

Customer Spectacles

A Practical Guide to True Customer Centricity



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Everyone says “customer first.” Few organisations behave like it. Customer Spectacles is Oak Consult’s discipline for making centricity real: seeing your organisation through the customer’s eyes — and delivering outcomes profitably, reliably, and sustainably.

At Oak Consult, we believe centricity needs an upgrade. Customer centricity is the old language. Customer Spectacles is the discipline that makes it real.

Putting on the spectacles means literally seeing your organisation through your customer’s eyes: how they experience your service, where they feel let down, and what moments really matter to them.



Research from KPMG, PwC, McKinsey, and others shows the payoff is clear:

- Customer experience is a growth driver — three-quarters of B2B buyers say it’s a deciding factor in supplier choice.
- Empathy drives loyalty — it’s the single strongest factor in retaining customers, yet the lowest-scoring capability for most UK organisations.
- Moments that matter define the relationship — a few key episodes shape long-term trust.

For leaders in manufacturing, SaaS, wholesale, healthcare, or public services, the lesson is the same: centricity isn’t a campaign, it’s a discipline. Technology can help, but culture, leadership, and balance make the difference.

This guide combines external research with Oak Consult’s real-world experience to give you:

- A practical framework (SCALE) to make centricity real.
- Field-tested plays to turn feedback into adoption and value.
- Measures that predict loyalty — before the dashboard goes red.

The rallying call is simple: without your customers, you are nothing. Put on the spectacles, and start leading from their point of view.



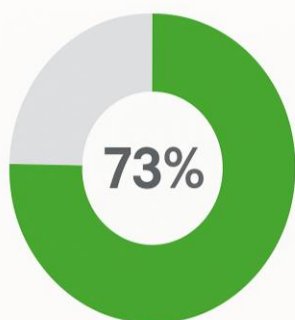
1. INTRODUCTION

Why Customer Spectacles Still Matter

Customer centricity has been a management mantra for decades, but in 2025 it matters more than ever. The context has shifted.

- Digital expectations are rising. Business buyers and citizens compare every interaction with the best consumer experiences they've had.
- Competition is relentless. New entrants use data and platforms to get closer to customers.
- Trust is fragile. Scandals like Horizon at the Post Office show what happens when organisations put systems before people.

The numbers tell the story. KPMG found that 75% of B2B buyers see customer experience as a major factor in supplier choice. Yet UK organisations consistently score lower than peers on empathy. Industry research shows that a majority of manufacturers now cite customer needs as the main driver of digital investment.



of customers agree:

“Experience is as important as product or service.”

Source: PwC, Future of Customer Experience Survey, 2022

At Oak Consult, we argue that customer centricity is no longer enough. It has become a slogan — empty slogan. Customer Spectacles is the corrective lens: a sharper, more practical and focused discipline that balances customer priorities with business realities.

Years ago, we brought this metaphor alive by handing out glasses frames to a whole team to put on their desks or monitors. Large glasses frame images were put on the double doors leading into and out of the office. The message was simple: don't just look at spreadsheets or process maps — look through the customer's eyes. Meetings shifted from “what suits us” to “what helps them.” That's the mindset this paper explores.



2. THE COST OF GETTING IT WRONG

Most organisations say they are customer-centric. Far fewer behave like it. The gap between saying and doing is expensive: in lost trust, wasted investment, reputational damage, and in some cases, destroyed lives and livelihoods. At the same time, chasing customer satisfaction without grounding in business reality can be just as damaging. Over-promising, under-delivering, or burning through resources unsustainably erodes confidence fast. True customer centricity requires balance.

Getting customer centricity wrong isn't just about a few unhappy customers. It can mean billions wasted, careers destroyed, reputations shredded, and in the worst cases, lives impacted. The common thread is imbalance: organisations either lean too heavily on the business lens (process, systems, compliance) or too heavily on the customer lens (promises, personalisation, speed). Both create risk. The spectacles keep balance in view. The following examples show what happens when balance is lost.

When systems trump people

The Post Office Horizon scandal in the UK has become a national case study in what happens when leaders elevate systems above people. Beginning in the late 1990s, hundreds of sub-postmasters were wrongly accused of theft and fraud after discrepancies appeared in Horizon, the Post Office's new accounting system. Despite consistent reports from sub-postmasters that the system was flawed, executives chose to trust the IT over the lived experience of staff.

The result was catastrophic: wrongful convictions, ruined reputations, bankruptcies, and in some cases, suicides. Financial compensation and reputational repair are still ongoing, costing the organisation billions and permanently damaging public trust.

Lesson: Systems are tools, not truths. Without scrutiny through the customer lens, organisations risk mistaking internal comfort for external reality. Business discipline (protecting the integrity of financial records) was allowed to overpower customer reality (the day-to-day experience of the people actually using the system).

When agility is missing

The UK's Emergency Services Network (ESN) was meant to replace the ageing Airwave radio system with a next-generation broadband platform for emergency responders. The vision was sound: high-speed, data-rich communication, enabling faster, safer, more integrated frontline operations.

But deadlines slipped again and again. Costs spiralled into the billions. Pilot projects failed to demonstrate the necessary resilience. As of 2025, the full service still isn't live, despite more than a decade of development and spending.

For firefighters, police officers, and paramedics, the consequences are more than inconvenience. Their core requirement — a system that is reliable in life-or-death moments — was missed. The ambition for innovation overran the discipline of delivering what customers (in this case, frontline responders and the public they protect) actually needed most.

Lesson: The customer lens (innovation, ambition) cannot overrule the business lens (delivery discipline, resilience, cost control). Both perspectives are needed for trust.

When expectations are mismanaged

In B2B wholesale and distribution, customers now demand greater choice, availability, and seamless service than ever. They expect suppliers to match the best consumer experiences in speed, visibility, and accuracy. Yet many distributors still lose contracts because promises made by sales teams cannot be fulfilled by operations.

This gap between commitment and delivery is toxic. Research highlights that expectation management is one of the strongest predictors of customer advocacy. If organisations fail here, even long-standing customers quietly walk away.

Lesson: Saying “yes” to every customer demand may win short-term contracts, but without aligning business capacity, it undermines trust and profitability.

The Balance Lens: keep both in view — customer outcomes and business viability.



The loyalty gap

Studies have uncovered a striking pattern in financial services. Two-thirds of UK business customers said they wanted to expand their relationship with their primary bank. In reality, only a fraction actually did. The intent was there, but poor onboarding, clunky processes, and inconsistent service turned opportunity into churn.

This wasn't a problem of appetite — it was a problem of experience. Customers were ready to grow, but organisations failed to remove friction at critical “moments that matter.”

Lesson: Growth doesn't just depend on sales; it depends on removing obstacles that stop customers from acting on their intent. The business lens (compliance, process efficiency) dominated at the expense of the customer lens (ease, empathy).

When technology investment ignores adoption

In CRM and digital projects, the same mistake plays out repeatedly. Leaders invest heavily in new systems, often with perfect technical configurations. But adoption lags. Users resist. Customers don't see value. Leaders blame “change resistance” or “user error” rather than asking the harder question: does this tool actually help staff serve customers better?

Project rescues show that when adoption is low, the real issue is usually that tools were designed for internal reporting, not customer outcomes. At the other extreme, we've seen teams over-commit to bespoke customer demands, draining budgets and exhausting staff. Both miss the balance.

Lesson: Technology succeeds when aligned to both lenses: it must make customers' lives easier and make business delivery more sustainable.

The dual cost of imbalance

The examples differ in scale and sector, but the pattern is consistent:

- Overweighting the business lens leads to Horizon-type failures — technically correct, but morally and reputationally ruinous.
- Overweighting the customer lens leads to unsustainable promises, ballooning costs, or fragile delivery.

Either imbalance creates risk. The cost of getting customer centricity wrong is not just unhappy customers. It is lost revenue, wasted investment, reputational harm, regulatory scrutiny, and in the worst cases, public scandal.

The lesson from these failures is not that customer centricity is impossible, but that it cannot survive as a slogan or a one-sided obsession. Organisations that put process before people lose trust. Those that overpromise to please customers lose credibility and profitability. The cost of imbalance is clear.

So how do leaders avoid repeating the same mistakes? The answer lies in updating what centricity really means today. In a digital, always-on, competitive environment, the discipline must evolve. That's where the next section turns: re-defining customer centricity for the digital age.



3. CUSTOMER CENTRICITY FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Customer centricity is one of the most overused phrases in business. For decades, it meant being friendly at the counter or picking up the phone quickly. Today, those things are just table stakes. In the digital age, true customer centricity is about something deeper: redesigning your operating model around outcomes that matter most to customers — and ensuring those outcomes are delivered profitably, reliably, and sustainably.

It is not about saying “yes” to every request. Nor is it about optimising purely for internal efficiency. It is about creating an operating model that keeps both lenses in focus: customer value and business viability.

What the research shows

- CX as a competitive battleground: surveys find that a majority of B2B buyers will walk away after several bad experiences, even if price and product are strong. Customer experience has become as decisive as price and quality.
- Lighthouse manufacturers: leaders did not just chase productivity. They reorganised around customer outcomes such as speed, customisation, and responsiveness, gaining loyalty and resilience.
- Experience on par with price: multiple studies confirm buyers weigh customer experience equally with price and product when choosing suppliers.

Three defining characteristics in the digital era

- 1) Systemic, not superficial.

Redesigning a website or rewriting call scripts does not make an organisation customer-centric. True centricity runs through every process, from procurement and billing to service resolution. Each must be tested against two questions:

- a) Does this make life easier for the customer?
- b) Can we sustain it profitably and reliably as a business?

Example: A manufacturer reduced order processing time from five days to two by redesigning ERP workflow around customer deadlines; errors and costs fell.

Counter-example: A public body launched a flashy portal but left back-end systems fragmented. Customers still called multiple departments; the experience did not improve.

2) Data-enabled, but human-interpreted.

Data and analytics are powerful, but numbers alone do not deliver customer centricity. They must be interpreted through empathy and context. Blind faith in metrics risks repeating Horizon: trusting systems over people.

Example: A SaaS provider used analytics to spot drop-offs after login; interviews revealed onboarding confusion. Redesign halved churn.

Counter-example: A distributor tracked fulfilment rates but ignored late deliveries; dashboards looked green while customers left.

3) Cultural as much as operational.

Processes and systems will not stick without culture. Employees deliver customer value only if leaders model it, reward it, and measure it. That means shifting success metrics away from activity (tickets closed, hours logged) toward outcomes (customer renewal, problem resolution, ease-of-use).

Example: An engineering firm added “customer impact” as a standing board agenda item, cascading intent through the organisation.

Counter-example: A utilities company rewarded short call times. Staff rushed customers, creating repeat calls and higher costs.

For leaders, the takeaway is clear: customer centricity isn’t about being “nice to customers” or chasing efficiency at all costs. It’s about balance — value for the customer *and* viability for the business.

Lessons from the field

Project rescues show organisations often mistake customer centricity for either “making customers happy” at all costs or “delivering efficiency” at all costs. Both fail. True centricity is balance: solving what customers need and ensuring the business can deliver it sustainably.

Definition

In the digital age, customer centricity is not a slogan or one-off initiative. It is a discipline that integrates customer value and business viability into strategy, governance, processes, and culture. Every decision — from boardroom strategy to frontline service — is taken with the spectacles on and the balance lens in place.





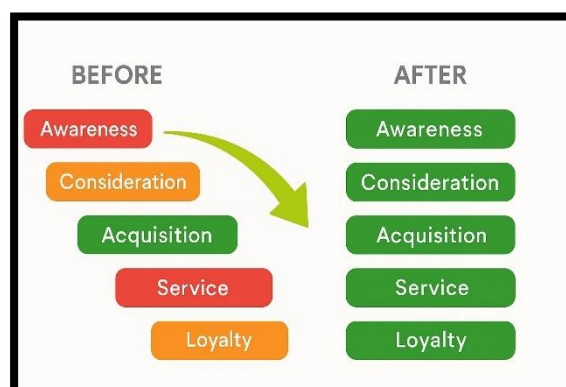
4. SEEING THROUGH THE CUSTOMER'S EYES

Customer centricity only becomes real when leaders and teams can genuinely see the world as their customers do. Strategies, dashboards, and process maps have their place — but they often present a sanitised, inside-out view. Customers experience your organisation differently: through frustration, relief, confidence, or disappointment at specific points in their journey.

Putting on the Customer Spectacles means deliberately stepping out of the boardroom and into the customer's shoes. It is about asking not just “what do our processes say?” but “what does it feel like to be our customer right now?”

Research perspective

- Journeys vs. touchpoints: organisations that manage end-to-end journeys achieve materially higher satisfaction and better economic outcomes than those focusing on individual touchpoints. Customers judge their experience as a whole, not as isolated moments.
- The empathy gap: empathy is the single strongest driver of loyalty — yet it is also the lowest-scoring pillar among UK organisations.
- Expectation inflation: most customers now expect organisations to anticipate their needs, not just respond to them.



Journeys, not touchpoints

- Manufacturing example: a factory measured success by on-time dispatch, but customers judged success by on-time installation. Mapping the broader journey revealed gaps with installation partners; fixing those gaps improved loyalty more than shaving minutes off dispatch.
- Public sector example: a council measured cases resolved per department. Citizens experienced a single journey across departments. Having to repeat information at each step was the biggest frustration. Mapping exposed duplication and delays invisible in siloed metrics.

Lesson: Customers don't care how you are organised internally. They care about getting their outcome with as little effort as possible.

The empathy gap

Empathy is not “being nice.” It is the ability to understand a customer's situation, perspective, and feelings — and to act accordingly.

- SaaS example: onboarding was treated as technical setup; customers saw it as “getting value quickly.” Adding guided tours, early wins, and human support cut churn.
- Healthcare example: clinicians resisted a digital tool they feared would reduce patient contact. Only when leaders addressed that fear did adoption climb.

Practical ways to see through the spectacles

- 1) Journey mapping — follow the path customers actually take, not the theoretical one.
- 2) Frontline listening — ask staff who interact with customers daily where the pain points are.
- 3) Role-play and shadowing — leaders should personally go through key experiences.
- 4) Story capture — numbers show what; stories show why. Bring both to the boardroom.

Lessons from the field

Inviting senior leaders to sit in on real customer service calls cut through complacency in a way reports never did. Visiting unhappy clients exposed issues buried in middle-management summaries. Leaders shifted direction faster because they wore the spectacles themselves.

The balance lens

Empathy without discipline can lead to over-customisation and unsustainable service models. The goal is to understand what truly matters to customers — and align the organisation to deliver that sustainably.

The leadership challenge

Seeing through the customer's eyes is not a one-off exercise. It's a discipline that needs to be built into strategy reviews, boardroom conversations, and frontline routines. Leaders who keep their spectacles on make better trade-offs, spot drift earlier, and stay closer to the realities their customers live every day. The organisations that win aren't those with the flashiest dashboards, but those with leaders who are willing to walk in the customer's shoes — and act on what they find.





5. COLLECTING AND USING CUSTOMER INSIGHT

Seeing through the customer's eyes starts with mindset. Acting on it requires disciplined collection and use of insight. In 2025, leaders face an abundance of data but a shortage of clarity. Every click, call, and comment generates a signal, yet without discipline, organisations either drown in noise or act on the wrong voices. Customers expect more than surveys; they expect to be recognised, understood, and acted upon in real time.

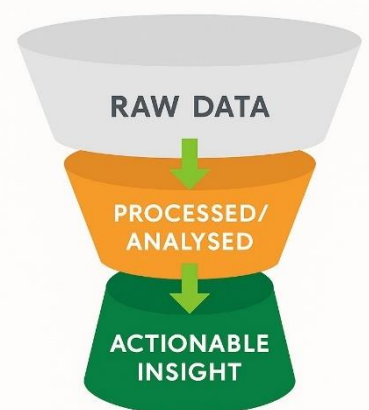
The risks of listening without balance

Listening itself carries risks. Without discipline, organisations can overreact to vocal minorities, chase irrelevant metrics, or build products that please everyone a little but no one a lot. The result is costly over-customisation, feature bloat, or service models that staff cannot sustain. Spectacles sharpen perspective, but must be balanced with the business lens — filtering feedback for what matters most and what can be delivered profitably and reliably.

The upside of disciplined listening

When leaders listen carefully and act on the most impactful insights, the return is significant:

- **Manufacturing:** combining customer complaints with sensor data enabled predictive maintenance, cutting breakdowns and downtime.
- **SaaS:** structured onboarding feedback, paired with churn analytics, revealed where to invest in training — halving early-stage drop-off.
- **Healthcare & MedTech:** patient forums highlighted barriers clinicians hadn't voiced; small tweaks improved adoption dramatically.
- **Public sector:** digital usage data plus citizen feedback simplified online journeys, reducing call-centre costs and improving satisfaction.





Research perspective

- The rise of unstructured insight: programmes are shifting from surveys to voice and text interactions — call transcripts, chat logs, social media — reflecting the need for real-world, real-time listening.
- Journey-based insight: measuring satisfaction/advocacy at specific stages — onboarding, renewal, crisis — yields richer, actionable insight than top-line scores.
- Customer-driven investment: global studies show the majority of Industry 4.0 investments are driven by customer needs; outperformers tie investment directly to customer insight.

Lessons from practice

- Live call listening revealed frustrations no dashboard could show, reshaping product roadmaps.
- Field visits to dissatisfied customers exposed systemic issues faster than internal reports.
- Attending focus groups in person uncovered nuance and hesitation agency summaries missed.
- Monitoring forums and social media revealed problems before they escalated into complaints.

Putting insight to work

- 1) **Integrate insight into strategy** — guide product, operations, and investment, not just marketing.
- 2) **Close the loop** — make visible changes based on feedback, or cynicism grows.
- 3) **Balance evidence** — numbers persuade the head; stories move the heart. Use both.
- 4) **Filter for sustainability** — weigh customer desire against operational capacity and strategic focus. Indiscriminate listening creates chaos; selective listening creates impact.

The balance lens

Insight without discipline creates waste. Insight without action creates frustration. Disciplined insight — focusing on what truly matters and aligning it with sustainable delivery — creates outsized returns. Small, well-judged changes in process, training, or systems deliver loyalty dividends far beyond their cost.

But insight alone doesn't build trust. Customers only feel the difference when organisations act on what they've heard — visibly, selectively, and sustainably. That's the bridge to the next discipline: moving from feedback to action.



6. FROM FEEDBACK TO ACTION

Collecting feedback is important. Acting on it is what makes the difference. Customers quickly notice when their input disappears into a black hole. Closing the loop — showing that you’ve listened and acted — is one of the most powerful ways to build trust. But acting without discipline carries its own risks.

The risks of over-reacting

- **Feature bloat in SaaS:** adding new features for every request creates bloated platforms that are harder to use, maintain, and support.
- **Policy churn in public services:** adjusting services too quickly for vocal minorities leads to confusion and inefficiency.
- **Process over-correction:** responding to every complaint with a new exception process slows service for everyone.

Lesson: Feedback should guide, not dictate. Filter for sustainability — weigh customer desire against operational capacity and strategic priorities.

The upside of disciplined action

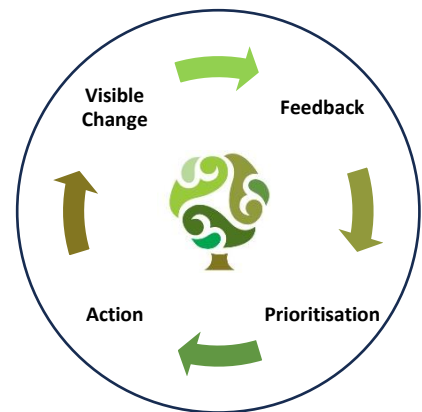
When organisations act selectively on the most impactful insights, returns are significant. Small, well-judged interventions often outperform wholesale overhauls.

- **SaaS:** companies with mature customer success practices achieve materially higher retention and expansion revenue by focusing on moments that matter like onboarding.
- **Local government:** co-designed digital services achieved higher satisfaction and cut delivery costs by up to 40% by redesigning journeys, not rebuilding systems.
- **Wholesale & distribution:** using AI to interpret demand signals, coupled with human oversight, increased sales and reduced waste without over-adjusting.
- **Healthcare procurement:** targeted tweaks to improve transparency and responsiveness transformed trust without scrapping platforms.

Oak Consult's experience

We've seen feedback gathered but left unused — survey reports nodded at, then shelved. We've also seen organisations panic and over-correct, making too many changes too quickly. The projects that succeed treat feedback as a steering wheel, not a rear-view mirror: guiding direction in real time, while balancing customer priorities with what the organisation can deliver sustainably.

In one software engagement, fortnightly roadmap reviews with an anchor client let feedback directly shape development, while prioritisation against strategy and capacity kept the roadmap commercially viable.



The role of service management

Service management disciplines (e.g., ITIL) provide a systematic way to capture, track, resolve, and learn from issues. Done well, they ensure:

- Customers see issues logged and resolved transparently.
- Leaders see trends and systemic issues, not just isolated complaints.
- Teams avoid chasing every request and act consistently on what matters most.

But service management shouldn't just be a ticketing process. For your most valuable and strategic customers, the difference often comes from having a named service manager who takes ownership from the first conversation to the final resolution. These face-to-face relationships create accountability, continuity, and confidence. Customers don't feel passed between departments — they feel heard and cared for by someone who "owns" their outcome.

Ken Blanchard's idea of creating "Raving Fans" comes alive here: when issues are solved consistently, proactively, and personally, customers don't just stay — they become advocates. Strategic service managers, backed by clear processes and empowered to act, turn negative experiences into loyalty-building moments. One well-handled issue can do more to cement trust than a dozen routine transactions.



The balance lens

Feedback without action creates cynicism. Action without discipline creates chaos. Organisations that thrive listen consistently, filter ruthlessly for what matters, and act visibly and selectively on high-impact improvements. Trust, loyalty, and efficiency gains then compound over time.



7. BUILDING A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC CULTURE

Processes and technology will only take you so far. Customer centricity becomes sustainable only when it is embedded in culture — how people think, behave, and are rewarded every day. Strategy can set direction, but culture determines whether it sticks.

Why culture matters

Drucker's maxim holds: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." In digital adoption, the number one barrier is rarely funding or technology — it is people and culture. Culture shapes what employees prioritise, how they respond to customers, and whether they see centricity as part of their role or someone else's.

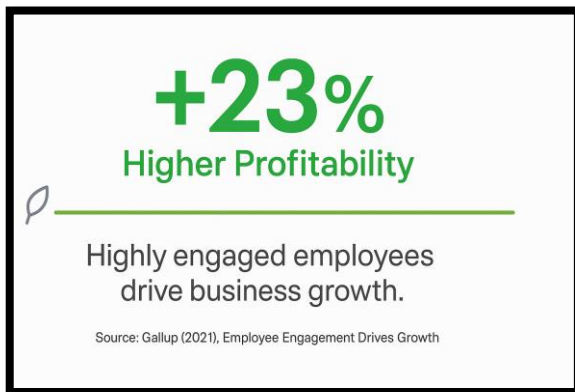
The risks of cultural misalignment

- **Misaligned incentives** — rewarding short call times drives rushed, poor resolutions and repeat calls.
- **Leadership blind spots** — if customers are absent from board agendas, staff learn internal metrics matter more.
- **Tolerance of blockers** — individuals who dismiss customer priorities poison culture unless managed.
- **Burnout risk** — a "customer at all costs" culture, without resources or support, leads to exhaustion and turnover.



The upside of cultural alignment

- **Employee empowerment** — clear guardrails plus trust let staff do the right thing for customers.
- **Consistent reinforcement** — making “customer impact” a standing agenda item cascades focus through the org.
- **Celebrating the right behaviours** — reward sustainable customer outcomes, not just internal target hitting.
- **Service management as culture** — disciplined logging, tracking, and learning from issues turns values into habit.



Research perspective

- Companies that embed cultural change are far more likely to achieve sustained performance improvements.
- Empathy and integrity — cultural attributes — are among the strongest predictors of loyalty, yet weak in many UK firms.
- High employee engagement correlates with higher customer loyalty and profitability.

The balance lens

Culture cannot swing too far either way. Business-only cultures create internal efficiency but ignore customers, driving churn. Customer-only cultures create heroics and burnout. The goal is a balanced culture: equip and reward employees to deliver customer value in ways the business can sustain.



“The goal is balance: enabling people to deliver customer value in ways the business can sustain.” — Mark Conway, Oak Consult



8. MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

“If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” But measuring the wrong things is worse than not measuring at all. In customer-centric organisations, what you choose to measure — and how — makes all the difference.

The peril of vanity metrics

Too many leaders lean on internal or activity metrics that feel safe but tell little about real customer health. Examples include number of support tickets closed, number of logins, or utilization of features. Those metrics may rise even as customer frustration and churn grow.



Vanity or proxy metrics create a false sense of control.

Strategic accounts: focused measurement, early warning

For strategic or high-value accounts, the stakes are higher — and so are the measurement demands:

- **Relationship Health Scores:** These composite metrics blend sentiment, account spend trends, support interactions, product adoption, and executive-level touchpoints.
- **Buying Momentum Tracking:** Watch for signs of slowing — e.g. fewer new orders, delayed expansion, or reduced renewal commitments. These “plateau signals” often precede churn.
- **Executive Voice Checks:** Quarterly or biannual executive-to-executive reviews with clients, recorded and tracked for satisfaction and commitment.
- **Named Service Manager Metrics:** The service manager monitors all logged issues, their age, repeat escalations, and overall temperature of the account. Their qualitative insights become as vital as quantitative ones.

By measuring at the account level — not just at aggregate — you catch risk before it becomes lost revenue.

Complaints that kill relationships

Not every customer who complains will churn — but many who churn started complaining first.

One bad experience drives exit: Surveys report that ~33 % of customers will leave a brand after a single poor experience; and 92 % will leave after 2-3 bad experiences.

- **Silent exits rarely post formal complaints:** Many customers simply drift away. Those who complain and never come back are the clearest indicator of a broken trust loop.
- **Closing the loop matters:** Customers who see their complaint result in real action often stay; those who don't become detractors.

When you map complaints (by touchpoint, by account segment) and track those complaints' resolution and outcomes, you turn them from liabilities into insight.

Churn: how much, who, and why

Understanding churn — both the magnitude and the mechanics — must be central in this section.

- **Benchmarks for SaaS & subscriptions:** According to Recurly's recent data, average churn (voluntary + involuntary) is ~ 3.27 % for subscription businesses.
- In B2B SaaS, voluntary churn often dominates, but **involuntary churn** (e.g. billing failures) can account for up to 40 % of total churn.
- **Cross-industry context:** In B2B software broadly, churn rates of 10–14 % annually are common.
- **Segment-level churn** can differ drastically; e.g. small accounts often exhibit higher attrition than strategic accounts.

But metrics alone don't diagnose — you need **churn analysis**:

- **Quantitative + qualitative:** Start by segmentation and correlation (e.g. low usage + low satisfaction) and then interview churned customers to validate root causes.
- **Hypothesis-driven:** List possible churn causes (weak onboarding, feature gaps, poor training, misfit customers), then test each against data and interviews.
- **Revenue-weighted mapping:** Map causes against lost revenue. The top-reported reason may not be the one costing you the most.

Turning measurement into action

It's not enough to know who left — you must act on it to prevent more from following:

- **Predictive “at-risk” flags:** Use leading indicators (declining usage, fewer login frequency, reduced support engagement) to flag accounts before they churn.
- **Tiered retention programmes:** Allocate more human resources and incentives to high-value accounts showing risk.
- **Rescue pathways:** Create structured recovery paths (e.g. “save the account” teams, executive interventions, loyalty offers) for accounts flagged as seriously at risk.
- **Incentives aligned to retention:** Make sure sales, success, and support incentives emphasise long-term retention, not just acquisition.
- **Feedback-fueled product/ops changes:** Use root cause data from churn in product roadmaps, process redesigns, or service enhancements.
- **Ongoing measurement loops:** Re-express churn reduction and complaint resolution success back into your health scores, so service managers see impact over time.

“Measuring what matters is not about tracking noise — it's about surfacing risk before it becomes lost accounts.” — Oak Consult



9. TECHNOLOGY AS ENABLER, NOT THE ANSWER

When organisations talk about becoming more customer-centric, the first reflex is often to buy a new system — CRM, ERP, AI, or a shiny digital portal. Technology can help, but it rarely solves the underlying problem. At best, it is an enabler. At worst, it becomes a distraction.

The risks of technology-first thinking

- **Proxy for progress** — Pointing to a system go-live as proof of transformation, even when customers notice little difference.
- **Feature over function** — Adding features instead of solving core customer problems, increasing complexity and cost.
- **Adoption failure** — Well-designed systems still fail when staff don't see the point; training, context, and purpose matter more than configuration.
- **Internal comfort bias** — Tools designed for reporting or internal efficiency rather than customer outcomes make dashboards glow green while customers stay frustrated.

Behind many high-profile failures sits the same pattern: leaders mistake new technology for customer progress. Yet customers only feel the benefit if journeys are simplified, staff are enabled, and value is obvious at the front line.

The upside of technology as an enabler

When aligned to customer needs and business realities, technology can be transformative:

- **Healthcare procurement:** Investments that improved transparency and responsiveness built trust between suppliers and clinicians, cutting delays and improving outcomes.
- **SaaS:** The best providers use platforms not just for transactions, but to build trust networks — dashboards, success managers, and communities that help customers achieve outcomes together.
- **Wholesale & distribution:** AI-driven forecasting paired with human judgement improved sales accuracy and reduced waste, proving that technology plus people beats either alone.
- **Local government:** Digital portals only drove satisfaction once underlying processes were redesigned, duplication removed, and staff empowered to resolve issues quickly.

These successes show the pattern: technology is powerful when anchored to customer journeys and supported by cultural change.

What the research shows

- **Most digital transformations fail** not through lack of technology, but because culture and processes lag behind (McKinsey, 2023).
- **Customer-journey alignment matters:** organisations that map technology to real journeys are far likelier to report revenue growth than those focused on internal features (Forrester, 2022).
- **Ease of use outweighs functionality:** A majority of customers say simplicity and effort reduction matter more than new features when evaluating digital services (PwC, 2022).
- **Trust is fragile:** poorly designed tools erode customer confidence quickly, particularly when they create more friction than the old way of working.

Beyond the system: lessons from the field

Technology is often deployed as a stand-in for centricity. Leaders announce a new app, a new CRM, or a new AI tool as evidence of change — but adoption flatlines and customers feel no difference. The fix is rarely full replacement. It is usually **realignment**:

- Stripping out unnecessary complexity.
- Simplifying journeys.
- Retraining staff to use tools in ways that actually help customers.
- Making success visible to both employees and customers.

In one manufacturing engagement, the turning point wasn't a new ERP module but a redesign of workflows and training that cut order-to-delivery times in half. In a SaaS project, loyalty increased not when new analytics were added, but when onboarding tools were made clearer and success managers were empowered to intervene early.

The balance lens

The test for technology is simple:

- **Customer lens** — Does it make life easier, faster, or better for the customer?
- **Business lens** — Can we sustain, support, and scale it without fragility or waste?

When both answers are yes, technology enables customer centricity. When either answer is no, it is an expensive distraction.

Technology does not deliver customer-centricity on its own. But when it is aligned with journeys, embedded in culture, and measured against outcomes that matter, it becomes a powerful amplifier of trust, loyalty, and sustainable growth.

“The value of technology lies not in features or dashboards, but in how it makes life easier for customers and more sustainable for the business.” — Oak Consult



10. CUSTOMER SPECTACLES SCALE FRAMEWORK

Customer centricity isn't an abstract idea — it's a discipline leaders can practise every day. Customer Spectacles turns the old slogan of centricity into a structured practice. At Oak Consult, we use the SCALE framework to embed balance: keeping both the customer lens and the business lens in focus.

SCALE is a five-step cycle: See, Challenge, Act, Learn, Evangelise.

1) See — Map the reality

What it means: Map the customer journey as it really is, not how manuals describe it. Identify the “moments that matter.” Step into the customer's shoes — wear the spectacles.

Examples: Manufacturing mapping order-to-installation; public services tracking citizen paths across departments.

Research: Managing journeys, not touchpoints, delivers materially higher satisfaction and stronger performance.

Risk: Mapping without action breeds cynicism.

Upside: Small fixes (removing a duplicate form, streamlining one step) can unlock disproportionate loyalty.



2) Challenge — Test assumptions

What it means: Question whether decisions are driven by customer outcomes or internal convenience. Challenge vanity metrics and cultural blockers.

Examples: Wholesale overpromising beyond capacity; healthcare procurement designed for reporting ease, not clinician adoption.

Research: Expectation management is a top driver of advocacy; poor management destroys trust quickly.

Risk: Avoiding hard questions compounds inefficiency and frustration.

Upside: Early challenge prevents costly mistakes later.

3) Act — Close the loop visibly

What it means: Use insight to make targeted, sustainable improvements. Close the loop so customers see you've listened.

Examples: SaaS onboarding fixes; co-designed council services that reduce cost and increase satisfaction.

Research: Mature customer success practices correlate with higher retention and expansion.

Risk: Acting on every request creates chaos and feature bloat.

Upside: Acting selectively on high-impact issues builds loyalty and efficiency.

4) Learn — Measure and improve

What it means: Track outcomes that matter to customers and the business. Share results openly. Learn from wins and failures.

Examples: Manufacturers measuring fulfilment accuracy; SaaS firms using customer health scores to predict churn more accurately than NPS.

Research: Advocacy and loyalty are stronger predictors of growth than satisfaction alone.

Risk: Vanity metrics create false confidence.

Upside: Honest metrics drive alignment and faster improvement.

5) Evangelise — Make centricity contagious

What it means: Share success stories internally and externally. Celebrate behaviours that keep both lenses in view.

Examples: Public sector sharing cost savings and satisfaction gains; healthcare celebrating clinician adoption.

Research: High employee engagement links to higher customer loyalty and profitability.

Risk: If success isn't shared, progress fades into business-as-usual.

Upside: Evangelising wins reinforces culture and attracts customers, talent, and investors.

Anchoring SCALE in research

- KPMG's Six Pillars — Integrity, Resolution, Expectations, Time & Effort, Personalisation, Empathy — provide a robust health check across SCALE. Empathy and expectation management are consistently powerful predictors of loyalty.
- Journey research — managing journeys, not touchpoints, drives both satisfaction and profitability.
- SaaS and public sector pilots — acting visibly on feedback and measuring outcomes delivers both loyalty gains and efficiency improvements.

Closing thought

"Customer spectacles sharpen the view, but only balance between customer outcomes and business realities keeps organisations moving forward." — Mark Conway, Oak Consult



11. CASE EXAMPLES & STORIES

Frameworks and research are vital, but examples bring centricity to life. Across industries, the same lesson repeats: when organisations put on the spectacles — and balance them with business realities — trust and performance grow. When they don't, costs and failures mount.

Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering

- **The risk:** factories that focused solely on productivity digitised lines and streamlined supply chains, yet customers still experienced slow turnaround and inflexible orders.
- **The upside:** plants that realigned digital programmes around speed, customisation, and responsiveness secured repeat business and new contracts.
- **Lesson:** Efficiency without centricity saves cost but loses loyalty. Efficiency with centricity strengthens both.



Technology & SaaS Providers

- **The risk:** feature expansion in response to every request stalled adoption; churn rose despite more releases.
- **The upside:** creating customer success functions that prioritised onboarding and training — and filtering requests for sustainability — lifted retention and expansion.
- **Lesson:** Adding features blindly creates bloat. Targeted action on what matters delivers loyalty and profit.

Wholesale, Retail & Distribution

- **The risk:** sales overpromised breadth and availability; operations couldn't keep pace, and contracts were lost.
- **The upside:** combining AI forecasting with human oversight balanced demand signals with operational reality, increasing sales and cutting waste.
- **Lesson:** Listening without filters creates chaos. Listening with discipline aligns service with customer needs and margins.

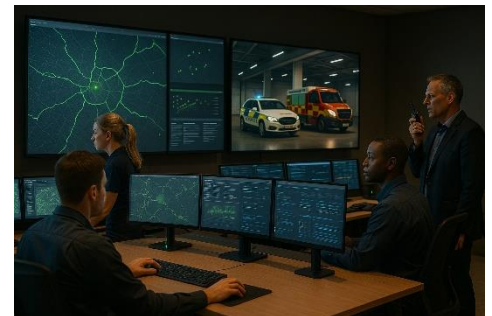


Public Sector & Local Government

- **The risk:** digital portals launched to meet targets were clunky and duplicative; uptake low, costs high.
- **The upside:** co-design with residents improved satisfaction and reduced costs by up to 40% via simpler journeys.
- **Lesson:** Centricity isn't about shiny tech; it's about redesigning journeys around the citizen.

Emergency Services & National Infrastructure

- **The risk:** ESN aimed for cutting-edge capability but missed reliability; delays and costs eroded trust.
- **The upside:** the legacy system was valued because it delivered the core outcome: reliability.
- **Lesson:** When lives are on the line, reliability outranks innovation.



Digital Healthcare & MedTech

- **The risk:** tools launched without clinician involvement saw poor adoption.
- **The upside:** targeted tweaks to improve transparency and responsiveness built trust without platform replacement.
- **Lesson:** Sustainable improvements based on real feedback build both adoption and loyalty.

Oak Consult's observation

Across sectors, dashboards glow green, systems go live, features multiply — yet customers remain dissatisfied. Success comes when leaders wear the spectacles, see clearly what matters most, and act on it sustainably.

12. CONCLUSION: THE LOYALTY DIVIDEND

Customer centricity isn't a slogan. It's a discipline that delivers measurable returns — or, when ignored, inflicts measurable costs.

The evidence is clear

- **Empathy drives loyalty** — the strongest driver of advocacy, yet weak in many organisations.
- **Expectation management builds trust** — meeting promises consistently predicts retention.
- **Growth comes from existing relationships** — expanding with current customers yields higher-margin growth than chasing new logos.



In public services, the dividend is different but equally compelling: higher satisfaction, lower costs, and restored trust.

Horizon scanning

- AI will raise expectations — tolerance for clunky interactions will shrink.
- Regulation will demand transparency — visible accountability will be expected.
- Sustainability will intertwine with trust — environmental and social impact become part of experience.

The loyalty dividend

When leaders get this right, rewards compound:

- In B2B, longer relationships, higher advocacy, and more profitable growth.
- In public services, stronger trust, lower delivery costs, and more resilient outcomes.

The dividend is cultural too: staff feel prouder and more engaged; customers feel heard and stay longer.

Call to action

Customer centricity is the theory. **Customer Spectacles** is the practice. Put on the spectacles. Use SCALE. Measure what matters. Act visibly and sustainably. Keep both lenses in view — and earn the loyalty dividend.



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