

Keep a close eye on CX as Covid-19 drives digital transformation in East Africa

By [Marko Reis](#)

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The socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating for most parts of the world, with East Africa being no exception and the region is seeing far reaching effects across most industry sectors.



Source: www.pexels.com

Before the outbreak of the virus, East Africa was the continent's fastest-growing region with an average economic growth of 5%. This plunged to 0.9% in 2020, but is at least expected to increase to 3% this year, according to a paper by Deloitte.

Nonetheless, the damaging effects of Covid-19 ushered in the new normal and had the unintended consequence of accelerating the pace of digital transformation in many East African countries. Having been a buzzword for several years, digital transformation became a necessity for organisations that had to abruptly change how they operate and how they meet growing consumer needs.

Fundamentally, digital transformation is a huge process that enables many opportunities for businesses, even for those that have never considered going digital. For most businesses, once they see what technology is capable of today and where it will be tomorrow, there is simply no turning back.

However, to be effective, digital transformation must always be coupled with a focus on customer experience (CX), as customer expectations have evolved and grown rapidly over the past few years.



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Targeted and personalised

An organisation's strategy to effectively enhance CX should include a strong focus on targeted and personalised communication. The modern customer no longer wants to be a number in a budget, or to be seen as a "revenue bringer". Customers expect to experience some type of contextual empathy from the brands they communicate with.

At the same time, organisations must also ensure that they effectively utilise the data that they pull in from personalised communications, further enhancing the CX by understanding a customer's preferences and interests based on these past interactions.

Unfortunately, brands often utilise customer information on a very shallow basis, resulting in customers being bombarded with irrelevant offers and information that the customer isn't interested in. All too often, companies spend a lot of money on communication or communication tools to pass irrelevant information onto their customers.

From a customer's perspective, it sends out the wrong message and customers may feel that the brand doesn't know them. This can easily prompt them to switch to an organisation that does this better.

We also see that while many companies have "Know Your Customer" processes in place, this is largely done as a regulatory compliance measure. Few companies take the time to leverage this data to get closer to their customers to provide a more efficient and effective CX.

Furthermore, many companies still insist on working in silos, where different departments have separate budgets, key performance indicators (KPIs), as well as their own goals and targets. Therefore, what digital transformation might mean for an IT department might not be the same for marketing, with the result that there are multiple simultaneous projects being driven across different departments.

The end result is that the customer will not perceive any difference, as digital transformation, in this case, would be little more than a box-ticking exercise that does not solve any specific problems, and if your CX was not up to par before – this is not the desired outcome. In fact, the disparate messaging coming out of these different departments would be confusing for customers and do little to improve CX.

Mismatch

There are still some companies in the East African region that still live in the pre-Covid-19 era, as markets lack knowledge about what can be achieved with new technology. There is often a mismatch between what the market expects and what companies think the market needs and wants. And while many still cling to the old way of doing things, customers are rapidly losing interest in these brands.

It is important that organisations move away from inflexible, expensive and difficult to manage legacy systems when they decide to implement digital transformation, and instead look to new technology solutions. It is also strongly recommended that they stop operating in silos, with different departments chasing different goals. These disparate divisions are likely to pursue different digitalisation projects, which in the end will have no impact on the customer. Digital transformation then simply becomes a box-ticking exercise that does not solve any problems.



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Digital transformation is a huge process and in the hands of the wrong tech partner can also be complex. It must be implemented and measured in the right way. It is not recommended that organisations attempt the implementation themselves. While it might seem like the cheaper option, organisations often end up spending more than they anticipated when they run into difficulties.

Ideally, companies should look for a partner that will act as a trusted advisor, consultant and solution provider to guide them along this journey. At the same time, partners should educate the market about digital transformation instead of merely focusing on sales when the market jumps on a specific hype train.

Organisations in the East African region must move with the times. The 'new normal' is not going anywhere and there is no going back to the usual way of doing things. Digital transformation has the potential to bring many new opportunities to modern enterprises, but CX must remain an integral part of its digitisation strategies.

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