

the offer you can't refuse

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What if customers want more than just excellent service?

Steven Van Belleghem

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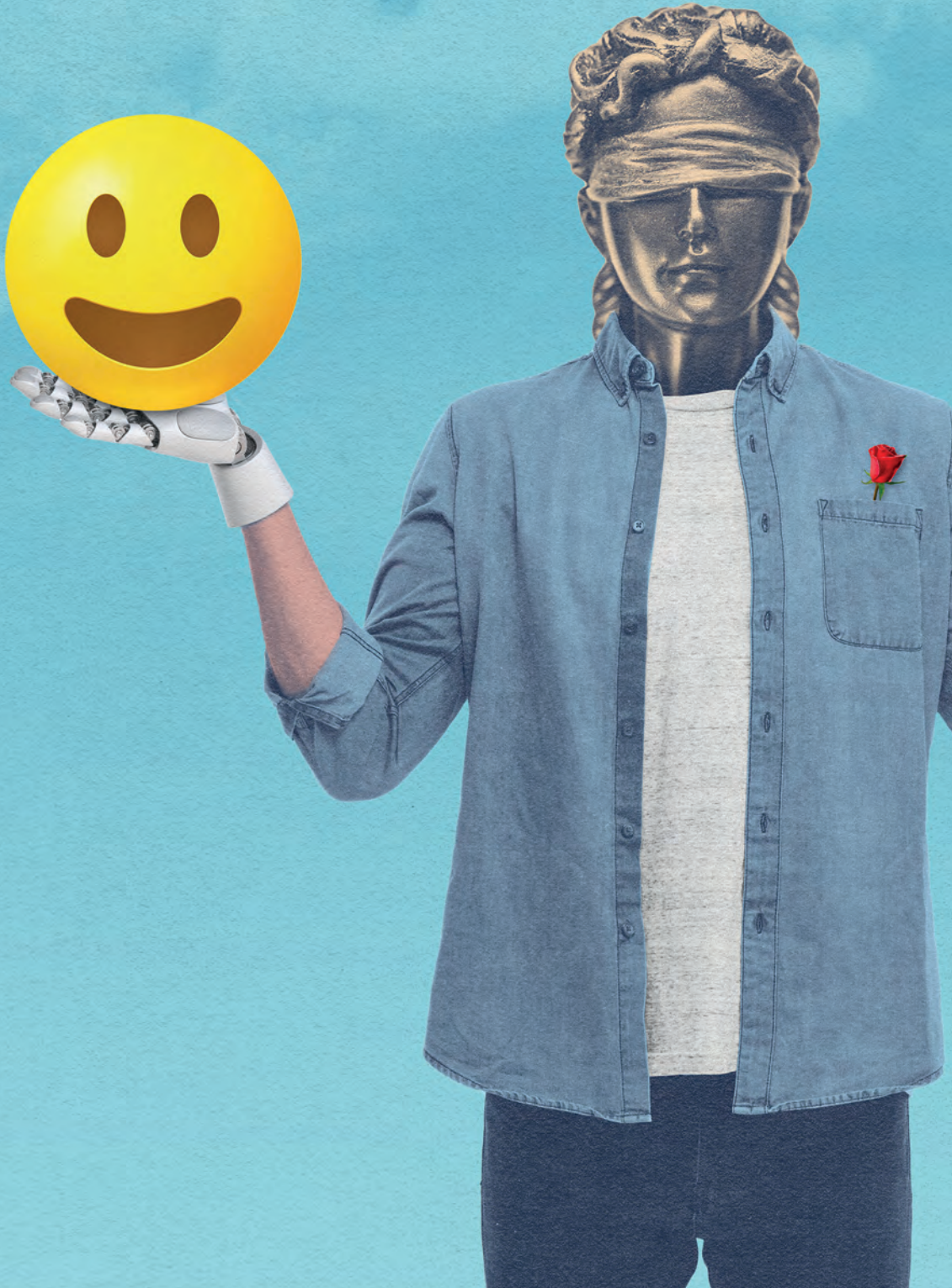
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introduction

Social challenges

At the age of just sixteen, Greta Thunberg was chosen as TIME's Person of the Year for 2019. This made the Swedish climate activist the youngest ever winner of that prestigious distinction. Thunberg has both her haters and lovers. Some people were hugely in favour of the series of climate protests in 2019; others were appalled that children were allowed to miss school to take part in demonstrations. Her famous 'How dare you!' quote at the meeting of world leaders at the United Nations was received by both applause and a chorus of boos. Reaction to her has always been ambiguous.

Leaving aside the polarisation, no-one can deny that the climate discussion is now higher on the political agenda than it has ever been, thanks largely to the

activism of Greta Thunberg and her followers. During recent months, initiatives have been launched all over the world to turn back the tide of climate change. More and more companies are also taking action to reduce their ecological footprint.

In fact, society is looking increasingly towards companies to help tackle society's problems. People's trust in the companies is greater than their trust in the government, as revealed by an annual study by the American PR and marketing advice bureau Edelman.¹ Companies like Unilever, Danone, Salesforce, Nestlé and many others now have very clear climate objectives, which are in keeping with the societal ambition to limit the effects of global warming.² Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, decided in February 2020 to invest 10 billion dollars in a fund to combat climate change. This money will be used to support scientists and activists in their efforts to protect our environment.

It is evident that both awareness of and actions to deal with climate change are moving into overdrive. But in spite of all this hopeful news, as few as 25 per cent of companies have a climate plan that is worth the name.³ The opportunities for society to grow further in this direction are still enormous.

More than ever before, people are starting to worry almost daily about the challenges facing society. The climate problem is just one of the major concerns of the average citizen. Health care is, of course, another issue that is fairly close to the top of the list.



As a result of the unexpected outbreak of the coronavirus, we have all been forced to face up to our weakness. Humanity is vulnerable and it will only be thanks to a previously unseen degree of co-operation between the public, the business community, scientists and politicians that we will eventually be able to defeat this terrible contagion. From now on, every company will need to be active in some way in health care. That is a matter of concern to us all.

In the years ahead, the expectations of customers will also be increasingly coloured by such societal concerns. More and more consumers will be looking for companies that take their social responsibilities seriously.

The biggest digital transformation ever

At the same time, it needs to be recognised that customer expectations are not focused exclusively on societal problems. For most consumers, their personal challenges, dreams, fears and desires are still at the forefront of their minds. Benefiting society alone without meeting the basic expectations of customers (in terms of price, product and service) is a non-starter. Companies therefore face the task of making sure that they can also satisfy the personal challenges of their customers – if they want to keep them.

In 2020, we all took part in the largest digital training course ever. Everyone – young, old, rich, poor, pro or contra – had no other choice during the great lockdown than to embrace the use of digital tools. Not only to work, communicate and relax, but also to buy products. There was simply no other option than the digital option.

Consumers threw themselves wholeheartedly into the digital process, resulting in a rapid learning curve and a previously unexperienced peak of use. The chief technology officer of Shopify, the largest e-commerce platform for traders and companies, said at the end of April 2020: ‘The number of daily purchases via the web is now comparable with the total number of purchases on Black Friday.’⁴ Black Friday and Cyber Monday are the busiest online shopping days of the year in the United States. Those annual top-spots have now suddenly become the daily average.

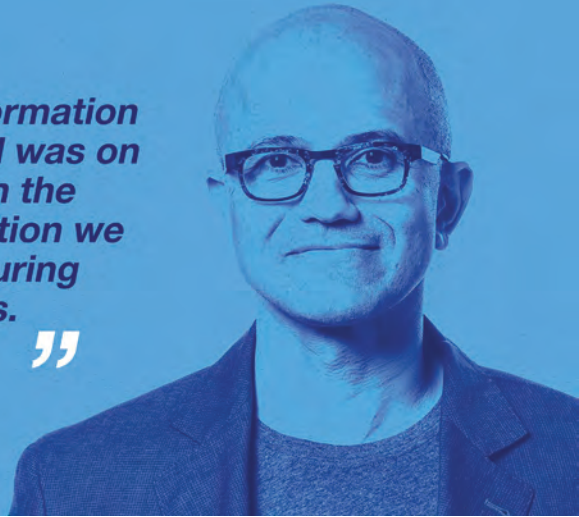
For many companies, this need to switch rapidly to digital represented the largest transformation exercise they had ever faced. Many of them were simply not ready with the measures and procedures that would allow their employees to work from home, forcing them to improvise solutions at very short notice. Likewise, many of them had no readily available e-commerce option, so that they needed to develop something almost overnight. Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, has commented: ‘The digital transformation in March and April was on a larger scale than the digital transformation we have witnessed during the past two years.’⁵

“

The digital transformation in March and April was on a larger scale than the digital transformation we have witnessed during the past two years.

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Satya Nadella



This digital sprint has resulted in the disappearance of many digital barriers, both for customers and for companies. And those barriers will never be coming back. From now on, digital will more than ever be part of every aspect of our daily lives. If, as a company leader, you look out of your office window, you can only see a very small piece of the world. But the invisible digital segment of that world is getting bigger and more important all the time. When formulating the customer strategies of the future, it is crucial to ensure first and foremost that the digital components are 100 per cent in order. Customers now know which digital interfaces work well and which ones do not. The quality level of digital services has improved dramatically in recent years, so that this standard of excellence is now regarded as a minimum requirement. It is fast becoming the newest commodity.

The start of new customer expectations

Between 2010 and 2020 a new type of customer relationship came into being, based on the increasing ease of use of digital applications. Companies like Uber, Amazon, Zalando, WeChat, DiDi, Booking.com and many other digital enterprises responded perfectly to these changing expectations, allowing some of them to develop into the largest companies in the world. The underlying technologies that made this possible were 4G, mobile devices and social media. In the meantime, the curve of customer expectations based on these technologies has reached its ceiling. However, in the years ahead we will see the development of a new curve with yet another set of new customer expectations. In this book I will describe how you, as a company, can deal with and make best use of these new

customer expectations, which are gradually becoming more and more visible. Today, we are only at the very bottom of the curve, but it is my hypothesis that by 2025 many of the elements explained in the following pages will have become the most normal thing in the world.

The new customer expectations are influenced by three elements:

- **General purpose technology:** the coming decade will see the growth of technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and robotics. Each of these technologies has the potential to change whole industries. But the combination of the four technologies together is set to revolutionise the way we live and work. The technologies will also offer new possibilities to take customer relations to a higher level.
- **Personal challenges:** everyone has their own personal dreams, fears, wishes and ambitions. As digital ease of use becomes the new norm, the question for companies will be how they can make the difference by responding successfully to the more emotional aspects of their customers' lives. Digital ease of use will guarantee transactional convenience. The next step is to provide greater ease and convenience for customers' emotional expectations.
- **Societal challenges:** more and more people are asking questions about the future of society. Challenges relating to technology, health and the climate are now at the top of many people's agendas. As a company, you can make use of your strengths to create a positive added value for the community.

The new drivers of customer expectations



**General purpose
technologies**



**Personal
challenges**



**Societal
challenges**

The Offer You Can't Refuse

If your company knows how to respond cleverly to the emergence of these three drivers, you will have the opportunity to develop a stronger relationship with your customers. In this book, I would like to take you on a journey; a journey that will help you to create that new kind of customer relationship. Based on a clear strategic vision, numerous practical examples and plenty of useful tips, I want to make it possible for your customers to receive an Offer They Can't Refuse in the very near future.

You can develop The Offer You Can't Refuse by investing in the following three axes, which will allow you to react in an appropriate manner to the new generation of customer expectations:

- **Ultimate Convenience:** this is the use of new technology in a smart way to make interfaces ever more automated, so that the customer needs to make no effort to do business with your company. This leads to the perfect transactional relationship.
- **Partner in Life:** this is not about your customer journey, but about the life journey of your customer. Which aspects in the lives of your customers create negative or positive energy? What things cost them too much effort? If you can provide answers to these questions, you can optimise your emotional relationship with your customers.
- **Save the World:** this is about companies taking their responsibility to do good for society as a whole. Every company has strengths that it can use to create a societal added value. Search for concrete solutions and contributions that will allow your company to make a truly tangible impact.



From authentic companies to **responsible** companies

Challenges for society

+ the ultimate convenience: automated & invisible

My dreams and challenges



The offer you can't refuse



From customer journey to life journey

The research for The Offer You Can't Refuse

I wrote this book during the 'great lockdown' of 2020. Even so, this is not a COVID-19 book. All the concepts and all the research for *The Offer You Can't Refuse* were already completed by February 2020. During the nine months before the start of the crisis I worked hard to develop my new ideas and give them concrete shape and form.

Originally, I intended to write the book between May and August 2020. However, the unexpected imposition of the lockdown meant that I was able to start writing two months earlier, so that the book can also be published earlier than planned. Of course, in some places I still make reference to COVID-19, given the impact of the pandemic on the totality of society and therefore also on the customer experience.

I am also convinced that the ideas and models from this book (which were ready before we had ever even heard of COVID-19) will become indispensable for companies at a faster pace than even I initially anticipated. The rapid changes in the use of digital during the

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lockdown, coupled with changing attitudes in the public's thinking, give added urgency to the need for developing a new kind of customer relationship. The unparalleled crisis of spring 2020 was therefore an added motivation for me to finish this book as quickly as possible. With the



completion of each new chapter, I had the same recurring feeling: more than ever, this is the new reality.

The research for the book was primarily field research, supplemented by desk research. The large majority of the examples in the following pages are based on things that I either heard or experienced at first hand.

In recent years, I have spoken at hundreds of events, where I met many different business leaders, who came to share their stories. In addition, our company nexxworks organises fifty or so inspiration tours each year, taking managers and entrepreneurs to the four corners of the world, where they can discover the very latest innovations in real life situations. In this way, during the past three years I have been able to visit dozens of trendsetting organisations in the East, West, North and South. Finally, I also had the pleasure of being able to interview various people with interesting things to say about the world of business and customer relations. You can listen to many of these interviews on my podcast. You can even watch some of them on my YouTube channel. It was the combination of all these insights that led to the philosophy behind this book.

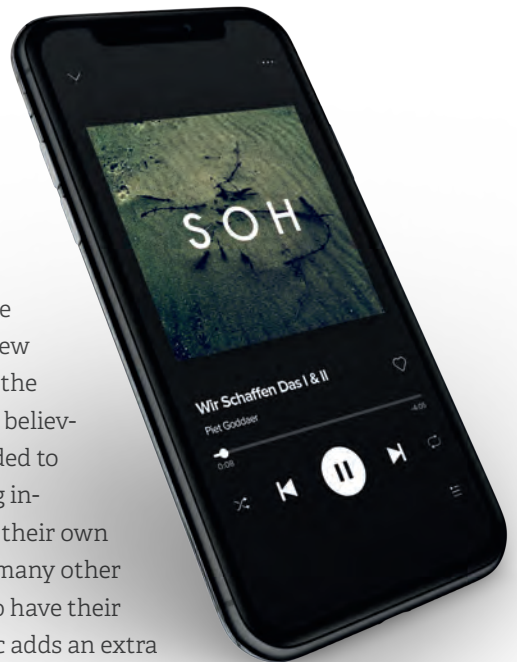
Feedback

As always, please feel free to send me all your questions and comments. My e-mail address is Steven@VanBelleghem.biz. I am always happy to read your feedback. I hope you enjoy my book: *The Offer You Can't Refuse*. Steven Van Belleghem
www.stevenvanbelleghem.com | www.youtube.com/stevenvanbelleghem

The soundtrack of The Offer You Can't Refuse

A book is more than a collection of letters on paper or on a screen. A book describes an idea, a story, a vision. With the writing of my books, I hope to generate enthusiasm, reveal new insights, encourage optimism and, above all, inspire a greater desire to help customers better. For this reason, I always like to add a little something extra. My previous book, *Customers The Day After Tomorrow*, had an added element of augmented reality. Readers were able to call up videos in which I talked with business leaders about some of the book's practical examples. But this time I want to take things even further, by adding a musical element.

During the past few years, I have had the pleasure of working together with Piet Goddaer. Piet has been writing, composing and producing music for more than a quarter of a century. He is best known under his artist name: Ozark Henry. During his career, he has been awarded various gold and platinum discs, won the Zamu Music Award in the 'best writer-composer-arranger' category and has travelled the world to make people happy with his music. I asked Piet if he would be willing to compose a soundtrack for my new book. Film music has been with us for decades, but the idea of book music is something new. Piet is a great believer that a musical component can and should be added to every aspect of life. With this in mind, he is working increasingly with companies to help them to develop their own unique sound. Museums, airlines, universities and many other organisations are discovering that it is important to have their own distinctive aural identity. In this respect, music adds an extra dimension to our lives. Music creates a certain type of atmosphere and puts us in a particular state of mind. As a result, I am happy and proud that I am now able to present to you the first ever management book with a soundtrack!



Before, during and after your reading, you can enjoy the music, which will hopefully help you to engage even more closely with the ethos and ambience of the book. You can access the soundtrack of *The Offer You Can't Refuse* via this QR code.



PART

the 😊 offer



you can't

refuse

