

Implementing effective services.

SERVICE BLUEPRINTS

The service blueprint is an operational tool that describes the characteristics of the service interaction in enough detail to verify, implement and maintain it. Service Blueprinting is based on a graphical technique that displays the process functions above and below the line of visibility to the customer - all the touchpoints and back-stage processes are documented and aligned to the user experience.

A service blueprint is an operational planning tool that provides guidance on how a service will be provided, specifying the physical evidence, staff actions, and support systems / infrastructure needed to deliver the service across its different channels. For example, to plan how you will lend books in a library, a service blueprint would help determine how this would happen at a service desk, what kinds of maintenance and support activities were needed behind the scenes, how users would learn about what's available, how it would be checked in and out, and by what means users would be trained on how to use the device.

Service Blueprints can take different forms, with some techniques being more graphic than others. Service blueprints should show the different channels through which services are delivered and show the physical evidence of the service, front line staff actions, back office staff actions, and support systems. There are five components of a service blueprint;

- Customer actions. This includes all the steps a customer takes during the service delivery process. In a Service Blueprint, customer actions are usually depicted in sequence, from start to finish. Customer actions are central to the Service Blueprint, so they are described first.
- The onstage visible actions taken by employees. Onstage visible actions by employees are the face-to-face contacts with the customer during the service delivery. These are separated from the customer by the line of interaction. Each time the line of interaction is crossed through an interaction between a customer and contact employee a moment of truth occurs. During these moments of truth, customers judge your quality and make decisions regarding future purchases.
- Backstage actions taken by employees that are not visible to the customer. Actions here are separated from onstage service delivery by the line of visibility. Everything above the line of visibility is seen by the customer while everything below it is invisible.
- Company support processes used throughout the service delivery. The fourth critical component of a Service Blueprint is the “support processes” that customer contact employees rely on to effectively interact with the customer. These processes are all the activities contributed by employees within the company who typically don't contact customers. Service quality is often impacted by these below-the-line of interaction activities.
- Physical evidence of the service. Finally, for each customer moment of truth the physical evidence of the service delivery at each point of customer contact is recorded at the top of the blueprint.

Service Blueprinting is based on the separation of the service into individual processes that can be considered separately. Progress in individual processes is depicted horizontally on a chart. Service Blueprinting differentiates between different 'planes' of customer interaction and integration. Each single component is on a different 'plane', ordered vertically on the same chart. Each plane represents a level of closeness to the customer, the higher the level the closer the interaction level is to the client.

Service Blueprinting differs from other approaches on process modelling and analysis, in that the vertical distribution is related to the responsible areas of each division. Assignment of responsibilities for each process step is also not shown visually. Here the customer focus is to be considered; for many customer's it is unimportant which divisions they need to be in contact with to get their service order properly accomplished.

How to develop a service blueprint

Service Blueprints are completed using an iterative process – using findings from personas, journey maps, and location plans to refine the blueprint over time. Ideally begin as a team, using the research and business analysis data (including customer experience maps, frameworks, models, insights, business processes, use cases, context diagrams) and shared knowledge to plot the service. As with mapping, the point of the initial blueprinting is generating team conversation about how the service works. The development team for a Service Blueprint should be represented by different service departments such as “service development”, service provision and service support. In some cases, the inclusion of the client is also useful. Before starting, the objectives of the Service Blueprinting process must be clear for each participant.

Once you have chosen the service you want to blueprint, all the customer actions involved in the service are placed on the blueprint in the Customer Actions section. Define all the steps in delivering the service you want to blueprint. This requires identifying one or more end-to-end journeys, called scenarios, that you want to blueprint. These scenarios should be based in the customer journey, but can also include organizational scenarios that happen internally away from the customer's view. If you are trying to differentiate your service offering to different customer segments, it will be helpful to blueprint each approach. Part of the challenge is deciding where the service starts and stops from the customer point of view. Once the customer actions are determined, the onstage and backstage actions of contact employees can be placed on the blueprint. Then identify the supporting processes that employee actions draw on and put these on the blueprint, too. Now link up each customer action to the onstage and backstage employee actions and support processes. I suggest you complete the physical evidence section last.

Break down the information into as much detail as is appropriate to the service, its complexity, and the scale of change proposed by the service development. Delineate each component of the service by indicating sequentially how each is connected. Do the blueprint once, then do it again. You will refine iteratively to the point a final comprehensive blueprint can be produced. Then look at the process – understand how customers relate to it (utilise the customer experience mapping concurrently). Identify the bottlenecks and areas where service quality can be improved? Examine customer's perceptions of the anticipated experience – this includes defining the internal and external activities that deliver to these expectations (actual not ideal). Identify fail points to show where the customer may experience quality or consistency problems' Look at what is revealed and/or what areas that should be focused on for change.

Service blueprinting will identify areas where a service could be refined. This process relies on a cross-functional collaboration between different parts of the organisation, to represent all aspects of the external and internal experience. The result is a complete picture of how the experience is delivered, end-to-end and surface-to-core. A Service Blueprint is a powerful document that gives you a high-level view of the experience and a detailed view into what is going on under the surface, stage by stage.

Customer Experience Maps and Service Blueprints represent the two key components of service – how it's experienced and how it works. While the Service Blueprint represents the service from the customer and business perspective, a Customer Experience Map represents the experience from the customer's perspective.

	Web	Point of Sale Display	Mobile Device	Service Desk	Signage	Printed Documentation	Other
Physical Evidence or Communication Channels							
User Actions Line of interaction							
Front-line Staff Actions Line of visibility							
Behind-the-Scenes Staff Actions Line of internal interaction							
Support Systems and Infrastructure							