



## How can travel brands remain human in a digital-first world

To succeed in today's competitive marketplace, travel brands must find a way to humanize their interactions—even when customers are using digital channels to connect with them.

### Enterprise and Deloitte team together to reimagine experience

Travel brands are trying to figure out how to strike the right balance between digital touchpoints and in-person interactions. But even during those digital interactions, retaining a human touch is key. There is economic value associated with focusing on humanizing an experience. Organizations that provide a more 'human experience (HX)' are twice as likely to outperform their peers in revenue growth over a three-year period, according to research from Deloitte.

While humanizing the experience for customers is a great place to start, it is important to think about how travel brands can extend that humanization of experiences throughout their ecosystem, including to employees, who are often the first point of contact for customers. "We don't wake up as customers or employees," said Ashley Reichheld, principal at Deloitte Digital. "We

begin and end each day as humans. And yet our technologies and artificial intelligence are making us feel a bit less human during our interactions with brands."

Ultimately, customers and employees remember how they felt during their interaction with a brand. "The most significant differentiator in this era for any product or service is how that interaction makes people feel," said Mark Allen, principal at Deloitte Consulting LLP. "The interactions that trigger positive, contextually relevant emotions at the moments that matter are those that humanize the experience." Great experiences build connections. Strong connections create loyalty. And loyalty drives business results.

### It's all about the humans

"Success in the digital age requires organizations to weave customer, workforce, and partner experiences into an integrated

human experience," Reichheld said. "It's about all the humans—and it isn't optional."

Organizations today can provide a personal touch in every interaction they have by understanding the values and aspirations of the people in their ecosystem, and then creating experiences that are driven by those values. For example, empowering a team driven by the ambition to think outside of the box to resolve customer concerns has multiple benefits. Not only can it improve customer satisfaction, it can also motivate and engage employees.

Implementing customer, workforce, and partner experience improvements as discrete initiatives can drive transactional behavior and inconsistent or negative experiences for all stakeholders. Consider an airline brand: Flight delays have a highly negative effect on customer satisfaction. Many carriers, therefore, focus on achieving

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on-time departures. Gate agents, who are often measured by their ability to deliver on-time departures, feel intense pressure to ensure that nothing causes a delay. As a result, they might spend less time than needed addressing passenger questions or resolving customer problems. This can result in an even worse experience for the customer and make employees feel helpless.

### How Enterprise Holdings is implementing new ways to deliver a more human experience

Enterprise Holdings is reimagining the customer experience it offers, especially to leisure travelers. The company, which owns the Enterprise Rent-A-Car®, National® Car Rental and Alamo Rent A Car® brands, is not only improving the experience it currently offers but also building capabilities that would prepare it for the future of the car rental industry.

“As our customers’ needs evolve, we believe we must change with them to ensure that we are continuing to provide a useful, easy, and enjoyable experience,” said Randal Narike, executive vice president of operations at Enterprise Holdings. “This means that our people, processes, and technology need to be in complete sync to deliver the same goals.”

The company is taking a [human-centered design thinking](#) approach to understand the rental process from the perspective of customers and employees. To do so, the team applied both evaluative and generative research methodologies that included site evaluations, mystery shops, customer interviews, and focus groups. Deloitte and Enterprise distilled the areas of focus down to

the moments that matter most to customers and employees.

“In the end, we identified not just how people behaved, or how they interacted with a car rental company, but more importantly, why people do what they do. This is a game-changer when we think about where to focus and invest,” said Paul Reh, vice president of customer experience at Enterprise Holdings.

For example, during their research, Enterprise and Deloitte discovered that though it was extremely rare that a customer wouldn’t have a car available to them after they reserved it, he or she was routinely worried about it being a problem. A commonly cited reason among customers was, “It happened to someone I know.” While that was the stated need, the unstated need discovered through in-depth interviews was that people wanted assurances that their car would be there, it would be reliable, and if an issue arose, it would be resolved swiftly. As a result, Enterprise Holdings’ brands are focusing on humanizing the customer experience by alleviating stress and ambiguity for travelers and connecting back to how it makes its customers feel in the moments that matter most.

The company has found personalization, empathy, control, transparency, and lack of friction are some of the most important elements of a positive customer journey – and that employees across the organization, throughout all three brands, must be on board to deliver that experience.

### You have to bring everyone along on the journey

“At the end of the day, delivery of a great experience is a team sport,” Narike said.

“We need all parts of our company, from operations to marketing to the teams at its rental locations, to deliver the same, seamless experience.”

A key element to delivering a more human experience is to look beyond a single transaction.

“Interactions don’t happen in a vacuum,” Reh said. “When a customer has a bad experience with airport security, that gets transferred to the airline. Similarly, a customer picking up a car at an airport rental car facility is carrying the remnants of the bad experience of a delayed flight.”

So how can a car rental company influence an interaction the customer had with an airline? It can’t. But it can empathize and help alleviate some of the associated stress.

“What we discovered is that all brands looking to elevate the human experience they offer should focus on these critical tenets,” Allen said. “Brands should be obsessed with all things human, enable connections and create moments. They also should proactively deliver on the more human needs of their customers and employees, execute with humanity by setting up their own employees for success, be authentic, and change the world by leveraging positivity and progress.”

Technology has significantly helped brands remove friction from customer experiences. The next step is for brands to align on the key points of interaction and ensure they are delivering a human experience. This is a business imperative that, if properly employed, can increase both employee and customer satisfaction and loyalty.

*This content was created collaboratively by Deloitte and Skift’s branded content studio, SkiftX.*

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