



CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CCO:

Personalizing Customer Engagements

Hosted by Curtis N. Bingham

Featuring Jay Topper

Former SVP, Customer Success

Rosetta Stone

CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER
COUNCIL



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**Hosted by Curtis N. Bingham
Founder and Executive Director
Chief Customer Officer Council
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Conversations with the CCO is a web-based, live Q&A series hosted by the Chief Customer Officer Council that features some of the most forward-thinking and successful CCOs in the world speaking candidly about best practices and challenges in driving customer centricity. To learn more and to view past Conversations, visit www.ccocouncil.org.

In this third and final excerpt from my interview with Jay Topper, former SVP Customer Success for Rosetta Stone, Jay shares his philosophy of customer engagement and strategies that have had the most impact in driving a relationship-centric culture. In a previous conversation, Jay emphasized that usage is king, and described the delicate balance of cost control relative to increasing product usage. Usage is a broad term that for all intents and purposes, Jay actually sees as engagement. Engaging customers individually, and personally to the extent he can, is what Jay is most passionate about, and what helped him drive his phenomenal success as VP of Customer Success.

PORTRAIT OF A CCO

Company Profile: Leading provider of language-learning software based in Arlington, VA.

Title: SVP Customer Success

Tenure: 2009 - 2012

Accountabilities: Customer Success organization including the support departments, language-learning coaches and the customer success team.

CB: Have you found that there are types of engagement activities that are more effective in driving the behaviors that you want than all other engagement activities?

JT: At the end of the day, it's about making you believe that what's inside the box is worth its value and then scaling that belief. One surprisingly successful engagement has been to invite customers to a

post-sale webinar with the CEO, a few coaches and myself. Five or six thousand have cycled through every month, with approximately 500 participating in one session. If we accurately identify and invite



the right segment, we have about a 50% conversion rate for the behavior we're trying to get. It has been huge. Sometime we want them to take a studio session, or install their software because they haven't yet, or renew. The effort has gone from trying to make the

product road map. Elsewhere, if a knowledge-based article has an average of three stars instead of five, we seek out feedback from our users group and rewrite it. If our studio sessions drop from 97% satisfaction to 95%, we investigate where the trend is and change it,

outlet interested in doing a series on women learning languages, so we started screening and blogging about some of our users. The series was cancelled, but we kept going. We found three users who were willing to come in—from Europe, Georgia and California. We flew them in and it was the most blow-you-away, amazing thing. We brought them to our theater in Harrisonburg for an optional employee event, and it was packed wall-to-wall. The customers weren't hard scripted; they just stood on the stage for an hour after the presentations and answered questions, but you would have thought there were 10,000 customers up there with the amount of impact it had on people. Now, we're looking at doing that quarterly. In addition, we're compiling hundreds of hours of testimonial videos. The information collected from a webinar gets put into an analysis and our CEO sends it out to everybody. Some of these trains are rolling downhill, and there are new ones to start up the hill, but people are embracing the concept of a customer-centric culture. We have a ways to go, but it's been exciting watching some things take hold.

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50-55% to making the 5,000-20,000 a month. Of all the positive engagements we measure – satisfaction, net promoter score, usage, and renewals – the webinars have been the most surprising to me.

CB: How are you using Net Promoter Score and satisfaction after engagement activities to drive strategy and change company behavior?

JT: I think that it's one of the best things we do. A specific example would be the survey questions at the end of our webinars, and collecting customer questions during chat. Segmenting that information gives us incredibly powerful intelligence that alters both marketing messaging and

whether it's that we broke pedagogy, the technology was faulty, or coaches need further training. We use all of it, even the Bazaarvoice and Amazon.com reviews. We're scrappy. We don't have a lot of overhead in our department and nearly everyone is customer facing. We take it all in, try to make sense out of it and pluck off the top two or three things per area to alter.

CB: What kinds of things are you doing to help the company become more customer-centric? How are you focusing on culture?

JT: Recently we decided to bring in our heavy users for a customer appreciation day, which we had never done before. We had been approached by a news media



CB: What do you hope to be able to do so that employees understand their impact on the customer and are pulling to make the customer's experience better?

JT: For employees, we're building a widget similar to Best Buy's, where they can give random feedback on the spur of the moment. It's a very user-friendly widget, not embedded in the CRM or a system. We're going to have to figure how to organize all that data, but I want every idea because some of the best come from juniors or people outside the organization. I would like to put it on our website, for crying out loud; I want feedback from anybody. Our customer user group Rosetta Compass is almost a thousand strong and their voice is incredibly powerful. Finally, I really want it to be personal. If a customer likes to learn by email and is getting married to a Frenchwoman in three months, I will communicate to that customer by email, maybe offer recipes for French cooking and list the top five songs in France, and create a lesson plan to accommodate the timeline of three months. The more I can get to know you, the more I can cater your messaging. Tools are also important. We are implementing a template tool that takes in different traits and

presents that personalized messaging. It isn't about getting into someone's personal space, it means understanding who the customer is and messaging to them in a way they feel good about.

CB: Personalization is huge in engagement. What other kinds of things are you focusing on to more fully engage customers with the product, with you, and with your employees?

JT: It's my life. It's all I care about, whether it's shaking hands with customers who come into our

of every post. It's just so powerful. During the CEO's webinar, my director of digital services presented Facebook, and then I asked people to join the conversation there. Three hundred and forty-seven people joined within 10 minutes. It was a plea and I meant it. I said, "I'd rather you join Facebook than buy another month of our services," frankly, because I just want that engagement. I fundamentally believe that the renewal and satisfaction will come if I can stimulate positive engagement in and outside the product. So, I am not trying to get you to renew. I'm

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office, doing webinars, maintaining a collegial yet professional culture, or succeeding at making our success.rosettastone.com portal engaging, cool and a place where we solve customer problems. We used to be, "Here's a phone number to call." Now, every single thing we do is to stimulate engagement in some way, shape or form. We just crossed a million people on our Facebook page. Maybe ten thousand are customers, but they represent 50%

trying to get you into a webinar, or to our social media page or whatever. If I can put a video of a coach inside the product when you start your product experience, the farther upstream I go. Now that I manage selling in the call centers, we're going to establish a relationship even if it means they're going to buy the next time they come back. As a result, our conversion rates have gone up 20% in the last two months. That being said, it was hard because it went down at first. I was nervous, but



fortunately no one turned their head at me. I knew I had one more month until people would start staying, "Gee, do you think he should be managing that?" But I

relationship period. There are all kinds of things we can do to extend our relationship into other industries that are complementary; it's a pillar that our CEO is building

individually. If you're selling cars, talk to the people who bought the cars. It's not the end-all-be-all, but it is what keeps you grounded, and what is number one above all else.

"Customers do not always say exactly what they want. They give you information; and you have to take all that intelligence and weave it into something."

held to it because I am passionate about engagement. I do it myself; I talk to hundreds of customers every month, and don't ever want to lose that.

CB: It's fantastic you have the fortitude to stay the course to see what the impact of increased focus on engagement is. A 20% increase in conversion has got to more than make up for the loss of hard pitch sales that are no longer there.

JT: I can't go backwards. That's why there are different pressures. The higher you raise that bar, the new bar becomes expectation, and those are really the pressures I'm dealing with across the board. Somebody asked about being cross-pitched by other travel companies, etcetera. I will tell you that one of our CEO's goals is to expand our partnership

upon and I believe in it as well, whether those are hotels, airlines, music, recipes or whatever, we're hyper-focused on that right now.

CB: What advice would you give to other chief customer officers who are working on driving customer engagement that would help shorten their path to success?

JT: What has enabled me to accomplish what I have accomplished is being in touch with the customer at the individual level to the extent I can, and then rolling it up and intelligently looking at what they're saying. Customers do not always say exactly what they want. They give you information; and you have to take all that intelligence and weave it into something. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to talk to your customers

CB: That is so true. It's fascinating to me that as companies grow, they begin to lose touch with customers. It's ever so important to figure out how to regain that relationship.

JT: After our CEO did the webinar, he was exhausted. Hundreds of questions scroll across the screen to answer and piece together. In spite of how tiring it was, he said, "That was incredibly valuable. Every person on the management team should be on one of these webinars and feel that." He meant it very positively, so we've made it a point to bring in others each time. Our CPO and CFO have been on it, as well as many special guests. The more webinars we have, the more that appreciation for engagement spreads down the chain. Now, if I'm talking to 50 customers a week, my direct reports make sure they're talking to 51. I'm dangerous if I have more information than they have, and they know it. At this point, it's culture.



About CURTIS N. BINGHAM

As Executive Director of the Chief Customer Officer Council™, Curtis Bingham is the recognized authority on chief customer officers and the first to promote this role as a catalyst for competitive advantage. He is the creator of the CCO Roadmap, a groundbreaking work containing 100+ critical strategies essential for customer centricity. As an international speaker, author, and consultant, Curtis is passionate about creating customer strategy to sustainably grow revenue, profit, and loyalty.



About Jay Topper

Jay Topper joined Rosetta Stone in 2007 as CIO and held that position through the company's April 2009 IPO, when he became SVP, Customer Success. Prior to joining Rosetta Stone, Jay was CIO and SVP of India Operations for Seven Worldwide, a global pre-media company. In August 2012, Jay joined Vitacost.com as CTO & CIO. Jay holds a B.S. in Mathematics from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and an M.S. in Telecommunications and Information Management from the Polytechnic Institute of NYU.

About THE CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER COUNCIL

The Chief Customer Officer Council is the first of its kind; a member-led peer-advisory network offering unparalleled insight into the critical issues facing CCOs. It was created to provide a safe environment where CCOs can share ideas, concerns, and build best practices that will help them, their companies, and especially their customers succeed. The Council includes CCOs from diverse industries, purposefully cross-pollinated with the most forward-thinking companies, large and small. For more information, visit www.ccocouncil.org, email info@ccocouncil.org or call 978-226-8675.



Conversations with the CCO: Influencing to Action with Peter Quinn - In this article by Curtis N. Bingham, featuring Peter Quinn, CCO of Infor, you'll learn critical first year strategies for ensuring the success of your customers and consequently, the impact of their success upon your sales.

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