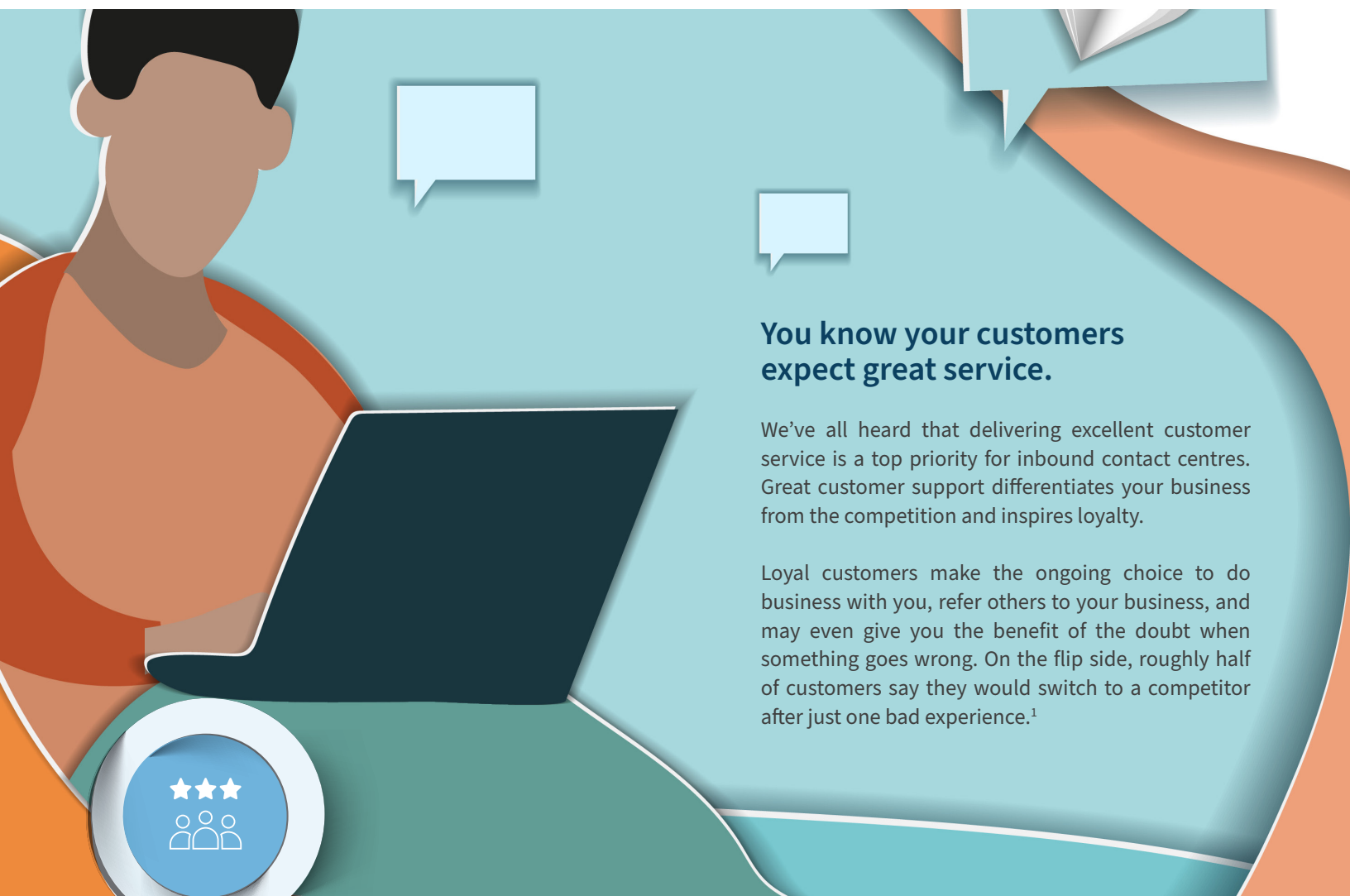


Six Steps to Simpler Customer Service

Deliver world-class customer support with practices specifically designed for blended contact centres.



You know your customers expect great service.

We've all heard that delivering excellent customer service is a top priority for inbound contact centres. Great customer support differentiates your business from the competition and inspires loyalty.

Loyal customers make the ongoing choice to do business with you, refer others to your business, and may even give you the benefit of the doubt when something goes wrong. On the flip side, roughly half of customers say they would switch to a competitor after just one bad experience.¹

But what exactly constitutes “great service”?

Over 80% of customers indicate that getting their issue resolved quickly is the most important aspect of good customer service. To drive down response times, businesses have turned to AI, templated responses, and automated workflows. What many businesses don't realise though is that customers rank excessive automation as the #2 most frustrating aspects of bad customer experience. (Unsurprisingly, long hold times is the #1 frustration).² No one wants to be a number in a ticket queue, receiving boilerplate responses while being bounced around to different departments so each team can meet their SLA.

Great customer service balances fast responses with accurate information and a personalised experience. It demonstrates a continuous willingness to listen to customer feedback and to improve. It leverages automation to augment service, not replace it. And, it is about knowing when your customer wants to self-serve and when they want to have a human connection with your business.

Here are six best practices for simpler customer service:

1. HELP CUSTOMERS HELP THEMSELVES

We live in an age of empowered customers. Today's customers are accustomed to searching for information online, comparing deals, and making educated transactions on their own. **81% of customers attempt to take care of matters themselves before reaching out to a live agent.**³ It's no surprise that self-service has seen massive growth in recent years. When customers leverage your website or virtual agent, they get an immediate answer any time of day or night. They are in control of their experience and best of all, there is no wait time.

The average cost of a live service interaction is \$7 for B2C companies and \$13 for B2B companies, but the cost of a self-service transaction is just a few cents². An effective self-service model removes basic, repetitive tasks from the live service queue and allows agents to focus on real issues. Understanding your customer journey and where it can benefit from self-service allows you to offer customers the flexibility they desire while reducing cost for your business.



2. KNOW WHO YOU'RE SERVING

Imagine a customer reaches out to your business for support, maybe they have a question about an account or want to know how to reschedule a recurring delivery. They start a web chat with your virtual assistant. The assistant has no idea who the customer is and asks a series of questions to identify their account and issue. Eventually, the virtual assistant escalates the conversation to a live agent, and the live agent asks the same questions again!

Now let's imagine the virtual assistant knows exactly who the customer is, their open tickets, and all their recent interactions with your business. It anticipates the customer's questions, providing thoughtful suggestions. And when it escalates, the live agent seamlessly picks up the conversation right where the virtual assistant left off with access to all of the previously gathered information.

As a customer, which of these experiences would you prefer?

Knowing your customer allows you to offer personalised and effective customer service. Making customer data available across your agents and automated systems provides a

consistent experience, wherever the customer chooses to engage with your business. In addition to convenience for customers, customer data also helps your team process service requests more efficiently. In fact, **according to a 2020 Harvard Business Review report, the strongest competitive positions are gained through customer data-enabled learning.**⁴

Customer data doesn't end with your service organisation. Customers see your business as one entity. You may have separate customer care, escalations, and fulfillment teams, but the customer expects all representatives of your company to have access to the same information about them. Let's consider for example the relationship between customer service and sales. Customer service agents often have deep product knowledge, but they can overlook obvious opportunities to upsell or cross-sell. Realistically, we can't expect every person in the company to know everything about each customer. Having a system that highlights 3-5 key data points about customers and makes it easy for employees to access additional customer information can help you deliver a unified customer experience across all levels of your organisation while also enabling the sales success many hope to see from their contact centre agents.



3. EMPOWER SERVICE TEAMS

Being knowledgeable about your product is an essential customer service skill, but it's becoming more complex to onboard and maintain knowledgeable agents. Customers are leveraging self-service to address simple, repetitive tasks. This means the typical request going to a live agent is becoming more complex. **Meanwhile, businesses continue to adjust to remote and hybrid work models, with only 7% of companies anticipating a return to full-time in-office contact centres.**³

Tools that make it easy to find product knowledge and customer data make agents feel empowered to do their job well. Moreover, tools that help the agent ask the right

questions, gather important data, and enter that data correctly into the CRM can aid new and experienced agents in establishing a productive dialog with customers.

To have empowered agents, you must also have engaged agents. With a remote workforce, it is especially important to communicate with your agents. Supervisors may not be able to walk about the contact centre floor anymore, but they can certainly schedule regular times for department all hands, team meetings, and 1:1 coaching. Businesses can promote transparency by giving agents visibility into their team and individual metrics and applying analytics for targeted, objective feedback.

4. CUSTOMERS WANT OMNI-CHANNEL

Companies have talked about the importance of an omni-channel customer experience for years, but the reality is many have delayed their own digital strategies with insufficient investment. **Less than 30% of companies are offering self-service, live chat, social messaging, in-app messaging, bots, or peer-to-peer communities.** Meanwhile, half of all customers (higher for Millennials and Gen Z) are signaling they want to conduct customer service over the social channels they already use to communicate with friends and family. 1 in 3 social media users have stated that they would prefer to get customer support over these channels.⁵ Now is the time to differentiate your business from the competition by researching what channels your customers use, how they'd like to interact with you, and equipping your organisation to engage through the customers' preferred channels.

The same customer may also contact you through different channels depending on the complexity of the issue, urgency, and time of day. **Only 35% of companies report having an integrated omni-channel strategy, as opposed to multiple systems that keep conversations siloed within individual channels.** A holistic view of the customer journey across channels helps your organisation resolve issues quickly and removes the

need for the customer to repeat information. In fact, companies with integrated omni-channel resolve tickets more than three times faster and their customers spend less time waiting for agents to respond.

A successful omni-channel strategy involves understanding that expectations and response times vary by channel. Just as customers expect different response strategies for voice and email, here are some metrics to consider for your omni-channel strategy:

- ✓ **90% of customers expect immediate email response** to their queries, with 60% defining immediate as under 10 minutes or less⁷
- ✓ The average response time on **Facebook is 1 hour 56 minutes**
- ✓ The average response time for **Twitter is 33 min**
- ✓ The average response time for **live chat is about 1 minute**
- ✓ Most customers expect responses on Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and WeChat **within 1 hour.**

5. AI AND AUTOMATION DO A LOT MORE THAN SAVE MONEY

Most people have a general understanding that AI can solve simple issues. The customer calls the service line, and a virtual agent helps them check their application status. The customer types a question on a website, and a chatbot answers the FAQs. Deflecting low complexity tickets is an obvious way to leverage AI, but there are many applications that are less apparent to the consumer.

Businesses leverage AI to correct typos when the customer searches for knowledge articles and to jump to the right time stamp in video tutorials. AI can present similar solved tickets

on the agent screen and guide the agent through the customer interaction with suggested responses. It can use speech analytics to parse customer sentiment, surface potential friction points in the customer journey, and optimise how many agents are staffed for work shifts.

Effective AI is subtle. Far from making it difficult for the customer to reach a live agent, AI facilitates the customer getting exactly what they want and leaves them with a great impression of your customer service, especially when the customer is unaware that AI was involved at all.

6. FOCUS ON THE RIGHT METRICS

A lot has changed since the days when contact centres struggled to get the performance metrics they wanted out of their system. Today's inbound contact centres have so many data points at their fingertips that there is a real risk for supervisors to lose focus on important metrics. We recommend identifying 5-8 KPIs that assess the health of your customer service operation and track these over time. These KPIs should include a mix of operational and customer-related metrics. Every portfolio has unique priorities, but here are a few common metrics you may want to consider for your dashboard:

Your customers have urgent needs and their requests for support should be met with equally time-conscious responses. Delivering quality customer care is essential to any thriving business and those who do not invest in meeting customer demands risk their competitive advantage.

- ✓ Average handle time
- ✓ Abandon rate
- ✓ Average wait time
- ✓ First response time
- ✓ Average response time
- ✓ Service level attainment
- ✓ First call resolution
- ✓ Schedule adherence
- ✓ Customer satisfaction
- ✓ Net promoter score
- ✓ Self-service ratio



1. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shephyken/2020/07/12/ninety-six-percent-of-customers-will-leave-you-for-bad-customer-service/?sh=319457cd30f8>

2. <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/future-of-customer-experience.html>

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4. <https://hbr.org/2020/01/when-data-creates-competitive-advantage>

5. <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-business/social-media-customer-service-statistics-and-trends-infographic>

6. https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/live-chat-go-to-market-flaw?_hstc=238111519.3c4fc3a8b8826a3863be3daf1d2b85f.1634170456484.1634170456484.1635184998466.2&_hssc=238111519.1.1635184998466&_hsfp=2580374673