But then there was some tech stuff on a kiosk in the front, and it just, it lacked the clean, crisp online interface which I've come to appreciate at Amazon. And it just was a little bit of a brand disconnect for me. In fact I found myself comparing it to the Apple Store, which I realize is a really unfair comparison because Apple has a handful of products and Amazon has hundreds of thousands of products, but by comparison because there's actually an Apple store in this mall as well. The Apple Store is really clean and sleek and there's you know just a few individual products that you're excited to see, whereas the Amazon store felt like wow here's a bunch of stuff that you might be interested in.

Dan Gingiss Yeah. And it's, which is kind of the Amazon way, right? Is that we have everything in the world.

Joey Coleman Exactly. But I think in their branding and saying, "Well these are the four star items," is an effort to say we're not going to show you everything. I almost wondered what it would be like to have the Amazon 4.9 store, right? Or like what would it be like if they truly only showed the five star items? Would they have enough to fill a store? I imagine they would, but I don't know how that works in terms of the retail traffic. So that was kind of interesting. The last thing I'll comment on when I was leaving the store, they had one of those little kiosks where you could push the buttons and give a review on what our experience was like. I thought that was great and especially because Amazon is so well known for reviews. I wanted them to have stars on the buttons instead of faces, right? I wanted because Amazon is so about the 1 to 5 star review I wanted to be able to give the store a four star review or a five star review. I would have done a four. And it would have been really cool if after you did that it prompted you if you wanted to write a review. Because I think what that would do is not only get them some interesting reviews and some interesting feedback for their store and their concept but it would condition me as an Amazon shopper. I buy a lot of stuff on Amazon and I rarely if ever do reviews. I feel like doing one in the real world might incentivize me or make it easier for me to do one for an online purchase in the future.

Dan Gingiss Yeah I agree and I think another interesting thing I haven't been to one of these stores but I wonder if they could do something to recommend to you alternatives that you can go on to Amazon in order and obviously if you're a Prime member have in two days or even you know sometimes it's same day delivery for free and therefore sort of expanding the walls of the physical location to be broader because you might be walking around saying well you know darn it I don't they don't have that security cover for my laptop but if there was some way for them to say, "and here it is." You know it just hit go and-

Joey Coleman I would have bought it right there. I would have bought it right there. I totally agree with you. You know and I realize I'm saying I would have bought it. I would have purchased it is probably better grammar, sorry since I know we have some grammarians that listen I would have bought in it. Yeah I would have purchased it is the time to get out of that grammatical snafu. But yeah that's a perfect example then of how they could continue to enhance it, but I will say I love that Amazon is pushing the envelope. I love that they're experimenting with new offerings like these real world bookstores and now the 4-Star stores. If their behavior online is indicative of how they're going to approach these physical stores I expect that there's going to be a great deal of iteration and enhancement in the weeks and months to come. And so my review of the 4-Star store? Well somewhere between a 3 and 4 stars today and its current design with a clear opportunity to move to five stars in the not too distant future.

[SEGMENT INTRO][THREE TAKEAWAYS]

Joey Coleman We've talked you've listened. Now it's time to act. There are many things you could do to take what you've learned in this episode and implement it. But at times that can feel overwhelming. Instead why not just focus on three takeaways.

[THREE TAKEAWAYS: Questions to Consider for Episode 68]

Joey Coleman Takeaway #1 - Have you explored how gender assumptions may be negatively impacting your organization? The new gender less voice of Q offers a fascinating example of how changing assumptions can create more inclusive, more intriguing offerings. What are you doing to consider the role gender plays in your product and service offerings? How can you be more conscious of the wide variety of customers and employees that you interact with, and how they may view your assumptions or non conscious decisions when deciding whether or not they want to do business with you?

Dan Gingiss Takeaway #2 - Are you constantly looking for ways to make doing business with you easier? If your customers don't understand their invoices or bills you're preventing them from paying you, which has a tremendous impact on cashflow in the long term sustainability of your enterprise. What are you doing to make understanding your charges and fees easier? Do you proactively let customers know when their bill is going to be higher or lower and then offer insight as to why, and suggestions for how to get it back to normal? Every business has a required component around billing and or collecting revenue. When was the last time you explored these parts of your operation to make sure you were creating remarkable experiences for your customers?

Joey Coleman Takeaway #3 - Are you willing to try bold new things? The number one online retailer in the world is actively and aggressively rolling out physical real world offerings, taking the best elements of their online brand, things like great pricing that shifts with demand, seamless service, and a search functionality that puts the highest ranking items at the top. Amazon is forging into new offerings. They aren't afraid to learn as they go and they aren't afraid to take risks. Are you like Amazon, or are you stuck in delivering business as usual? What could you do to explore new ways to interact with your customers, in new places, especially when it comes to the venues and formats that your brand is not currently known for?

Dan Gingiss And those are the three takeaways for this episode. If you listen to the show regularly, and we know many of you do, but haven't had the chance yet to give us a review on iTunes, we would greatly appreciate it if you would take just a few minutes. It really does take less than five minutes and zip over there to share your thoughts. One of the best ways for podcast listeners to be exposed to our show is with listener reviews, and the more reviews, the better we will do an apple search listings. As always thank you for your support and thanks for listening.

[SHOW OUTRO]

Joey Coleman Wow! Thanks for joining us for another episode of Experience This!

Dan Gingiss We know there are tons of podcasts to listen to, magazines and books to read, reality TV to watch... We don't take for granted that you've decided to spend some quality time listening to the two of us.

Joey Coleman We hope you enjoyed our discussions and if you do we'd love to hear about it. Come on over to ExperienceThisShow.com and let us know what segments you enjoyed, what new

segments you'd like to hear. This show is all about experience and we want you to be part of the Experience This! Show.

Dan Gingiss Thanks again for your time and we'll see you next week for more...

Joey Coleman & Dan Gingiss Experience This!