

## ► Innovation is futile unless the customer comes first

*'To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often' - Winston Churchill*

When people hear the word 'innovation' within the technology sector they immediately think of leading edge brands such as Apple, Facebook, Amazon or Google. These types of companies are truly visionary and can dramatically change consumer culture within a short space of time. The biggest winners are the ones that not only stay ahead of the curve when it comes to innovation but also make customers their top priority.

**Service led organisations with innovation at their core almost always outperform their closest rivals. Perfect examples include John Lewis and Kiddicare. These are companies that have carefully adopted the latest technologies to create a seamless multichannel shopping experience that always puts customers first. Everyone within these organisations is encouraged to embrace new innovation and to accept that change and more change can be a good thing-especially if consumers want it.**



For every John Lewis or Kiddicare, however, there are many other companies that get it wrong and often to the detriment of their profit margins and in some cases, their existence. Jessops is a good example. At one stage the company was a leader in the field. It sold the best camera equipment and was one of only a few high-street chains to offer photo processing and developing. Jessops was well positioned to continue that status and could have become a long established market leader or iconic British brand. Sadly, their focus on the customer began to diminish and their resistance to fully embrace advancements in digital photography contributed in accelerating their downfall.

Most of Jessop stores were either understaffed, which forced customers to wait in long queues, or the shopping experience was out of touch with what the customer actually wanted – whether they were in-store or online. Jessop's found itself moving from an industry where technology advancements around traditional photography were relatively steady and easy to keep up with to the fast paced world of digital photography where the customers buying habits started to change. There were lots of new market opportunities available within the digital space such as the introduction of smartphones with built in cameras, the advent of social media, print on demand photos and ,more recently, digital cameras with wireless internet connections to help share photography across social

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networks. Jessops would have still been around today if only it had endorsed these market changes and collaborated with the other technology advancements to stay connected with their customer needs.

Orange is another company that once led the way in its field by its innovation and unique marketing ideas. Who would have thought initiatives such as bundling tariffs under names such as Dolphin, Raccoon and Monkey could successfully differentiate an

organisation from its rivals? Orange's problems began when it couldn't keep up with its increased market share and the expectation to follow it through in everything it did as a business- from the quality of its products to the level of service it delivered. The organisation failed to keep up and customer loyalty began to wane. Orange was recently singled out for attracting the highest service complaints of any provider in Britain this year, according to a comprehensive Ofcom report.



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Surprisingly, despite the negative feedback, Orange hasn't addressed the customer service problem and the number of complaints continues to rise. This suggests that Orange's many innovative services may not be enough to retain customer loyalty if those services are not being delivered to expected levels - and this could ultimately lead subscribers to switch from Orange to another provider.

As a marketer in a service based business I am always looking to implement innovative change that is relevant to the needs of our customers. In order to do this effectively my team must explore new ways to engage closer with our target market while company as a whole needs to deploy end-to-end processes that deliver on our promises and values.

Accelerating the adoption of innovation is difficult unless the culture within an organisation is willing to embrace change. That explains why so many companies born out of pure innovation often succeed over their rivals. Unfortunately, a culture of change is often hard to integrate into the status quo of a business as people often see it as a threat instead of an opportunity. This level of resistance can be managed by understanding each department's key pain points and using innovation to provide solutions to these issues. Only then will those reluctant to the idea of change can feel comfortable embracing a process that alters the way things are done and the way customers are served.



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