

Title: Best Face Forward – Why Companies Must Improve Their Service Interfaces with Customers

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Rayport and Jaworski take a popular marketing adage, every consumer touch-point matters and the aggregate of all of these interactions are the firm's brand, and discuss its growing importance and our ability to leverage these touch-points in new ways due to the recent global proliferation of interactive, networked and smart technology devices.

The short book (228 pages) is laid out logically. The majority of the concepts are straight-forward, such as three general types of interface systems: people dominant, machine dominant, hybrid. They also do a good job of going deep on only a few examples like QVC and HSN (Home Shopping Network) while avoiding the “two hundred examples” trap that so many business books fall into. Chapters 7 and 8 provide nice frameworks for analyzing and executing interface systems.

Best Face Forward could be extremely helpful depending on a firm's current interface systems. I believe most marketers are going to agree with Rayport and Jaworski's view - every customer touch-point matters and harnessing the power of today's technologies to improve customer interfaces is a positive. The challenge lies in planning, financing and mobilizing an optimized interface system within a large organization.

Highlights by Chapter:

Overview

Hypothesis – How companies structure and manage their entire systems of interactions and relationships with customers and markets will determine their ability to establish and sustain competitive advantage.

Four trends have caused firms to no longer be able to complete on product or service offerings alone and lead to a “front office revolution”.

1. Proliferation of smart devices
2. Rising intelligence and interactivity of these devices
3. Capacity of such devices to appeal on increasingly emotional dimensions
4. Synaptic connectivity linking devices and networks globally

3 interface types of archetypes:

1. People dominant (human to human)
2. Machine dominant (machine to human)
3. Hybrid - People enabled by machines or Machines enabled by people

Ch. 1

- Interface systems are the ultimate expression of brands
- “how you sell it” not “what you sell”
- Service interfaces are points of connections that link companies and customers

Ch. 1

- Why use machines over people?
 - Provide privacy
 - Allow customers to move at their own pace
 - Minimize human error
- Efficiencies only realized by putting people and machines on the correct tasks_and through activating and empowering people and outlining the process
 - Human use of human beings
 - Technology/machines are neutral
- Ultimate goal is to reduce complexities

Ch. 2

- ATM, voice-mail and “pay-at-the-pump” gas stations are classic examples of optimizing interface systems with machines
- AIBO – artificial intelligence robotic – allows for greater emotional connectedness between people and machines
- Devices and networks have converged creating ubiquitous connectivity
- With smart technology all around us and our existing in an era of total commoditization, reconfiguring a company’s interfaces with its customers has greatly increased in importance.

Ch. 3

- CRM should describe everything that people and machines working together in an organization do to establish meaningful customer experiences & relationships
- Ratio of effectiveness over efficiencies (performance/price)
- 4.5 hurdle rate with 1 to 5 satisfaction ratings as only “5” are influence behaviors
- Interface system is like a “presentation layer” which presents the content, functionality and services of a company to its users (customers)
- Dan Norman in Emotional Design says “attractive things work better” in that users will more likely overlook minor problems in design and tolerate “minor difficulties and irrelevancies”

Ch. 4

- In-n-Out (CA burger house) is people dominated while Lakeshore Drive Parking (Chicago garage) is machine dominated but both are extremely successful showing that there is no one size fits all to interface systems
- Machine drivers:
 - Proliferation, interactivity, affect and connectivity
- Human drivers:
 - Physical presentation, cognitive abilities, emotional abilities, synaptic connections
- Machine interfaces are more scalable than people

Ch. 5

- Hertz prints (machines) directions for customers – easily scaled and more accurately handled by machines than people
- Machines are good for straight-forward transactions such as ordering prescriptions over the telephone – rote, repetitive, data intensive, etc.
- People project emotional attributes onto machines and the emotions are real and powerful

Ch. 5

- Pool company monitors pools electronically sending SMS messages to people to make service calls when needed

Ch. 6

- Hybrid (people/machines) is the future
- What humans dependably offer:
 - Judgment, personality, empathize, responsiveness
- What machines dependably offer:
 - Scalability, consistency, usability, knowledge, memory, efficiency, depth
- Either machines or people are equally dependably offer:
 - Aesthetic, experience
- Leverage model = people enable machines and leverage increases for people
- People-led hybrid example would be McDonald's Drive Thru
- Productivity model = machines enable people and productivity increases for people
- Machine-led hybrid example would be National Weather Service
- Optimizing hybrid interface depends on asserting the optimal division of labor between people and machines with customers – must optimize trade-offs

Ch. 7

- 5 As of interface design – not linear
 - **Assessment** of current experience
 - **Aspiration** for customer interactions given customers' desired experience
 - **Alignment** of front office capes with interface system
 - **Articulation** through deployment of interface and front office configuration
 - **Activation** of customers an employees throughout interface evolution
- Optimizing interface systems occurs in 3 stages: separate, relate and integrate
- Must determine the anchor interfaces in order to successfully build a interface system
- QVC (quality value convenience) is a machine-led hybrid

Ch. 8

- Interface Audit
 - Inventory gives big picture of entire system – 5 step process using conceptual maps
 - Scorecard provides a framework for evaluation
 - Covers four areas: effectiveness, efficiency, consistency, adaptability and uses a 1 to 7 rating scale
- Each interface should be graded on some combination of the following:
 - Accessible, intuitive, aesthetics, personalized, balanced, pleasurable