



Customer Journey Map or Touchpoint Map – What’s the Difference?

Customer journey maps and touchpoint maps (also known as service blueprints) are often conflated, but they are not the same thing. Though they are similar creations, they are actually two different ways of understanding the customer journey. One is a front-end map – the part the customer sees and experiences, ideally created from their point of view. The other is a back-end map – a blueprint of everything your organization does for the customer under the surface and behind the scenes. Think of them as the on-stage perspective versus the behind-the-scenes backstage tour of your favorite Broadway musical. Together, they form the complete picture of your customer's journey. Both are essential tools for understanding the experiences you're creating for your customers. When utilized together, they can help you identify hurdles in the customer journey, opportunities for optimization, and ways to improve your customer experience.

What is a customer journey map?

Picture a nice restaurant. When you drive up, a sharply dressed valet takes your keys and parks your car. The maître d' has your reservation and shows you to a finely adorned table. The linens are crisp. The menus are laid out in simple, easy-to-understand language with a bit of flair. A separate, curated wine list helps you decide on the perfect pairing for your meal. The waitperson gives you recommendations based on your stated preferences. The food arrives warm and beautifully plated. It's tasty and exactly what you wanted. You receive the wrong coffee with your dessert, alert the waitstaff, and a few minutes later, they deliver the right one along with a complimentary biscotti. The check comes, you have no difficulty giving them your card to pay, and you leave having experienced a practically perfect meal.

As a diner at the restaurant, this is your customer journey. A customer journey map captures every step of this journey from the moment you enter the parking lot until you leave – ideally happy and satiated. It's everything a customer experiences from their point of view. Every important beat, every data point, is documented along the way. The map becomes an expressive narrative of the customer's progress through the lifecycle, outlining not just major milestones but also how the customer is thinking and feeling along the way. The best ones help identify gaps between a customer's expectations and the reality you present by asking questions centered around the customer's goals, feelings, needs, and expectations in each phase of the journey.

If you were to create a customer journey map of our restaurant example, you'd first want to identify each phase of the customer's experience. Driving into the lot and interacting with valet might be phase one, speaking with the maître d' phase two, and so on. Then, for each phase, you'd delve into the details that are most important for your team. In this case, you might include typical questions your customers ask, how they feel during each interaction, and what is said to them. As you do this work, you're charting the story of your customer experience.

What is a customer touchpoint map?

A customer touchpoint map is the flipside of everything going on in a customer journey map. We're still looking at the customer journey, but we're looking at it from a different point of view. We're no longer at the front of the restaurant, in the customer's shoes. A touchpoint map, or service blueprint, is a back-end perspective—the business's point of view. In our restaurant example, a customer touchpoint map would show everything happening behind the scenes to facilitate the beautiful dinner our customer enjoys. This includes things like which team is involved at each stage, what systems are in place to support them, and the key steps for moving the customer through to the next phase.

Going back to our restaurant, let's look at what a touchpoint map might include. Your valet team is a critical touchpoint as your customer drives into your parking lot. They are responsible for the first impression, which includes greeting the customer, but it could also involve maintaining the parking lot. After all, you want to give a good impression not only in those human interactions, but through all available avenues. Maybe someone is responsible for shoveling the sidewalk, cleaning the front windows, polishing the brass doorway, and removing garbage from the foliage. And all of that is just phase one!

Once a customer is inside, other key players behind the scenes create the right ambiance, manage foot traffic, organize reservations, and answer the phone. With this support and the right reservation software, the maître d' is able to identify the customer's reservation without delay. Throughout the customer's meal, the back of the house is buzzing with activity. Food is prepped and cooked. Dishes are washed. Napkins are folded. Waitstaff bustle in with orders and out with meals plated to perfection. At the end of the experience, the table is cleared and reset, ready for the next customer.

A touchpoint map captures all the back of the house action, every point of interaction with your brand across all the phases of the customer lifecycle (yes, even the pre-sale phases!) These are the internal workings, the systems of support, that create your customer experience.

Why they get mixed up sometimes

When you lay out a customer journey map and a service blueprint side by side, they're visually quite similar. The framework and criteria used to create them are much the same, and they are both ways to map your customers' experience. Where they diverge is in which lens you choose to look at that experience. A customer journey map uses a customer's lens to view the experience, whereas a touchpoint map uses a business lens. A journey map has more details revolving around the customer's thoughts and emotions. A touchpoint map has more details revolving around the processes in place to deliver those thoughts and emotions.

If you're building either of these maps, you want to begin with the current state. [Identify the phases of your customer's journey](#) and document the critical steps of each phase. You may want to do this with each of your [customer segments](#), since their interactions and experiences with your company may vary by geographic region, product(s) purchased, annual spend, or other key segmentation factors. Generally, if you have a few different customer segments, you want to begin with your core segment – those customers that fit your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP). Your organization's goals will determine what you want to include. Both map types can incorporate information about your customers' levels of satisfaction at each stage of the journey. Both types look at key interactions with the customer, including digital touchpoints.

With so many similarities, you can see how one type can be confused for the other, but don't be fooled. Each map type is geared toward different goals. Before you decide to build out either or both maps, think about what you want to use it for, your team objectives, and the ideal outcomes for your new creation. Are you trying to make your Customer Success team more efficient? Are you considering adding a new digital tool to increase [your tech touch capabilities](#)? Are you preparing to launch a new product or service? If your goals are customer-oriented, like identifying pain points during onboarding or understanding the value you're bringing to your customer at each stage of the journey, customer journey maps are the right tool for the job. Anything process-related will likely benefit from a touchpoint map/service blueprint.

But a word of caution: we don't recommend relying on a touchpoint map/service blueprint alone. Utilizing this without the customer perspective of a journey map can cause companies to become too internally focused and ultimately forget what this is all really about – your customer.

Why you need customer journey maps

Customer Success organizations use journey maps for a variety of things. They help with big goals like enhancing the customer experience, reducing churn, and increasing customer expansion and lifetime value. TSIA believes there is a strong [correlation between higher NPS scores and customer journey mapping](#). In the past, they've found that [journey mapping is a common practice in top-performing CS organizations](#), netting nine points higher average renewal rates and seven points higher average expansion rates. Yet, less than half of all CS organizations were doing the important work of mapping the customer journey.

Journey maps help make all these exciting things possible by visually depicting the full breadth of the customer experience. They enable the CS team to identify points of frustration, hurdles that might not be necessary, and places in the journey that are already smooth sailing. Then, you can tweak them to make the customer experience even better for your customers and your CS team. Let's say, for example, you've developed a journey map and are utilizing it to review your onboarding process. By doing so, you find that you've dedicated CSM resources to a portion of the journey where customers are sailing right through with no difficulty. Armed with this information, you can confidently re-distribute your CSM resources to a different point in the onboarding process or somewhere else altogether. You might even want to enable some tech touch checkpoints instead.

A customer journey map is a powerful tool that not only helps you better understand your current state but it can also help you establish and move closer to your ideal future state. By comparing current and future state journey maps, you can easily identify the gaps in your current process that need closing, and then set realistic goals for your team to align efforts with your customers' desired outcomes. Then, you can use other processes like [Customer Success Plans](#) to carry forward the changes you want to make.

Why you need customer touchpoint maps

In the same vein, customer touchpoint maps are powerful tools for implementing change. They are great for gaining a clear and overarching picture of the entire customer journey from an internal systems perspective. In creating these blueprints, you identify customer touchpoints at different phases of the journey (just like a journey map), but their focus on back-end processes makes them better suited for defining and refining your internal capabilities. They don't examine the customer experience from the customer's perspective, but rather dive into the systems and processes responsible for delivering that customer experience.

Let's say you already know your customer journey. You've done the work, examined it from your customer's point of view, and you know their pain points. You've identified areas of the customer journey that need work. The next step is diving deeper, building a touchpoint map, and figuring out how to adjust your internal processes and procedures to lessen or even outright fix these areas of frustration for your customers. A touchpoint map is the right tool to drill down into these areas of inefficiency to examine how your organization is contributing to them and discover ways to optimize your functionalities and processes better.

They are also really useful visual representations of your operations, processes, and systems. As such, these are essential tools if you need to make a case for better [cross-team collaboration](#) or more investments in technologies that will help scale your CS capabilities. For example, a touchpoint map would layout the process that follows as soon as a new customer is marked by sales as "closed won" in your CRM: an API key pulls the account into your [CS platform](#), where a CSM is automatically assigned, which triggers an email to the CSM with the details of their new account and a welcome email to the new customer, introducing them to that CSM.

Put it all together and what do you get?

Using a customer journey map in conjunction with a customer touchpoint map illustrates the full spectrum of your customer experience. But, just as if you were looking at our restaurant, taking in the front of the house and back of the house action all at once would feel extremely chaotic. The best way to utilize these tools together is by pinpointing your objective and then zooming in on the relevant moments in both maps, allowing them to complement one another as you design a better and better customer experience.

Of course, the danger of chasing a better and better customer experience lies in overtaxing your team in the name of perfection. Utilizing both of these maps can help prevent this scenario by showing you the internal costs of fixing moments of customer pain. Something that takes your team monumental effort to circumnavigate but only lends the customer a slight benefit may not be worth doing. Allowing these maps to work together, looking at both sides of the customer experience at once, can inform your decisions and tell you if certain strategies are worthwhile to pursue.

These mapping techniques are critical for developing a better understanding of the customer experience. Customer Success teams that employ these tools will have an easier time improving both their internal processes and customer engagement.