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For most of us, the idea of walking a tightrope with no safety net to break our fall would be our worst nightmare. Add to the mix unwelcome noises, a strong wind, and other distractions, and you might think, even for the most experienced performer, that getting to the other side is nearly impossible. The key to not tumbling into the abyss is to block out the distractions. Similarly, those individuals in charge of their business' customer experiences (CX) could learn a lot from a tightrope walker.

Both need perfect balance. The same way noise can disrupt a tightrope walker, businesses must strike the right balance in communicating with their customers. Too much noise can alienate a customer for good, while too little can leave them feeling undervalued. The rope beneath your feet can feel pretty thin when trying to strike this balance, which is why the right approach cannot be underestimated.

For the tightrope walker, this can take any number of forms. Imagine what would happen if a lion tamer was asked to walk to

the end of the line unscathed? It's similar to organisations asking their IT departments to successfully deliver customer experience (CX) projects without the right skills to be able to do so effectively.

A recent Pega study found that IT departments are leading more than a quarter of global CX projects (26%) versus 13% by dedicated CX functions. Without the right expertise and focus, it's easy to understand why many of these IT projects fail. Although IT can be critical to supporting these projects, problems can arise when IT folks are forced to make business decisions that require those in other departments – many of whom have a completely different set of metrics – to buy in and adopt a new approach or solution. It might not be as dangerous as asking a lion tamer to walk a tightrope (or vice versa, for that matter), but the chances of success are just as bleak.

The ability to prepare well extends beyond making sure you match the right skills with the right projects. Any major undertaking, whether it's a high-wire agility act or a successful CX initiative, relies on people delivering what is asked of them. Our study

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found that just 35% of businesses currently have a C-level sponsor for CX projects, and in 36% of organisations, these initiatives are led at the director level or below. It's easy to underestimate the value of C-level backing, and the truth is without it projects can falter. A lack of expertise, leadership, and awareness of the CX program can lead those working on it to question the organisation's commitment. C-level involvement can help break down barriers between IT and business departments and result in a more carefully balanced overall approach.

For tightrope walking, as well as those embarking on CX initiatives, investing in the most relevant equipment is critical. The same way you wouldn't expect a tightrope walker to improve their performance with a suit of armour, spending in the wrong areas can only hinder CX projects.

Although 68% of companies say their customers determine their marketing focus, those companies named email (43%) and digital ads (42%) as their top two channels, despite increasingly low customer response rates. On the other hand, only 28% of companies said they were planning to invest

in chatbots, and 26% planned to invest in inbound contact centers, suggesting a focus on short-term outbound gains instead of the inbound channels customers typically use to communicate.

Similarly, while analytics software evolves at lightning speed, far too many organisations rely on outdated and less effective analytics solutions. For example, a quarter or more still rely on customer journey mapping (27%) or micro-segmentation (25%), while almost one in five (19%) still perform arduous A/B testing. Even more telling is that customer-centric analytics that can jumpstart CX, such as propensity modelling (37%), customer lifetime value projection (34%), or performance simulation (33%), are still far from prevalent.

When all is said and done, organisations have to realize that implementing new technology without due diligence is like taking a giant leap into the unknown. They need a more holistic, strategic approach, in which businesses look at their customers in a new way – as individuals with unique needs and preferences who have a complex, real-time relationship with every brand they

interact with. Organisations have to nurture that relationship every day by offering relevant, tailored experiences, which requires change driven by empowered C-level leaders who are willing to re-architect their core business around the customer. If they don't, they could learn the hard way that it's easy to lose their footing and come crashing down.

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