



Lessons Learned

Janalakshmi Customer Journey

Challenge

In 2015, Janalakshmi and nine other institutions in India were awarded the small finance bank license, which allows them to expand their range of services beyond group loans. With 11 payment banks launching shortly and several banks, mobile payment operators, and microfinance institutions already in the picture, India could soon become a competitive market for financial services for the poor. Janalakshmi saw an opportunity to invest in positive customer experience to distinguish their offering from the competition. Ashwini Jain, Head of Products and Marketing at Janalakshmi, estimates that a quarter of their current group loan customers will graduate from group loans to a broader range of financial services such as savings, insurance, and small- and medium-enterprise loans. Jain reflects, "If you have treated them well, then these are just the customers who will stay with you rather than go elsewhere."

Questions

What do our customers value most?

How can we design offerings and experiences that deliver on these values?

How can we identify and remediate gaps in customer experience and pave the way for active, loyal customer relationships?

Overview

The customer experience project began by creating a cross-functional working group of employees from Janalakshmi branches, marketing, product design, and compliance to collaboratively work on improvements. Through field research and immersion exercises with customers, the team identified current gaps in delivering a positive customer experience along their journey with Janalakshmi. The project's focus was to fill gaps in customer experience and move from, in founder Ramesh Ramanathan's words, "a somewhat average experience [for customers] to an experience of delight."



Ideation workshop at Janalakshmi, Design Impact Group - Bangalore, India

For example, despite a strongly articulated social mission to serve poor customers, large socio-cultural inequities were sometimes reflected in the Janalakshmi customer experience: customers feared asking questions. Some admitted to being disrespected but didn't feel empowered to express dissatisfaction. A customer waiting in a branch with her infant felt too self-conscious to ask the all-male staff for a place to breastfeed. Gaps like these stem from factors such as gender inequality and class distance – and they impose a psychological cost. They can turn customers away from services altogether.

Field research also revealed that sometimes basic amenities were missing at a branch. Drinking water was not available and bathrooms were often designated "staff

only." On other occasions, customers said they waited over six hours for a manager to address them. Financial service providers that serve poor customers must keep a list of non-negotiable factors that reinforce their basic minimum customer experience and create a distinct brand identity in customers' minds.

Articulating values and pain points along the Janalakshmi customer journey was an eye opening experience for the team. In a very human way it revealed the discord Janalakshmi sometimes faced in delivering on customer needs and expectations, and allowed them to plan for improvements and innovations.