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A portrait of K V Dipu, President and Head of Operations at Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a striped shirt. He is standing in an office environment with blurred figures of other people in the background.

Customer engagement is about going beyond the customer's expectations

As President and Head of Operations at [Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company](#), [K V Dipu](#) is spearheading digital transformation within the company. He spoke to Digital CMO Digest about how they have integrated technology with their initiatives for a seamless customer experience and the mistakes you need to avoid in order to achieve Customer Success. Besides being a certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, he is also a member of the Harvard Business Review Advisory Council.

Interviewed by Prajwala Hegde

// Practices and possibilities pertaining to Customer Success have changed over the years, with the advent of newer technologies like AI, among others. Can you tell us about the extent of adoption of such technologies within Bajaj Allianz?

At Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, cutting-edge customer experience is the outcome of a powerful blend of emerging technologies and the timeless ethos of placing customers at the center of all our initiatives. In this context, among many others, we would like to highlight a strong use case of technology adoption – blockchain.

As they say, the real moment of truth in the insurance industry is the moment when the customer files a claim. We rolled out a blockchain-driven claims process in June wherein a customer need not indulge in any paperwork (ticket copies, proof of flight delay, correspondence with the airline etc.) in case his international flight gets delayed beyond the limits set out in the insurance policy purchased from us. By leveraging the power of blockchain technology, we have shifted the onus of proof from the customer to ourselves. If the flight is delayed, we cheerfully transfer the amount to the customer's bank account without requiring ANY paperwork from him!

// Various research studies have shown (including our own recent study on the 'State of Product Marketing 2017') that marketers are focusing more on winning new customers than on engaging with existing ones. Does this statement resonate with your company's marketing strategy as well?

A good football team needs both defence and offence! Likewise, we focus on BOTH new customer acquisition and existing customer retention. We take pride in the fact that we are a noble industry, in the sense that we come to the aid of customers during bad times, and our endeavor therefore is to cast the net wide and far to ensure that we provide protection to as many customers as possible. Hence, the focus on new customer acquisition.

At the same time, having provided cover to customers, our objective is to ensure customers renew their policies with us so that they continue to enjoy the benefits of protection. And we have deployed a slew of initiatives over the years (digital purchase of policies, faster settlement of claims, prompt servicing, customer empowerment) to ensure a hassle-free process for the

customer, be it a new or an existing one.

// In today's ever-changing landscape (rise of mobile and social technology) and competitive business environment, what are the big challenges you have faced while ensuring that customers are engaged with your products and services.

The biggest challenge for insurance companies is that this is one product which customers think of only during bad times. Unlike a credit card, which customers used to flash with pride as a status symbol not too long ago, and which customers use very frequently (whether to book a cab or a movie or to even eat a simple meal), the insurance policy is neither a flashy product nor a high-involvement, frequently used one! It is in this context that our tag line "relationship beyond insurance" clearly delineates our endeavor to go beyond "bad" times, and play a much bigger role in the customer's life. And we have been one of the fastest off the block in terms of leveraging mobile & social technology in this ever-changing landscape. For instance, we launched the 'connected car' product wherein the customer buys a traditional policy (to be invoked during bad times) along with a device (to be invoked during good times). The device tracks his driving patterns and can help the customer & the insurance company draw up a more informed, customized policy rather than rely on aggregate / mass patterns derived from the overall customer data.

// What, according to you, are the three key elements behind effective customer engagement in Bajaj Allianz? How do you scale building close-knit customer relationships, when you have such a large customer base?

Three key elements of the customer engagement drive at Bajaj Allianz are

(a) Combining science with art: Deploying cutting-edge technologies with the timeless tradition of instilling a servicing mindset in every employee

(b) Mapping white spaces: Fixing the obvious and hidden untouched areas throughout the customer life cycle.

(c) Twinning: Drawing up enterprise journeys which mirror actual customer journeys to ensure that processes are aligned to the customer rather than the other way round.

The key to building close-knit customer relationships, given such a large customer base, is to shift focus from scale (one size fits all product & approach) to scope (use of data mining & analytics) to ensure the power of one, viz., a truly customized offering for every customer. Actuarial science has been the cornerstone of the insurance industry and there is an underlying tectonic shift in terms of switching the focus from risk to customers.

// Tell us more about some of the innovative strategies/programs you have employed to drive customer engagement in your company?

We have rolled out a plethora of initiatives to drive customer engagement! For instance, in line with our stated objective of relationship beyond insurance, we have deployed "relationship managers at hospitals". These relationship managers are personally appointed executives at hospitals who take care of claims and other insurance related services for our customers. With this pilot project, we aim to provide not only financial support but also, more importantly, emotional support to people at times they need it the most.

Likewise, we have an app that empowers the customer and dramatically reduces the motor claim settlement time from days to minutes! Imagine that you are on a road trip with your friends, and that you suddenly experience a vehicle breakdown. Rather than cobbling together paperwork, going through the rigmarole of registering a claim, pushing for inspection in an unknown territory etc., with the help of Bajaj Allianz - Motor On The Spot, the customer can register and self-inspect his motor insurance claim for claims up to Rs 20,000!

Another significant offering is our artificial intelligence powered chatbot – christened Boing – which caters to various needs such as policy copies, quick claim servicing etc. Incidentally, Boing has just been conferred the 'Skoch Order of Merit', which is surely one of the highly valued honors in the country!

// What do you think are the biggest reasons companies fail at customer engagement and what should they do to avoid those mistakes?

Companies fail at customer engagement when they take an insular, inside-out view and assume their core, often narrowly defined products / services suffice. Let me illustrate this with an example.

What if an insurance company assumes that its core product (settling a claim) suffices? What about airlifting a customer from a remote area to a hospital when he or she is stuck prior to the claim process? This is where our tag line "relationship beyond insurance" comes in. Recently, when a customer was stuck in a remote area in Ladakh, we air dashed her to a hospital. The claim (our product) was not the issue, speed of action in getting her to a hospital was. She survived. Had we assumed that we had one of the best claim settlement processes but had refused to budge on the process prior to the claim, the patient would have not been alive to even file the claim!

// What is the one big learning that you would like to share with us?

I am a certified six-sigma black belt, and it is sheer irony that my biggest learning (which I am never tired of telling my team) is that the best customer engagement is when you do not stick to processes in terms of going by the book. It is about going beyond! A case in point is a recent situation wherein a customer's husband had to undergo a surgery. The customer who had filed a health claim had also requested an instant approval to facilitate an early discharge from the hospital. Curious in mind and customer-centric at heart, we got to the bottom of the case immediately, and figured out that the couple wanted a quick discharge to celebrate Onam with their friends and family members (some of whom had come over from outside the country) in Kochi. We realized then how a by-the-book approach (proper settlement of claim via due diligence) wouldn't get us a wow. So, we leveraged the "relationship manager" angle, worked closely with the hospital and the patient, and ensured that we not only got them discharged quickly but also made arrangements for a safe drop home. The patient sent us a thank you note letting us know how our efforts ensured that they could join their family for the festive celebrations. The joy we experienced seeing a happy customer is indescribable and it was our biggest reward too!