

Synergistic CX

The Customer Experience Magazine

CUSTOMER INSIGHT
IN MOTION WITH
**OLEKSIY
TSYSAR**

1 From Feedback to Action
**What Drives Perception
at Gas Stations**

2 Consistency as a Standard
**Why Reliable Execution
Defines CX Excellence**

3 Mapping the Everyday Journey
**Turning Routine Visits
into Enjoyable Experiences**

March 2026

Fueling Loyalty

Winning Customers in a High-Frequency Industry

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

In customer experience, particularly in high-frequency sectors such as gas stations, differentiation is rarely built through a single grand gesture. More often, it is built through the quality and consistency of fundamentals.

While this month's focus is on the gas station industry, the lessons extend beyond it. In sectors shaped by routine visits and practical needs, customers still notice the same essentials: how they are treated, whether the offer is reliable, and how the physical environment supports ease, trust, and comfort. People, Product, and Place remain central to perception, even when they are often taken for granted.

This edition features an online study using Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA), examining around 42,000 customer reviews worldwide. The findings are revealing. Sentiment weakens early, even before arrival, and remains fragile across key stages of the journey. The deeper lesson is not only where experience breaks down, but how strongly customer judgement is shaped by the moments many businesses still consider routine.

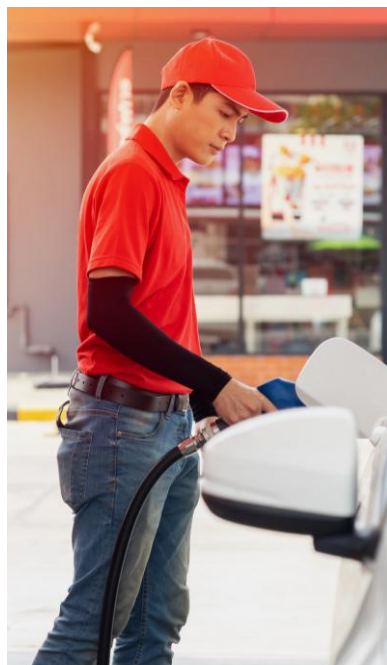
The critical insight is this: in everyday categories, convenience alone does not secure loyalty. It is shaped by the hidden drivers of behavior that determine whether a visit feels smooth, predictable, and worth repeating. When the fundamentals fail, dissatisfaction rises quickly. When managed with discipline, they become a source of preference.

Our guest expert, Oleksiy Tsysar, Founder and CEO of 4Service Group, brings a clear perspective on how research helps uncover these hidden drivers and translate them into better decisions. In our Business Perspective section, UPG, a company from Ukraine, shows how customer feedback, operational focus, and a strong sense of purpose help a business remain relevant amidst uncertainty.

Across this issue, one message stands out: fundamentals should never be mistaken for basics. In the right hands, they become a source of distinction.

Emil Tsankov
Issue Editor
Synergistic CX Magazine
Together with the CX Channel Team

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PREVIOUSLY ON SYNERGISTIC CX

Our February banking edition explored the foundations of trust in customer experience, highlighting how clarity, reliability, and ownership shape long-term customer confidence. Kerli Zeiger-Soosaar examined the growing pressure of accelerating expectations, where digital benchmarks continuously raise the performance bar and require constant internal elevation. The edition also emphasized frontline empowerment, showing how balancing compliance with human decision-making enables more personalized, responsive interactions that strengthen trust and reduce friction across the customer journey.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM KERLI ZEIGER-SOOSAAR

TRUST AT THE CORE: THE FOUNDATION OF SUSTAINABLE CX

Trust in banking is built through clarity, reliability, and consistent execution. Every interaction - from pricing to advisory - either reinforces or weakens confidence, making transparency and ownership essential to long-term customer relationships.

RAISING THE BAR: ADAPTING TO ACCELERATING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Customer expectations are continuously shaped by digital leaders, raising the performance baseline across the industry. Organizations must go beyond maintaining strong results by actively elevating internal standards and simplifying experiences to remain competitive.

FRONTLINE EMPOWERMENT: BRIDGING COMPLIANCE AND PERSONALIZATION

True differentiation emerges when frontline teams are empowered within clear boundaries. Enabling employees to act with confidence allows faster resolution, more personalized interactions, and a shift from rigid processes to customer-centered experiences.



Kerli Zeiger-Soosaar, CEO of Dive Group



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PODCAST REACTIONS FROM THE CX CHANNEL TEAM

In the latest episode of the Synergistic CX podcast, Kerli Zeiger-Soosaar, CEO of Dive Group, offered a clear perspective on what truly sustains customer experience in banking. Drawing on her expertise in research and mystery shopping, she highlighted that trust in financial services is built not through promises, but through clarity, reliability, and ownership across complex customer journeys. Kerli also challenged the complacency that can emerge from strong performance scores, arguing that excellence in banking depends on continuously raising internal standards while empowering frontline teams to respond with judgment, empathy, and accountability.

EMIL TSANKOV



“Kerli makes a critical leadership point: in banking, strong scores can become dangerous when they create the illusion that the work is done. Real progress starts when organizations stop protecting good results and start raising the standard again. Sustainable trust depends on leadership discipline, not comfort.”

CEO & Co-Founder
Research Metrics

CRISTIANI OLIVEIRA



“Kerli shows that in banking, research is not only about measuring service quality. It is about understanding where trust is strengthened, where friction creates doubt, and where customer expectations are moving faster than internal standards. That is where research creates business impact: by helping leaders make better decisions in an environment where clarity, reliability, and confidence directly influence long-term relationships.”

CX Strategy Ambassador
Research Metrics

ERIK BROOKS



“Kerli highlights the strategic challenge of modern banking: customers now approach it with digital-first expectations, but the relationship carries emotional and regulatory weight. Banks are no longer compared only with other banks, but with the best digital experiences customers encounter anywhere. That shift makes clarity, ease, and follow-through even more critical.”

Vice President
Research Metrics

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www.cx-channel.com



INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT:

Fueling Loyalty

Winning Customers in a
High-Frequency Industry



INTRODUCTION

The gas station sector is no longer defined solely by fuel price and location - it has evolved into a high-frequency retail and service environment where trust, speed, and operational precision shape customer choice. What was once a simple refueling stop is now judged through a broader lens that includes payment ease, safety, store quality, product availability, and visit reliability. Customers assess not only how fast they refuel, but how seamless and predictable the entire stop feels.

Rising expectations are reshaping competition. Drivers demand transparent pricing, intuitive payment options, clean and well-lit forecourts, and well-stocked convenience areas. Digital price comparison tools, navigation apps, and online reviews influence decisions before arrival. Reputation spreads quickly, and inconsistencies in service, cleanliness, or staff interaction can immediately affect brand perception across locations.

In response, operators are expanding beyond fuel with stronger foodservice, premium coffee, loyalty programs, mobile payments, and app-based promotions. Sites are increasingly positioned as convenience hubs within everyday mobility journeys. While these initiatives drive revenue and differentiation, they add complexity. Delays, unclear promotions, equipment downtime, or inconsistent engagement can quickly erode perceived value and weaken loyalty.

Within this complexity lies opportunity. Brands that master execution fundamentals – pricing transparency, site safety, service speed, and retail consistency – can turn routine stops into preferred destinations. In a repetition-driven market with thin margins, loyalty is engineered through dependable delivery. Treating each visit as a strategic touchpoint enables operators to secure lasting preference by consistently delivering trust under pressure.

This edition explores how gas stations compete in a market defined by price visibility and operational intensity. Each site is approached as a high-frequency mobility and retail hub where speed and reliability shape preference. By translating customer signals and on-site execution into clear priorities, the study aims to strengthen positioning, protect margins, and turn routine stops into lasting loyalty. We aim to:

- **Understand Digital Influence:** Assess how navigation apps, online reviews, ratings, and customer comments shape perception, influence stop selection, and build or erode trust before drivers even arrive on-site.
- **Evaluate Site and Service Execution:** Identify the touchpoints that matter most – from location access and pump functionality to staff interaction, checkout speed, and follow-up – and assess how these factors affect perceived value and intent to return.
- **Optimize the Marketing Mix:** Examine the 7Ps in context: fuel quality and pricing clarity, retail and foodservice offer, site safety and accessibility, promotions and loyalty, staff professionalism, payment efficiency, and cross-location consistency.
- **Strengthen the Customer Journey:** Map each stage – from gas station search and approach, to fueling, in-store purchase, payment, and post-visit feedback – to uncover friction points and improve continuity across repeat visits.
- **Unlock Growth Levers:** Explore how pricing transparency, loyalty mechanics, cross-sell strategies, digital integration, and disciplined execution can transform routine refueling stops into preferred destinations within everyday mobility journeys.

INDUSTRY STUDY SAMPLE

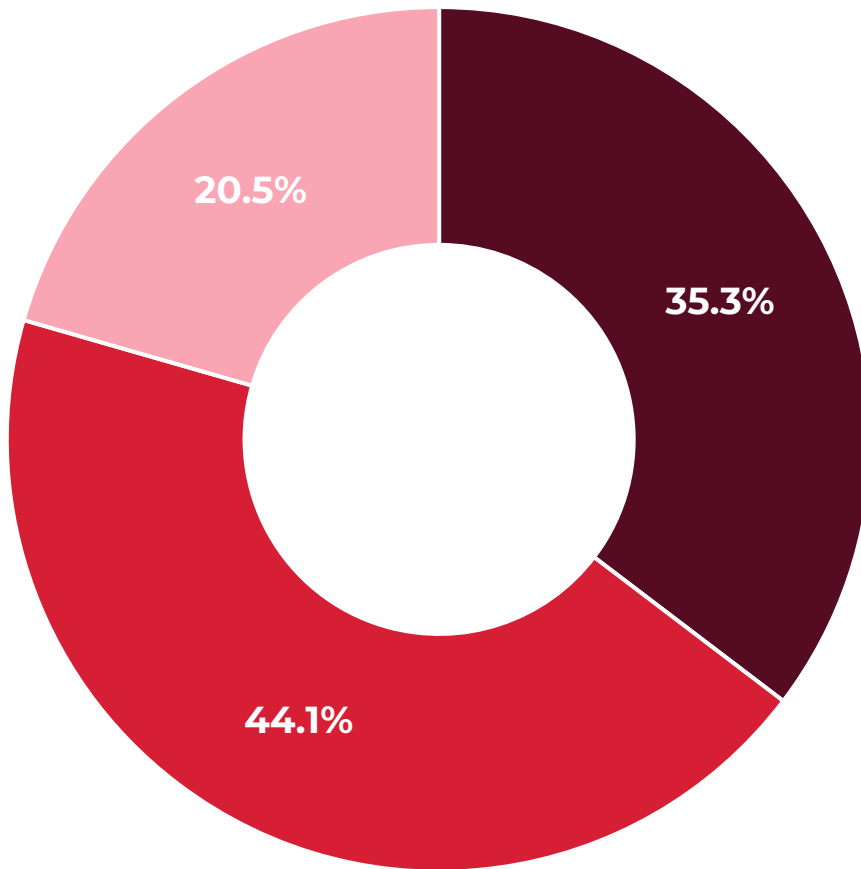
The sample represents the selected **gas station locations** included in the study, defined by the following key parameters::

- Number of Places **2156**
- Confidence Level **99.50%**
- Margin of Error **2.50%**
- Number of Reviews **41,559**

Our sample's worldwide geographic structure is separated into three primary zones: the Americas, APAC (Asia-Pacific), and EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa). Each zone is further broken down into specific regions.

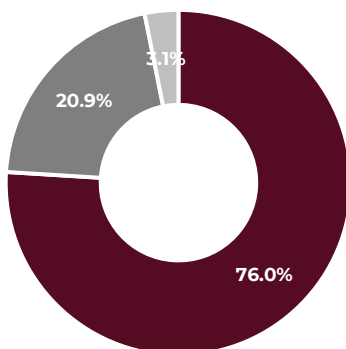
The distribution reflects a **globally diversified gas station sample**, with the **Americas** representing the **largest share** at **44.1%**, followed by **EMEA** at **35.3%**, and **APAC** contributing **20.5%**. This regional spread ensures balanced market representation across mature fuel networks and high-growth mobility markets.

GLOBAL



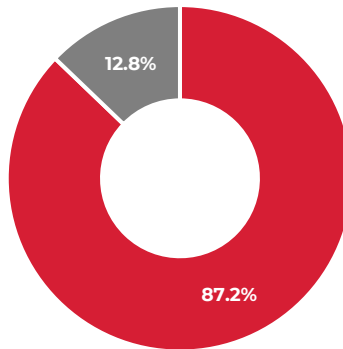
EMEA AMERICAS APAC

EMEA



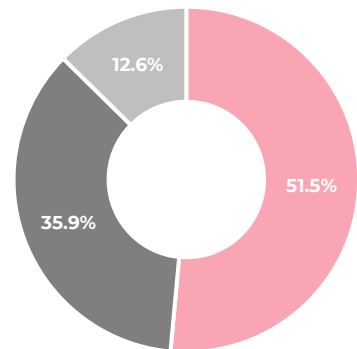
Europe
Africa
Middle East

AMERICAS



North America
Latin America

APAC



Central and South Asia
East Asia
Oceania

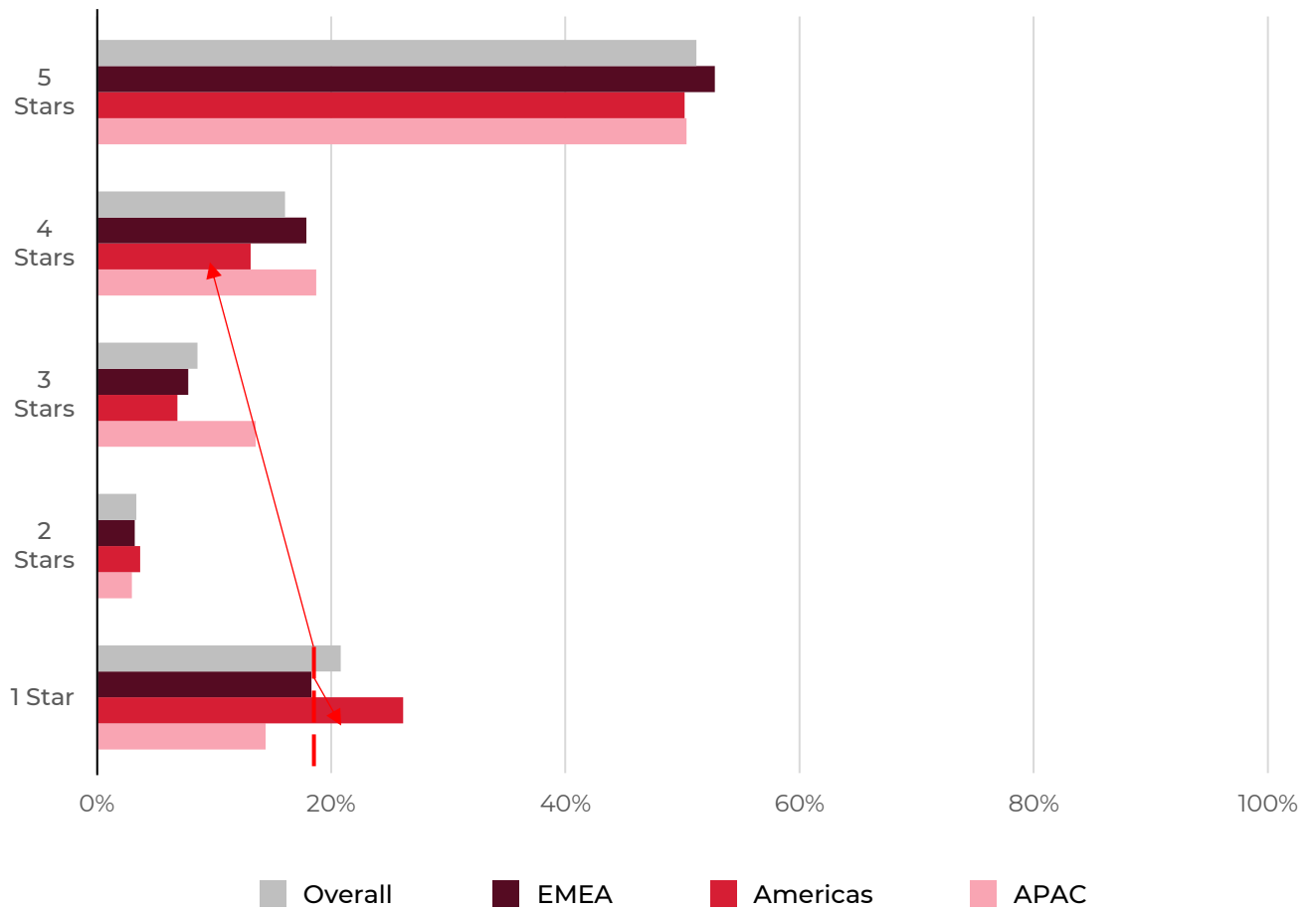
STAR RATINGS

The star-rating distribution for gas stations reflects a moderately positive yet clearly polarized satisfaction profile. **Five-star reviews represent roughly half of all feedback**, confirming strong performance across many locations. At the same time, one-star ratings account for a meaningful share, signaling that service breakdowns or negative staff interactions remain recurring pain points rather than isolated cases. Mid-range ratings (three and four stars) appear comparatively limited, suggesting customers tend to evaluate their visits in more decisive terms.

Regional averages show noticeable variation. **APAC records the highest average at 3.88**, followed by **EMEA at 3.84**, while the **Americas lag behind at 3.58**. The lower score in the Americas appears closely linked to a higher concentration of one-star ratings and fewer top-tier evaluations, pointing to greater inconsistency across locations.

"Star ratings" in online reviews and ratings are a system that allows customers to evaluate a product, service, or business on a scale, typically from one to five stars. Each star represents a level of satisfaction, with one star being the lowest (very dissatisfied) and five stars being the highest (very satisfied).

STAR RATINGS DISTRIBUTION



AVERAGE STAR RATING



CRITICAL REVIEW RESPONSE TIME (CRRT)

Critical Review Response Time for gas stations reveal a clear recovery gap. **Globally, over half of critical reviews (56.3%) remain unanswered**, indicating limited action at moments of highest dissatisfaction. While 40.2% receive timely responses, delayed engagement remains minimal, exposing inconsistencies in follow-up when trust is most vulnerable.

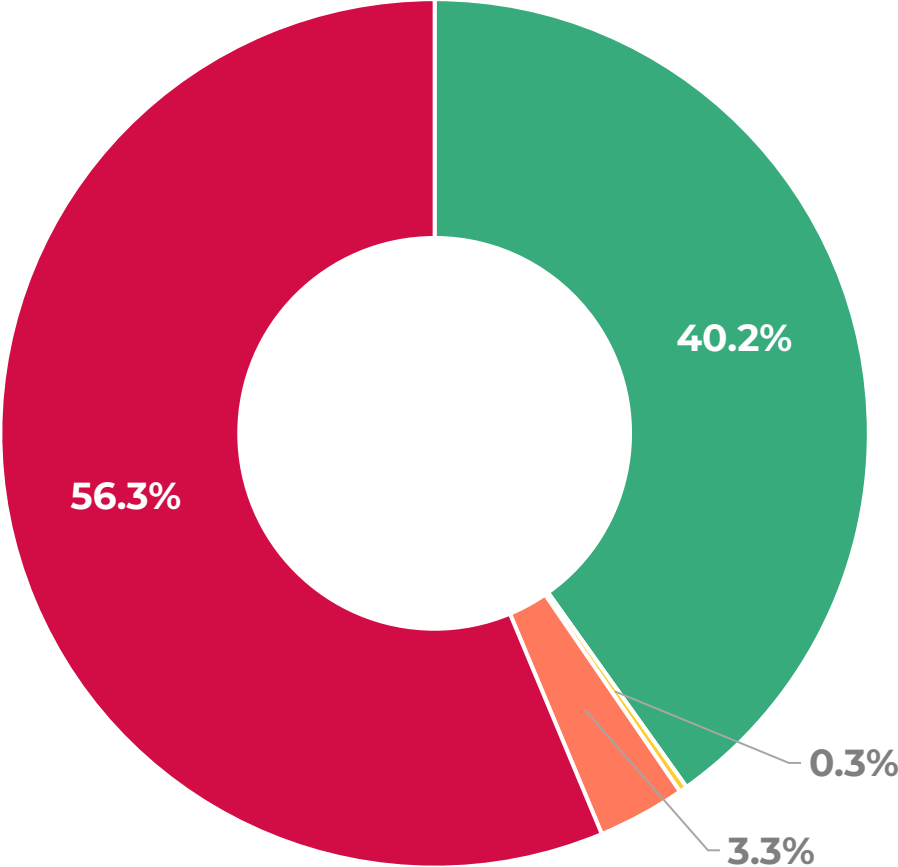
Regionally, **APAC shows the greatest risk, with 81.0% of critical reviews unanswered**. **EMEA** follows, leaving **60.7% without response**. The **Americas** perform **comparatively better, with 49.1% addressed promptly, yet 46.5% still unanswered**.

The Critical Review Response Time (CRRT) KPI measures how quickly a business responds to critical reviews – **those with a rating of 1 or 2 stars**. This KPI is key in customer relationship management, as it reflects the business's dedication to promptly addressing customer complaints and issues.

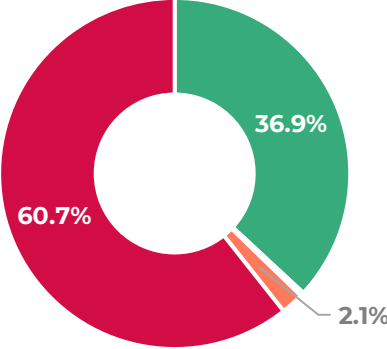
CRRT KPI bands:

- **Excellent**: within 24 hours
- **Fair**: within 72 hours
- **Attention**: more than 72 hours
- **Critical: Not Responded**

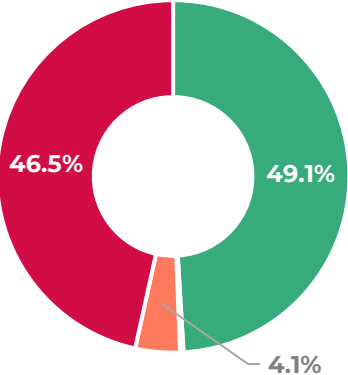
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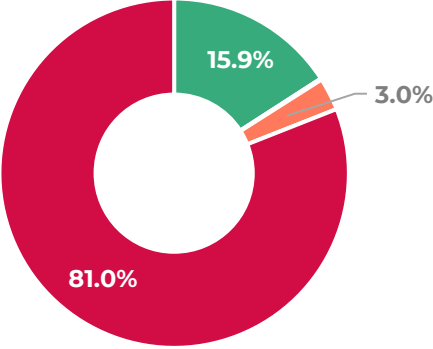
EMEA



AMERICAS



APAC



■ Excellent ■ Fair ■ Attention ■ Critical

REVIEWS WITH COMMENTS VS RATING-ONLY

Public feedback handling across gas stations highlights inconsistent recovery discipline.

Globally, 53.4% of reviews that include **written comments receive no response**, despite offering direct insight into operational or service shortcomings. **Rating-only** feedback reflects even lower engagement, with **76.2% left unanswered**.

Regionally, **APAC** records the highest share of **unaddressed commented reviews (81.2%)**, followed by **EMEA (60.1%)**, while the **Americas** perform better yet still **leave 42.3% without reply**. In a sector built on repetition and visibility, inconsistent response practices forfeit opportunities to convert dissatisfaction into loyalty.

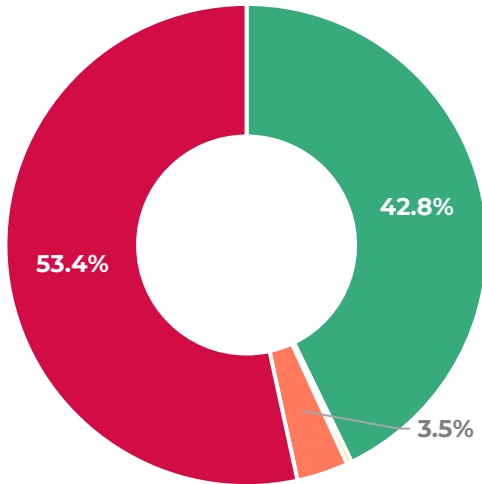
Reviews with Comments: These are reviews where customers provide written feedback along with their rating. The comments can range from positive to negative, giving specific details about the customer's experience. These provide context and a chance to address concerns.

Rating-only Reviews: These are reviews where the customer only leaves a star rating without any additional comments or details. While these reviews provide less context for other customers and the business, a quick acknowledgment can still be beneficial.

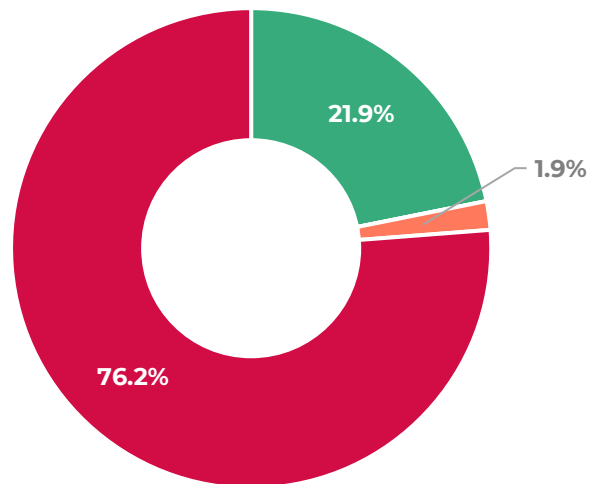
CRRT KPI bands:

- **Excellent:** within 24 hours
- **Fair:** within 72 hours
- **Attention:** more than 72 hours
- **Critical: Not Responded**

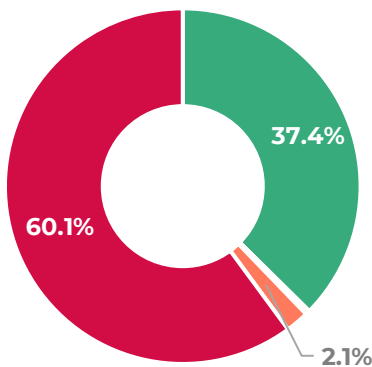
CRRT: REVIEWS WITH COMMENTS



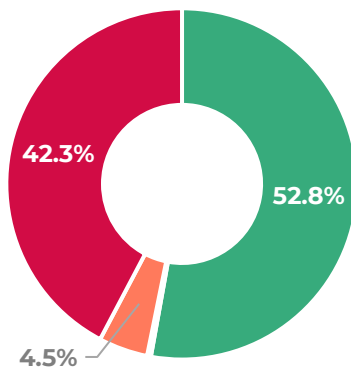
CRRT: REVIEWS WITH RATING-ONLY



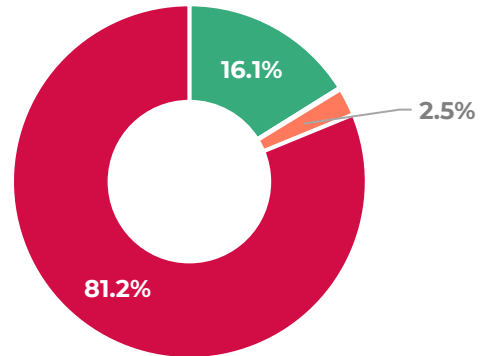
EMEA



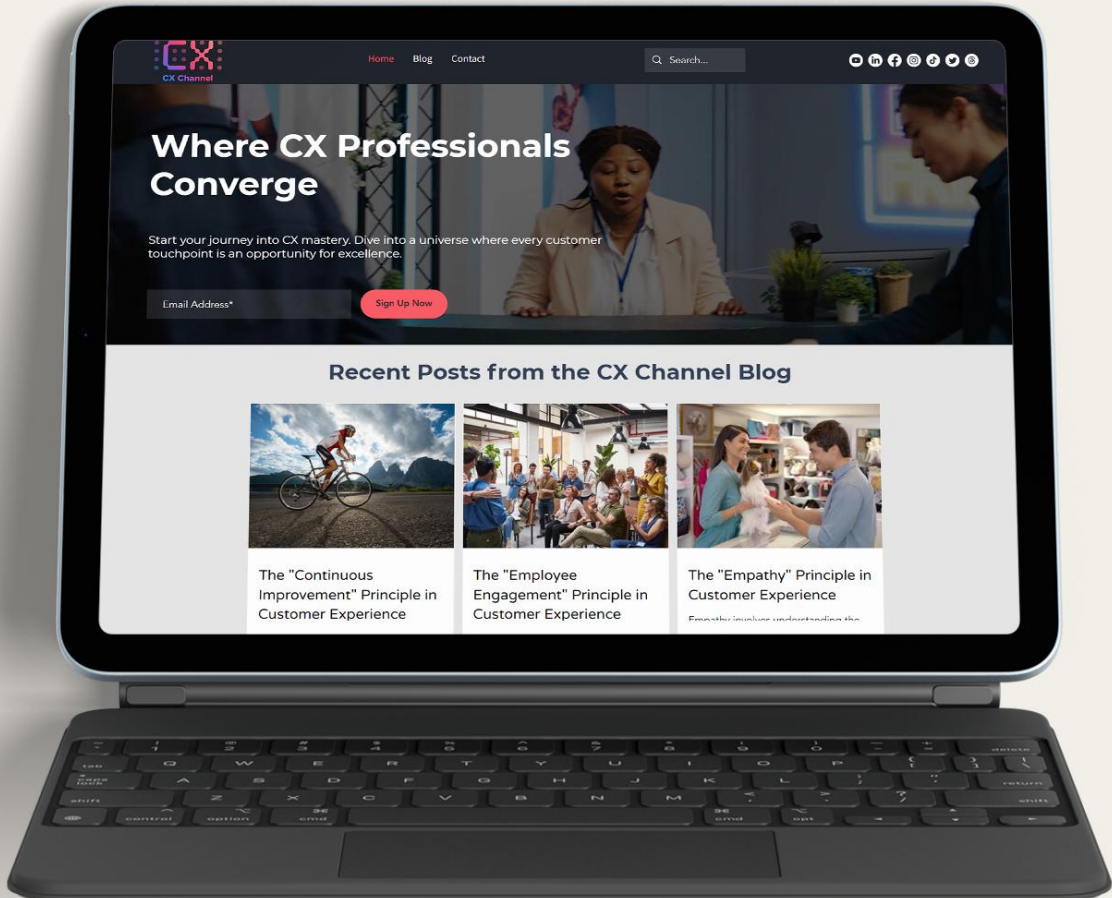
AMERICAS



APAC



■ Excellent
 ■ Fair
 ■ Attention
 ■ Critical



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Gas Stations: **Marketing Mix**

In the gas station sector, the 7Ps – Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence – frame how customers assess reliability and overall value at every stop. In a high-frequency, price-visible environment, these elements shape not only immediate satisfaction but also long-term preference and repeat behavior.

This section explores how frontline conduct, product dependability, site conditions, pricing perception, promotional mechanics, and operational flow interact to influence customer judgment. By examining each element through the lens of real customer feedback, we uncover the factors that strengthen trust, reduce friction, and determine competitive positioning in a routine-driven market.

MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS

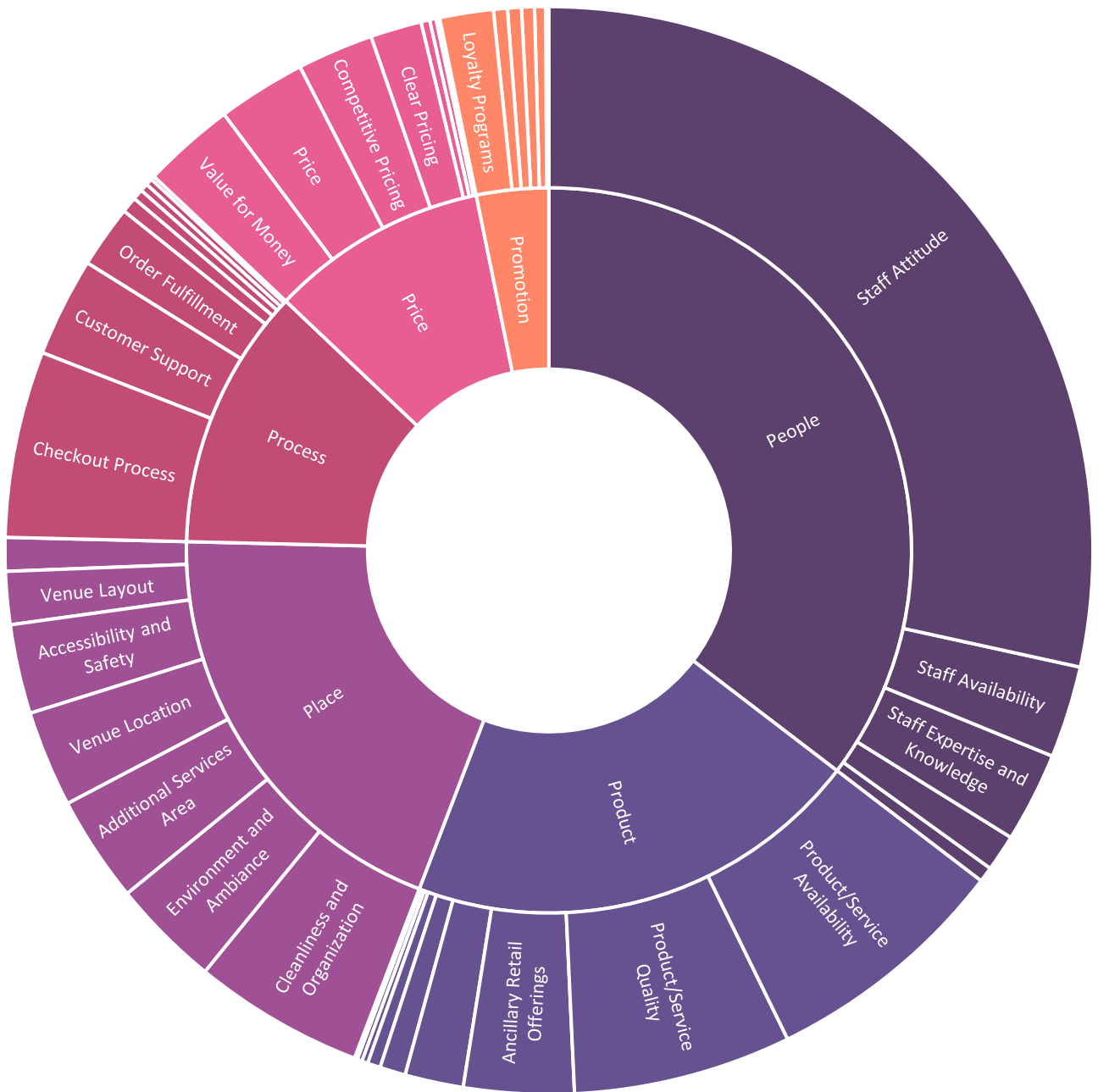
What Do Customers Talk [Care] About?

The distribution of feedback across the 7Ps reveals a clear concentration pattern in the gas station sector. Customer commentary is primarily concentrated on **People, Product, and Place**, which together account for roughly **three quarters of all mentions**. With **People** alone representing **35%**, human factors emerge as the most influential dimension shaping perception. In contrast, Process, Price, and Promotion generate noticeably lower attention, indicating that core human and operational elements dominate customer focus.

This results highlights a fundamental industry dynamic: customers judge gas stations primarily on **how the staff serves them, what is offered, and how the physical environment is maintained**.

While pricing and promotions matter, they are secondary. In a sector defined by routine visits, preference is shaped less by marketing mechanics and more by consistent human execution and dependable on-site conditions.

The 7P Marketing Mix is an extended version of the traditional 4P concept. It includes the following seven elements: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. This model provides a more comprehensive framework for businesses to evaluate and improve their CX and marketing strategies.



Explore the top 5 features within each marketing mix element on the next page. ▶

MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS AND FEATURES

Which Details Do Customers Prioritize?

Customer feedback in the gas station sector is primarily shaped by human interaction, with **Staff Attitude (28.4%)** standing out as the most influential Marketing Mix feature. It is followed by **Product / Service Availability (7.37%)**, **Product / Service Quality (6.48%)**, and **Checkout Process (5.54%)**, underscoring the importance of frontline conduct and reliable execution. Respectful treatment, dependable availability, and smooth transactions form the core drivers of customer satisfaction.

Beyond interpersonal dynamics, product reliability and site standards significantly influence expectations. Fuel and retail availability, consistent quality, and efficient checkout reduce friction during time-sensitive visits. Together, these elements demonstrate that reliability across interaction, offerings and environment strengthen perceived value.

At the center of the gas station journey remains frontline conduct. A professional attitude, clear communication and expertise, as well as service consistency, outweigh pricing or promotional mechanics in shaping preference. In this high-frequency sector, customers return not only for fuel, but for predictable treatment and dependable execution that transform routine stops into trusted choices.

MARKETING MIX ELEMENT	MARKETING MIX ELEMENT FEATURE	% OF THE MARKETING MIX	
People	▶ Staff Attitude	28.44%	98.7% of People
	Staff Availability	2.73%	
	Staff Expertise and Knowledge	2.68%	
	Staff Accountability / Reliability	1.08%	
	Other	0.46%	
Product	▶ Product / Service Availability	7.37%	92.3% of Product
	▶ Product / Service Quality	6.48%	
	Ancillary Retail Offerings	3.28%	
	Product / Service Variety	1.73%	
	Other	1.57%	
Place	▶ Cleanliness and Organization	5.07%	73.3% of Place
	Environment and Ambiance	3.23%	
	Additional Services Area	3.17%	
	Venue Location	2.86%	
	Other	5.22%	
Process	▶ Checkout Process	5.54%	92.5% of Process
	Customer Support	2.94%	
	Order Fulfillment	1.85%	
	Loyalty Program Processing	0.48%	
	Other	0.87%	
Price	Value for Money	2.74%	94.2% of Price
	Price	2.62%	
	Competitive Pricing	2.27%	
	Clear Pricing	1.52%	
	Other	0.57%	
Promotion	Loyalty Programs	1.59%	86.9% of Promotion
	Digital Marketing	0.41%	
	Discounts and Offers	0.41%	
	Community Engagement	0.39%	
	Other	0.42%	

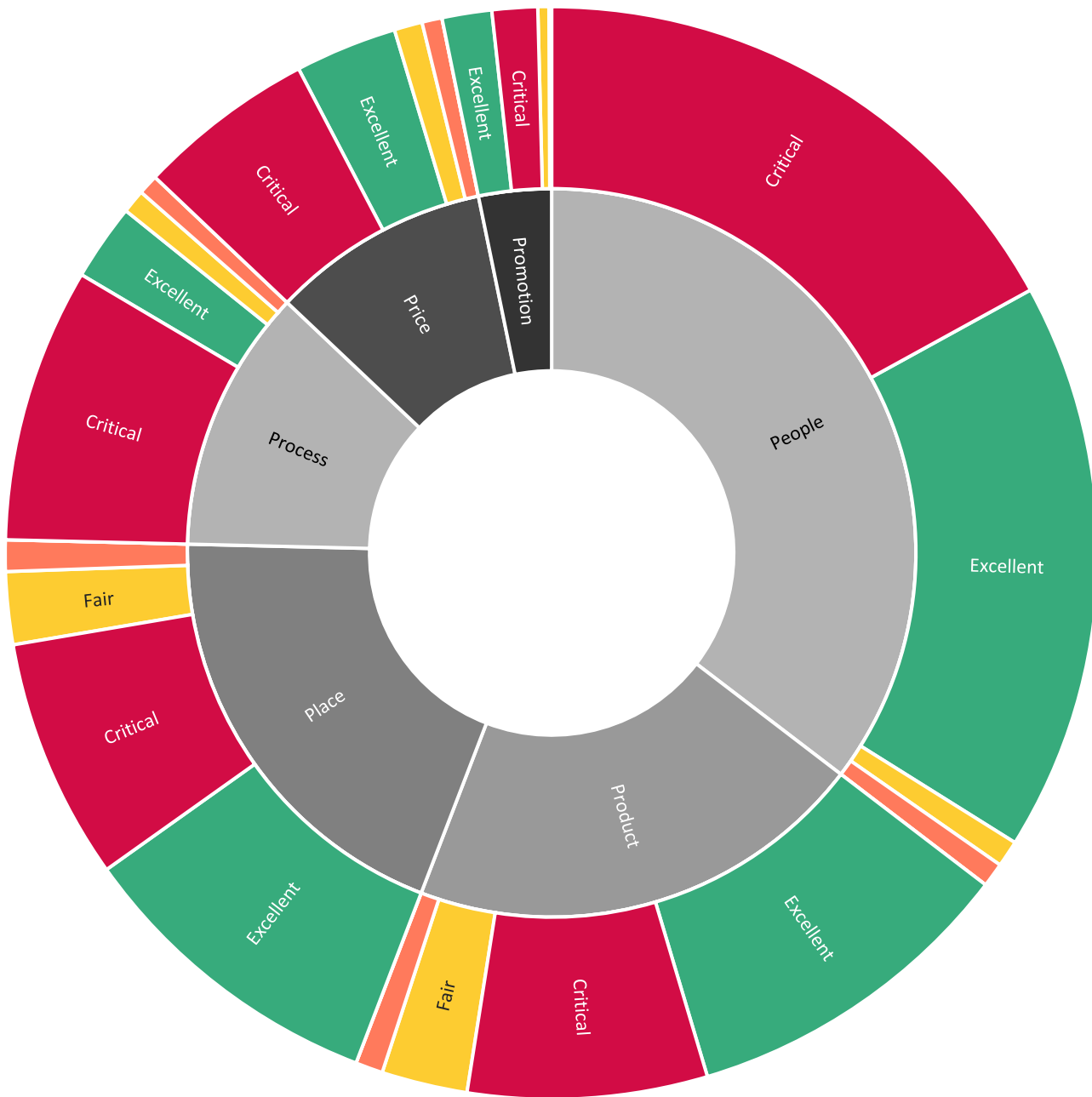
MARKETING MIX EXPERIENCES

Understanding Customer Sentiments, Thoughts, and Feelings

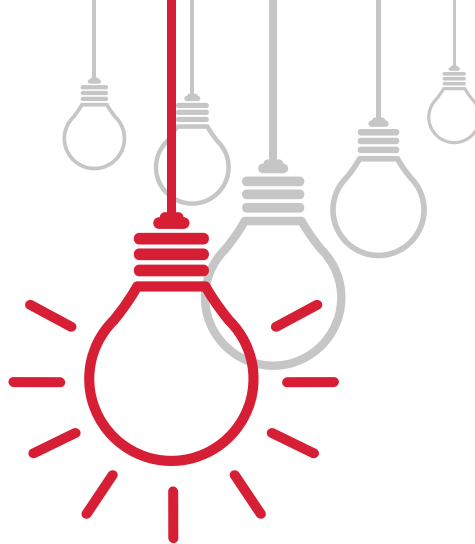
The gas station experience profile shows that the core pillars – **People, Product, and Place** – account for a substantial share of dissatisfaction, with **41% of** feedback across these elements rated as **critical**. **People** alone records **48% critical** sentiment, underscoring the strong impact of staff conduct and service consistency on perception. Meanwhile, **Process emerges as the most vulnerable dimension**, with nearly **70%** of related feedback classified as **critical**, signaling concentrated friction in operational flow.

Customer feedback shows that dissatisfaction is driven less by isolated events and more by recurring execution gaps. Common themes include inconsistent staff behavior, uneven service handling, and checkout and service execution friction. Process breakdowns intensify frustration during time-sensitive visits, while Place-related concerns highlight how cleanliness and organization shape perceived reliability.

To improve performance, operators must reinforce process discipline and frontline accountability. Clear service standards, stronger ownership at each touchpoint, and smoother checkout coordination are critical. Supported by consistent site conditions and transparent pricing communication, these actions reduce friction, stabilize execution, and rebuild trust in a high-frequency environment.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



Customer feedback, response behavior, and experience drivers reveal a gas station sector where routine visits depend on reliable service and quick execution. Because stops are frequent and time-sensitive, gaps in response or operational consistency can quickly weaken trust. The results highlight several priorities where focused action can improve everyday customer experience.



Respond to Critical Feedback:

Globally, over half of critical reviews remain unanswered (56.3%). The gap is most severe in APAC, where more than 80% receive no response. Fast responses to negative feedback are essential to strengthen recovery.



Reduce Critical CX Friction:

People, Product, and Place concentrate 67.95% of all critical feedback. People alone reaches 48%. Process is the most fragile element, with nearly 70% negative sentiment, signaling operational friction.



Focus on Core Experience Drivers:

Customer feedback centers on People, Product, and Place, which dominate the conversation (75% of all mentions). Among them, People (with 35% share) stands out as the most influential element.



Consistency in the Fundamentals:

Staff attitude, product / service availability and quality, and the checkout process are the strongest experience drivers. Consistent delivery across these basics most strongly shapes satisfaction.


By responding faster to complaints, reinforcing frontline professionalism, and improving operational consistency, gas station operators can turn routine stops into dependable experiences that support long-term customer loyalty.



Gas Stations: **Customer Journey**

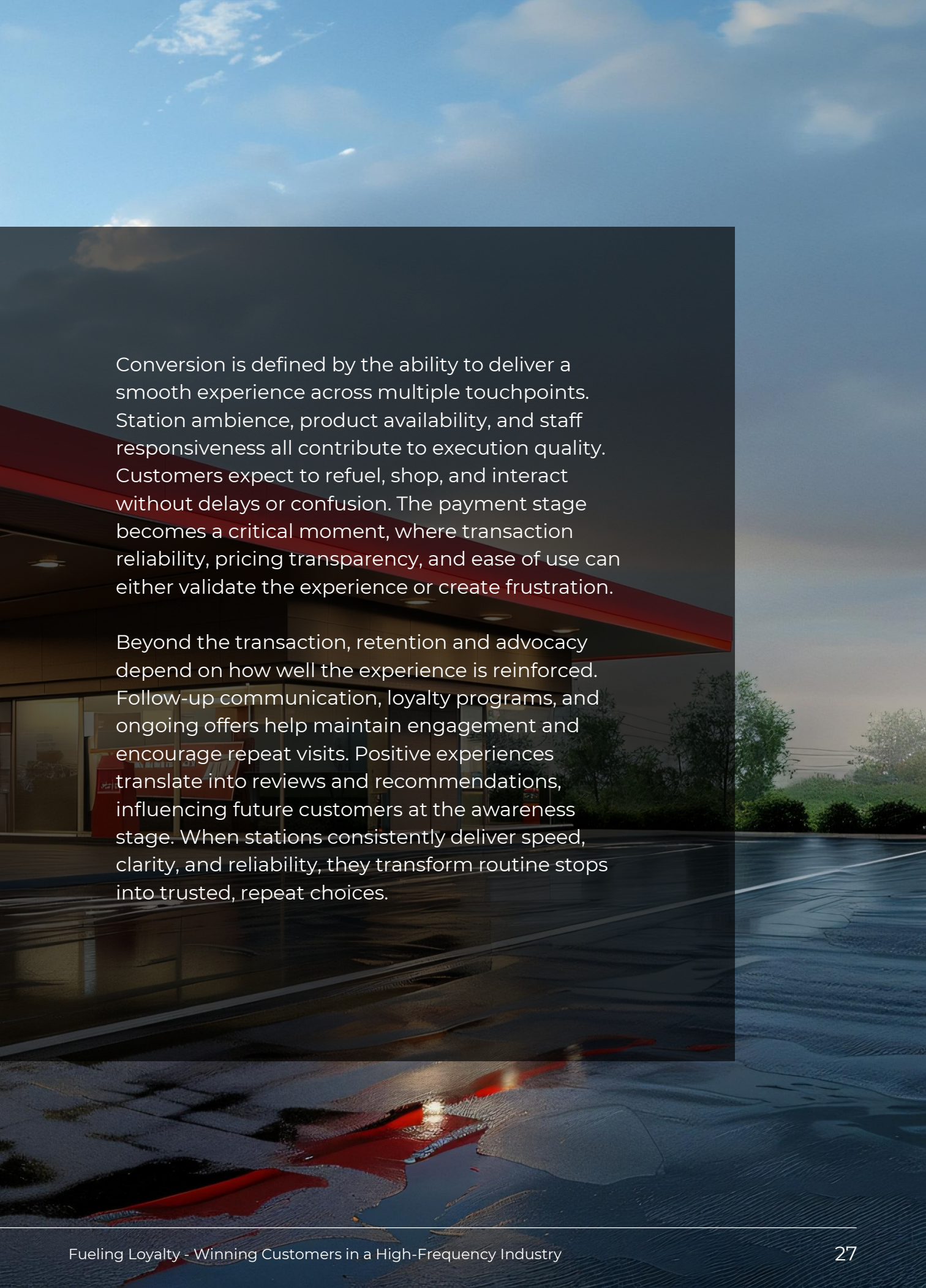
A gas station journey is shaped by fast, routine decisions across multiple connected touchpoints rather than a single fuel transaction. It starts with a mobility need, moves through station selection, arrival, refueling, in-store activity, and payment, and extends beyond the visit through follow-up and future intent to return. Each step – from price visibility and site access to checkout efficiency – influences perceptions of trust, speed, and reliability.

This section maps the journey across five stages: Awareness, Consideration, Conversion, Retention, and Advocacy. At each stage, customers engage with digital tools, physical environments, staff, and operational systems that affect satisfaction and repeat behavior. Understanding these connections helps operators reduce friction, improve consistency, and turn routine stops into lasting loyalty.



The gas station journey begins with an immediate, often time-sensitive need, where convenience and visibility drive the first decision. Customers rely on online maps, fuel price apps, and prior experience to quickly identify a suitable station. At this stage, proximity, price perception, and ease of access dominate expectations. Clear, accurate digital information and visible site accessibility reduce uncertainty and guide the choice before arrival.

As customers move into consideration, evaluation becomes more tangible. Drive-by impressions, station layout, and visible service options influence whether the stop feels efficient and reliable. Upon entry, the condition of service areas, shop entrance, and initial staff interaction reinforce or weaken confidence. Customers look for clarity, speed, and a sense of control - expecting to quickly understand what is available and how easily they can complete their visit.



Conversion is defined by the ability to deliver a smooth experience across multiple touchpoints. Station ambience, product availability, and staff responsiveness all contribute to execution quality. Customers expect to refuel, shop, and interact without delays or confusion. The payment stage becomes a critical moment, where transaction reliability, pricing transparency, and ease of use can either validate the experience or create frustration.

Beyond the transaction, retention and advocacy depend on how well the experience is reinforced. Follow-up communication, loyalty programs, and ongoing offers help maintain engagement and encourage repeat visits. Positive experiences translate into reviews and recommendations, influencing future customers at the awareness stage. When stations consistently deliver speed, clarity, and reliability, they transform routine stops into trusted, repeat choices.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAP: GAS STATIONS

In this analysis, we examine a typical **5-stage** Customer Journey Map that includes **10 distinct steps** reflecting the evolution of the customer experience.

The Customer Journey refers to the various stages a customer goes through while interacting with a company or brand – from the initial contact to the eventual purchase, and beyond.

The Customer Journey Map is a visual diagram that shows the Customer Journey. The Customer Journey Map helps businesses understand and analyze their customers' experiences, identify pain points, uncover opportunities for improvement and ultimately enhance the overall customer experience.

Awareness

Becomes aware of a brand, product, or service

Consideration

Researches and evaluates potential solutions

Conversion

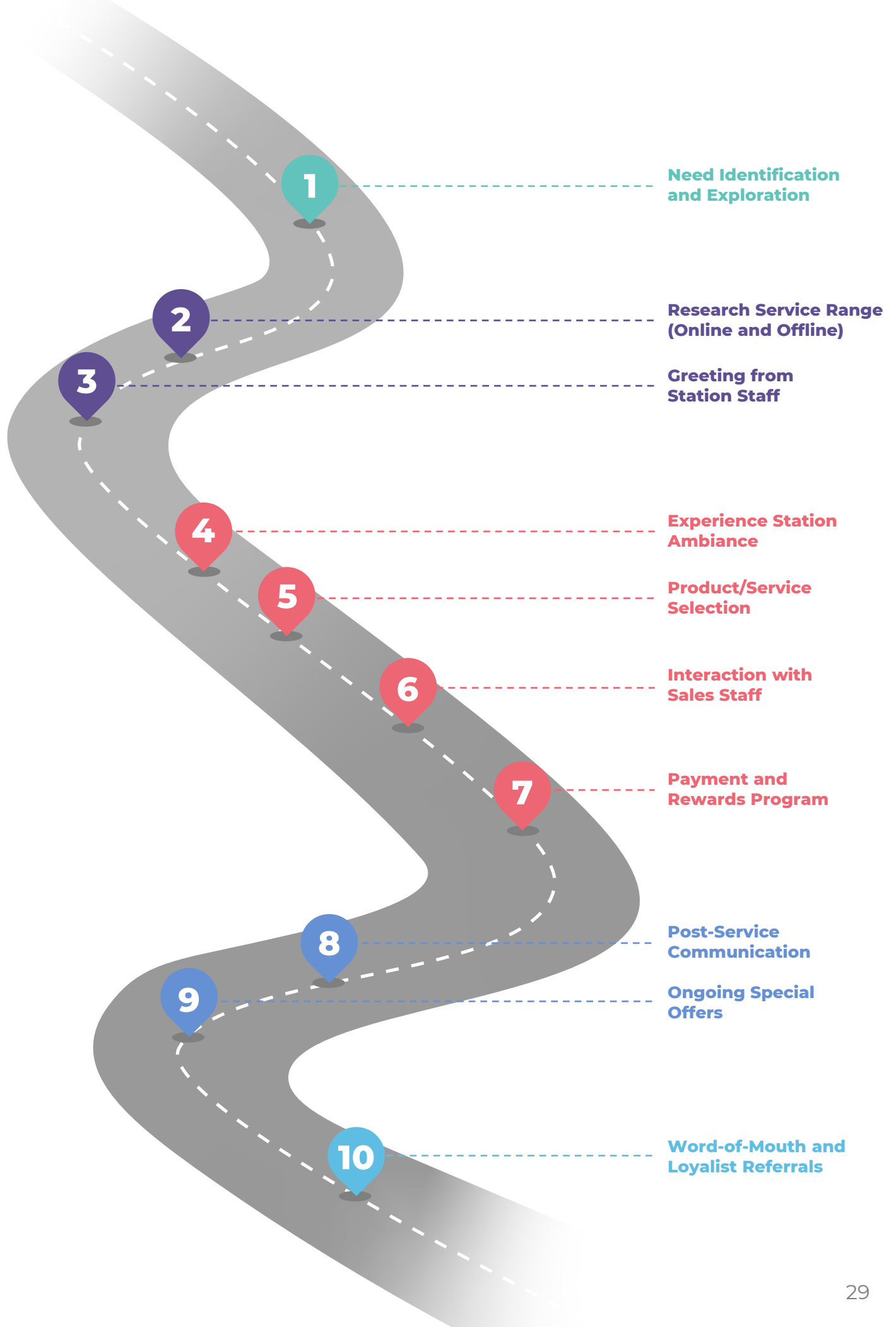
Chooses a product or service and makes a purchase

Retention

Delivery, use, additional purchases of product or service

Advocacy

Advocate, shares the positive experience with others



CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAP: GAS STATIONS








































We map the gas station customer journey as a connected flow across five stages, illustrating how customer engagement forms and strengthens over time:

- **Awareness**
- **Consideration**
- **Conversion**
- **Retention**
- **Advocacy**

Each stage reflects a step in the customer's relationship with a gas station – from recognizing the need to refuel or make a quick stop, to choosing a preferred location and recommending it to others. What begins as a functional visit can turn into a habitual choice when expectations are consistently met.

Throughout the journey, customers move through key touchpoints: finding a nearby station, comparing prices and services, arriving and accessing the site, refueling, shopping in-store, interacting with staff, and completing payment. Each moment shapes perceptions of speed and convenience.

These interactions allow operators to demonstrate reliability and control. When access is seamless, the environment is maintained, and each step runs smoothly, gas stations can strengthen satisfaction, increase repeat visits, and build preference through consistent execution.

Awareness	<p>Need Identification and Exploration</p> <p>Realize the need to refuel or purchase vehicle-related products, begin searching for nearby stations</p>	 <p>Online maps</p>	 <p>Fuel price apps</p>	 <p>Word-of-Mouth</p>	<p>Locate a conveniently positioned station with competitive fuel prices and additional services</p>	 <p>CSAT</p>
Consideration	<p>Research Service Range (Online and Offline)</p> <p>Browse the station's services online or drive by to assess its offerings</p>	 <p>Station website</p>	 <p>Drive-by visuals</p>	 <p>Service menus</p>	<p>Assess the quality and range of services such as car wash, air, vacuum, and shop items</p>	 <p>CES</p>
	<p>Greeting from Station Staff</p> <p>Receive a greeting and offer of assistance when entering the shop or using services</p>	 <p>Service areas</p>	 <p>Station shop entrance</p>		<p>Feel welcomed and quickly receive the help or service needed</p>	 <p>CES</p>
Conversion	<p>Experience Station Ambiance</p> <p>Engage with the station environment, including cleanliness and facility layout</p>	 <p>Fuel pumps</p>	 <p>Store layout</p>	 <p>Restroom cleanliness</p>	<p>Refuel or shop in a clean, safe, and well-maintained environment</p>	 <p>CSAT</p>
	<p>Product / Service Selection</p> <p>Select fuel type, use additional services like car wash or air, and pick items from the shop</p>	 <p>Fuel type</p>	 <p>Car wash entry</p>	 <p>Shop shelves</p>	<p>Complete refueling efficiently, utilize services to maintain their vehicle, and find desired shop items</p>	 <p>CSAT</p>
	<p>Interaction with Sales Staff</p> <p>Interact with staff for payments, inquiries about products or services</p>	 <p>Checkout counters</p>	 <p>Payment kiosks</p>	 <p>Staff on the floor</p>	<p>Receive fast service, accurate information, and a friendly interaction</p>	 <p>CSAT</p>
	<p>Payment and Rewards Program</p> <p>Pay for fuel and products, join or utilize a rewards program if available</p>	 <p>POS systems</p>	 <p>Loyalty program sign up</p>	 <p>Mobile payment options</p>	<p>Have a smooth payment process and gain loyalty rewards</p>	 <p>CES</p>
Retention	<p>Post-Service Communication</p> <p>Receive follow-up communications, such as electronic receipts or service reminders</p>	 <p>Email</p>	 <p>Text messages</p>	 <p>Service apps</p>	<p>Stay informed about past services and reminded of upcoming needs</p>	 <p>CSAT</p>
	<p>Ongoing Special Offers</p> <p>Take advantage of ongoing promotions such as fuel discounts or service deals</p>	 <p>Promotion signage</p>	 <p>Loyalty app notifications</p>	 <p>Email offers</p>	<p>Save on fuel or services and find value in choosing this station consistently</p>	 <p>CSAT</p>
Advocacy	<p>Word of Mouth and Loyalist Referrals</p> <p>Share positive service experiences and recommend the gas station to others</p>	 <p>Referral cards</p>	 <p>Social media</p>	 <p>Online reviews</p>	<p>Influence others to visit the station and potentially receive benefits for referrals</p>	 <p>NPS</p>

CUSTOMER JOURNEY STAGES

Awareness

The Awareness stage begins when customers recognize the need to refuel or purchase vehicle-related essentials, often triggered by low fuel levels, travel needs, or routine habits.

Consideration

During Consideration, customers evaluate stations, including websites, drive-by visuals, and clearly displayed service menus. They compare not only fuel prices, but also the range of available services such as car wash, air, vacuum, and shop offerings.

Conversion

The Conversion stage is where intent turns into action as customers arrive, refuel, and complete their visit, often supported by brief but important staff interactions. This phase is critical in shaping trust, as customers expect the experience to be fast, reliable, and aligned with their expectations for convenience and efficiency.

Retention

Retention is influenced by how the experience continues after the visit through follow-up communication, perceived value, and ongoing offers that keep the station relevant over time.

Advocacy

Advocacy emerges when customers share their experience through reviews, social media, or direct recommendations.

Customers turn to online maps, fuel price apps, and word-of-mouth to identify nearby stations, forming quick expectations around location convenience, price competitiveness, and available services.

Upon arrival, service areas, shop entrance, and initial staff interaction shape whether the station feels accessible, organized, and efficient. Clear layout, visible signage, and a welcoming environment help customers quickly understand their options and proceed with confidence.

During this stage, customers interact with multiple touchpoints – fuel pumps, service areas, shop environment, and payment systems. Attention shifts to execution: fuel availability, equipment functionality, cleanliness, and overall process flow. Staff interaction plays an important role, especially when assistance is needed or during in-store purchases, where responsiveness and attitude influence the experience. The payment moment becomes decisive, where speed, accuracy, and pricing transparency confirm the value of the visit and leave a lasting final impression.

Electronic receipts, messages, and loyalty incentives help customers stay informed, recognize value, and consider the station for future visits. Consistent offers further reinforce customer trust and encourages them to return to the gas station as part of their regular routine.

Positive, consistent visits encourage customers to promote the station to others, strengthening reputation and influencing new customer decisions.

SUMMARY

The gas station journey unfolds through a series of quick, purpose-driven moments, where customers aim to complete their visit with minimal effort and maximum efficiency. From the initial trigger to the final payment, each step contributes to how the station is perceived in terms of speed, convenience, and dependability.

Rather than being a single transaction, the experience is shaped by multiple connected elements. Easy entry and exit, intuitive layouts, clean and functional facilities, available products, and responsive staff all influence how smoothly the visit progresses. Customers expect clarity at every point, and any disruption can quickly impact overall satisfaction.

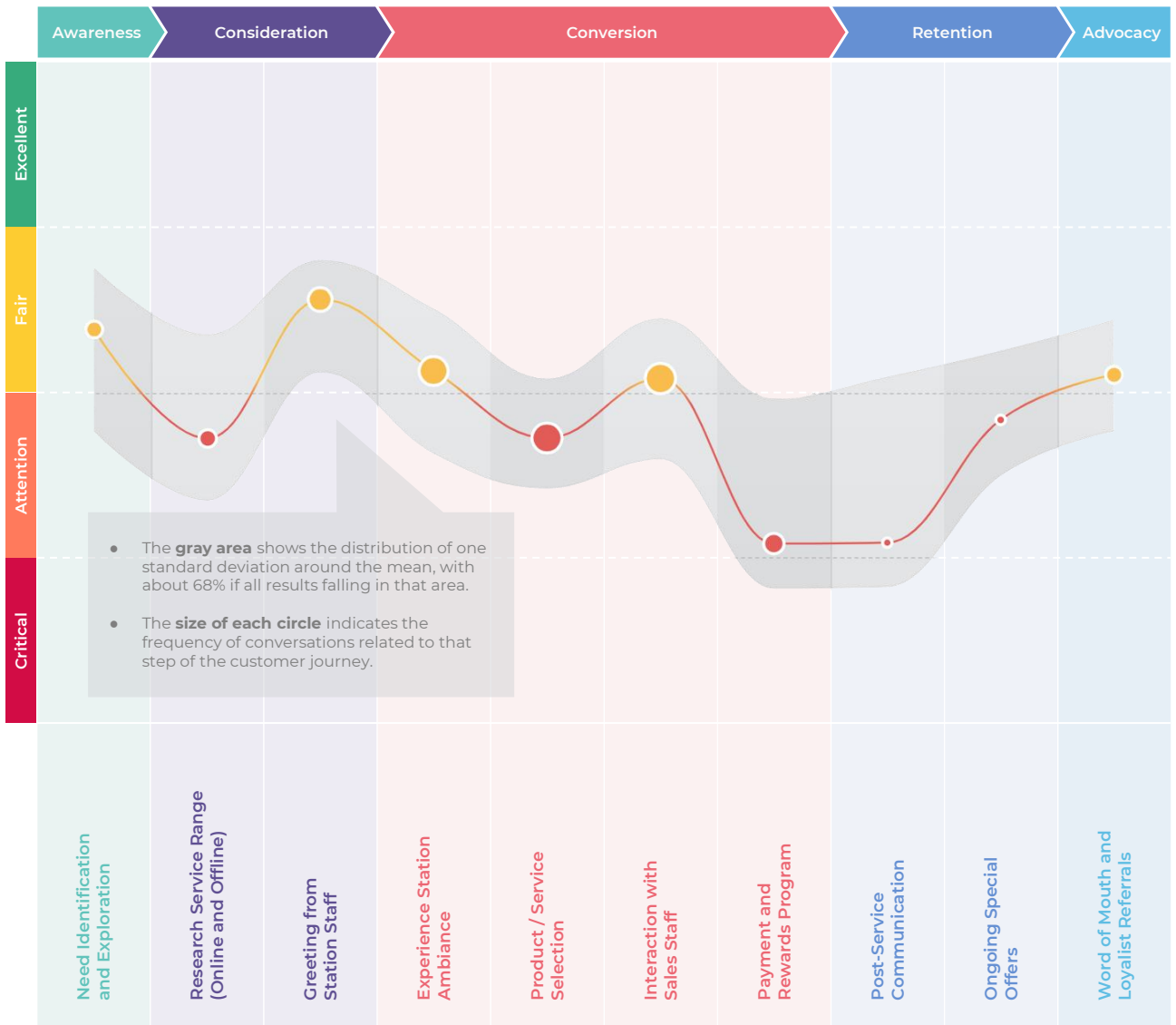
Long-term success relies on delivering this experience consistently while staying relevant beyond the visit. Follow-up communication, loyalty benefits, and stable service quality help reinforce trust and encourage repeat visits. When customers know they can rely on a station for a fast and hassle-free stop, it becomes part of their routine – building preference and increasing the likelihood of recommendation.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

The gas station customer journey reflects a **predominantly negative** curve, with sentiment falling into attention and critical zones at key stages. Notably, sentiment drops unusually early at the Research Service Range stage signaling weakened confidence even before customers arrive on site. The largest conversation volumes cluster around **Station Ambience, Product / Service Selection, and Staff Interaction**, confirming their central role in shaping perception, yet performance across these moments remains **fragile**. Sentiment drops most sharply at **Payment and Rewards** and continues into **Post-Service Communication**, where dissatisfaction persists.

The chart illustrates customer sentiment during the various phases of the Customer Journey. Areas shaded in the graph denote the standard deviation from the average, highlighting the degree of variability at each step and signifying the need for more precise measurement techniques.

The circles on the graph correspond to the frequency of specific elements noted at each phase, with larger circles indicating steps with more frequently cited attributes. This visualization aids in identifying which areas to prioritize for strategic focus.



SENTIMENT BANDS

Excellent	0.5 to 1.0
Fair	between 0.0 and 0.5
Attention	0.0 to -0.5 (excluded)
Critical	-0.5 to -1.0

CASE IN POINT

Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) is particularly effective for analyzing online reviews and ratings by providing detailed, aspect-specific insights.

A customer review may read:



I researched online, but there was almost no useful information about what was offered, which made it hard to decide. I still chose to stop there because it was on my route. It was disappointing to see that some basic services (like air pumps) were not available. On the positive side, the staff was helpful and polite when I asked for help. Payment was slow and frustrating - I had to try multiple times before it worked. I didn't receive any receipt or follow-up after I left, which made the experience feel incomplete. I doubt I will return again.

Aspect	Modifier	Sentiment
Research service range	No useful information	Negative
Location	Convenient, on my route	Positive
Product / Service selection	Missing services, no air pump	Negative
Staff interaction	Helpful, polite	Positive
Payment and Checkout	Slow, frustrating, multiple attempts	Negative
Post-service	No receipt, no follow-up	Negative

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Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) excels in extracting deeper insights from customer interactions by categorizing aspects of the product, service, or experience being reviewed. It then evaluates the modifying words or phrases in the review, assigning them a sentiment polarity – positive, neutral, or negative – to gauge customer opinions.

ABSA is not, however, without some limitations. Notably, complexity in language and expression: people who frequently employ idioms, sarcasm, or metaphors can pose difficulties for accurate interpretation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Mapping the gas station customer journey reveals an experience shaped by operational pressure rather than clear service strengths. Sentiment declines across several stages, particularly during conversion and post-service moments, weakening confidence and limiting repeat intent. Identifying where these drops occur helps operators prioritize improvements where they matter most.



A Journey With No Clear Strengths

Sentiment drops immediately at the Research Service Range step, signaling uncertainty event before the visit. Clearer communication of fuel options and prices, shop services, and amenities can strengthen pre-visit confidence.



Strengthen Core Service Moments

Key Conversion moments show relatively low sentiment scores. Product or Service Selection stands out as the weakest step, where limited assortment and availability gaps undermine confidence at a crucial decision moment.



Improve Visibility of Services

The Payment and Rewards moment shows one of the sharpest experience drops, disrupting the journey just before completion. Simplifying payment flow and reinforcing value perception are critical to a positive experience.



Focus on Payment and Post-Visit

The sharpest drop occurs during Payment and Rewards and continues into Post-Service Communication. Transaction issues, pricing transparency concerns, and weak follow-up disrupt the journey's final moments and lower the likelihood of repeat visits.

By improving service visibility before arrival, strengthening product selection during the visit, and removing friction in payment and post-service communication, gas station operators can transform routine stops into smoother journeys that build confidence and encourage repeat visits.

MEET THE EXPERT



Meet the experts featured in our podcast series. Discover their backgrounds, unique perspectives, and invaluable contributions to the field of Customer Experience.

OLEKSIY TSYSAR

Oleksiy Tsysar is the Founder and CEO of 4Service Group, a globally-operating customer experience and market intelligence company supporting multinational organizations across complex, multi-country environments.

Since founding the company in 2001, he has led its development into one of Europe's established CX intelligence providers, helping brands transform customer and market insight into measurable business performance.

Under his leadership, 4Service delivers large-scale CX benchmarking programs, customer and employee journey diagnostics, Voice of the Customer initiatives, compliance audits, mystery shopping, and advanced qualitative and quantitative research. The company works with organizations across sectors including retail, banking, telecommunications, petroleum networks, and automotive, focusing on where experience creates tangible value and what leadership teams should do next.

After serving for a decade on the supervisory board, Oleksiy returned to an active executive role as CEO in 2025, focusing on advancing CX intelligence as a strategic business discipline. He leads international teams across multiple markets and works closely with senior leadership teams to translate customer insight into growth, operational improvement, and financial performance.

Oleksiy holds a Bachelor's degree in Marketing and Economics from Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics. Outside the business world, he enjoys long-distance motorcycle travel and navigating sailing and power yachts.





FROM FOCUS TO ACTION: TURNING FUNDAMENTALS INTO DIFFERENTIATORS

Companies collect significant volumes of data - from online reviews and surveys to operational audits and performance metrics. Yet many of them fail to deliver real improvement. The issue is rarely a lack of insights, but a failure to prioritize them correctly and act effectively. Without clear direction, efforts become fragmented and impact remains limited.

*“Know your fundamentals!
Know where you need to focus your effort first.”*

– Oleksiy Tsyar

Focusing on fundamentals requires a deliberate choice about what to measure and what to prioritize. As Oleksiy states, *“Put in those metrics that matter.”* This means moving beyond broad dashboards and identifying the indicators that truly influence customer perception and business outcomes. When organizations concentrate on the right metrics, they create clarity – teams understand where to direct their effort and what success looks like in practice, rather than navigating through excessive and often competing signals.

This challenge becomes more visible when organizations aim for completeness instead of impact. *“It’s nice to have everything, but it is important to include those [metrics] that really drive the company performance.”*, Oleksiy added. Capturing all possible data points often results in complexity without direction. Instead of enabling better decisions, it creates noise, making it harder to distinguish between what requires action and what can be deprioritized.

As Oleksiy notes, *“The companies may make wrong decisions where to focus.”* Misaligned priorities lead to investments in areas that are

not impactful, while core issues remain unresolved. This affects both operational efficiency and customer perception, as the experience fails to improve where it matters most.

Even with the right focus, performance improves only when insight is translated into action. *“It’s not only about the answers, it’s about the action taken.”* Organizations must address the root causes behind every issue reported. Without this step, feedback loops remain incomplete, and the same issues continue to surface, limiting the effectiveness of CX initiatives.

To ensure that action is consistent, it must become part of how teams operate. As Oleksiy explains, *“It should be a standard procedure to go after a customer’s feedback... closing the loop with the customer.”* This highlights that acting on insights is not a one-time effort, but a repeatable practice. When teams know how to respond, what to improve, and how to follow through, organizations can move from isolated reactions to sustained performance improvements.



BENEATH THE SURFACE: UNDERSTANDING THE HIDDEN DRIVERS OF CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

Customer feedback is often treated as a direct reflection of experience. However, as Oleksiy explains, what customers say and what actually drives their decisions are not always the same. True CX understanding requires going deeper — beyond surface-level responses to uncover the factors that genuinely influence behavior.

“Customers cannot always explain why they behave the way they do.”

– **Oleksiy Tsysar**

This insight challenges a foundational assumption in customer research. As Oleksiy explains, there is a consistent gap between *“What customers say that matters to them and what actually impacts...their decision making.”* Customers may provide answers, but these are often interpretations rather than true causes. The implication is critical: relying solely on stated feedback can lead organizations in the wrong direction, as expressed preferences do not always reflect real behavior.

At the core of this gap is the nature of human decision-making. *“Humans are not quite rational beings... their behavior is only – in a small part – influenced by rational decisions.”* Customers often rationalize their choices after the fact, assigning logical explanations to actions that were initially driven by subconscious factors. This means that even well-intentioned feedback may not reveal the true drivers of experience, but rather constructed justifications that feel correct.

This creates a significant risk for organizations. When companies act on these stated reasons, they may invest in areas that appear important but have little real impact. The consequence is not just inefficiency, but missed opportunities.





This challenge is further reinforced by the way customers shape their answers in a social context. As per the example provided by Oleksiy during the March episode of the Synergistic CX podcast, *“People sometimes want to give socially desirable answers. But our modelling has shown that this has a very limited influence on actual decision-making. So, people say something that sounds good, but it's not true.”* This highlights a critical distortion in customer feedback – responses may reflect what feels appropriate or expected, rather than what actually drives behavior. As a result, organizations risk overvaluing themes that appear important in feedback but have little real impact, unless they validate them through deeper analysis and integration in the business strategy.

Ultimately, understanding customer experience requires moving beyond what is said and identifying what is actually happening beneath the surface. As Oleksiy emphasizes, *“What people say is important, but it's sometimes not enough.”* Organizations must combine feedback with deeper analysis to uncover the true drivers of behavior. When these drivers are correctly identified, they become the most valuable focus for investment - guiding decisions that genuinely influence loyalty, satisfaction, and business performance.

By shifting from stated preferences to real drivers, CX evolves from just listening to understanding, driving real business growth.



CONSISTENCY AS COMMITMENT: DELIVERING WHAT WAS PROMISED – EVERY TIME

Customer experience is often associated with standout interactions and memorable moments. Yet in high-frequency industries like gas stations, customers rarely seek exceptional experiences – they expect reliability. The real challenge for organizations is to consistently deliver what was promised. When expectations are not met, even small gaps accumulate into dissatisfaction and erode trust over time.

*“Customer experience can be described in one word.
It's consistency.”*

– **Oleksiy Tsysar**



Operational consistency is not one of many priorities - it is the foundation on which customer experience is built. As Oleksiy explains, *“The excellence in customer experience is the excellence in operational delivery. This is where the company should start.”* This reframes how organizations approach CX: not through isolated improvements or standout initiatives, but through disciplined execution every single time. Without consistent delivery, even well-designed experiences fail to meet expectations.

The importance of consistency becomes even more visible when performance is compared across locations. *“Hugely important for consistency is performance across places or regions,”* Oleksiy states, because customers expect the same experience regardless of where or when they interact with the brand. Any variation immediately breaks the perception of reliability. As Oleksiy points out, *“high deviation of overall company results is due to an inconsistency in operations.”* These gaps are not random – they are symptoms of processes that are not uniformly applied.

At its core, customer experience is a simple commitment: deliver what was promised. *“Operational consistency comes before everything...Just do what you have promised. There should be no gap between promised delivery and actual delivery.”* This clarity removes unnecessary complexity. Customers are not evaluating brands based on ambition or intent, but on whether expectations are consistently met. Even small deviations create friction, while stable execution builds trust and confidence over time.

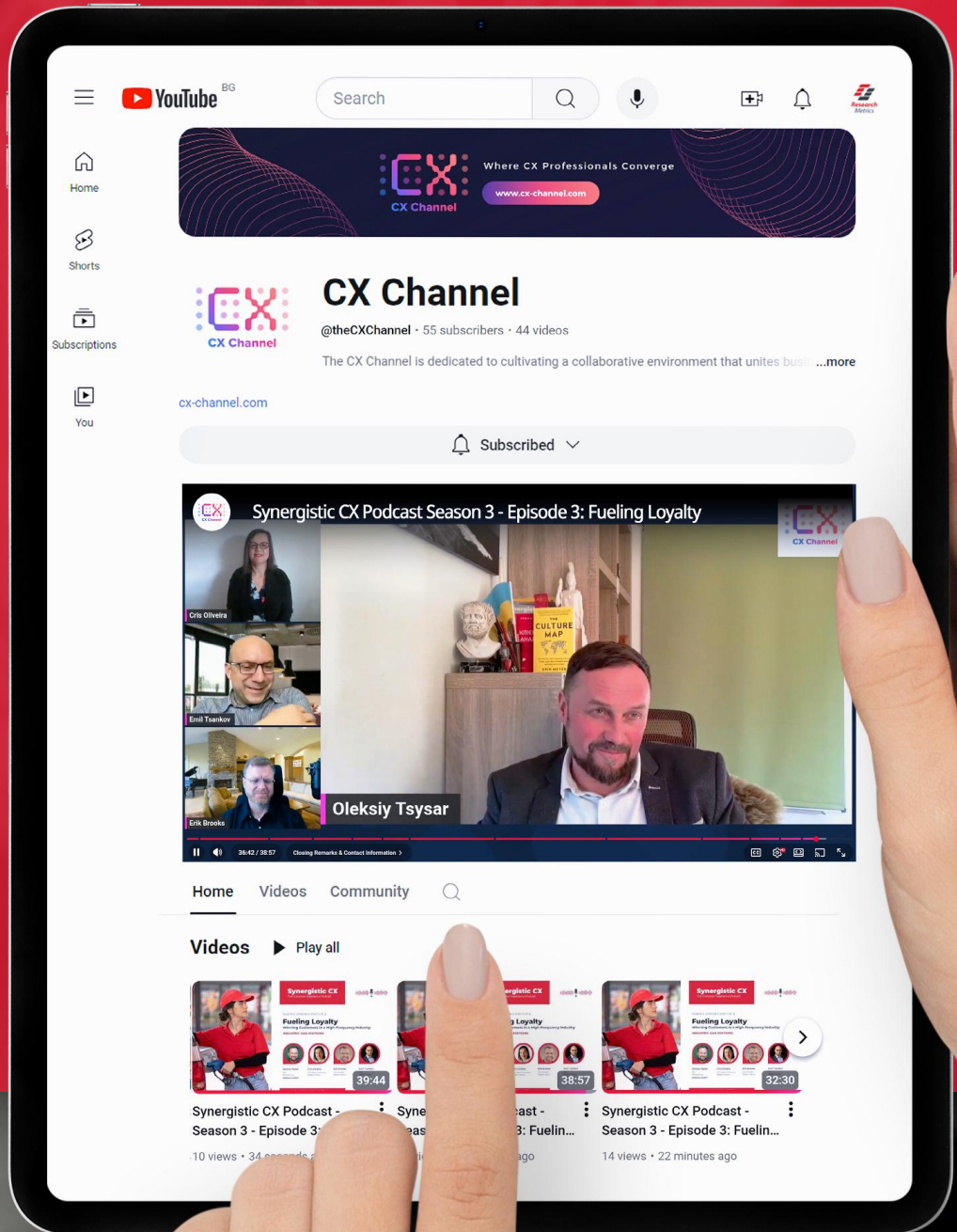
This requires more than operational adjustments - it demands alignment at every level of the organization. Consistency is not accidental, it is the result of clear strategy,

leadership commitment, and well-defined processes working together. As highlighted, *“companies should absolutely focus on the consistency of delivery to meet the promises they have made to the client,”* which *“takes the strategy, the vision...putting the customer experience in the center...the leadership support, the processes and alignment.”* When these elements are in place, execution becomes repeatable, and the experience becomes predictable for the customer.

Oleksiy concludes *“But excellence is worth it – in both the human terms and the business terms. It pays off. It has a mission of making human existence better.”*



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FUELING LOYALTY IN A HIGH-FREQUENCY INDUSTRY



IDENTIFYING THE DRIVERS of Customer Preference in Gas Station Customer Journeys

Fuel retail operates in one of the most high-frequency service environments in the global economy. Drivers refuel regularly, often several times per month, and make decisions quickly based on habit, convenience, and perceived reliability.

At first glance, customer choice in this sector appears primarily driven by price visibility and location convenience. However, when multiple stations compete within the same mobility corridor, differences in customer experience execution begin to shape long-term preference.

In reality, the gas station visit represents a multi-touchpoint customer journey rather than a single fueling transaction. The journey begins with a mobility need, continues through station selection, arrival, refueling, retail interaction, and payment, and extends beyond the visit through loyalty programs, digital communication, and repeat behavior.

Understanding what drives preference within this journey requires moving beyond isolated service metrics and examining how multiple operational and emotional signals combine to shape trust, repeat visits, and advocacy.

To address this challenge, 4Service conducted a comprehensive research program designed to identify the experience drivers that most strongly influence customer loyalty in the gas station sector.

The result is the 4CX Model, an analytical framework linking individual customer experience attributes with behavioral outcomes such as repeat visits and recommendation.

GAS STATIONS as Multi-Touchpoint Service Environments

Over the past decade, gas stations have evolved from purely functional fueling infrastructure into hybrid retail and service environments.

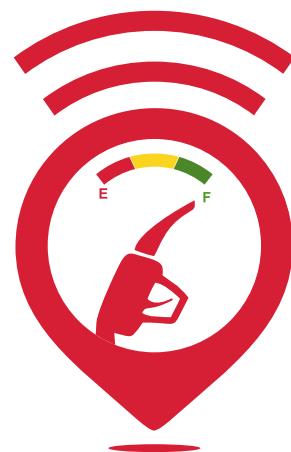
A typical visit now combines several experience elements:

- **Fuel purchase**
- **Convenience retail interaction**
- **Food and beverage consumption**
- **Loyalty program participation**
- **Digital payments and communication**

From the perspective of customer experience management, these activities represent interconnected journey touchpoints.

In high-frequency industries such as fuel retail, customers rarely evaluate these touchpoints independently. Instead, they form a holistic perception based on the consistency of execution across the entire visit.

As a result, even relatively small operational breakdowns can disproportionately influence overall perception and future behavior.





RESEARCH CONTEXT: Reliability Under Extreme Conditions

The empirical research underlying this study was conducted in the Ukrainian fuel retail market, which has operated under extraordinary circumstances since the beginning of the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022.

Throughout the war, Russian missile and drone attacks have repeatedly targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, causing large-scale electricity outages across the country. In such situations, gas stations often became some of the few locations able to maintain operational continuity.

During extended power outages, many gas stations effectively functioned as community support points known in Ukraine as “пункти незламності” – invincibility points.

These locations provided essential services such as:

- **Electricity for charging mobile devices**
- **Access to heating during winter outages**
- **Hot drinks and basic food**
- **Stable communication points for local communities**

To ensure operational continuity, most major gas station networks installed autonomous generator systems capable of powering both fuel pumps and convenience retail operations during grid disruptions.

As a result, gas stations became not only mobility infrastructure but also reliable service hubs during periods of national crisis.

This context significantly reinforced the importance of reliability, trust, and operational stability in shaping customer perception.

RESEARCH DESIGN

First, we explored global experience. Rather than creating yet another CX framework, we began by stepping back and analyzing what already exists. We conducted a structured meta-analysis of 55 widely used customer experience models from both academic research and industry practice, identifying recurring dimensions, overlaps, and gaps. This allowed us to isolate the experience components that consistently explain customer choice and loyalty across industries.

Then we turned to the Ukrainian market itself. The study followed a multi-stage research design combining qualitative exploration, quantitative measurement, and statistical modeling.

QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

The first phase involved expert interviews with professionals working in fuel retail operations, including station managers and industry specialists.

These discussions identified key operational elements influencing the customer journey, including:

- **Fuel quality reliability**
- **Station navigation and layout**
- **Staff professionalism and interaction**
- **Retail and food service offerings**
- **Checkout efficiency and payment experience**

Based on these insights, the research team defined 53 measurable customer experience attributes representing key touchpoints during the station visit.

QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT

The second phase involved a large-scale survey of 1,022 active gas station customers.

Respondents evaluated their experience using a seven-point Likert scale measuring agreement with statements describing each attribute.

In addition to experience attributes, the survey measured behavioral outcomes associated with loyalty:

- **Recommendation intention**
- **Customer satisfaction**
- **Customer effort**
- **Emotional connection**
- **Perceived value**

Together these indicators capture both behavioral loyalty and customer advocacy within the fuel retail journey.



STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The dataset was analyzed using several complementary statistical techniques designed to identify the structure of customer experience and its relationship with loyalty behavior.

EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

First, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to identify latent experience dimensions within the 24 measured attributes.

The analysis revealed six statistically distinct experience components.

The dataset demonstrated excellent statistical adequacy:

- **Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin index: 0.987**
- **Bartlett's test of sphericity: $p \approx 0$**

All attributes demonstrated factor loadings above 0.4, confirming their association with the six experience dimensions.

CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

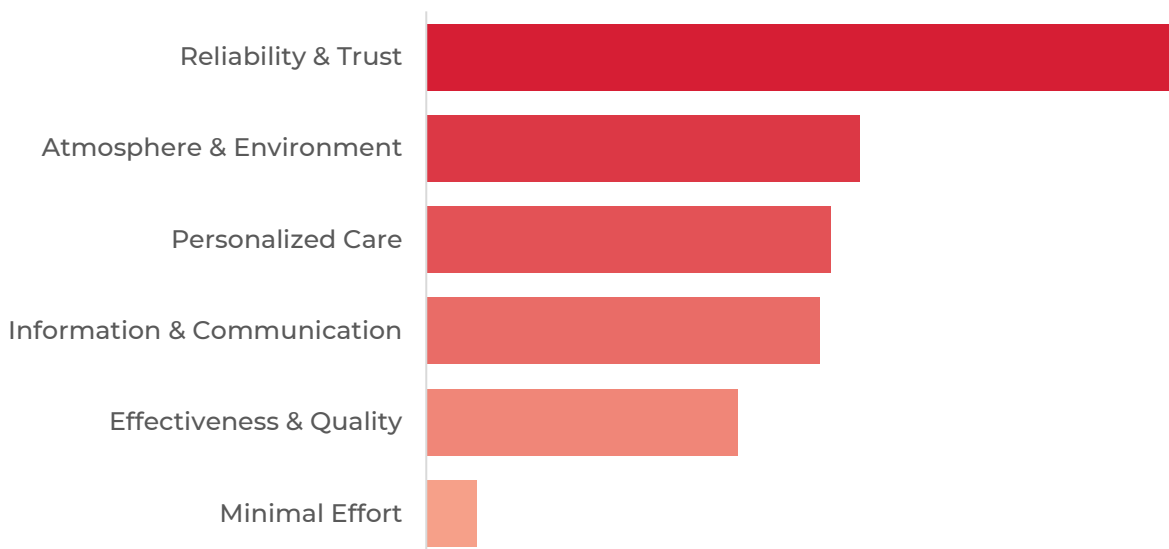
To validate the structure identified through EFA, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted. The results confirmed the stability of the six-dimension model

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Regression analysis was then applied to estimate the relative influence of each experience dimension on customer loyalty behavior.

The results below indicate that trust-related and emotional experience drivers dominate the formation of loyalty behavior.

Table 1. Impact of Experience Dimensions on Loyalty



STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING

Finally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to estimate the relationships between higher-order constructs.

The six dimensions form two overarching experience clusters.

Functional Experience

- Information & Communication
- Effectiveness & Quality
- Minimal Effort

Emotional Experience

- Reliability & Trust
- Atmosphere & Environment
- Personalized Care

Functional drivers explain 32.25% of the total loyalty effect, while emotional drivers explain 67.75%.

Together, these constructs form the 4CX Index, calculated through the weighted aggregation of Top-2-Box (T2B) attribute scores, with weights derived from prior statistical analysis of their relationship with customer loyalty.

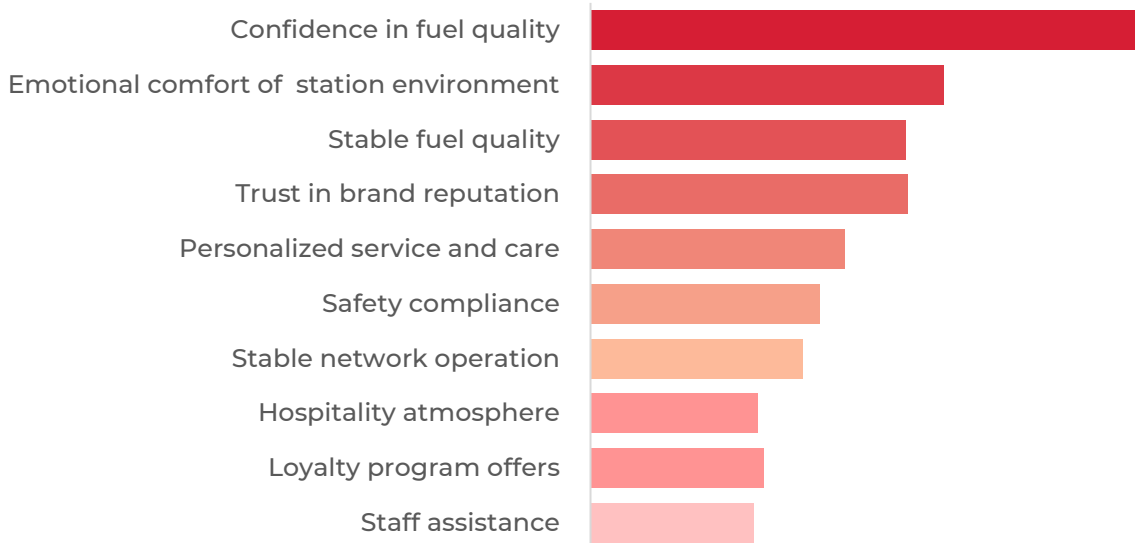
For the Ukrainian fuel retail market, the 4CX Index reached an aggregated score of 62 points, reflecting the overall level of customer experience delivered by the category. This value represents a consolidated benchmark of how customers experience the market when all relevant experience attributes are evaluated and weighted according to their impact on loyalty.

The 4CX Index also functions as a strong predictor of customer loyalty. Higher index values are associated with stronger loyalty intentions, a greater likelihood of repeat visits, and increased advocacy. Importantly, the index allows companies to identify which improvements in customer experience are most likely to generate measurable gains in loyalty, enabling more precise prioritization of CX investments.



TOP LOYALTY DRIVERS

Table 2. Top 10 Loyalty Drivers Ranked by Impact



These results show that trust, reliability, and emotional comfort represent the strongest drivers of customer preference.

WHY CUSTOMERS CANNOT FULLY EXPLAIN THEIR BEHAVIOR

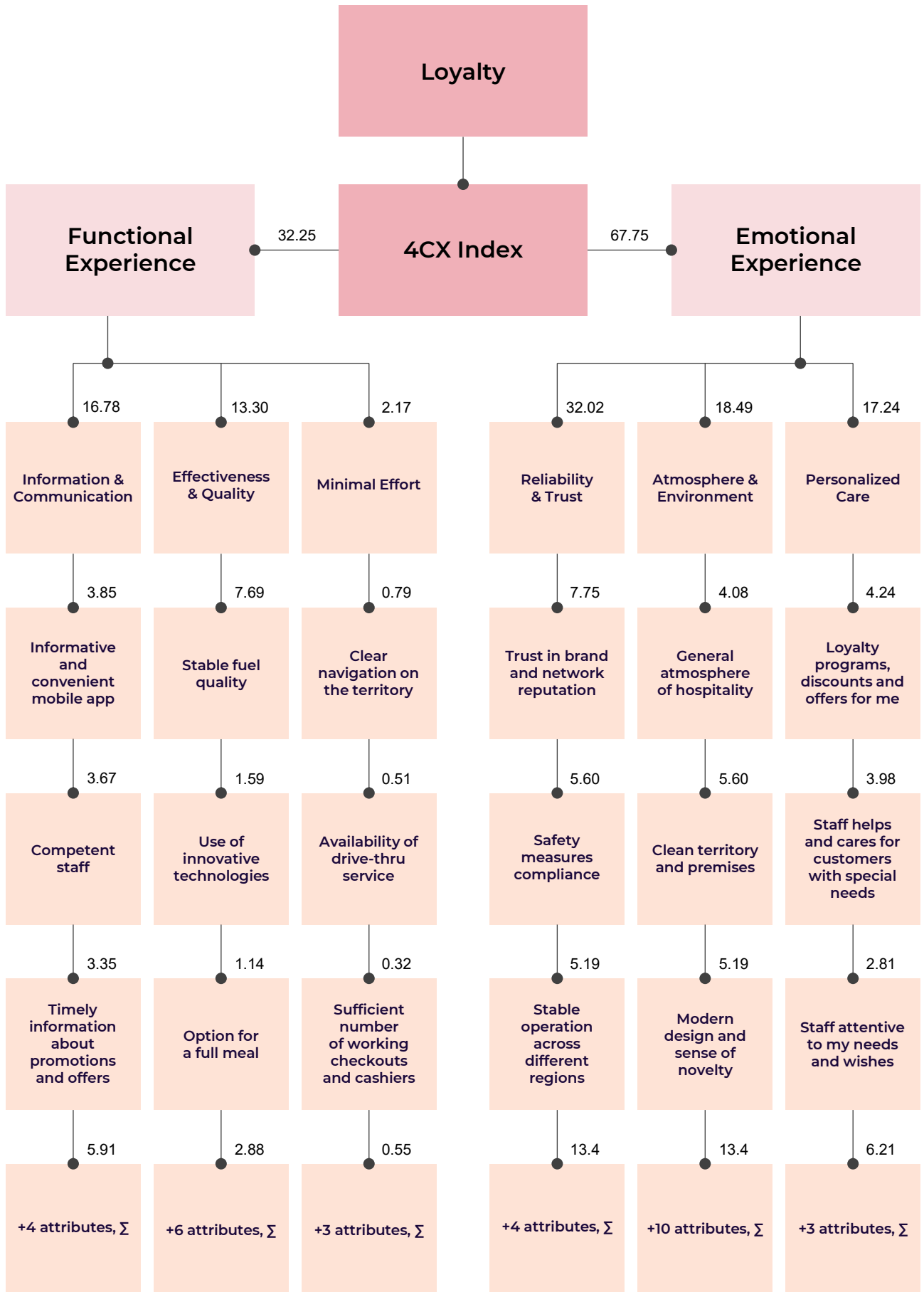
An important methodological challenge in customer experience research is that customers often cannot clearly articulate the true drivers of their own behavior.

Many purchase decisions are influenced by automatic cognitive processes, emotional impressions, and environmental cues that **operate below the level of conscious awareness**. As a result, when asked directly why they choose a particular gas station, customers frequently provide simplified explanations such as price or location.

In reality, their decisions are shaped by a combination of subtle signals accumulated across the customer journey, including perceived reliability, emotional comfort, staff interaction, and brand trust.

Traditional customer surveys that rely exclusively on direct questioning therefore capture only part of the behavioral mechanism. **Statistical modeling of large datasets allows researchers to identify latent drivers of behavior that remain hidden in self-reported explanations.**

The 4CX Model was developed precisely to uncover these hidden experience drivers.



THE 4CX MODEL: A Practical CX Management Model

The research presented in this study ultimately resulted in the development of the 4CX Model, a structured framework designed to explain how customer experience translates into customer loyalty behavior.

Unlike traditional satisfaction measurement approaches that analyze isolated indicators, the 4CX Model examines customer experience as a system of interconnected drivers.

The model identifies six core experience dimensions:

- **Reliability & Trust**
- **Atmosphere & Environment**
- **Personalized Care**
- **Information & Communication**
- **Effectiveness & Quality**
- **Minimal Effort**

These six dimensions combine into two broader experience layers:

Functional Experience, which reflects operational execution and service efficiency.

Emotional Experience, which reflects trust, comfort, and psychological perception of the brand.

Together, these layers form the 4CX Index, a composite experience indicator that demonstrates a correlation of 0.62 with customer loyalty behavior.

For gas retail operators, the implications are clear. First, trust and reliability represent the strongest drivers of loyalty. Consistent fuel quality, safety compliance, and brand credibility are fundamental to long-term customer relationships.

Second, emotional experience plays a larger role than many operators expect. Atmosphere, hospitality, and perceived comfort significantly influence how customers evaluate the overall station experience.

Third, while operational efficiency remains important, elements such as queue management or navigation primarily function as hygiene factors rather than strong loyalty drivers.

Finally, the results demonstrate that customer experience should be managed as a system rather than a set of isolated operational indicators.

When gas station networks consistently deliver reliability, trust, and emotional comfort across the customer journey, routine refueling stops evolve into trusted destinations within everyday mobility.

In a sector where products and prices are often similar across competing networks, the ability to understand and manage the real drivers of customer experience may ultimately determine which brands build lasting loyalty.

A study provided by 4Service Group

www.4service.company



THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

PURPOSE-DRIVEN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

How UPG uses customer feedback to stay relevant and navigate uncertainty



UPG



Founded in 2003 in Ukraine, UPG has grown into a network of more than 500 locations and a brand that positions itself beyond the traditional gas station model. Built as a full-service fuel and rest complex, UPG combines operational efficiency with a clear focus on customer comfort.

Across its network, the company has shaped an offer centered on thoughtfully designed spaces, fast service, strong cleanliness standards, and an inclusive environment. The aim is not only to serve efficiently, but to make each stop feel easier, more comfortable, and more dependable.

UPG has also invested in premium MYTICO coffee machines and restaurant-quality dishes prepared by professional chefs, reflecting a broader ambition to elevate the role of the gas station within the journey itself. In a high-frequency category, that matters. Customers rarely judge the experience by fuel quality alone. Preference is shaped by the full visit: speed, ease, atmosphere, and the confidence that standards will hold across locations.

Guided by values such as responsibility, quality, sustainability, transparency, and customer respect, UPG continues to strengthen its position as a Ukrainian brand trusted by millions.

At the center of that evolution is a clear belief that its people (Teams) are fundamental to the customer relationship and to the trust the brand has built.

OLEKSIY BABICH



Oleksiy Babich is the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) at UPG.

With over 12 years of experience in the marketing industry, he brings extensive expertise in cross-functional marketing strategies, with a core specialization in digital marketing.

He took over UPG's marketing department in the spring of 2025, during the most significant growth period in the company's history. Under his strategic leadership, UPG executed a large-scale expansion of its gas station chain, increasing from 87 locations in July to 529 by December 2025.

Oleksiy Babich, Chief Marketing Officer at UPG, reflects on how customer centricity, data-driven decision-making, and operational discipline come together to build loyalty in a high-frequency sector.

For UPG, customer experience excellence begins when a visit to a gas station becomes more than a functional stop. *“It’s when a visit to a gas station is no longer just a functional refueling stop, but an enjoyable part of the journey, where every process works seamlessly like a Swiss watch.”*

That definition immediately signals a commitment to excellence that goes beyond operational adequacy. It reflects an ambition to transform a routine stop into a positive and memorable experience. *“From the customer’s perspective, it means fast service, high-quality fuel, and a welcoming atmosphere at VIVO Café.”*

Here, the experience is defined through the elements customers feel most directly: speed, quality, and atmosphere. These are practical expectations, but also emotional ones. They shape how a visit is remembered and whether it becomes part of a preferred routine. *“From a business standpoint, it’s about building emotional loyalty driven by consistently high standards across the entire chain.”*

This is a particularly important point. UPG does not position customer experience only as service delivery, but as a business discipline capable of creating emotional loyalty. In a category largely associated with repetitive visits, this perspective is powerful. It shows a clear belief that even highly functional services can create connection when consistency is strong enough to build trust and preference.

“Our goal is for drivers to choose UPG not simply because our stations are conveniently located, but because they seek out the level of service we deliver at every location.”

That aspiration reinforces a central customer experience principle: convenience may drive trial, but consistency is what drives intentional return.

UPG’s investments in recent years show how this philosophy is being translated into practice. *“We have redefined the perception of our gas stations by focusing on developing VIVO Café into a full-fledged dining destination.”* This is a significant positioning move. In many markets, food at gas stations is still viewed as secondary, something quick and purely functional. UPG clearly aims to challenge that perception. *“Campaigns such as ‘Chefs Invite,’ ‘mmm Coffee,’ and ‘UPG Ice Cream’ were designed to demonstrate that the quality of our food matches the quality of our fuel.”*

That statement is particularly strong. It signals an integrated view of experience in which the standards applied to the core product are expected to extend across the broader customer journey. It is also a clear sign of innovation: UPG is not treating food and hospitality as peripheral services, but as part of the brand promise itself.

Beyond the offer, the operational architecture behind the experience is also evolving. *“We have introduced a comprehensive operational control system and established real-time feedback collection across all customer touchpoints – from restroom cleanliness to fuel pump performance.”*



“We look at our stations through the eyes of our guests”

This shows that the organization is listening closely to customers and monitoring the details that often shape real satisfaction. It also reflects a disciplined approach to customer centricity: not only defining a strong experience but building the control mechanisms needed to sustain it.

“We have also updated our mobile app and website, and introduced a convenient QR menu to make interactions with our chain as fast, intuitive, and seamless as possible for drivers.” This is where the Seamless Principle becomes especially visible. In an environment that is already time-sensitive and demanding for customers, effort should be minimized. UPG appears to understand that clearly. Ease, clarity, and speed are not extras in this sector; they are part of the value delivered.

Customer research plays a central role in how UPG listens and responds. *“We place strong emphasis on customer research, as it serves as our compass.”* That is one of the most telling statements in the interview. Research is not described as a formality or a reporting exercise. It is described as direction.

That language reflects a clear commitment to data-driven decisions. *“We look at our stations through the eyes of our guests, using NPS scores, app and map reviews, as well as regular mystery shopper visits.”* The strength of this approach lies in the combination of methodologies. Different tools reveal different dimensions of the customer experience. Together, they create a fuller, more reliable picture of performance.

“Today, most feedback is collected online. This saves time and allows us to respond to customer needs in real time.” This matters because the value of insight often depends on how quickly it can be captured and acted upon. In this case, research is not static. It is supporting responsiveness.





“The results have been very encouraging – customer satisfaction among new customers currently stands at 94%, and we are committed to maintaining this high standard.” The number is important, but even more important is the mindset behind it. UPG is not presenting a positive result as an endpoint. It is presenting it as a standard to protect.

That same operational discipline is visible in the way insight is translated into action. “Data don’t just sit in reports – they are segmented by categories, from refueling speed to the taste quality of our dishes.” This is a crucial statement for any executive audience. It makes clear that research at UPG is designed to be usable. Data is organized in a way that supports decisions rather than passive observation.

“Almost every piece of driver feedback is turned into updates to our operational checklists or becomes part of staff training programs, all aimed at continuously improving our service level.”

This is where the strategy becomes especially credible. Customer research is not being conducted to feed dashboards. There is a visible system to distribute findings across the organization and activate the right stakeholders. Operations and training both become vehicles for improvement, which is exactly what underpins a strong continuous improvement program.

When discussing KPIs, Mr. Babich highlights an important constant. *“Our key KPI has remained unchanged for years – customer satisfaction.”* That continuity says a great deal. While many organizations regularly shift focus from one management theme to another, UPG has consistently kept customer satisfaction at the center of its decision model. That signals real customer centricity.

“We have progressed from basic metrics to a comprehensive monitoring system.” This distinction is important. The KPI has remained stable, but the sophistication of the measurement system has evolved. That is often a sign of maturity: the strategic priority remains constant while the ability to monitor and manage it becomes stronger.

“Supervisors regularly inspect each gas station to ensure it meets the highest expectations of our visitors.” This reinforces the operational seriousness behind the KPI. Customer satisfaction is not being left to chance or assumed from high-level indicators alone.

“

“The most important indicator for us is maintaining a consistently high level of service across all stations, whether it is a large-scale complex or just a small gas station.”

This is a strong expression of scalable excellence.

Consistency across the network is what transforms customer centricity into business impact. It protects trust, reinforces brand reliability, and increases the likelihood that customers return by preference, not only by convenience.

The interview gains additional weight when addressing the reality of operating during prolonged war in Ukraine. *“Under any circumstances, customer experience remains a top priority for UPC.”* That statement is relevant because it shows continuity of intent. Customers were not elevated to the agenda only because of crisis. They were already there and they are still there.

“During wartime, it also becomes a question of reliability and safety for our clients.” This is where the shift becomes clear. What changed was not the importance of the customer, but the nature of customer priorities. Reliability and safety became central.





"We understand that our gas stations have effectively become pillars of resilience, providing electricity, light, and hot meals." This reflects a significant expansion of business purpose. UPG recognized that its role in customers' lives had changed and responded accordingly. The traditional proposition of fuel and convenience had to evolve into something broader and more meaningful in the context people were living through.



"This sense of responsibility drives us to maintain a high standard of service."

This response adds strategic depth to the conversation. It shows that customer centricity requires organizations to continually reassess what customers need most and adapt the experience around those realities.

Finally, Mr. Babich offers direct advice to leaders seeking to build more customer-centric organizations. *"Don't treat research as just another task to tick off, or it will become 'just another report.'"* This is a strong leadership reminder. Research only becomes strategic when it is treated as a driver of decisions, not an output itself.

"Focus on discovering insights that can serve as the foundation for real improvements in service quality." That sentence captures the shift from measurement to management. Insight should be useful, actionable, and tied to better execution.

"In my opinion, the return on research is best measured through LTV (Lifetime Value)." This is one of the strongest executive messages in the interview. It directly links research with business value, moving the conversation beyond information gathering and into commercial relevance.

“When a customer keeps coming back, even when alternatives are nearby, that is the clearest proof that your strategy and investment in research are working.” This closes the argument well. At the leadership level, research is strategic because it helps organizations understand what matters, improve what matters, and earn repeat choice over time. Especially in periods of uncertainty, quantitative metrics remain essential to guide decisions and validate whether customer-centric investments are truly strengthening long-term value.

Across this conversation, UPG presents a model of customer centricity grounded in consistency, insight, operational discipline, and adaptability. The underlying message is clear: customer experience is not treated as a layer around the business, but as a strategic system that shapes loyalty, relevance, and performance.



The CX Channel extends our appreciation to 4Service Group for facilitating this interview with UPG.



www.upg.ua



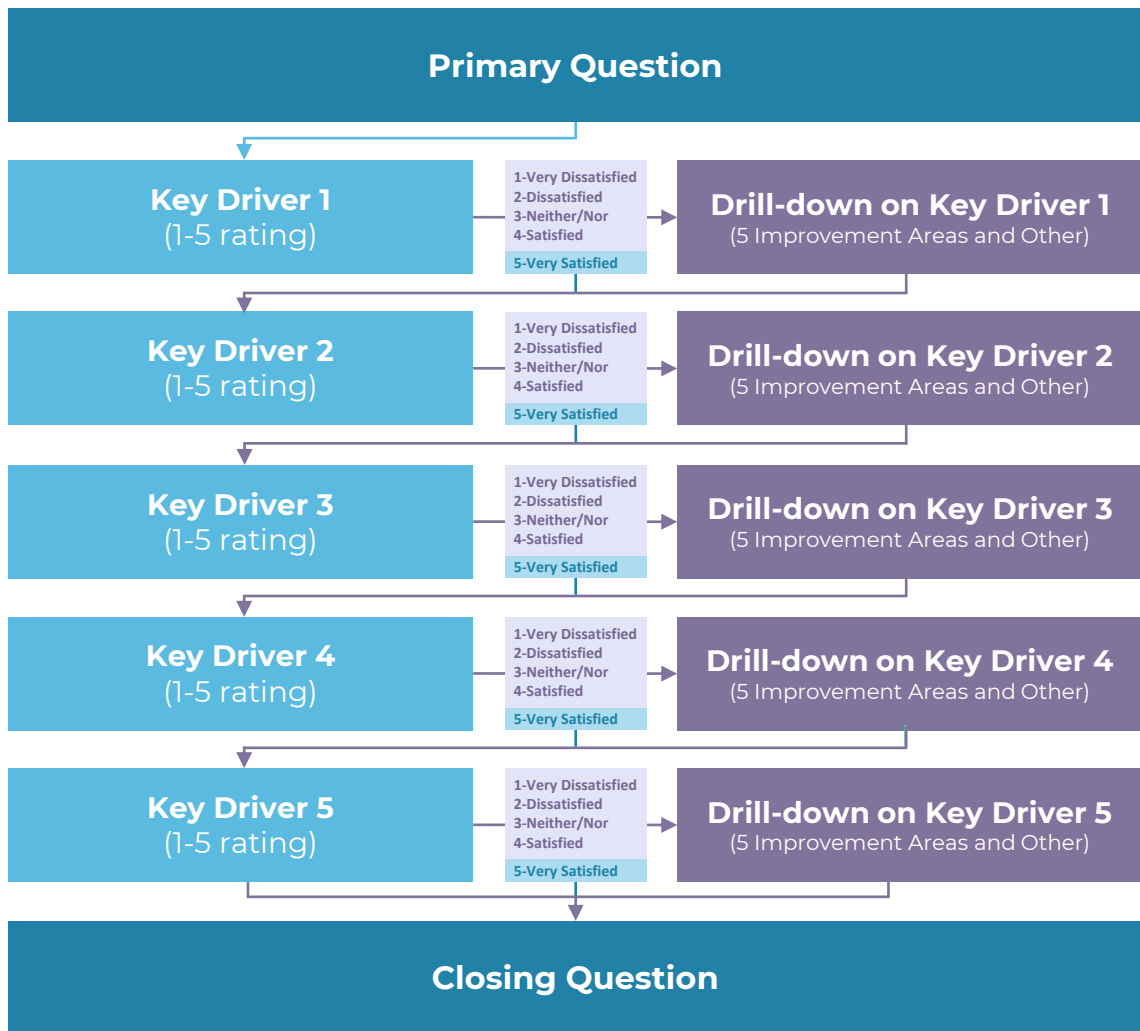
Creating a Starter VoC Survey

Customer perception in the gas station sector is shaped by fast, routine interactions where expectations for speed and reliability are high. Because visits are frequent and comparisons are immediate, even small inconsistencies can quickly affect trust. A structured Voice of the Customer program, grounded in the journey steps generating the most negative feedback, provides clear visibility into where friction is strongest and improvement is most urgent.

This section explores how a focused VoC approach helps operators prioritize the areas with the highest dissatisfaction, validate root causes, and track corrective action over time. By concentrating on the touchpoints that drive the most critical sentiment, organizations can align operational efforts with real customer pain points and create measurable gains in consistency, confidence, and long-term loyalty.

CREATING A STARTER VOC SURVEY

A starter VoC survey can be created by harnessing insights from customer sentiments, thoughts, and feelings expressed in their online reviews and **focusing on the topics customers discuss most frequently.**



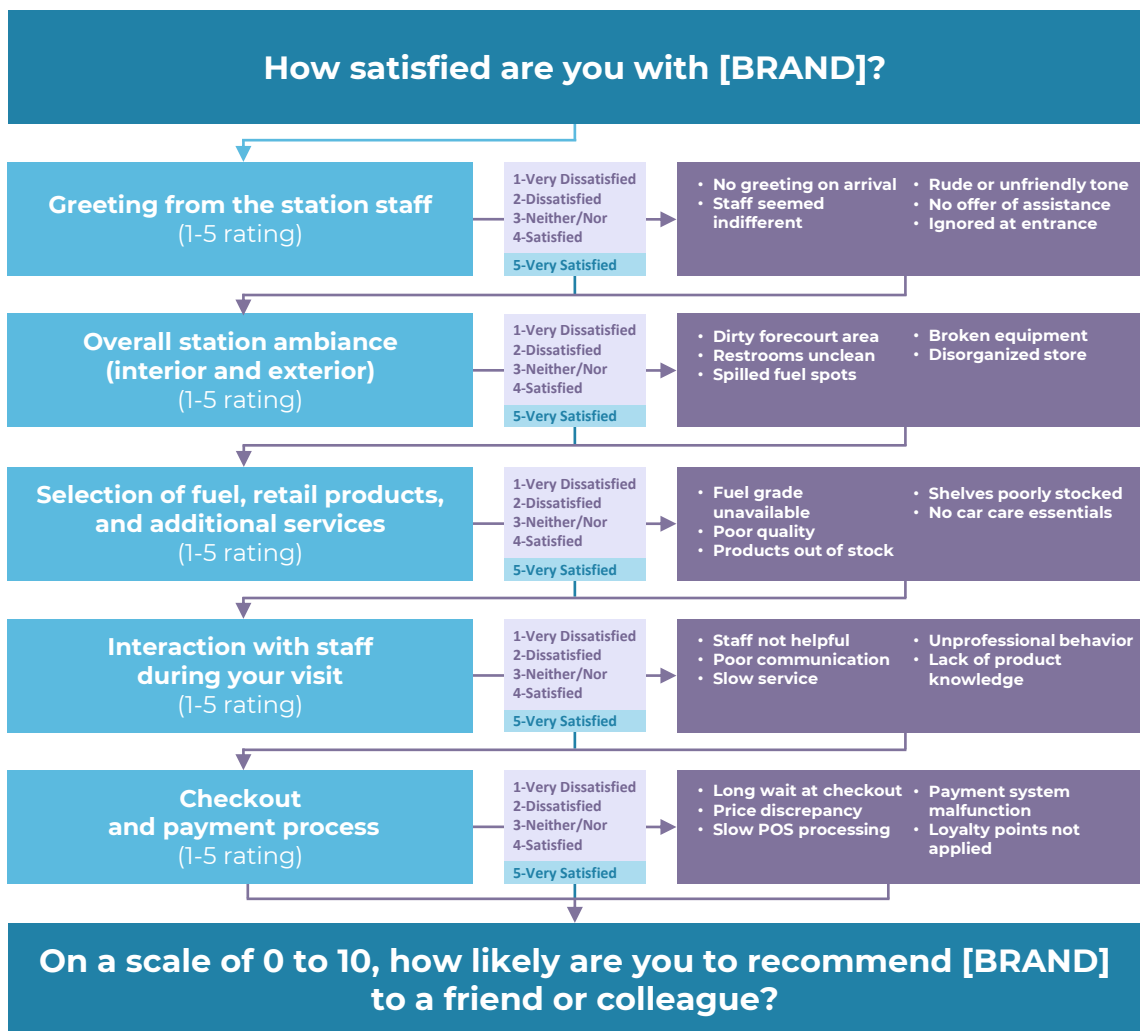
Primary Question: The starting point of the survey, setting the general direction and context. It gathers a quick overall snapshot on the customer's opinion of the brand, company, or product.

Closing Question: The final question posed to the respondent. This can capture valuable insights that might not otherwise fit the general format/structure of the survey.

KEY DRIVER AND DRILL-DOWN QUESTIONS

Primary Question: Rate “How satisfied are you with [BRAND]” on a scale from 1 ('Very Dissatisfied') to 5 ('Very Satisfied')

Closing Question: Evaluate customer retention and advocacy potential, gaining insights into the customer experience.

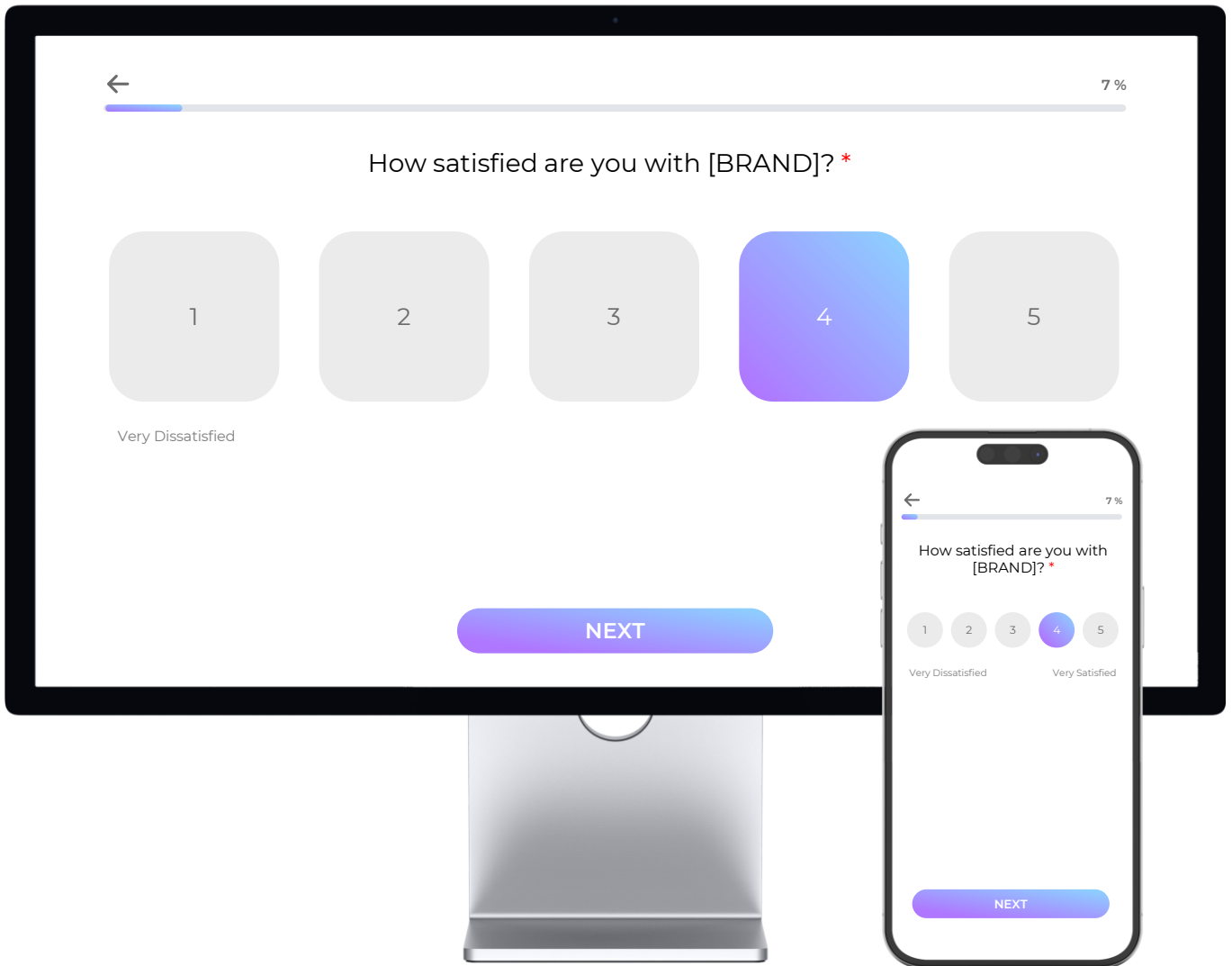


Key Driver Question: Used to assess user satisfaction on top 5 critical industry topics using a 1-5 scale.

Drill-Down Questions: Respondents not fully satisfied identify their top dissatisfaction factors.

A STARTER VOC SURVEY FOR GAS STATIONS

Creating a starter Voice of the Customer (VoC) survey based on insights from online customer reviews ensures that the survey is relevant and focused on actual customer experiences. This approach leads to higher engagement and response rates, as it addresses the issues and trends that matter most to customers. Such a survey provides valuable data for prioritizing business strategies and improving customer satisfaction.



← 15 %

How satisfied were you with the GREETING AND INITIAL WELCOME FROM THE STATION STAFF?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 23 %

What part of the "GREETING AND INITIAL WELCOME FROM THE STATION STAFF" fell short?*

No greeting on arrival

Staff seemed indifferent

Rude or unfriendly tone

No offer of assistance

Ignored at entrance

Other

NEXT

← 30 %

How satisfied were you with the OVERALL STATION AMBIANCE (INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR)?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 38 %

What part of "OVERALL STATION AMBIANCE (INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR)" fell short?*

Dirty forecourt area

Restrooms unclean

Spilled fuel spots

Broken equipment

Disorganized store

Other

NEXT

← 46 %

How satisfied were you with the SELECTION OF FUEL, RETAIL PRODUCTS, AND ADDITIONAL SERVICES?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 53 %

What part of "SELECTION OF FUEL, RETAIL PRODUCTS, AND ADDITIONAL SERVICES" fell short?*

Fuel grade unavailable

Poor quality

Products out of stock

Shelves poorly stocked

No car care essentials

Other

NEXT

← 61 %

How satisfied were you with your INTERACTION WITH STAFF DURING YOUR VISIT?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 69 %

What part of the "INTERACTION WITH STAFF DURING YOUR VISIT" fell short?*

Staff not helpful

Poor communication

Slow service

Unprofessional behavior

Lack of product knowledge

Other

NEXT

← 76 %

How satisfied were you with the CHECKOUT AND PAYMENT PROCESS?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 84 %

What part of "CHECKOUT AND PAYMENT PROCESS" fell short?*

Long wait at checkout

Price discrepancy

Slow POS processing

Payment system malfunction

Loyalty points not applied

Other

NEXT

← 92 %

On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend [BRAND] to a friend or colleague?*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not likely at all Extremely likely

NEXT

VoC SURVEY NEXT STEPS

In this 'starter' VoC survey, we selected the top five key driver questions based on what customers talk about and frequently mention in negative aspects in their online reviews. The drill-down questions were chosen following the same principle.

The VoC Survey Process

	Awareness	Consideration	Conversion	Retention	Advocacy
People	0.02%	13.16%	20.68%	0.44%	1.09%
Product	1.06%	2.81%	15.65%	0.17%	0.48%
Place	2.26%	1.08%	15.62%	0.08%	0.39%
Process	0.06%	0.36%	9.85%	1.01%	0.18%
Price	2.19%	1.81%	4.93%	0.42%	0.28%
Promotion	0.23%	0.26%	0.85%	0.83%	0.97%
Physical Evidence	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Step 1: Data Analysis

We begin by analyzing online reviews and ratings to create a customer response score matrix. The Marketing Mix-Funnel matrix highlights how different Marketing Mix Elements perform across various Customer Journey Stages.

Step 2: Identify Critical Areas

From the Marketing-Mix Funnel, we identify the top five areas showing the most critical feedback, based on their online reviews and ratings scores.

Step 3: Key Drivers

These areas are selected for deeper examination in the VoC survey. They are converted to questions, following the pattern "How satisfied were you with...", used to assess user satisfaction using a 1-5 scale.

Step 4: Key Driver Details

For each key driver, additional questions are designed and visualized if the driver is scored with a 4 or lower. This direct questioning helps to drill down into the exact reasons behind the customer negative experiences.

Step 5: Data Collection

The VoC survey is distributed, and data is collected.

Step 6: Actionable Insights

The collected data reveals specific aspects that negatively affect the overall customer perception of the brand. With this detailed insight, the company can directly target improvements in the critical areas to enhance the customer experience and improve brand reputation.

NOTE: It is up to the CX professional to selectively fine-tune and adjust the key drivers and appropriate drill-down questions, considering the specific needs and objectives of the business.

GREETINGS FROM THE STATION STAFF

The initial greeting sets the tone for the entire visit. A simple acknowledgment, eye contact, or friendly attitude signals attentiveness and readiness to assist. This brief moment helps customers feel noticed and welcomed. When it is missed or feels indifferent, the experience can start on an impersonal note, affecting overall perception.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **GREETINGS AND INITIAL WELCOME FROM THE STATION STAFF** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- No greeting on arrival
- Staff seemed indifferent
- Rude or unfriendly tone
- No offer of assistance
- Ignored at entrance

Additional Key Driver Details

- No eye contact
- Staff distracted
- No acknowledgment
- Rushed attitude
- Unclear staff presence
- No visible staff
- No proactive help
- Delayed response
- No initiation
- Cold greeting

OVERALL STATION AMBIANCE (INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR)

The station environment shapes first impressions and overall comfort throughout the visit. Cleanliness, lighting, organization, and safety cues influence how customers perceive quality and trustworthiness. A well-maintained space encourages confidence and ease, while neglected or poorly kept surroundings quickly reduce trust and satisfaction.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **OVERALL STATION AMBIANCE (INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR)** key driver may fall short.

Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Dirty forecourt area
- Restrooms unclean
- Spilled fuel spots
- Broken equipment
- Disorganized store

Additional Key Driver Details

- Poor lighting
- Litter present
- Unpleasant odors
- Cluttered layout
- Damaged signage
- Poor parking condition
- Slippery surfaces
- Visible graffiti
- Full waste bins
- Unclear directions



SELECTION OF FUEL, RETAIL PRODUCTS, AND ADDITIONAL SERVICES

The availability and variety of products and services determine whether the station meets immediate needs. Clear options, stocked shelves, and accessible services create convenience and efficiency during the visit. When key items are missing or choices are limited, the experience feels incomplete and may lead customers to consider alternatives next time.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **SELECTION OF FUEL, RETAIL PRODUCTS, AND ADDITIONAL SERVICES** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Fuel grade unavailable
- Poor quality
- Products out of stock
- Shelves poorly stocked
- No car care essentials

Additional Key Driver Details

- Limited fuel options
- Incorrect pricing labels
- Expired products
- No fresh food
- Limited beverages
- Poor product display
- Products out of stock
- Missing car essentials
- No windshield cleaning tools
- No air pumps

INTERACTION WITH STAFF DURING YOUR VISIT

Staff interactions play a key role in reinforcing trust and support across the visit. Helpful, responsive, and engaged employees can turn routine moments into positive and memorable experiences. When interactions feel rushed, unclear, or unhelpful, customers may feel overlooked and less confident in the overall service quality.

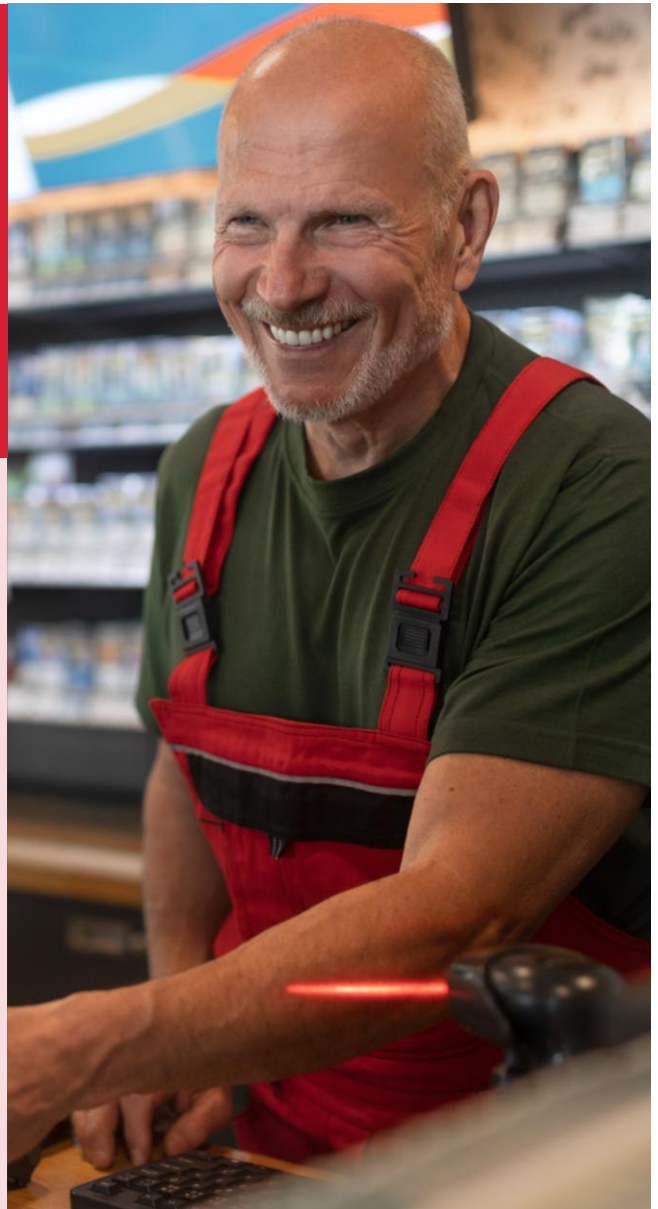
The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **INTERACTION WITH STAFF DURING YOUR VISIT** key driver may fall short.

Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Staff not helpful
- Poor communication
- Slow service
- Unprofessional behavior
- Lack of product knowledge

Additional Key Driver Details

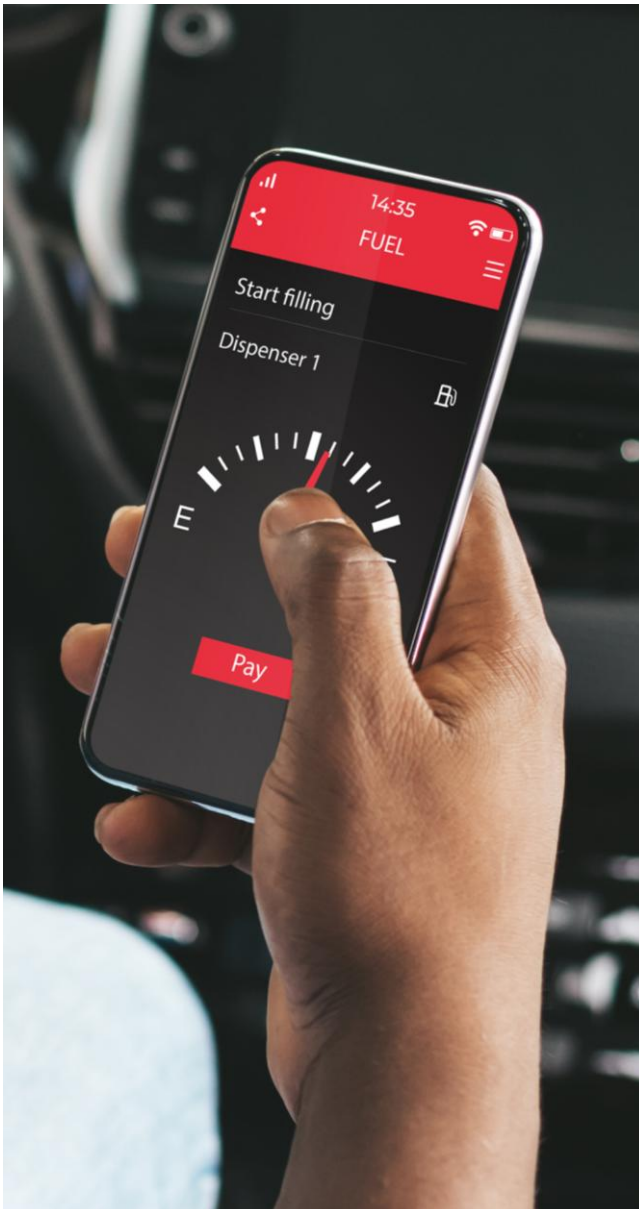
- Ignored at pump
- Unclear guidance
- No assistance offered
- Impatient tone
- Conflicting info
- Absent on forecourt
- Avoided interaction
- No support in store
- Unfriendly attitude
- Issue not resolved



CHECKOUT AND PAYMENT PROCESS

The payment stage defines the final impression of the visit. Smooth, transparent, and quick transactions create a sense of reliability and ease at the end of the journey. Delays, errors, or unclear pricing can quickly undermine the entire experience, leaving customers frustrated and less likely to return.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **CHECKOUT AND PAYMENT PROCESS** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Long wait at checkout
- Price discrepancy
- Slow POS processing
- Payment system malfunction
- Loyalty points not applied

Additional Key Driver Details

- No cashier available
- Unclear self-payment steps
- Limited payment methods
- No receipt given
- Incorrect charge
- Incorrect item(s) charged
- Unclear loyalty program terms
- Self-service not working
- Unexpected charges
- Poor queue management

BEYOND THE STARTER TWO MORE KEY DRIVERS

The gas station VoC survey extends beyond the visit itself, focusing on two often overlooked drivers: how customers understand what a station offers before arrival, and how the experience continues afterward. These moments shape both the decision to stop and the likelihood of returning.

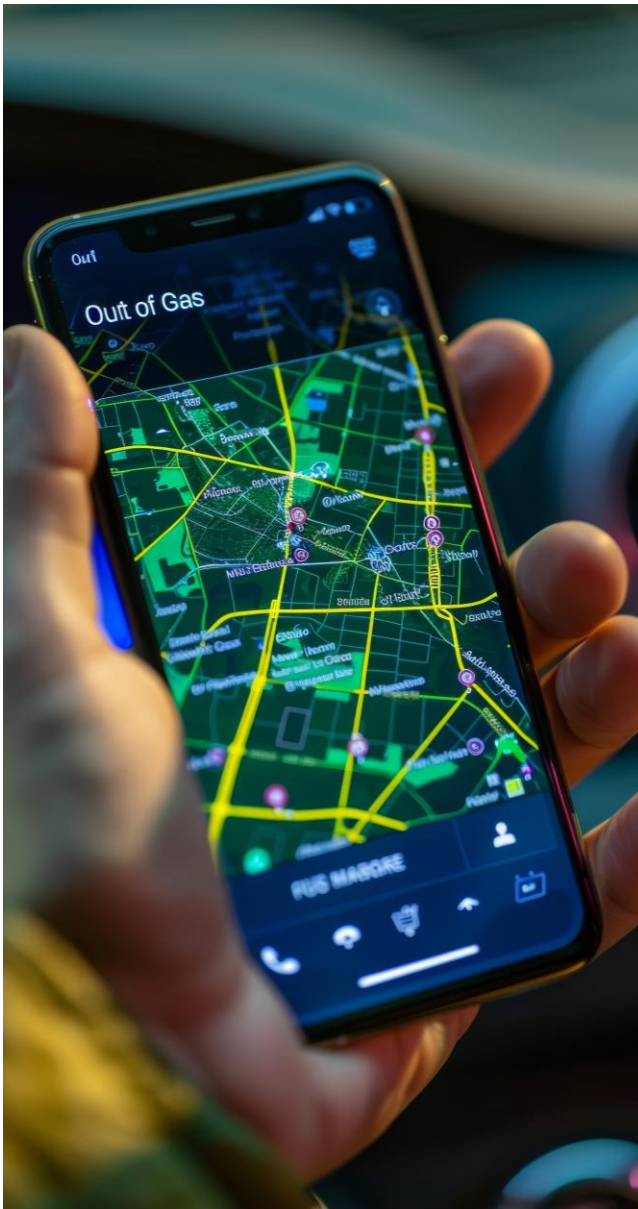
Before arrival, clear and accessible information about fuel types, pricing, and available services supports quick and confident decisions. In a fast-paced, routine-driven context, missing or unclear details can create hesitation and redirect customers to alternative places.

After the visit, communication reinforces whether the experience is remembered and repeated. Relevant offers, loyalty updates, and timely messages keep the interaction active and meaningful. When customers remain informed and recognized, routine visits are more likely to turn into consistent preference and ongoing engagement.

RESEARCHING PRODUCT AND SERVICE RANGE

Before arriving, available information influences station selection and sets expectations. Clear details about fuel types, pricing, and services support confident decisions. When information is limited, outdated, or unclear, uncertainty begins before the visit even starts.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **RESEARCHING PRODUCT AND SERVICE RANGE** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- No information online
- Outdated information
- Missing service details
- Unclear fuel options
- Inaccurate pricing info

Additional Key Driver Details

- No website available
- Hard to find location in navigation
- Incomplete service list
- Confusing information
- No opening hours listed
- No additional service info
- Missing fuel prices
- No photos of station
- Information hard to find
- Mismatch with reality

FOLLOW-UP AND COMMUNICATION AFTER THE VISIT

After the visit, communication plays a key role in shaping the final perception of the experience. Clear receipts, relevant follow-up, and accessible support channels reinforce trust and reliability. When communication is missing, delayed, or unhelpful, it creates uncertainty and weakens the likelihood of return.

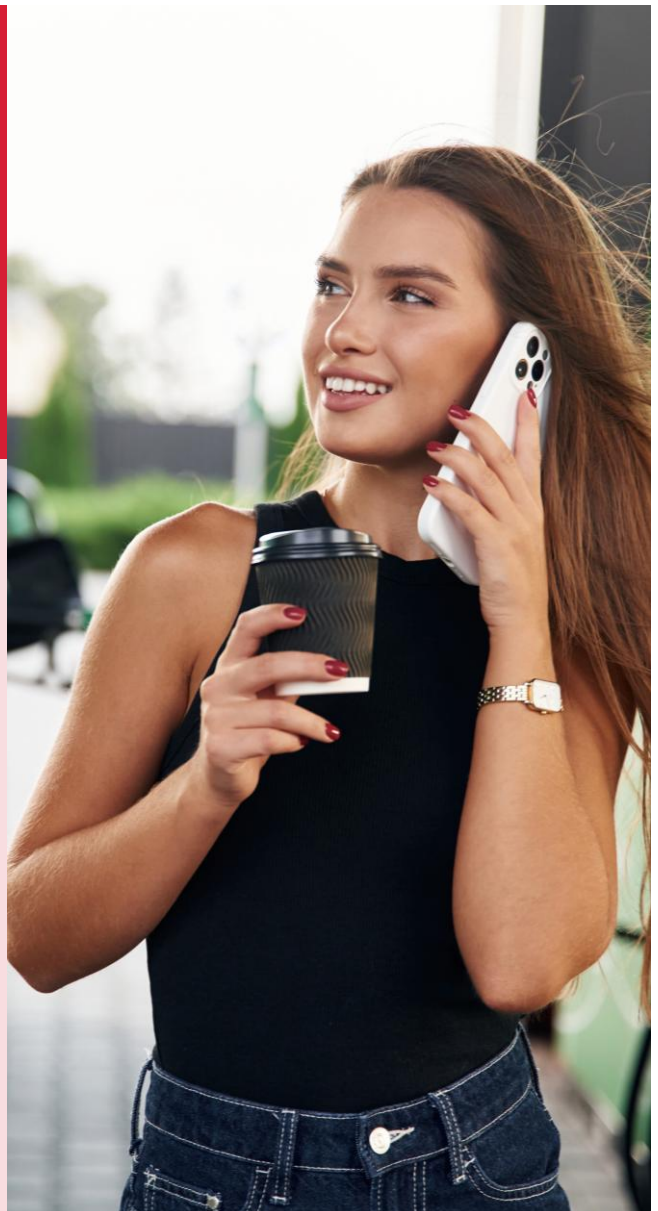
The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer insight into areas where the **FOLLOW-UP AND COMMUNICATION AFTER THE VISIT** key driver may fall short.

Top 5 Key Driver Details

- No communication after visit
- Unclear support contact
- No follow-up provided
- No loyalty offers received
- Irrelevant communication

Additional Key Driver Details

- No special promotions shared
- Issue not resolved
- No personalized offers
- No feedback requested after the visit
- No useful information communicated
- No updates on services
- No additional services suggested
- No follow-up assistance offered
- Communication not relevant
- Too frequent messages



PRINCIPLES OF CX: PURPOSE

Why companies matter beyond what they sell



Purpose influences how a company is understood by customers, how it is represented by employees, and how it is judged by society.

Purpose is often reduced to a brand statement, a line on a website, or a message reserved for corporate communications. In customer experience, it has greater operational significance. It influences how a company is understood by customers, how it is represented by employees, and how it is judged by society.

At its simplest, purpose answers a strategic question: Why does this company deserve relevance in people's lives beyond the product or service it sells?

For customers, the answer carries emotional weight. People may choose a company for convenience, price, or access, but stronger attachment usually forms when they sense that the organization stands for something beyond the transaction itself. A business with a clear sense of purpose often feels more grounded, more serious, and more worthy of trust. The relationship is no longer built only on utility. It gains a deeper basis.

From a CX perspective, this matters because experience is never judged only at the level of the touchpoint. Customers interpret the broader relationship. They notice not only whether an interaction was smooth, but also whether the company seems to act with intention, responsibility, and awareness of its role. Purpose shapes that interpretation. It gives the experience context.

In many cases, purpose becomes visible in more practical ways: the sense that a company understands its place, recognizes its impact, and acts with a wider sense of responsibility. Customers respond to that. They may not always describe it explicitly, but they feel the difference between a business that is merely efficient and one that is genuinely intentional.

The same principle applies internally. Employees rarely feel pride because a process is efficient or a target has been met. Pride grows when work feels connected to something worthwhile. Purpose gives effort direction. It helps people understand not only what they are doing, but why it has value.



"Purpose does not replace management discipline or service standards. It strengthens the human commitment behind them, which is often where customer experience succeeds or fails."

That connection can influence service quality in very concrete ways. Employees who believe in the role their company plays are more likely to serve with care, remain engaged under pressure, and take ownership in moments that test the relationship. Purpose does not replace management discipline or service standards. It strengthens the human commitment behind them, which is often where customer experience succeeds or fails.

It also carries real weight in employer branding. Companies with a strong sense of purpose are more attractive to talent because they offer something beyond compensation or job title. They offer significance. In competitive labor markets, that has practical consequences. People increasingly want to work for organizations they can respect, defend, and feel proud to represent. Purpose becomes part of reputation, and reputation shapes who wants to join, stay, and advocate for the brand.

This is especially true for Gen Z, both as customers and as employees. Younger generations tend to be more alert to alignment between what a company says and what it actually does. As customers, they are often more willing to form stronger emotional

preferences around brands that reflect values they see as socially relevant. As employees, they are more likely to seek workplaces where purpose is credible and connected to everyday decisions. They are not only evaluating jobs or products. They are also evaluating integrity, contribution, and coherence.

The implications extend well beyond branding. Purpose strengthens brand equity because it adds recognition and depth. It brings coherence to what the organization promises, delivers, and how it is remembered. When that coherence is real, word-of-mouth becomes more powerful. People do not only recommend the offer – they speak positively about the company itself, and that kind of advocacy carries unusual force because it is rooted in conviction rather than mere satisfaction.

Seen through a CX lens, purpose belongs to the broader idea of customer centricity. CX is not limited to touchpoints, journeys, or service interactions. It also includes the wider perception of how a company behaves, what it prioritizes, and whether it contributes something of value beyond commercial exchange. Customers increasingly judge companies in that broader context.

For that reason, purpose cannot sit outside CX strategy as a reputational theme. It needs to be visible – in service priorities, employee enablement, decision-making, and the way an organization responds when expectations shift. If purpose is real, customers should be able to sense it in the experience. Employees should be able to express it through their actions. Society should be able to recognize it in the company's conduct.

This month's Business Perspective offers a useful illustration through the example of UPG. In the interview, purpose is not presented as an abstract statement. It becomes visible when the company recognizes that its role in customers' lives had expanded beyond fuel and convenience, particularly under the pressures of prolonged war in Ukraine. In that reality, its stations also became places associated with electricity, light, hot meals, and continuity. The lesson extends far beyond the sector itself. Purpose becomes real when a company recognizes that people need more from it and responds with a broader sense of responsibility.

No company needs to solve every social problem in order to have purpose. But every company should be able to answer a harder question than what it sells: what good does its presence create for the people it touches?

That is why purpose deserves a place among the core principles of customer experience. It deepens emotional connection with customers. It strengthens commitment and pride among employees. It supports employer branding, enriches brand equity, and encourages the kind of word-of-mouth that cannot be manufactured through communication alone.

At the leadership level, purpose is not an accessory to customer experience. It shapes the meaning of the relationship, the quality of internal commitment, and the relevance a company earns in the market. In a business environment where customers, employees, and communities are paying closer attention to how organizations behave, that is no longer peripheral. It is part of the CX agenda itself.



EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

A recurring feature exploring what customer experience excellence looks like in everyday businesses.

WHEN SERVICE RECOVERY BECOMES THE PROOF OF EXCELLENCE

In customer experience, we often focus on what is missing. We analyze friction points, weak links, broken moments, and unmet expectations. That work matters because it shows organizations where trust erodes, where journeys lose momentum, and where loyalty is put at risk.

But there is another question senior leaders ask, and rightly so: **What should we actually be aiming for? What does excellence look like in practice?**

That is the purpose of this new recurring feature. Each month, **Excellence in Practice** moves away from theory and looks at something more concrete: real examples of what customer experience excellence looks like in everyday life.

This month the story comes from a longtime **Nespresso** customer.

THE STORY

She has been a customer for 20 years. She loves the brand. Their coffee feels premium and, to her, tastes like sunshine. She does not mind paying almost double per capsule compared with some competing offers. Over the years, Nespresso has built a customer experience that feels carefully designed from A to Z: innovative products, a wide range of flavors, limited editions and collectibles, a store experience that is difficult to duplicate, and a transparent approach to responsible sourcing and recycling. New faces come and go, but George Clooney is still there as ambassador and, just like this long relationship with Nespresso, he is aging well.

All of this creates familiarity, pleasure, and preference. It builds a relationship that goes well beyond the product itself. But that is not where she recognizes the brand's excellence most clearly. She recognizes it when something fails.

Recently, she received a registered letter from a debt collection company regarding an invoice she knew had already been paid long ago. Somehow, it had been sent externally for collection by mistake.

For many customers, that kind of incident would trigger immediate stress. It creates inconvenience, confusion, and the unpleasant feeling of having to prove something that should never have become a problem in the first place.

And yet her reaction was surprisingly calm. She did not call the debt collection company. She did not panic. She did not begin preparing to defend her case. Because she is a Nespresso customer, and in her mind, that meant something very simple: this was not her problem to solve. It was theirs.

That response says a great deal about the strength of a relationship built over time. The mistake still matters, of course. But it does not immediately destroy confidence. Instead, the customer waits to see whether the company behaves in a way that confirms the trust it has spent years earning.

Nespresso gave her several channels to choose from: app, email, and phone. She chose the phone and waited only a few seconds.

From the very beginning of the conversation, what stood out was ownership. While the employee was still checking the case online, she spoke as though the issue already belonged to the company. There was no distancing, no defensiveness, and no subtle attempt to return the burden to the customer.

After confirming that there were no pending invoices, the employee said clearly that Nespresso would take care of the matter and that nothing further would be required from the customer. She then sent an email confirming exactly that.

This is where many organizations fail. Even when the issue is acknowledged, the customer is still left to manage the consequences: contact the other company, send proof of payment, follow up personally, keep checking whether the issue has been closed. The error is recognized, but the labor remains with the customer.

Here, the opposite happened. Nespresso absorbed the complexity.

That is one of the clearest signs of service excellence. In moments of failure, the question is not only whether the company apologizes. It is whether it protects the customer from the operational mess created by its own mistake.

The human quality of the interaction also played an important role. The employee apologized sincerely. She used the customer's name several times during the call. She acknowledged that this had been an error and an inconvenience. Her tone was calm, respectful, and accountable.

And throughout the conversation, the customer remained calm as well.

Not because the incident was acceptable. It was not. Mistakes should not happen. But mistakes do happen, even in strong systems. What defines the experience is whether the response protects the relationship rather than weakening it further.

A few days later, Nespresso made contact again to confirm that the issue had been fully resolved with the debt collection company. A manager apologized once more, again in a sincere tone. Once again, the company gave a clear sense that it had taken full responsibility. That final step completed the recovery.

Too often issue resolution breaks down, not in the first contact, but in closure. Customers are left uncertain, forced to monitor the situation themselves, or wondering whether the problem might return later. Follow-up is not a courtesy. It is part of restoring confidence.

In the work we do at Synergistic CX, issue resolution repeatedly stands out as one of the most fragile moments in the customer journey. It reveals whether customer centricity remains real when the script breaks, when the process fails, and when the customer is exposed to friction they did not create.

In this case, it revealed something else. It showed what excellence looks like.

Not perfection. Not the absence of error. But something more valuable: a brand that had built enough credibility over time, and enough service maturity and processes in practice, to respond to failure with ownership, low effort, sincere apology, and proper closure.

For leaders, that is the lesson worth keeping: Customer experience excellence is not proven only in the moments carefully designed to impress. It is proven in the moments that could easily damage the relationship, yet do not, because the company knows how to respond.

That was a masterclass in customer experience excellence.

LESSONS IN CX EXCELLENCE FROM NESPRESSO



Ownership

The issue was treated as the company's responsibility from the start.

Low Customer Effort

The customer was not asked to manage the problem.

Clarity

The response was direct: there were no pending invoices, it was a mistake.

Reassurance

A written confirmation reduced uncertainty and reinforced confidence after the call.

Human Acknowledgement

The apology was sincere, specific, and clearly recognized the inconvenience caused.

Respectful Communication

The tone remained calm, accountable, and personal throughout the interaction.

Closed-Loop Resolution

The company followed up to confirm that the issue had been fully resolved.

Trust Protection

The recovery process was managed in a way that preserved the relationship.



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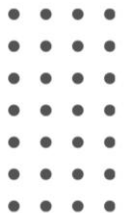
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HOW **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE** BUILDS CONFERENCE LOYALTY

LESSONS FROM THE **MSPA EUROPE/AFRICA** CONFERENCE

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In this section, we usually report on events and conferences that matter to CX professionals. This month, however, we chose a different angle. Rather than simply covering an event, we wanted to examine what it takes to organize one using the same principles that shape strong customer experience.

Few examples illustrate that better than the annual MSPA Europe / Africa Conference.

This year, MSPA EA celebrates 25 years. Over that time, its annual conference has become a fixed point in the industry calendar, attracting more than 200 delegates from around 50 different countries and taking place each year in a different country across the region.

NIKKY ALKEMADE

At the center of that journey is **Nikky Alkemade**, Executive Director of MSPA EA for 22 years and Founder of **Datalinx**, an event management company based in The Hague, Netherlands.

Presidents and Board members naturally come and go. In the case of MSPA EA, Nikky has long been the constant. She has helped shape not only the logistics, but also the sense of belonging that people associate with it.

Her experience goes well beyond one annual event. As a professional event organizer, Nikky manages everything from **Board meetings with just a few participants to conferences of 3,000 delegates**. That range gives her a strong understanding of what makes an event work, both in practical terms and from the participant's point of view.

What Nikky has done for MSPA EA goes well beyond organizing a conference. She has helped transform it into a gathering that many in the industry prioritize every May. Her events are operationally strong, but just as important is the environment she has built around them: one of familiarity, trust, and community.

One further point matters. Nikky does not carry the conference alone. She engages the Board of Directors closely, and during the conference days that shared commitment becomes visible. Board members are not simply present as management figures; they act as hosts, and delegates are received as guests. The Governor is also actively involved in shaping the conference program and speaker curation, reinforcing the overall quality of the event. That contributes directly to the atmosphere people remember.

In the case of MSPA EA, the conference reflects its own motto clearly: **Connect, Learn, and Share**.

When asked to choose one reason why delegates are so loyal to the conference, her answer came without hesitation: **"Because if they do not come, they know they will be missed."** Loyalty is rarely built by logistics alone. People return because of the way an experience makes them feel.



EVENT EXCELLENCE STARTS LONG BEFORE THE EVENT BEGINS

Nikky's definition of event excellence starts long before the first delegate arrives.

When shortlisting hotels during the RFQ stage, she looks for signals that many organizers overlook. Response time, or non-response, matters immediately. So does the clarity and speed of the information provided. A venue may have good images, but if communication is slow, vague, or fragmented, that already says something about what working with that team will be like.

When organizing events, small questions always come up. If the hotel is not quick with information, the entire process slows down, and the event becomes harder to manage. Her view is very clear: it needs to be a team. There is nothing in between.

Customers do not experience departments. They experience one organization. If things already feel disconnected during planning, they are unlikely to feel smooth during delivery.

THE DETAILS DELEGATES REMEMBER MOST

Delegates tend to value the same core elements in hotels. The praise, she says, usually goes to the same kinds of things: a lot of light, a lot of space, room to breathe, sit, and walk around. Cleanliness is essential, not only in the room, but in the surrounding areas.

Accessibility matters too. A hotel that is easy to reach from the airport or train station works better for an international audience. Once travel takes more than around 30 minutes, convenience starts to fade.

The factors that shape judgement and criticism are often basic. When we asked her whether there is one thing delegates consistently wish hotels would improve, her answer was also immediate: free water in the room. She recalled that she once almost cancelled a full event because a hotel charged an excessive amount for a small bottle of water in the room. For her, that kind of decision sends the wrong message. Once a guest has already committed to a 5-star hotel, charging heavily for a basic need does not feel thoughtful.

In hospitality, customer judgement is often formed through small decisions.

Photo credit: MSPA Europe/Africa





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INCOGNITO, LIKE A MYSTERY SHOPPER

Before signing a contract, Nikky often visits hotels incognito, observing the experience as an ordinary guest. It is the event organizer's version of mystery shopping.

She pays attention to how people are treated before staff know who they are. How is the welcome? How does check-in work? Do they give you the room you asked for? Do they ask the right questions? These are the details she notices immediately, because they show whether service is truly attentive or procedural.

For her, the first impression is decisive. As she said, the moment you arrive and step into a hotel is usually the moment you make the decision. The red flags also appear quickly.

A dirty entrance. Full baskets. Staff not in place. Nobody at reception. The way staff speaks to each other.

These are not minor slips. They are warning signs in the first minute. For an experienced organizer, they point to something deeper than surface disorder: poor process and a weak corporate culture.

A BEAUTIFUL CONFERENCE ROOM IS NOT ENOUGH

Hotels often make the same mistake: they focus on the beauty of the main room and neglect the infrastructure around it. For an event organizer, that is never secondary.

A main room may look excellent, but if the toilets are on another floor, the foyer is too far away, or tea and coffee are served at a distance, the experience starts to break apart. Delegates do not want friction around simple needs. They do not want to walk long distances to reach the basics. They want ease. Everything should feel close by and practical.

All of this makes the difference between a venue that looks impressive and a venue that actually works. The best event environments reduce effort. They make movement natural. They support the rhythm of the day, instead of interrupting it.

WHY THE MSPA CONFERENCE FEELS DIFFERENT

What distinguishes the MSPA EA Conference goes beyond venue selection and operational execution. Nikky describes the association as a space where competitors first become colleagues, then become friends.

Even though member companies may compete in the market, MSPA EA has created an environment in which they openly share challenges, ideas, and experiences. They support one another not only during the conference, but throughout the year. That trust, in her words, is unusual.

People do not come only for presentations. They come to meet each other, reconnect, ask how business is going, exchange ideas, and help each other out. They come because the conference is not only informative. It is relational. The conference does more than deliver content; it reinforces membership in a professional community.

That is also why her answer about delegates being missed carries so much weight. People return because they know they belong there.

LEADERSHIP, COMMUNITY, AND THE CULTURE OF GIVING

When Nikky speaks about MSPA EA today, she describes it as a strong, connected network of companies united by one wider goal: strengthening the industry together.

That purpose also shapes the kind of leaders who thrive within the association.

In her view, the leaders who truly belong in MSPA EA are those who are ready to listen, ready to share, and ready to contribute beyond their own immediate circle. They understand that staying only inside their own organization does not make them stronger. Real value comes from openness, exchange, and mutual support. Her view is clear: the leaders of MSPA EA give, instead of only taking.

The association creates a platform where companies of different sizes can all find their place, where **everyone** is treated as equal, and where industry challenges can be faced together rather than alone.

MORE THAN A CONFERENCE

MSPA EUROPE/AFRICA
MYSTERY SHOPPING PROFESSIONALS ASSOCIATION

Nikky's perspective points to a broader lesson. The conference is a team effort, and it starts months early. Event excellence is not defined only by what happens on stage or by the smooth execution delegates see. It happens in responsiveness, in clarity, in coordination, in the quality of the environment, and in the judgement shown in small decisions.

The strongest events also achieve something less visible — they make people feel that their presence matters. People need a reason to be together, and that trait is also a part of event planning. The best events combine Operational Excellence with Emotional Intelligence.

For readers who would like to experience that atmosphere firsthand, the next MSPA Europe / Africa Conference will take place in Alicante, Spain in May 2026. It is a good place to observe how customer experience principles work in practice.



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