

THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

**EPISODE SEVENTY-ONE
EXPERIENCE SYSTEMS**

HOST: MICHAEL HARPER

GUESTS: SHAWN NASON & ZACK HAMILTON

JULY 20, 2022

Shawn:

Hello, everyone. I'm Shawn Nason, CEO, and founder of MOFI, and I want to welcome you to The Combustion Chronicles podcast, where bold leaders combined with big ideas to make life better for all of us. We're excited to depart from our usual programming for a few weeks, so I can step away from my hosting duties to dig into the world of Experience Ecosystems™ with my good friend and fellow maverick, Zack Hamilton. Zack currently serves as the Chief Experience and Strategy Officer at Chatter by Stingray. As you'll hear in our conversations, his people-first leadership mindset and his 20-plus years of working in the Experience Management industry come together to challenge tired, outdated systems that are holding organizations, maybe like yours, back to what they need to do. And leading the conversation in this mini-series is Michael Harper, the Chief of Radical Experiences at MOFI. When the three of us get together, we cut through the bullshit to think bigger and bolder about designing a human-obsessed world. Ready to blow up the status quo and ignite a people-first experience revolution? Yeah? Me too! So, let's do this.

Michael:

On this episode, we continue our conversation about all things experience and ecosystems. Now that we have a good understanding of what an ecosystem is, I'm here with Shawn and Zack to talk about how to put that into action a little bit. Zack, when we're talking about needing some kind of framework in an operational system, where do companies just screw things up?

Zack:

Yeah, I think for this context, right, a framework is really around how do we align our ecosystem in order to take action with building those experiences that we want our organization to be known for? If you think about traditional experience management, that framework for the last 25 years has really been around. Think of it as a waterfall approach, project management. So we understand the frictions that are happening within our organization, and now we build out this project plan and it takes us about 6, 9, 12 months to deploy that project plan. And what's happened between time is consumer behaviors rapidly changing, and when we go to deploy that framework, we've already cost significantly more frictions than what we intended to. And so if you really think about how most brands have pivoted today, it's really around that agile framework process. And that's where I believe leading brands are using the experience system framework, very similar to an agile process to deploy very agile ecosystem, the teams within the ecosystem, start with a minimally viable. For example, Shawn, you just mentioned it, how do we operationalize an improvement to the friction? And then we constantly involve all the stakeholders within the ecosystem to build small improvements along the way that are adapting to consumer behavior, for example.

Michael:

Now I don't know about y'all, but I just felt the ground move, of all the project managers and COOs of the world, and all the business school professors have just, you know, fallen over or fainted or dropped their coffee mugs at this point. I mean, this is no small deal, I guess, is my point. Shawn, like when you think of this frustration, what gets you all riled up about these problems?

Shawn:

Well, yeah, and I think this was when Zack and I met each other, this was the thing that we really got excited about in our thinking. And I know we're going to do another episode on this here in the mini-

series, but it goes back to that system versus management. So many companies are still set up to manage experience and not build it as a system. And that ecosystem we talk about. You're right, what I think about is, what comes to my mind is a call center, right? As a managed system or a management is, you think 25 years ago, call centers that still work off of scripts is a 25 year old way of looking at it, a call center that equips and gives the tools to their associates to do what they are good at. And we've done a lot of work, Michael in healthcare, right? And so we script, you know, we've seen where people have scripted nurses, really educated people that they can't even use what they're good at. And so that's, to me, what this, breaks that habit, but got, you're right, like I'm not surprised that there's not things pointing at us in this direction because of what Zack just said.

Zack:

Yeah. And I'll give you a tactical example. So this is when I was still back in industry leading retail is we, at that point, we knew we wanted to roll out a mobile app for our customers. And so we engaged a third party design firm to help us design what this mobile app looks like. We had a project manager who, who project managed the entire plan and it took about nine months before we deployed it to, you know, into beta test. And about two weeks later, we had three customers who had downloaded the app. And so we never included customers or employees into this process of designing the app, and we had to completely back up and I said, well, what data do we have that says, this is what our customers want to use in the app. The design firm said, well, everyone wants it to be an extension of your website. And what our customer said was I want an easier way to manage my account, which was number one. Number two is to make my payment. Number three, I can't remember what three was, but four was actually an extension to shop. And so we did all this work for nine months, got three people. We had to completely go back to the drawing board, take it as iterative approach. And now it's highly adopted within a customer base.

Shawn:

And how many millions of dollars?

Zack:

Might not have been millions, maybe a couple hundred thousands of dollars, but that is an example of a very traditional experience management framework, where we're in a waterfall, the approach, and this is what we want. And we basically made the decision on the app of, hey, we want to increase same store sales. So let's, let's make the P and L decision. And then customers and employees, and everyone has to get in line versus a more experienced system approaches. What is it that our customers want? Let's go build for them and let's make it an iterative process.

Michael:

So let's shift to what should be happening. If this is all what shouldn't be happening, where should we be going? How can this be fixed?

Shawn:

Well, I'll jump in here. Your whole story just talked about, we never talked to the customer, right? And Michael, what we do at MOFI, what Zack does at Chatter is lead with the customer first, right? You, you, you're leading a project even now, Michael, where you're spending a lot of time learning the process of what the customers and the associates go through before you even talk about what problem we're going to solve. Right. But yet, so many organizations, and I don't want to throw people under the bus,

but those agencies that you're talking about, Zack, it's the great ah, let me pay you a lot of money. I'm going to go do this. And then we're going to pull back the curtain. And then you ask the simple question, what did the customer want? Oh, we never even talked to them. How many times do we hear that on a daily basis, a weekly basis, we go to conferences and we're still talking about how to do VOC, voice of the consumer or voice of the customer work. What, if you, and this will be pick up your toes. If you work in the Experience Ecosystem and you don't know how to do VOC, voice of customer work or voice of employee work, get out of the industry.

Michael:

Well, it's not even voice, right? It's heart, it's live. It's, it's the whole self of the consumer. So even when we just use the phrase VOC, it'd drive me nuts.

Zack:

Yeah. I think to me, if you think about the experience system framework, that's elevating the ecosystem work you guys are doing, it's really understanding, hey, what are the frictions or the, or the non-desirable experiences that we're creating as a brand? Now let's, let's connect the dots. How is that making it what's it impacting from a business perspective, right? Because we all know we have to be able to connect the dots to business outcomes. If we want to get prioritization, if we want to get the organization to say, hey, let's go create this ecosystem or this system of team players to go, iteratively improve the frictions that we're creating. And now you have your team, right? That cross-functional team who's really has the autonomy and decision making ability to iteratively make decisions that improve the experience. And then you roll out that minimally viable, operational improvement. You roll it out to a select few stores, for example, in retail. And now you're starting to understand, is this changing the experience that we want to make that aspirational experience? And it just becomes that consistent loop.

Shawn:

And I have to tag on what you just said there though, Zach. Because you said that that team has the autonomy and the decision making power to do what they need to do. But let's be real. How many organizations do we know that have chief experience officers, vice presidents of experience and vice presidents of this, and they have no decision making power. So how do you even implement, I guess this is my question to use, how do you even implement an experienced system when you have people that are chief experience officers that have no decision rights?

Zack:

I mean, that's where that's where systems fail, right? And that's where we get back to this traditional experience management approach, where we just obsess about the benchmarks. That's where businesses are failing. If you think about the autonomy to make decisions. And I, when I say autonomy, it's not, hey, we're going to go make a multi-million dollar decision without getting the, the buy in the feedback and, and the approval from the executive leadership team that they should have the autonomy to say, hey, we have to change this 10 year old operational process that is impacting the experience, and here's what it should be presented to.

Michael:

So all of this is possible, right?

Shawn:

I think so. I think so.

Zack:

So yeah, I mean, I, we, we were able to create it my past life. I've seen brands who have adopted this, that have elevated their experiences through this experience system framework. Yes, it's going to take breaking some A's and getting rid of this is how we used to do things to here's how we're going to go empower our ecosystem.

Michael:

There you go. I love the empowerment. Well, thank you, Zack and Shawn, for this conversation, it has been a blast and we look forward to continuing the conversation later.

Shawn:

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of The Combustion Chronicles. If you've enjoyed this episode, please take a few minutes to subscribe, rate and review our podcast. Remember that I'm always looking to meet more big-thinking mavericks. So let's keep the conversation going by connecting on LinkedIn. If you want to discover more about human-obsessed, maverick-minded Experience Ecosystems, go to MOFI.co where you'll discover ideas and resources to help you ignite your own experience revolution. As always stay safe, be well and keep blowing shit up.