STATE OF
BRAND
LOVE
REPORT

Put a Little Love in Your CX
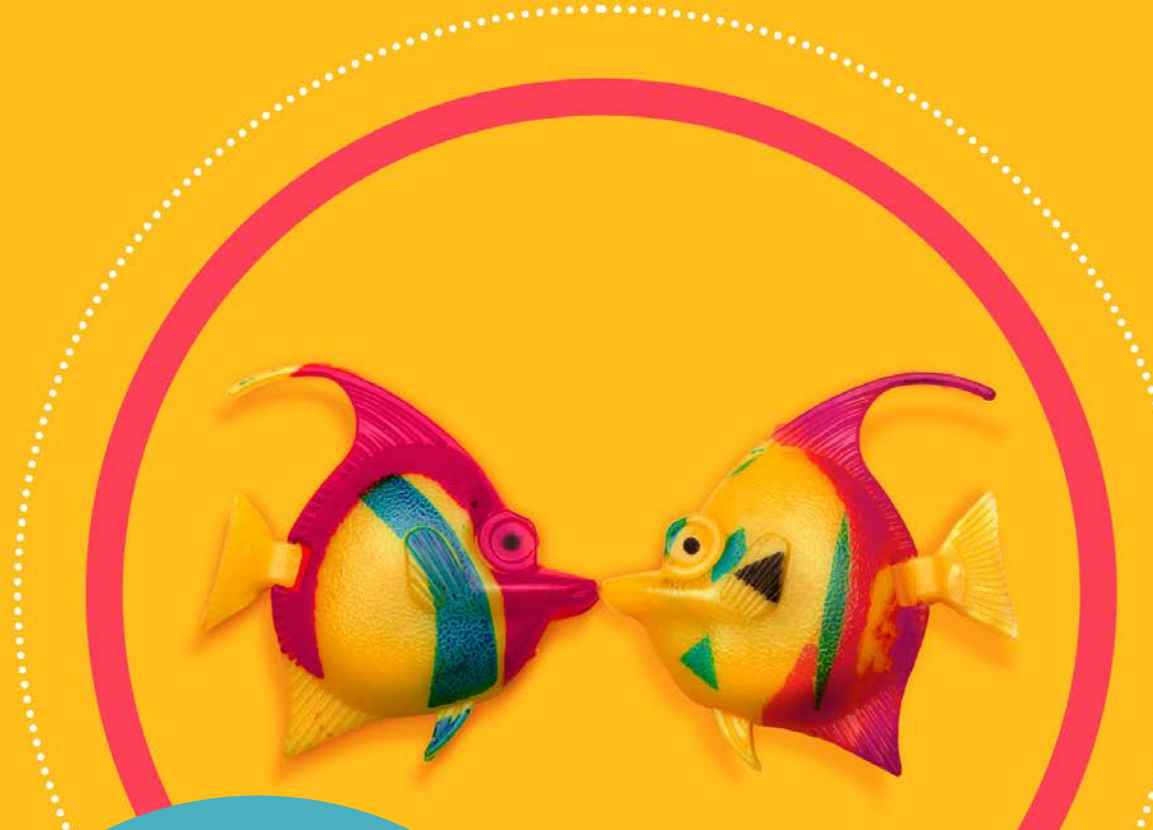
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Executive Summary

Building and maintaining relationships is hard—for customers and brands alike.

Customers are dealing with rapid change and uncertainty in their lives—political, economic, and technological, to name a few. In this context, brands have to find new ways to serve customers, while also dealing with macro shifts in global finances, supply chain, and talent.

At the same time, customers now increasingly desire certainty and meaning. By tapping into the most meaningful and enduring force in human nature—love— brands can respond to their customers' need for significance in this chaotic environment.

Hard as it may be to define, and unique as it may be to each individual, the desire to feel and sustain love is a universal part of the human experience. And brands are a part of it.

By tapping into the most meaningful and enduring force in human nature— love—brands can respond to their customers' need for significance in this chaotic environment.

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In this report, we'll show you how to set, meet, and exceed expectations with customers to achieve brand love.

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We all have brands we love:

The big aspirational brands that unite communities

The special, niche brands we discover and champion

The quietly constant brands we gratefully rely on

But brand love doesn't happen without nurturing. Put simply, if you don't take steps to keep your customers in love with you, many of them will walk away from your brand—and will likely never come back. When you don't actively nurture brand love—creating that relationship with a customer and exceeding expectations—you may find yourself on the receiving end of a "breakup," resulting in the loss of advocates and market share.

We conducted independent consumer research to get a sense of what makes them fall in love with a brand, what makes them fall out of love with a brand, and how to get into what we call the "inner circle" of brand love. In short, we discovered that the secret sauce to getting to the inner circle of

brand love, and staying there, requires you to focus on quality, customer experience, and trust. If you invest—and succeed— in these three areas, you are on the road to achieving brand love nirvana.

In this report, we'll show you how to set, meet, and exceed expectations with customers to achieve brand love. Key findings include:

What makes (or breaks) your customer relationships

How to maintain close, enduring bonds with your customers

Where to prioritize investment in the moments that matter most in a customer journey

We hope this report illustrates how to keep the spark alive with your customers for years to come.

Introduction

Is Your Brand a Keepsake?

Customers are people too. Obviously, right? But for all the talk about customer centricity and customer experience, most brands sometimes forget this simple fact. Of course, customers buy stuff. But customers are humans first—people with richer lives and bigger needs, hopes, and dreams than buying products, services, or experiences. The best brands never forget this, and by creating connections with their customers, they win the most rewarding emotion humans can give: Love.

We've all said at some point that we loved a product, a service, a brand. But what does that mean? Can you really even love a brand?

We set out to test two theories with our brand love research:

1 Brand love is inherently related to customer engagement and brand value

2 There are specific and controllable factors that contribute to brand love

And we discovered that brand love matters more than ever. Customers form a strong emotional connection through perceived value—what brands are "cool" or "leaders" or "memorable." And once this connection is forged, brands can earn their way into an inner circle of brand love—a place where customers make lifelong bonds.

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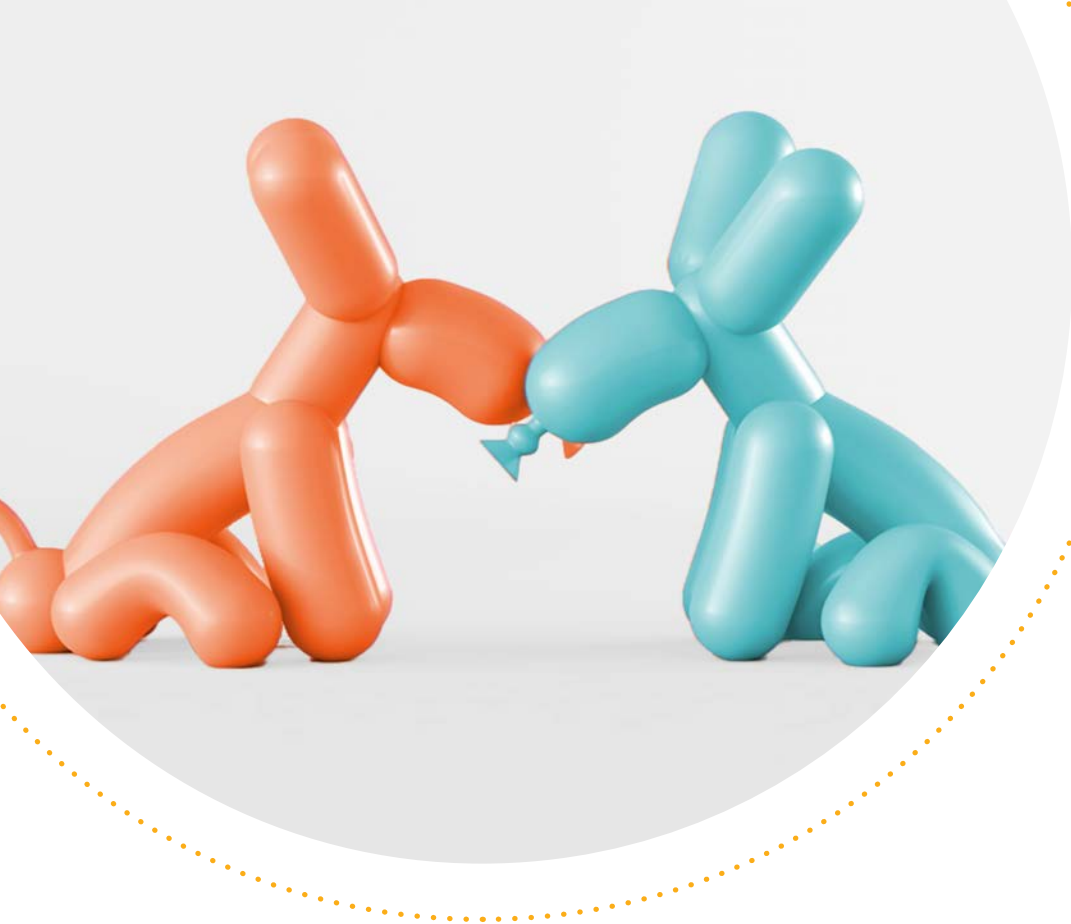
But relationships deflate over time if little to no work is put in to nurture them.

To combat this, brands must reinforce and grow brand love through trust built on consistent experience delivery and value exchange; otherwise, brand breakups can and do happen.

And the fallout from a brand breakup can be forever. It's part of the risk for the business to even strive for love vs. being sidelined as the kind of brand that no one even thinks about.

How do you gain entry into that inner circle of brand love? Without doubt, you must continuously earn the right to exist in people's lives. Because once you've lost the love of a customer, it's so much harder to win it back. And we have the model that proves it.

70%
of consumers say there is nothing that would compel them to switch away from a loved brand

52%
of consumers used to love a brand that they now avoid at all costs

2/3
of consumers say they can't be won back once a brand has lost their love
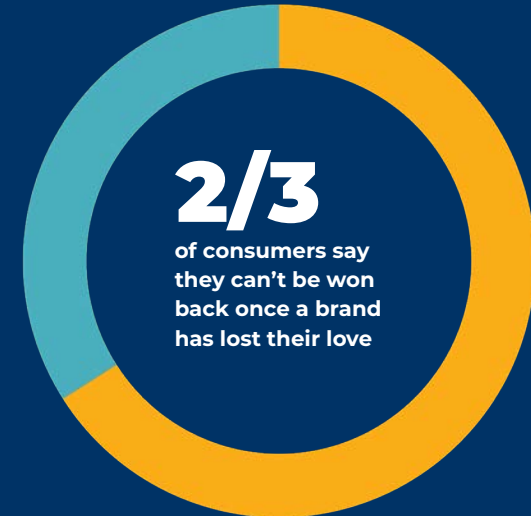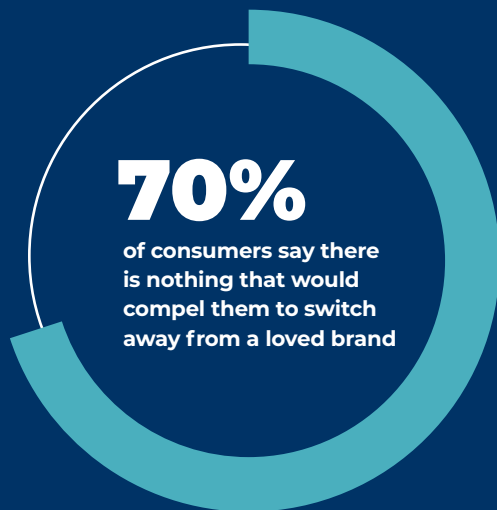
The Model

We surveyed 3,375 consumers to build a framework for identifying, improving, and growing brand love.

The framework places brands on either an "inner circle" (brands that are most loved by respondents) and an "outer circle" (brands that are actively avoided by respondents). By contrasting the two groups using the inner/outer circle model, we were able to determine the factors that make people love their most cherished brands, and why other brands don't make the cut.

3,375 consumers

1150+ brands

9 industries

Outer Circle of Brand Breakups

Neutral Zone

Inner Circle of Brand Love

4.6 the average number of brands in a customer's inner circle

2.6 the average number of brands in a customer's outer circle

898 inner circle brands evaluated

746 outer circle brands evaluated
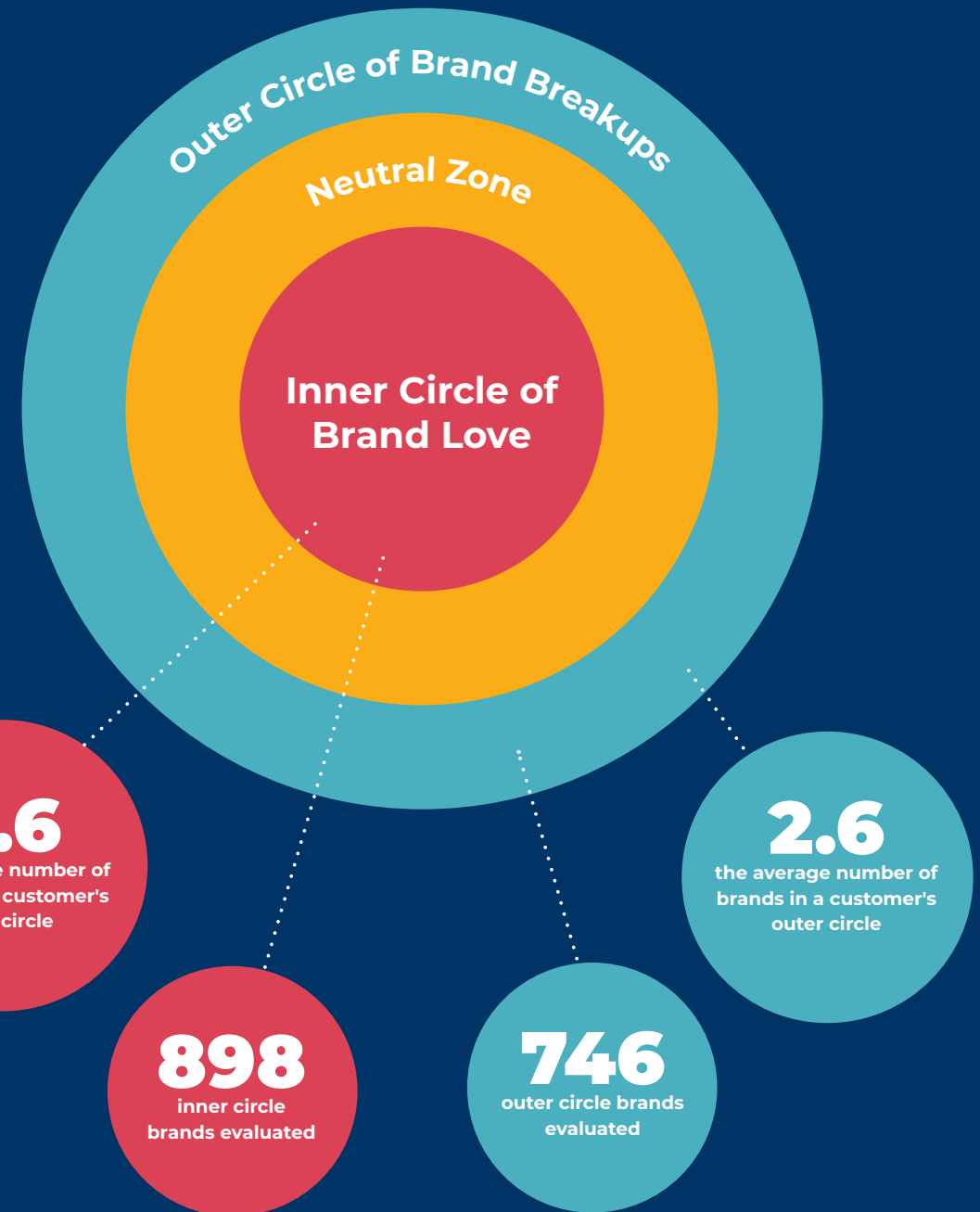
How Do You Earn Memento Status?

Earning a spot in the inner circle of brand love is special. And the other brands—the ones that are in the friend zone or on the way to a breakup—they're measured against those loved brands. The metric, of course, is the individual's subjective brand perception—and how they compare yours not only against other brands in your category, but against all the brands in their broad sphere of awareness. Each time a customer interacts with your brand, you're being benchmarked against their loved brands, and your brand must meet or beat those expectations.

So how do you shape brand perception? Our research on brand love identifies three areas to invest in across your product delivery: Quality, Customer Experience, and Trust.

Quality: The level of excellence, reliability, and superiority associated with a brand's products, services, and overall customer experience
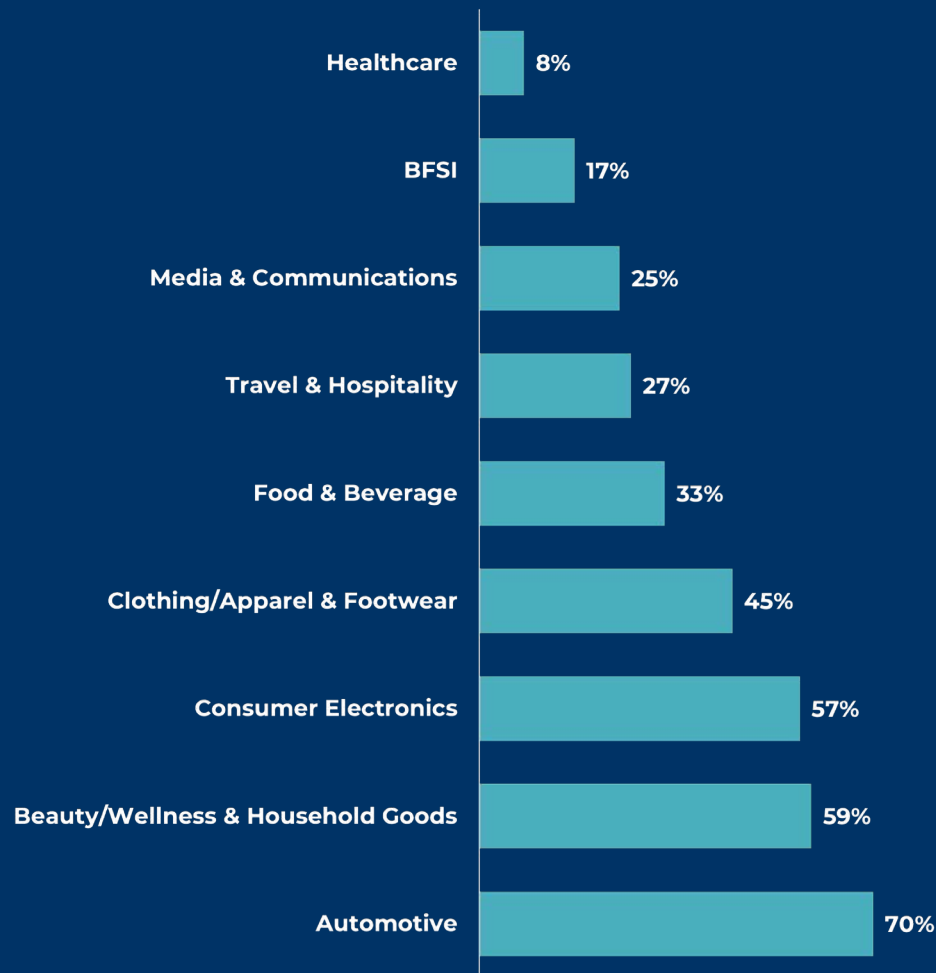
Customer Experience: The interactions that a customer has with a company, from initial awareness through engagement to support, and the perception of the brand that journey nurtures

Trust: Firm belief in the reliability, character, ability, strength, or truth of a product or service

Quality as a Driver of Brand Love by Industry

% Selected by Industry, Inner Circle

Industry	%
Healthcare	8%
BFSI	17%
Media & Communications	25%
Travel & Hospitality	27%
Food & Beverage	33%
Clothing/Apparel & Footwear	45%
Consumer Electronics	57%
Beauty/Wellness & Household Goods	59%
Automotive	70%

Quality: The Degree of Excellence

Customers have a lot on their minds, and are looking to avoid decision fatigue from a wealth of choices whenever they can.

This is where branding steps in. For customers who expect top quality and consistency, they'll choose the same brand again and again, taking a shortcut to fulfilling their needs.

Quality ranks #1 overall as a driver of brand love, and particularly stands out for the automotive **(70%)**, consumer electronics **(57%)**, and beauty, wellness, and household goods **(59%)** industries.

Because more and more purchases are made online, it's harder to test things, feel them, or pick them up and play with them. The only way for many customers to test the quality of items is through a proxy—a friend, a review, an influencer.

Quality becomes dependent on trust of that proxy because what gets recommended has a better shot at eventually winning customers' love. Recommendations from friends and family ranks #1 as means of discovery—**21%** of respondents discovered a new inner circle brand from recommendations.

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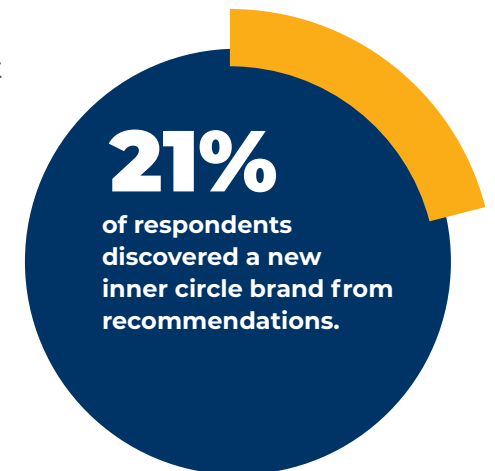
Customer Experience: The Journey

Customer experience–which includes customer service—and product quality are inherently tied together, but customer experience tends to be the deciding factor for brand love.

In our research, customer experience is the second most important driver of brand satisfaction after quality in sparking brand recommendations to family and friends—even beating out price. Diving deeper, there are three industries where experience really earns its keep: banking & financial services, healthcare, and travel & hospitality—**54%**, **49%**, and **50%** of responses respectively.

When we talk about falling out of the inner circle of brand love, it's rarely because a customer's laptop died. It's because their laptop died, but the brand didn't help them to solve their problem...a scenario which, for the brand, is a critically important opportunity to win brand love.

While you may not always be able to give customers the answer they want when they contact you about an issue, you have 100% control over how you treat your customers. There's still an outsized impact for love in your touchpoints with customers—and the human touch matters. Loyal customers, whether or not they're part of a loyalty program, expect you to treat them differently—like you know them and value them.

Empowering employees to be brand ambassadors and arming them with the proper training and tools to deliver exceptional experiences can lead to positivity toward your brand, which in turn influences customers. Done well, you build the brand into the culture.

Customer Service as a Driver of Brand Love

% Selected by Industry, Inner Circle

Industry	%
Beauty/Wellness & Household Goods	7%
Automotive	13%
Consumer Electronics	14%
Clothing/Apparel & Footwear	18%
Food & Beverage	18%
Media & Communications	21%
Healthcare	49%
Travel & Hospitality	50%
Banking & Financial Services	54%

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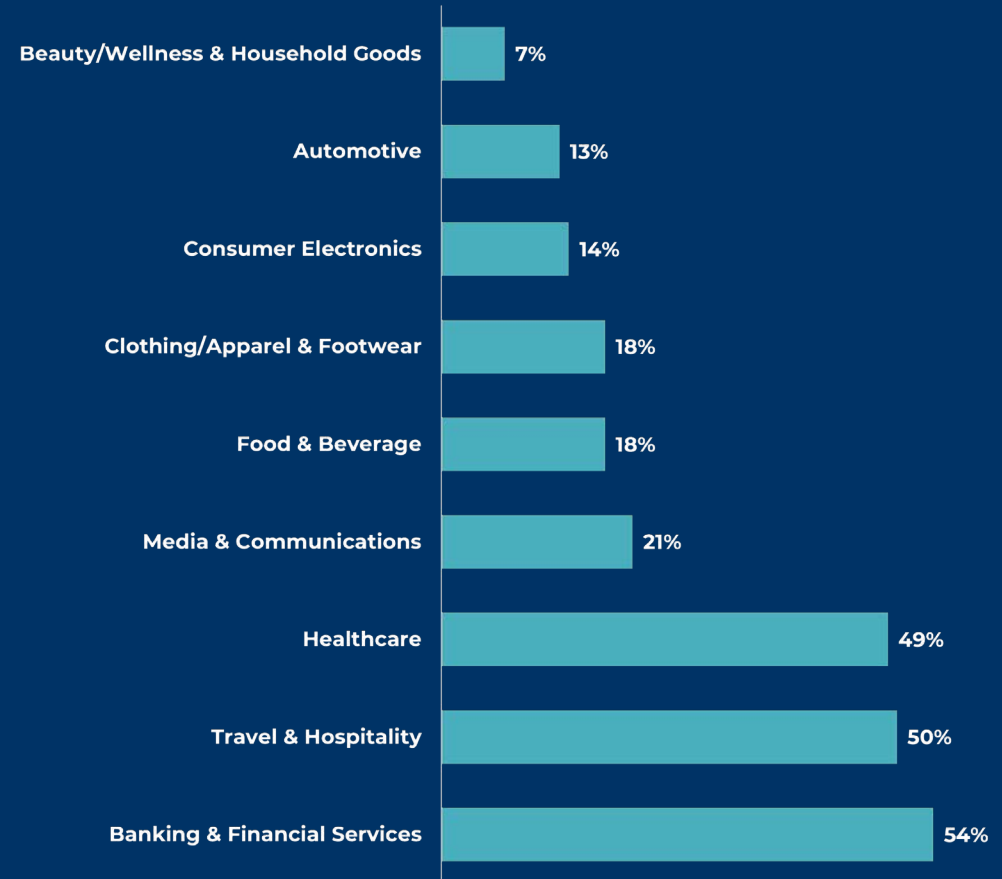
Inner Circle First Trial Sources

What led you to first try...?

- ● Trusted
- ● Transactional
- ● Trapped
- ● Other
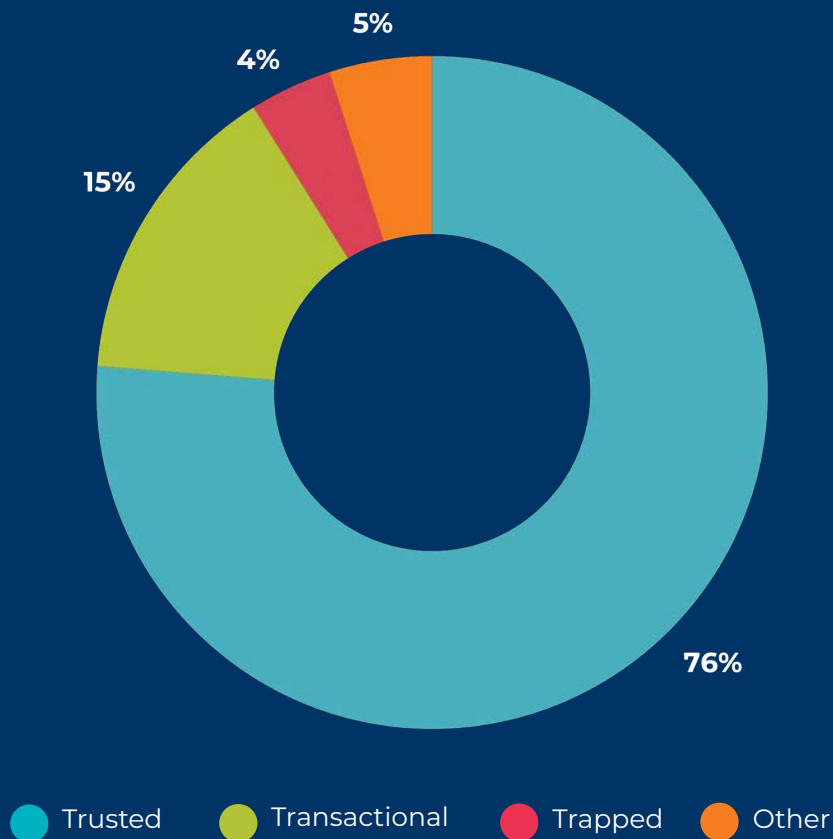
Trusted includes: Friend and family recommendations, brand reputation, online reviews/social media influencers

Transactional includes: Offered of a better product performance than alternatives, offers or benefits from a loyalty program, special deal or promotional pricing, compelling sale/advertisement, offered better customer support than alternatives, availability including location/online presence/home delivery

Trapped: The only option available to the customer

Trust: The Strong Belief in Reliability

84% of respondents agree that they trust their inner circle brands, whereas 70% of respondents don't trust their outer circle brands. This is important, because customers regularly discover new brands through trusted sources.

There's a direct correlation between familiarity and trust. Customers who have heard of your brand are more likely to trust it, as opposed to those who haven't heard of it. Context matters as well—they're more likely to trust you if they heard about you from someone they already trust, or in relation to a positive experience they had.

Some of these factors may be out of a brand's control, but who a brand affiliates itself with is important, and as always, being authentic and consistent is also important for a brand to foster trust among customers.

Customers need to trust not just the quality of the products or services you provide, but they also need to trust you with their data. This of course means that they trust you to not excessively spam them or get caught up in a data breach.

In addition, inflation has caused customers to become more aware of the cost of goods, and many now think more about the value they get for the money they spend on a product. So, if the sole of a customer's new shoe is flopping off after they wore it once, or the battery of their new smartphone drains within hours, they'll question the quality your brand provides, and you will ultimately lose their trust.

Memorable Moments that Matter

Memorable moments that matter—the experiences that "wow" customers and end up as inflection points they have with the brand—place the real-world needs, concerns, and emotions of customers at the heart of every interaction.

Leading brands are able to differentiate themselves in ways that speak not only to the customer experience, but also to the human experience, when they focus on the memorable moments that matter. To that end, customers encounter a wide range of moments that matter for falling in love with a brand. Ultimately, the proof is in the long-term relationship.

Finding the memorable moments for each of your customers starts with customer centricity—by focusing on the needs, concerns, and emotions of your customers, you reinforce and nurture brand love. And when brand love is consistently nurtured, it becomes harder to break that love.

Within the context of the buyer's journey, memorable moments are peak experiences a customer has with a brand that have the potential to leave a lasting impression on the customer.

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Memorable Moments That Matter

The top moments when a customer's feelings about a brand turn to love are:

Moments When Customers' Feelings toward a Brand Shifted to Love

More likely to drive love

Average (1x)

- Learned about while growing up or during school — **.7x**
- Recommended by someone — **.9x**
- Learned about their good business practices — **.7x**
- Realized I like their brand — **.9x**
- Saw they had the options I need/want — **1.8x**
- Saw the pricing was competitive — **1.2x**
- First purchase — **1.6x**
- Had a good experience with the product/service — **1.0x**
- Product/service proved to be reliable — **3.0x**
- Product/service proved to be well-designed — **.9x**
- Customer service treated me with respect — **2.3x**

Awareness | **Evaluation** | **Purchase** | **Use**

Indexed Vs. Average Likelihood to Drive Love

What Causes Brand Breakups?

Just as a romantic relationship can end when we stop doing the "little things" that keep the spark alive, customers are also prone to breakups when a brand's quality, customer experience, and trust levels start to decline—or even remain the same over time.

When it comes to relationships, what was once special becomes familiar, and relationships take work to stay relevant.

Fundamentally, the act of branding is making a promise. Poor quality or customer experience erodes trust, breaking the promise between the brand and customer. And once that happens, it's exceedingly difficult to win customers back—**66%** of customers will never return to a brand after a breakup.

Customer service and **quality** are the top two drivers cited in respondents' decision to break up with a brand. And **half of customers** say poor performance in these areas (1/4 each) are enough to make them never shop with a brand again.

66%
of customers will never return to a brand after a breakup

Memorable Moments That Matter

Customers encounter a wide range of "memorable moments that matter" for breaking up with a brand. The top memorable moments when customers fall out of love with a brand are:

Moments When Customers' Feelings toward a Brand Shifted to Dislike

More likely to drive dislike

- Learned about their poor reputation — **2.8x**
- Did not like their products or brand — **1.2x**
- Did not see enough variety or choice — **1.2x**
- Saw the prices were too expensive — **1.6x**
- Researched & read poor reviews — **.8x**
- Bad experience from the first purchase — **1.0x**
- Too many problems arose during use — **1.4x**
- Products did not work consistently — **3.8x**
- Realized wanted healthier options — **.8x**
- Bad experience with customer service — **3.0x**
- Customer service experience declined — **.6x**

Average 1x

| Awareness | Evaluation | Purchase | Use |

Indexed Vs. Average Likelihood to Drive Dislike

How to Design, Build, and Run Brand Love

All relationships take work, and relationships between brands and customers are no exception.

In order to realize the benefits of brand love, you must put in the time and effort to nurture it. Below, we illustrate how to design, build, and run relationships with your customers.

Design with a Purpose and a Personality

To be loved, you first have to love yourself. Brands must bring a purpose and a personality, one that is true to their very reason for existence, in order to earn a place in their customers' lives.

If you want to build a strong bond, you have to take a strong stance and ground yourself in that at a business level. All the little decisions that flow into brand design—such as product mix, service design, and employee training—are expressed with the kind of brand personality you're trying to project. You need to ask yourself: what's your tone, and what kind of emotions are you looking to bring to life?

So, while every touchpoint you have with your customer is an opportunity to express and reinforce your personality and the types of emotions you want to evoke, there are three areas of influence that matter the most:

- **The perception** that your brand can fulfill a need or want

- **Reliability** of your product or service

- **Customer service** that treats customers with respect

Ultimately, these three core areas of influence are about emotional connection. Does the customer feel fulfilled? Do they trust in the reliability of your product or service? Are they being respected?

The more a brand reinforces positive associations in those core areas, the higher likelihood they end up in a customer's inner circle of brand love.

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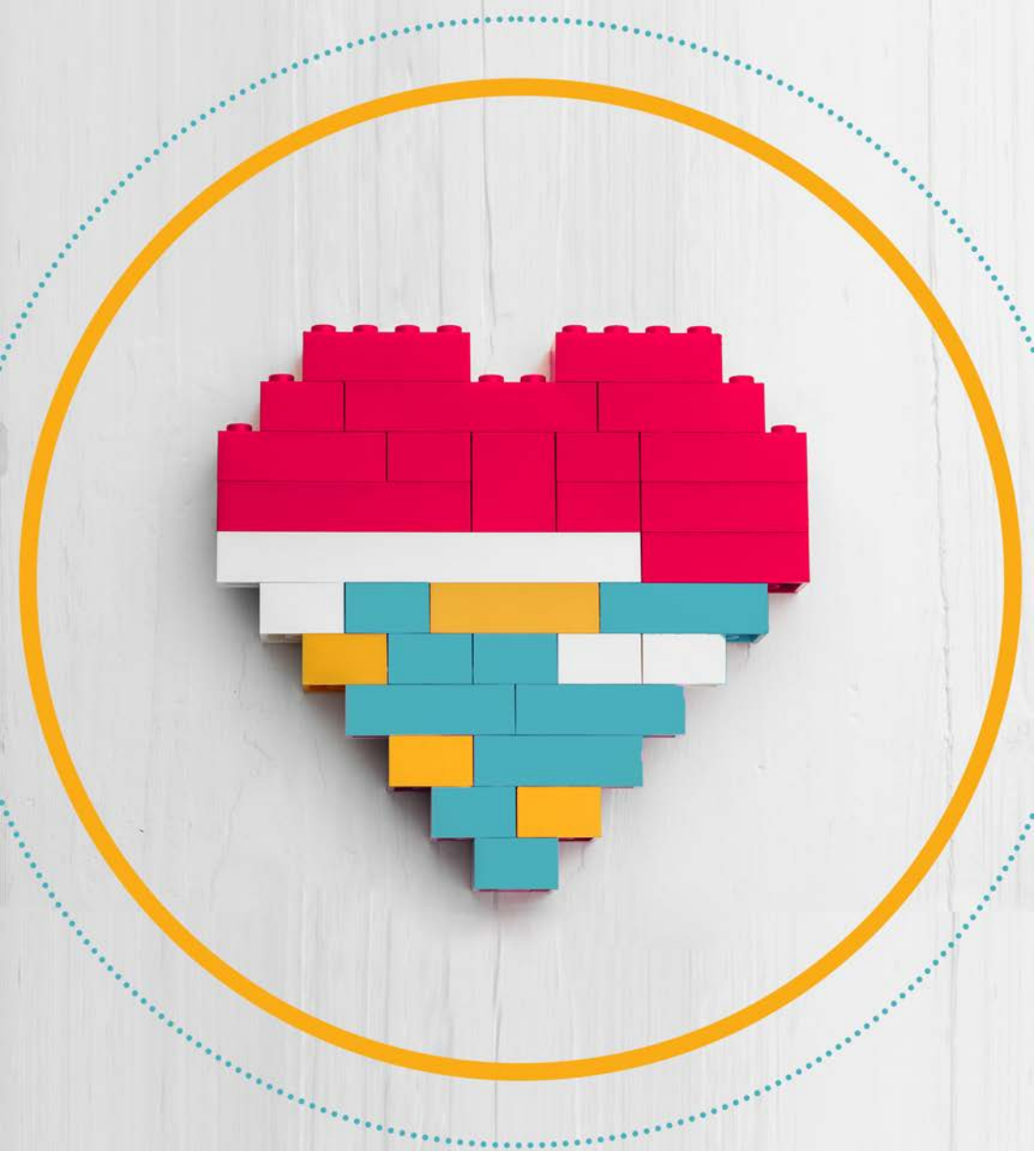
Build a One-to-One Relationship

The next step on the journey to greater brand love is to build solutions that manage your relationships with customers, and encourage more loyalty from them.

From a brand love perspective, the design phase is where the brand determines who they want to be in the world, and building is finding the way to express that across all channels and touchpoints with consistency. There's nothing so small that it should be overlooked as a moment of possible brand love.

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You need to have a golden customer record: a single source of truth for customer data that's identifiable and addressable.

To drive consistency across the entire customer lifecycle, you need to blend the physical experience with the digital experience.

Tap into your customers' emotions and expectations along those touchpoints, using technology and data from that golden customer record to orchestrate seamless experiences within and across channels.

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> You need to continually iterate on all the facets of your CX that contribute to customer loyalty.

Run Amazing CX

Our research has shown that customer service was 2x more likely than price or cost to drive recommendations of brands to family and friends.

Likewise, many responses from survey participants reflect how important it is to consistently run remarkable CX. When describing why she rated a financial services brand highly, a female survey respondent in the 55-64 age range said that **"they have consistently provided good customer service and have products that are relevant to me."** Similarly, another female in the 45-54 age range rated a health insurance company highly because **"they have great customer service and explanation of services and billing."**

You need to continually iterate on all the facets of your CX that contribute to customer loyalty. This can mean implementing strategies to repeatedly capture individualized data about who your customers are, what interests them, and what they care about. Continue to nurture those whose inner circle you are trying to enter, while also tracking their amount of brand love by keeping your finger on the pulse of the customer experience. And continually look for ways to improve CX to evolve with customer expectations. Keeping your customers in love has to be a relationship you continue to nurture.

Conclusion

Become the Object of Your Customers' Affection

Brands are now faced with unprecedented competition for wallet share, resulting in less room for mistakes that could drive customers to switch to another brand. With today's economic uncertainty impacting both the operating costs of brands and consumer spend, brands can't afford to lose customers.

Earning brand love is the best defense for protecting and growing your business. If you don't take steps to keep the love alive, your brand could be on the outside looking in. Our research found that the cost of goods and services is not a major contributing factor to brand love. You'll need to focus on quality, customer experience, and trust; otherwise, you risk customer "breakups"—and loss of market share.

The good news is that brand love is an achievable goal and the insights and principles we've shared are guiding tools that can help you achieve it. Since **70%** of consumers said that nothing could make them switch away from their inner circle brands, getting to that inner circle should be your goal. And all it takes to get you there is a little love.

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Methodology

Data for this report comes from an online survey fielded in April 2023. A total of 3,375 consumer surveys were completed with a representative selection of US consumers ages 18+. Respondents evaluated over 1,150 brands in 9 industries.

Responses were gathered equally across industries for a balanced total view: 303-309n per industry for most loved or "inner circle" brands, and 260-267n per industry for least loved or "outer circle" brands. Statistical significance thresholds were set at a 90-95% level of confidence.

- Automotive

- Banking & Financial Services

- Beauty/Wellness & Household Goods

- Clothing/Apparel & Footwear

- Consumer Electronics

- Food & Beverage

- Healthcare

- Media & Communications

- Travel & Hospitality

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Whether you need a specific solution, the whole end-to-end journey—or anything in-between, Concentrix is the partner to call. As a leading global provider of CX solutions and technology, we reimagine everything CX to improve business performance for some of the world's best brands. We'll help you define the roadmap to achieve brand love and evolve it for the long-haul.

Contact us today to see how we can design, build, and run the brand experiences people love.

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