
A platforms strategy is the only way to win in customer service

By Steve Pollema 8 days ago Feature

Organisations with strong omnichannel strategies retain the most customers.



When managing the entirety of a technology infrastructure, sometimes it's hard to see the forest for the trees. Even if you have a big-picture idea of how things are going, it can still be difficult to see how the individual components of the whole come together in a meaningful way.

Disparate solutions in which a company uses different technologies or services for each aspect of customer communication are often to blame. For instance, a business might use one solution to answer phone calls, another to respond to emails, and yet another to perform back-end functions such as finances or receivables.

The start-and-stop nature of all these individual processes is called the “stove top” approach. You’ve all been privy to its drawbacks: As distinct departments use tactics tailored to them, vital pieces of information get lost in translation.

These siloed communications come at a cost. According to Aberdeen Group Inc., companies with the strongest omnichannel strategies can retain an average of 89 percent of customers, while those with ineffective omnichannel strategies retain only 33 percent.

Not aligning these approaches can bring headaches for CIOs and CTOs trying to construct streamlined, convenient experiences for both the customer and employee. Getting them all on the same page only stands to help all involved.

Put your team in better spots

With siloed communications, your customer-facing employees are flying blind. They have no knowledge of past transactions or historical context, so they’re instead left to figure it out as they go — even for repeat and long-term customers. Customer service representatives must start from scratch with each transaction, destroying their performance statistics and hindering their ability to get issues resolved quickly and efficiently.

If siloed communications are frustrating for the customer service rep, they’re absolutely maddening for the customer. Having to endlessly repeat the reason for the communication makes for long, repetitive, and unproductive transactions.

According to Accenture, 89 percent of customers reportedly disliked having to repeat the same issue to multiple customer service representatives. However, getting to a place where all information is available and disseminated to each employee in an organization is not necessarily an easy undertaking.

Break down the walls

Despite the difficulties standing in the way of freely shared information among employees, there are numerous tangible benefits. Not only are bad customer experiences a main reason for churn, but they can also hurt the business on a broader scale. If customers aren’t satisfied, they’re not likely to keep it to themselves. Instead, 13 percent will tell 15 or more people about their woes.

On the other side of the coin, a majority (72 percent) of customers will share a positive experience with upward of six people. To ensure these statistics are working for you, there are a few options available to CIOs and CTOs to help them overcome the obstacles and reap the benefits of a frictionless customer experience.

Start by empowering associates. Giving our employees the context and tools they need, such as historical and real-time data, can optimize customer interactions.

For example, consider a cable customer calling for the fourth time in three days to complain about a slow internet connection. Instead of going through the same troubleshooting steps undertaken in the first three interactions, our customer service rep can instead schedule an appointment for a technician to assess the issue in person.

That kind of in-person service is a great way to create a customer-facing corporate culture in the eyes of consumers. A Deloitte and Touche study reports companies that put the customer first are 60 percent more profitable than companies less focused on the customer. Make every associate a customer service person by connecting back office systems and providing a single knowledge base for the entire organization.

Look at an online retailer’s shipping department and how it must deal with a customer claiming that his package never arrived. Employees should be able to access the customer’s history, giving them the power to determine the best course of action. Whether the customer is a high-level account worth preserving with a free reshipment or has a number of missing shipments that require recipient signatures or package insurance, a willingness to face the customer improves the chances that a problem is properly fixed.

Finally, try capturing self-service solutions that clients utilize because solving problems themselves is attractive to customers for a variety of reasons. In a Zendesk report on the omnichannel customer service gap, 50 percent of respondents said it’s important to go this route, while 70 percent expect a company’s website to at least include a self-service application.

Knowing how customers address issues themselves is valuable for a business in terms of efficiency and providing optimal customer service.

Think about a customer who has gone through several troubleshooting steps and online help for setting up a gaming console and finally decides to escalate to a phone call. An empowered associate would be able to see the steps he performed and avoid requiring the customer to go through the same steps again. The employee can instead move on to a higher level of product support.

A global health insurance organization client of ours acquired another company but still relied on disparate reporting across contact center solutions. This not only created a silo between divisions in the original organization, but the effect was exacerbated because a silo existed between the “old” and “new” companies.

Our company integrated the two companies’ interaction routing platforms and reporting technologies and added engagement channels using the information captured on each transaction and each channel. The resulting continuity of experience enables customers to have a journey as opposed to an instant transaction, which ultimately allows for improved call-handling times and lower operational costs.

Customers notice when the company they’re buying from is a well-oiled operation because it manifests itself in quick, convenient problem-solving. The “stove top” approach is anything but that, meaning the longer companies continue siloed manners of communication, the less patient customers might become.

Allow managers across multiple departments to streamline operations and communications. It’ll help them all get a clearer vision of just what lies ahead in the forest of customers.

Image Credit: Lenetstan / Shutterstock