



Voices of experience

c2c

Citizen Experience Excellence 2024-25



c2c – Putting the love back in

c2c, owned by Trenitalia, is a busy rail network stretching from London across south Essex. It is a strong customer satisfaction performer, coming in the top 10 rail operators in KPMG’s Citizen Experience Excellence rankings.

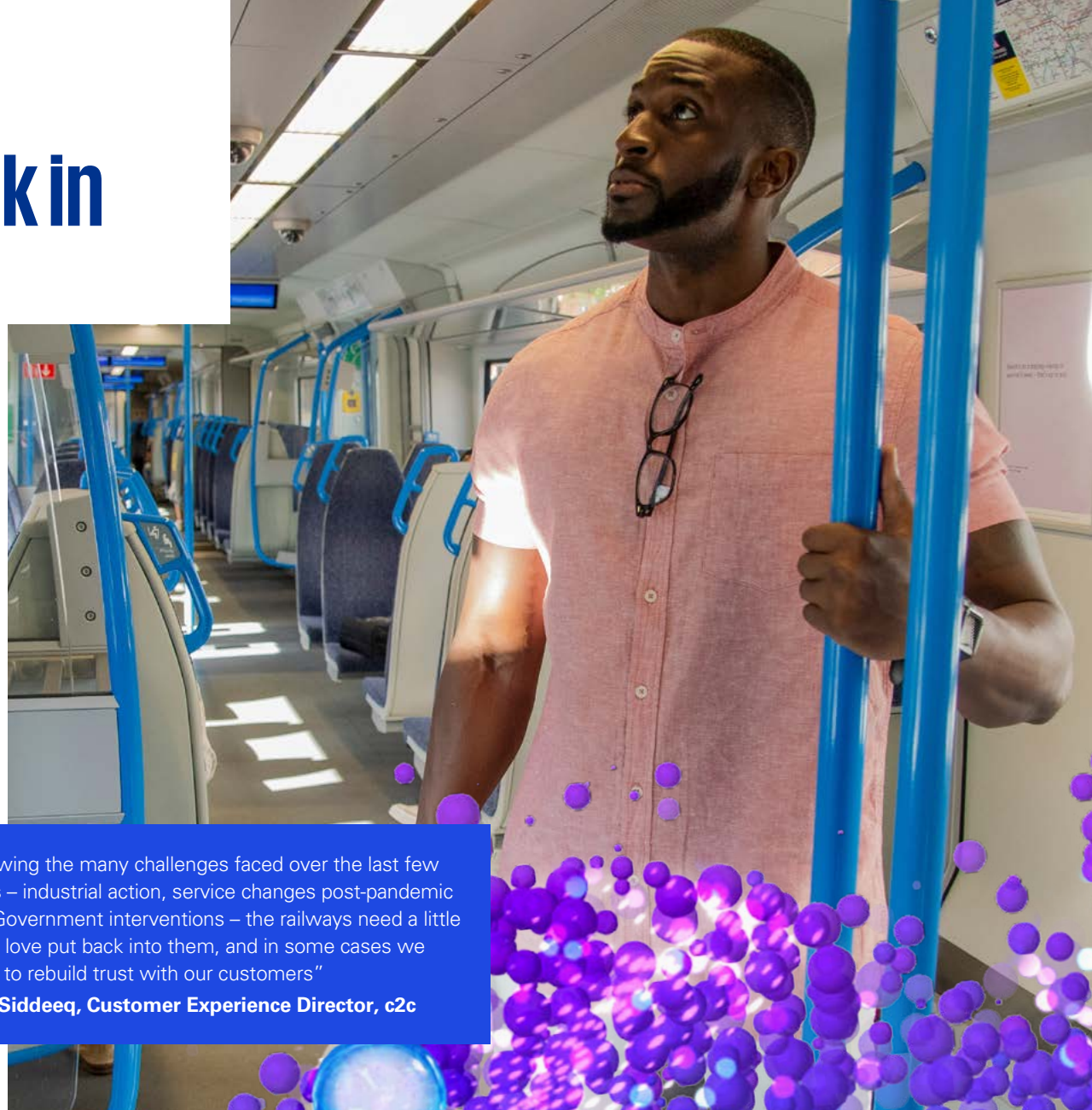
However, the company is not without its challenges. Notably, as a service heavily reliant on commuters, the post-pandemic working from home trend has had an impact on passenger dynamics.

c2c recruited Abu Siddeeq as its Customer Experience Director two years ago, and he has been pursuing an active agenda to keep the service oriented around the needs and priorities of customers. He says: “Following the many challenges faced over the last few years – industrial action, service changes post-pandemic and Government interventions – the railways need a little bit of love put back into them, and in some cases we need to rebuild trust with our customers”.

Reflecting on this, Abu says: “There is an argument that as long as you run your trains on time, passengers will be happy. But there’s more to it than that. Surveys show that punctuality makes up about 60% of passengers’ concerns – that leaves a lot of other ground to cover. We needed to build up the connection that passengers feel with c2c, and we continue to do so this by ensuring our workforce reflects the people and communities we serve; we want local people serving local stations. This is also a case of really instilling pride in the brand amongst staff, adhering to consistently high standards, and caring about what you achieve.”

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Abu Siddeeq, Customer Experience Director, c2c





Personalisation through people

One of the key pillars in KPMG’s customer experience excellence model is personalisation – this is what drives improved customer experiences over and above getting the basics right.

Abu is realistic about how much a train operator can really personalise its service, given that essentially most passengers just want to get from A to B. Nevertheless, there are ways of making the service more centred on the individual, such as regular communication to its Smartcard holders and a flow of service updates and information through social media channels. c2c also has an app so that passengers can make and manage bookings and check live service information – but here, Abu is realistic too, saying: “As a taxpayer subsidised service, we’re rightly under pressure to manage all of our costs and therefore have to carefully consider our investment and spend in all areas of the business, including digital services.

“We have to focus our investment on the things that really matter most and provide greatest benefit to our customers – we regularly seek customers feedback and comments via online surveys and in-person meetings – such as the reliability of the service and the cleanliness of our trains.”

However, one way in which the service can be personalised is through the people that help run it – something that c2c as a community railway puts a strong emphasis on. Many of its stations are small with a handful of regular staff. Passengers come to know these team members on a personal basis. Some travellers, Abu says, may even elect to buy their ticket from the ticket office rather than online or via a ticket machine so they can talk to the person they know.



“You can’t beat that type of personalisation!” Abu says. “We have it right across our network. For many customers, it’s such an important aspect of the journey. People also trust experienced staff to give them the right advice about what type of ticket to buy, travel options etcetera – at times, there can be less trust amongst some groups of customers of automated systems and ticketing machines and they prefer speaking with a human, such as we see in many supermarkets. That’s why we continue to offer a wider range of ticketing and payment options, from pay as you go with contactless, e-ticketing and Smartcard, to traditional paper tickets purchased at machines or from our station offices.”

Abu felt so strongly about the value and importance of this personalisation that he added the option for customers to nominate c2c customer service staff that have provided them with excellent service for the ‘Customer’s Choice’ category in the annual staff awards. There was doubt amongst some whether customers would care enough to remember or name individual members of staff – but there has been lots of positive feedback and nominations, he says.

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Abu Siddeeq, Customer Experience Director, c2c



Anticipating customers' needs

Communication is a crucial part of keeping customers informed so that they can manage their journeys and travel plans. This has been another area of focus, increasing regular communication across different channels as well as when there is a service disruption or unexpected event. While this doesn't remove the problem, it's more likely to prevent an escalation of complaints.

Another aspect of this is to improve station and driver announcements so that customers know what's ahead. Abu gives the example of a driver informing passengers travelling to London if one of the tube lines is suspended or subject to delays.

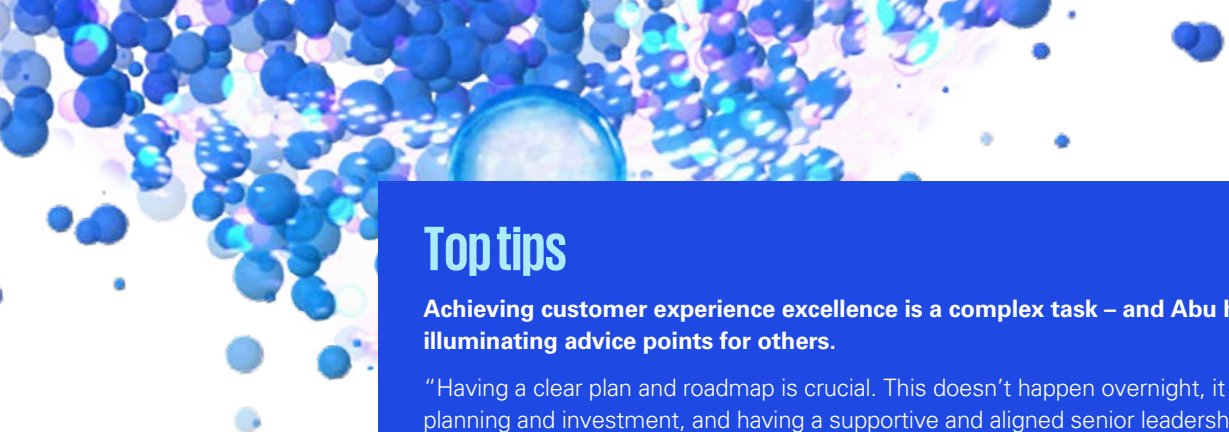
"This might mean that I don't waste time walking all the way to that line only to find it's down, and having to walk back all the way only to try and find another route," Abu observes. "It's about taking that holistic approach, looking at journeys from a passenger's point of view, rather than only seeing our part of it. It shows that we care and that we're thinking from their perspective. Failing to do so may not always be a driver of complaints – but it's definitely a driver of dissatisfaction."

Progressing in stages

Another point Abu makes is around taking a phased approach to technology-led improvements. "c2c continues to embrace technology and the many benefits (to customers) and business efficiencies it provides – we have recently introduced pay as you go with contactless ticketing across our entire route – but all enhancements and changes in these areas are always carefully considered, researched and thoroughly tested before being introduced."

Similarly, there's a temptation amongst some organisations to implement new communication channels at once, such as when new social media platforms were launched. Many organisations were quick to have a presence on these channels, as it was good from a brand awareness perspective, but they may not have considered how customers would use those channels. For many, these new channels become somewhere else to raise their grievances and concerns – and with audiences too – but these channels may not have been developed enough to provide a comprehensive and all encompassing customer relations service"

Abu says. "What we don't want is another inefficient way to get in touch which actually frustrates customers. Don't adopt new channels if you're not ready for them, are unable to support them properly and if there isn't a clear purpose for them. And for the channels we do provide, we need to focus on being both responsive & quick, as well as providing a high quality service"



Top tips

Achieving customer experience excellence is a complex task – and Abu has a number of illuminating advice points for others.

“Having a clear plan and roadmap is crucial. This doesn’t happen overnight, it takes sustained long-term planning and investment, and having a supportive and aligned senior leadership team. Be clear about your goals and the stages along the way. Listen to customers and colleagues in any and every way you can – that’s fundamental. Make good use of data here too – if you don’t have it, find a way to get it. Engage staff and motivate them to excel. Our station staff engagement has improved by 22% over the last year as recently reported by our annual in-house People Survey, and it’s no coincidence that customer engagement has risen too and complaints have dropped.”

Over and above this, Abu makes the point that improving customer satisfaction scores is a team effort and a collaborative journey. Even though he is responsible for customer experience, his team can only directly influence certain areas, with a coordinated approach and working in partnership with other departments (operations, facilities, digital and more) key to ongoing success and improvements. “You’ve got to talk to others in their language and get them to care about what you care about – by making them see what’s in it for them. You have to be a great influencer, listener and collaborator. It starts with getting others invested in the experience excellence agenda too. And that’s when you can start putting that love back in!”



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CREATE | CRT159472 | April 2025

Document Classification: KPMG Public