Journey Maps. They are a visual way of summarizing what a customer goes through as they interact with a company or organization.

Their purpose is to help the organization identify the most important pain points (and positive events) for customers at any and all stages during the customer-company interaction process. This information is critical in maintaining high customer loyalty, improving retention and increasing initial and repeat purchases. Even non-profit organizations use them frequently to ensure they are providing the best service in line with their stated brand promise.

A Journey Map is populated with data from a variety of sources including employees, management, industry experts, and obviously the customers themselves. A good Journey Map is never “done” because the dynamics of human interaction are constantly changing. People come and go from a company, products and services change, even a firm’s business model may go through a transformation at some point. All of these things and more could have serious impacts on how customers interact with and perceive a company.

But let’s be honest, taking the time to do an accurate, quality job of mapping your customer’s journey – well, it’s not a “lay-up”. It takes patience, dedication, and time is often not on your side as market offerings change and influence customer perceptions.

However, there are three important benefits from customer experience journey mapping that make the “view” definitely worth the “climb.”

Diving Below the Iceberg

Let’s begin by acknowledging the obvious value derived from journey mapping. First, the result is a visualization of the customers’ journey from their perspective of what they actually experience, rather than what you believe they are experiencing. As a result, chronic problems and opportunities for competitive differentiation reveal themselves. Evangelists of journey mapping typically stop right there, as if this alone is enough to make the case. But in our experience, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. The bigger insights lie below the waterline:

1. Explaining the ending by revealing the beginning

We have all seen it before: You charter a team to improve some attribute in the experience that survey data suggests you are behind on. Pick your poison; pricing; cost-to-serve; negative trending first call resolution results – it can be a long list. Well, if you
narrow in on one of these issues before understanding the larger picture, you are often treating the symptom rather than the cause. True story: we were working with a retail bank that was struggling to have customers sign up for their Bill Pay product. There was a big payoff in solving this because customers that used Bill Pay were far more profitable. When we mapped the entire experience, we discovered the culprit: The account opening process actually discouraged front line employees from taking the time to demonstrate Bill Pay and set up a new customer. Rather than continue to throw marketing dollars to drive up adoption, a simple change to the account opening steps drove up Bill Pay usage and allowed reallocation of those marketing dollars.

2. Making the invisible, visible
There is nothing magical about this, other than the opportunity you may uncover. We worked with a quick lube retailer locked in a pricing war with a competitor. By mapping the customer journey, we discovered something that was truly invisible to them. During peak periods, the manager worked alongside employees to speed up the line, but no one saw that the third car waiting to be served would wait for about 10 minutes and then leave if the line didn’t move. We saw it at literally every location we visited. The solution? A simple electronic cable that alerted the team inside the garage that the third car in line was waiting and a fail-safe alert to encourage them to engage with the customer before they waited 10-minutes. The impact? A 33% increase in Same-Store Sales within 9 months.

3. From optimizing costs to leveraging value
Although we all serve customers, we report to shareholders. We are all responsible for being good stewards of the dollars shareholders entrust to us. This includes ensuring optimizing things like cost-to-serve. When you look at the transactional cost of self-service channels over a direct call, it may be tempting to hide that customer support number deep into your website for only the truly desperate customer to find. One healthcare provider we worked with found the reason why some older members tended to use their call center over other self-service channels, wasn’t because of some outdated stereotyping that they didn’t know how to use a computer – It turned out they were lonely and just wanted to talk to someone. Getting this balance right is challenging, no doubt about it, but with a documented understanding of customer value by segment, mapping the customer journey can reveal low-cost channels that may actually deliver more value to certain customers, to optimize both costs and the experience. They don’t have to be mutually exclusive.

The Most Powerful Tool for Outpacing Competitors
Journey mapping is no longer a tool limited to Design Thinking types or those who get enthralled with unleashing their graphic talents to create attractive depictions of the customer journey. The goal isn’t to create something worth framing. Done well, customer journey mapping is nothing less than the most powerful tool available for reinventing your business and outpacing competitors.