Delivering A Signature Service: The Past, Present & Future of Customer Service in the UK
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In this eBook, we investigate why customer experience has become one of the top priorities for most of today’s businesses. We highlight some key findings and look at the evolution of customer service, where it stands today and what you need to do to move forward with customer service expectations.

With the rise of the Internet, global trade and the ever-increasing "Global Village", digital platforms where consumers buy, sell and review goods and services have become some of the largest and best-known companies in the world.

With this increase in trade and the growth of social networks, it has never been easier for customers to share their opinions on the service they receive from these global brands.

If you are trying to evaluate or improve your customer service and/or customer experience, you might want to ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Do you answer your customers promptly and professionally?
- Are your support team available when your customers need them?
- Can you quickly & easily access customer details, engagement and purchase history?
- Do you know what channels your customers prefer to communicate on?
- Can departments easily share customer data or are they siloed?
Defining your signature customer experience is paramount!

From our findings, some of the important things you should focus on are:

- **Knowing your market & identifying the ultimate customer experience** - knowing your ideal customer allows you to perfect your customer service activities and processes. Pinpointing your signature customer experience and building it out is a crucial first step.

- **Map out all touchpoints & interactions (360-view)** - This is the part of your process which helps to identify your Signature Customer Service Experience.

- **Build your team around the customer experience** - next, you’re ready to start putting the right team in place to successfully implement your signature experience process.

- **Implement the right technology** - Using the right technology can take your customer service from 0 to 100. Using the wrong technology, however, can have drastic consequences. Implementing the correct system to fit your specific needs is not just important, it's critical to the state of your customer service.
1.1 - The Growth of Customer Service

Over the last 10-20 years, customer service has changed dramatically - and for the better. Looking back over two decades ago, most consumers were still making purchases on the back of advertising, news and mail that was dropped through their actual letterbox.

Back then, changing service providers was difficult, time-consuming and a major headache for most consumers. Customers tended to be loyal to brands merely out of convenience, rather than for the quality of service provided. It would be foolish to ignore the fact that the rise of accessibility to the Internet and mobile devices has changed the buying process drastically. With access to unlimited information at their fingertips - 24/7, you could say that the consumer is now in the 'driver seat'.

There has been a clear path for the development of Customer Service. While starting at phones and call centres, customer support has now evolved to using social media, intelligent AI bots and even voice-recognition technology.

So, what's the issue?

While some of the movers and shakers of today are using these new technologies, a large number of businesses are still not leveraging most of these options successfully.
When looking at customer satisfaction in the UK, we must look at some of the facts. Some stats you should take note of include:

- At the start of 2020, the UK Customer Satisfaction Index is 76.9, 0.8 points lower than 2019. Overall, customer satisfaction was at its lowest point since 2015 (1).
- Customers that experience a problem with a business rose to 13.4% - the highest level since 2009. (1)
- “80% of customers say the experience a company provides is as important as its products and services.” (2)
- “82% of service decision-makers say their company’s customer service must transform in order to stay competitive”. (2)
- “72% of service agents say their interactions with customers are relationship-oriented”. (2)
- “78% of service professionals say their company views agents as customer advocates, and 75% view them as brand ambassadors.” (2)

When looking at the stats from multiple reports, surveys, etc. we can see businesses that receive 9+ out of 10 for customer satisfaction are 95% more likely to be trusted, 96% more likely to retain customers and 94% more likely to be recommended. (1)

This really shows that today's market is a customer's market. With more choice than ever before, it is evident that businesses that put customer experience as their focal point are winning the hearts and minds of their customers.

(1) UK Customer Satisfaction Index // The state of customer satisfaction in the UK 2020
(2) State of Service - Salesforce
Chapter 2: Present Day Customer Service

Looking at customer service today, we can see there has been a growing emphasis on delivering excellence in support and the overall customer experience. This isn’t going to stop, in fact, the way customer service is moving, this will only become more prominent.

It is becoming increasingly evident what the businesses need to do, to not only stay up-to-date but move ahead of their competitors.

Below, we highlight some of the current top priorities and challenges in the customer service industry:
What is Customer Service? What is Customer Experience? Which one should you prioritise? It's very important to know the difference between customer service and experience. Customer service and customer experience can be seen in two ways:

1. Customer service is part of the whole customer experience.
2. Customer experience is the result of customer service and how the customer feels.

Either way you look at it, customer experience focuses on the journey of a customer including every interaction between the customer and business. From seeing an advertisement to purchasing a product/service to logging a support issue. Customer experience is about the overall journey and continual experience of the customer.

Customer service focuses more on human interaction and directly supporting a customer (this contact can relate to chatbots, phone calls, emails, etc).

So which should you put more emphasis on? Both of course.

It is important to focus on customer experience as a whole and include customer service in this. This why Customer service should be the ethos in your organisation across all divisions.
With the growth of social networks, customers' expectations of service have increased dramatically. It is important not to fall into what is known as the “satisfaction trap”.

As a company, you do not want to fall into a trap of overly compensating and obsessively trying to please your customer. Instead, look at your processes and feedback and identify issues early on that you can resolve. Ask yourself the question... How much is too much Customer Service?

Customer experience author, Matt Watkinson, suggests you “move fast and fix things”. Moving fast will give quick wins at board level and will make changes that customers will notice. He also specifies that self-service options and intelligent chatbots are becoming part of the service offering.

One area you want to avoid is the “zone of tolerance”. This is when your customer service falls between the ideal and just adequate. These are the experiences customers will not remember. This is not what you want - the goal should be to make lasting impressions on customers. This should be the main focus and where employee training and standards can make a difference.

You should prioritise your ‘Signature Customer Experience’ (your organisation’s gold standard of customer service) - decide what is yours and focus on it!
2.3 - Where are consumers placing priority today?

Currently, the figures show where consumers are placing their priorities when choosing a product/service:

- 8.54/10 - Competence of staff
- 8.49/10 - Listening to the customer
- 8.43/10 - Ease of dealing with the company
- 8.43/10 - Business keeps their promises (trust) (1)

According to the Salesforce State of Service report, £122 billion is lost annually in the UK economy as a result of poor customer service. (2) Remember that poor customer service from your company only gives business to your competitors.

When it comes to Customer Satisfaction, the future is going one way. If you want to move into the future with your customer service, your business needs to take note of the following:

- You should be aiming to use AI to identify and fix problems before the customer knows there's a problem.
- Everyone in your organisation is part of customer service. Therefore, everyone needs to adapt to this culture and put it as a priority.
- 90% of service professionals say customer service is viewed as the responsibility of the entire company – not just their department. (2)
- Trust is more important than ever and transparency is key to succeeding in customer service. Ethics are not an ‘option’ for your business, they should be at the core of what your business believes and be portrayed as such.

(1) UK Customer Satisfaction Index // The state of customer satisfaction in the UK 2020
(2) State of Service - Salesforce
Chapter 3: The Future of Customer Service

"Only 69% of service decision-makers agree that executives allocate the budget needed to modernize customer service operations and only 63% expect a budget increase next year." (2)

Wow...this is a big statement. This means nearly 1/3 of businesses are currently not prioritising their customer service offering.

The bottom line? Customers of today, and in the future, will do business with companies who offer omni-channel, user-friendly and on-demand support. They expect to be able to fix the problem themselves or have an array of channels to resolve their problem.

How do we know this? Well, that stats speak for themselves:

- 80% of service decision-makers say emerging technology is transforming customers' expectations of their service organization (2)

- 82% of service decision-makers say their company's customer service must transform in order to stay competitive (2)
Developing your ‘Signature Customer Service Experience’ is important. What sets your company aside from the rest? Why is your customer service & experience better than other businesses?

The idea of a signature customer service is for your business to stand-out and be recognized for its standard of service. Becoming a leader in customer service and known for this standard will attract more customers.

Customer service is like your own built-in extension of marketing. Providing great customer service will not only get you remembered, it will get you known. At the end of the day, people like good customer service, want to do business with people they like and will spread the word.

Achieving that ‘wow’ factor is what set’s your business apart. Looking at brands like Virgin, it is clear that their emphasis is on customer and employee experience. Companies need to provide seamless customised experiences and know that each customer’s journey is different. It’s not always necessarily about going ‘above and beyond’ for customers but being readily available and accessible across many channels. It’s also important to put emphasis on employee satisfaction and an employee’s feeling of ‘making a difference’. This is what brings a strategic advantage when it comes to customers deciding factors.

What your business needs to do is figure out how to add that little ‘something extra’ as part of the service, so you don’t just fall into that “zone of tolerance”.
When it comes to the future of customer service, consumers want new options like chatbots, community portals and more, but also be able to use self-service options.

Currently, only 75% of businesses are using AI for routine tasks (self-service password reset, etc) and 51% of agents say that they would spend the majority of their time on mundane tasks, if not for AI & Self Service. (2)

What's also interesting is that "69% of decision-makers indicate that self-service is a huge part of their strategy and have also stated that Customer portals are proven beneficial." (2)

The ability to go in and fix their own problem or lodge their own ticket is an essential part of case deflection and customer satisfaction. Within these portals, you can even bring in Gamification. This is a great way to make a client-facing community feel rewarded.

### 3.3 - Multi-Channel Purchasing and Service

By now, we've all heard about 'Omni-channel; It's been thrown around in articles and reports about customer service for a while now.

The average customer now uses 10 different channels to communicate with companies (2). Your customers not only want to but need to be able to contact you through multiple mediums such as WhatsApp, Facebook messenger and text messaging.

An 18% increase of contact through social media (currently being utilised by 72% of businesses) and a 44% increase of support through online chat/live support is expected in the next 18 months.

At the end of the day, most B2C customers do not really care about the term 'omni-channel' or how many channels you are available on. They care about being able to contact you when it really matters - whatever the medium.
3.4 - AI & Voice Technology

For a few years, reports and surveys have been predicting voice technology will take over many aspects of business, not only online searching. With the growth of voice-activated devices at home, it’s no surprise that it has made its way into customer service.

Not only have businesses been embracing AI & Voice technology, but they are also seeing real-time improvements. AI can help with small problems, so agents can deal with the bigger issues.

“70% of agents believe automating routine tasks would allow them to focus on higher-value work” (2) and over half are exploring how AI can help routine tasks.

3.5 - Don’t get stuck in the past - How CRM can help your Customer Service.

How can CRM change this?

- 360-Degree / Unified View of the Customer
  We’re sure you’ve heard of this 360-degree view of the customer. Customer service agents can see all information and updates when dealing with the customer for any reason or issue. This brings a strategic advantage to customer service.

  “84% of service professionals say a unified view of customer information is key to providing great customer experiences.” (2)

- Communities
  As mentioned above, Communities, where customers can access knowledge bases, ask questions and advocate your product/service, can take your customer service to a new level. Online communities/discussion forums have a projected growth of 50% over the next 18 months.

- AI & predictive analytics
  The use of Voice-activated assistants in customer service has a projected growth of 152% over the next 18 months. If your business is not taking advantage of AI, then it will fall quickly behind during this rapid increase in voice technology.

(1) UK Customer Satisfaction Index // The state of customer satisfaction in the UK 2020
(2) State of Service - Salesforce
Conclusions

At the end of the day, your customer service is not going to improve if you’re not willing to accept change or make a conscious effort to enhance your service offerings. The times of the customer being put first are back, and it’s here to stay.

Placing importance on the needs of the customer is now a priority. Fast responses (AI), easy case resolution (Self-Service) and the ability to offer customer communities to share knowledge (Service & Community Software) are a must.

The 3 changes you can make to improve customer service:

• **Become fast, reliable, relatable and present in your Customer Service.**
  This can be achieved with Chatbots, correct training of staff and making information easily accessible (knowledge-base community). Creating a community where customers can go on, read informative articles and help one another with issues can increase case deflection and create advocates for your brand.

• **Make excellent Customer Service your company ethos**
  Do this by not only providing customer service training for all employees but by ensuring your employees are happy. Happy employees are your brand ambassadors. Reward your employees for promoting your business.

• **Embrace AI and implement a 360 CRM platform.**
  How do we improve customer service with AI? Besides chatbots and predictions, you want to catch issues at the beginning before the customer knows and gets burdened down with it. If you can catch this issue before the customer is aware, you can fix it before and the customer is not bothered by an issue that was fixed quickly. Predictions and prevention are key.

It’s been mentioned many times about having a 360-degree view of the customer. When a service agent is handling a case, seeing back to the very first touchpoints with the customer helps paint a picture and reassures the agent that they have all the information to handling the case.
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