

Why ‘Simply Executing’ Your Customer’s Wishes Isn’t That Simple Anymore

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I was born in Detroit and still follow the sports teams out there, even the Lions whose record of football futility is almost legendary. So naturally, I had some mixed emotions when I watched the Los Angeles Rams win the NFL Championship this year with longtime Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford at the helm. I was happy he finally had a chance to win a championship. I just wish he didn't have to be traded from the Motor City to do it.

Stafford always had talent. He just needed the right team around him to let it shine. In many ways, **Stafford personifies a business dilemma we face all the time—making sure we align the right solution to the right situation.**



I was thinking about this point when we got the news that Lumen had been named a Leader in the 2022 Gartner® Magic Quadrant™ for Network Services, Global for the second year in a row. A company's position in the Magic Quadrant depends in part on its Ability to Execute and Completeness of Vision. **Here's where the “Stafford dilemma” comes to play. Simple execution isn't so simple anymore.** You need to keep three other factors in mind as well.

Understand the playing field

A data-rich world allows us to know more about individual customers than ever before. Our ability to acquire data quickly, analyze it thoroughly, and act upon our assumptions can give enterprises a key edge when it comes to meeting customer needs.

Gone are the days in which solutions had an inherent value that we could sell universally.

Customers are calling the plays, and just like in any football game, the right play is situational. You know your team and you know the tendencies of your opponent. There are other factors as well—how much time is on the clock, what’s the weather conditions are like, and how far you need to go to score.

These same elements have their counterparts in the business world. The terms are different—artificial intelligence, machine learning, edge computing, adaptive networking, workforce automation—but the concept is the same. **Learn what’s important to the customer**, so you can participate in the play making based upon knowledge and understanding.

Call audibles

The best quarterbacks know how to call an audible. Once they receive a play from the bench, they scan the defensive alignment facing them and quickly determine if they need to make an adjustment to ensure success.

In sum, they are adaptable. **Enterprises try to avoid locking their customers into one specific outcome by offering solutions that offer flexibility when conditions change.** In many cases, today’s customer doesn’t choose solutions that target specific needs; instead, they want solutions that have the adaptability to solve present and future problems, especially those that no one anticipated.

Be fearless

Our current age of transformation forces enterprises to be fearless because they need to adjust at an uncomfortably rapid pace. Companies that thrive in this environment deploy what I call “human glue.” They learn to trust the adaptability and expertise of their employees to lead smart consultative discussions with their customers. They excel because they truly listen to their customers and show a genuine interest in their success. They know how to literally “cheat” time—driving into the marketplace faster, cheaper, and better solutions before their competitors can.

Stafford was an excellent quarterback in Detroit, but it took a win the Super Bowl with another

franchise to open the eyes of those who think he now belongs in the Hall of Fame. He didn't change his ability to execute. He simply made the execution more impactful. **Enterprises need to embrace the same philosophy, relying less on the inherent value of a solution, and focusing instead on how to customize that value so that they can score a touchdown in any situation.**

Gartner, Magic Quadrant for Network Services, Global, 21 February 2022, By Neil Rickard, Bjarne Munch Et Al.

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