Top Customer Support Trends of 2020

A guide to keeping your customer support on the cutting edge
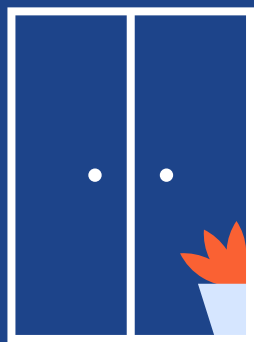
Table of Contents

01

Introduction

Make your customer support stand out from the competition with the latest and most impactful approaches to your help desk.

The customer support industry isn't new. But it is ever-changing. Customer expectations are at an all-time high with the availability of online service software and instant communication now the standard. These dynamics create new challenges and opportunities alike for business leaders.

Fortunately, we've done the heavy lifting for you in researching and identifying the current trends that are topping customer support across sectors and businesses of all sizes. Here, we explore those patterns and discuss best practices to better equip you to meet and exceed your own customers' needs.

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Read this eBook to learn new techniques on:

- Providing streamlined support across diverse communication channels
- Helping customers via social media
- Leveraging customer support as a marketing tool
  And more...

Ready to dive in? Read on!

02
Customer Self-Service

The future of customer support is helping customers help themselves.

When businesses think of customer support, the following typically comes to mind: A customer reaches out with an issue they're having with a product or service and a support agent—or, if necessary, a manager—replies. A reactive process, indeed.

Today's most effective customer support solutions rely on a different first line of defense: Customer self-service. And customers have come to expect it, too. According to Microsoft, "90% of consumers now expect a brand or organization to offer a self-service customer support portal." Here, we identify ways you can do just that.

Create a knowledge base

The increasingly common way to implement customer-self service is with a searchable information bank, often referred to as a knowledge base. Businesses can anticipate customer needs by proactively making support articles and answers to FAQs available.

Vary your content

The content of your knowledge base can also take different forms. For questions that require more thorough assistance, consider providing step-by-step guides or how-to videos. Perhaps you include screenshots to show customers where they should be looking on your website. Your support information isn't one-type-fits all.

Update your content as needed

Businesses and customer support managers should also view a knowledge base as a living, breathing entity. If customer questions on a certain matter spike and a knowledge base article on that topic doesn't already exist, add one. If you see an influx of customer questions on a particular topic and already offer a knowledge base article on it, revisit the article, evaluate why it may not be providing sufficient info and revise.

" **90%** of consumers now expect a brand or organization to offer a self-service customer support portal".

Microsoft

03
Chatting Live

The most successful help desk systems offer immediate online support.

With all major businesses selling products and services online, customers expect to be able to resolve their support issues online, too. **Live chat offers a simple way to meet this demand.** According to Econsultancy, "live chat has the highest satisfaction levels for any customer service channel, with 73%, compared with 61% for email and 44% for phone," which means businesses and customers are both better served with live chat as part of a help desk system.

Proactive chat support

Set up chat to automatically greet each visitor. Then, a support agent can enter the chatbox to offer more personalized assistance. Without being overbearing, the extent to which your support team makes itself available, the more likely a site visitor is to buy your service or product.

Reactive chat support

With chat, you can also react to inquiries or concerns that arise *after* a customer has made purchase or needs help troubleshooting. Live chat is actually ideal for such scenarios. The faster you can help them, the shorter their frustration and the more likely they are to remain loyal to your business or even leave a positive review (more on that in Chapter 7).

"Live chat has the highest satisfaction levels for any customer service channel, with 73%, compared with 61% for email and 44% for phone."

Econsultancy

Automated chat support

Though live chat doesn't always have to truly be live. A chatbot—which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to simulate a person-to-person conversation—can help you provide your customers the info they're looking for without pulling your or your agents' attention at all.

04
Getting Social

Offering support via social media is now part of the industry standard.

With social media now an integral part of our everyday lives, businesses are expected to account for it in their customer support. Offering support via social media is especially important as "social is one of the first channels consumers head to when they have a question or an issue. In fact, 45% of consumers have done this," according to a study by Sprout Social. Let's explore some best practices for providing excellent customer support on social media.

It's OK to not know the answer

While customer support is most helpful when provided as promptly as possible, it's more important to provide quality support. Even on social media where rapid response is the norm, take the time needed to get back to customers with the right information, no matter how instinctive it may feel to react right away.

> **"Social is one of the first channels consumers head to when they have a question or an issue. In fact, 45% of consumers have done this."**
>
> Sprout Social

Don't be a robot

Some social media platforms such as Facebook allow businesses to send users canned responses. While this tool can save you and your team time, be careful not overuse it as your business can come across as impersonal (see Chapter 6 for more on the importance of personalizing every customer interaction). Automated replies on social media should be used as a crutch, not as your primary method of communication.

Know when to move to a private conversation

When you provide support through comments, posts or tweets, remember these conversations are visible to all your viewers. Though certain matters are better handled in private. When a customer conversation takes an unusually negative turn, consider moving to a private communication channel. If your customer needs assistance involving sensitive information, definitely do so.

05

Support from Every Channel

Leading support solutions help customers get in touch, no matter how.

Customers today don't only want their problems solved. They want their problems solved fast and the ability to choose how and when they get in touch with a business. This means you need to offer support via different modes of communication, referred to as of late as multichannel or omnichannel support. Doing so also behooves your business. According to a CCW report, "companies with the strongest omnichannel customer engagement strategies retain an average of 89 percent of their customers, compared to 33 percent for companies with weak omnichannel execution."

Support from Every Channel

Here are some factors surrounding major customer support channels that can help you decide which ones to add to your platform:

Phone support

Phone support may be great for customers who need to be walked through a specific process but may fall short if the request is overly complex or requires more in-depth investigation.

Live chat

Live chat works best for answering questions that can be found in your knowledge base as you can send articles and other info easily. Chat isn't great, however, for longer conversations.

Email

Email can help you exchange sensitive files or more complex information. On the other hand, you will likely spend more time in a back-and-forth with a customer via email.

Self-service

Self-service tools suit clients who prefer browsing information on their own. Though even the best of knowledge bases may miss some articles or information, so make sure you offer other channels, too.

Social media

Social media is ideal for users who are active online, especially younger customers. However, this medium requires more constant and immediate attention as customers expect particularly fast answers here.

"Companies with the strongest **omnichannel customer engagement** strategies retain an average of 89 percent of their customers, compared to 33 percent for companies with weak omnichannel execution."

Customer Contact Weekly

06

Making
It Personal

In the age of automated customer support, set your business apart by treating your customers with personalized care.

When corresponding with customers online or over the phone, businesses don't have the luxury of using body language to express tone. That's why leading companies pay extra attention to personalized communication while providing support. And it pays: "44% of consumers say that they will likely become repeat buyers after a personalized shopping experience with a particular company," according to a recent Segment study.

Making It Personal

Here's how your business can stand out, too:

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Blend saved responses with custom text

Sending prepared responses to FAQs is standard. That info may well be in a knowledge base as discussed in Chapter 1. Though customer responses often require personalization, as well. Adding tailored pieces in your reply are key to ensuring each customer feels valued, in addition to having their challenges addressed.

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Demonstrate empathy

Make it clear that you care. If the nature of the customer's communication is positive, mirror or build on that. When your receive a customer complaint, show the customer that their pains pain you, too. With AI and automation entering the customer support space, businesses can make their support shine by maintaining a human connection.

"44% of consumers say that they will likely become repeat buyers after a personalized shopping experience with a particular company."

Segment

Address every issue the client mentions

While many customer support inquiries may focus a lone issue, it's not uncommon for them to also touch on a few separate topics. Respond to the questions you're able to initially while you look further into the remaining pieces and assure the customer you'll be getting back to them on the rest soon. Then, of course, do follow up with the requisite information as promptly as possible.

Polish your communication

Even in our age of rapid communication do not hit "send" without double-checking everything. You can rely on outside softwares to proofread spelling and grammar. Microsoft Word and Google Chrome offer their own tools and Grammarly can also be helpful. Beyond that, only the human eye can certify that your response points the customer in the right direction.

07

Customer Support as a Marketing Tool

Show off your excellent support to reel in new customers.

Once you've hit the ground running with some (if not all!) of the above tricks of the customer support trade, get more mileage out of your great support by leveraging it as a marketing tool itself. Customer testimonials have become one of the best ways to do so and are key to building credibility and your business' reputation. In fact, according to Spiegel Research Center, "displaying reviews can increase conversion rates by 270%." Here, we explore how you can harness the standout service you've provided to grow your business.

Written reviews

You can locate customer reviews on social media or product pages. Customer reviews directly reflect consumers' experiences with a business and are the the easiest form of a testimonial to obtain. Reviewers usually discuss how they were treated by a company and how they liked the end product. But you've got to ask for it. According to a recent study, 68% of consumers have left a review after it was requested by a local business. So don't be shy: follow up with customers and ask them what they think.

"Displaying reviews can increase conversion rates by 270%."

Spiegel Research Center

Influencer testimonials

These are the game-changers of today's market. Social media influencers have managed to establish large followings and credibility in their specific industries. Landing a testimonial from one can create significant buzz for your business. So, if you're looking to increase traction, reach out to influencers that are both popular and relevant in your industry or have the potential to be, offer your products or services for free and ask for their endorsements.

Case studies

Customer case studies are more in-depth analyses of customer experiences with a particular company that usually result in positively transformative behavior. Depending on your industry, a case study may or may not be worth your time. It's a lengthy process, but this form of storytelling can truly help you connect with your customers, as well as benefit your brand, by providing meaningful insights that are more challenging to express in other forms of testimonials.

Video testimonials

Adults in the U.S. spend an average of 5.5 hours watching video content everyday. On top of that, user-generated content is becoming a major trend in social media marketing. These facts alone should serve as reason to reach out to your consumers and ask for video reviews of your products and services, then upload them to YouTube or social media to feature online.

Conclusion

Now, you're ready to make your customer support even better. Whether you add a support channel, change the way you automate your replies in live chat or on social media or add customer testimonials to your website, there's always room to improve your service delivery and ultimately increase customer loyalty.

Also remember that these recommendations aren't one-size-fits all. The way you implement each recommendation will and should look different from the way other businesses—even competitors—do. Your support team itself may also take the tips included here and apply them in different ways across various parts of your support solution.

Treat your support as an ever-evolving process as you continue striving to meet and exceed customer expectations.

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