The ABCs of Omnichannel Service Strategy
Planning for Success

Building an omnichannel customer service strategy doesn’t need to be an overwhelming task. Let’s explore some basics from A to Z that can lead to omnichannel success.

Aim high, but start small. While your end goal may be to provide service across a dozen channels, trying to execute on too much at once can be a mistake. Start with your most critical channels and expand from there.

Build for growth. As you start small, make sure you are choosing a technology foundation that allows for growth. You need a single platform that will enable you to add channels without changing technology.

Create a unified desktop. In addition to joining up communication channels, consider joining back-end data systems into a unified desktop. Your agents will then have a single application to handle issues across channels.

Determine your goals. It doesn’t make sense to add communication channels without a reason. Determine which channels will be most beneficial to your customers, and what results you are looking to achieve.

Everyone should be involved. One of the main challenges of omnichannel customer service is coordinating the people in the organization who are responsible for each channel. To achieve a unified experience, all parties need to be on board.

Facebook, Twitter, communities and more. When planning your omnichannel strategy, be sure to consider all of the channels that your customers are likely to use. They are a critical component of your solution.
Key Solution Components

Give your customers options. Customers have different preferences, so offer them more than just a single channel and allow them to choose the channel they need.

Have a consistent experience across channels. One of the main goals of omnichannel service is consistency. Ensure that your customers will get the same answers and have the same experience, regardless of channel.

Integrate your applications. Customer service data likely spans several different back-end systems. Rather than ripping these systems out and replacing them, use a “wrap and renew” approach to integrate them into a single desktop.

Join up the experience. Not only do customers use several different channels, they often use multiple channels during a single interaction. Be sure the transition from one channel to another is seamless.

Knowledge is power. One of the best ways to ensure consistency is to leverage a central knowledge base across channels. In this way, each agent will give consistent, accurate answers to customer service questions.
Channels to Consider

**Live chat is on the rise.** Customers are frequently turning to live chat to get the immediate response of a phone call with the convenience of not needing to talk on the phone.

**Mobile messaging provides flexibility.** Messaging allows customers to start a conversation on one device and pick it up at a later time on a different device. This flexibility is critical for today’s busy consumer.

**New social channels are here to stay.** Social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter are no longer just for early adopters. These mainstream channels demand an enterprise-class service experience.

**Online communities are growing in popularity.** These forums allow customers to help each other, which not only makes customers happy, but also helps reduce your total cost of service.

**Phone, email and in-person channels are still heavily used.** While there's currently a lot of focus on emerging channels, traditional channels are still widely used and should be a primary focus of your omnichannel strategy.
Best Practices for Success

**Quality over quantity.** Be realistic about your resources, and focus on offering a high quality of service before adding to the quantity of channels you provide.

**Remember customer effort.** In everything you do, think about the customer’s perspective and try to make the customer experience as effortless as possible. Customers want you to value their time and to make things easy.

**Seamless transitions.** Part of reducing customer effort is to make channel transitions seamless. Using a single technology across channels can help you easily transfer a customer’s history and allow customers to pick up where they left off.

**Tell your customers.** Your customers won’t know you’ve added a new way for them to reach you unless you tell them. Promote your new service channels in order to gain adoption.

**Understand customer expectations.** While customers may be willing to wait 24 hours for an email reply, they may expect a Facebook reply within minutes. Think about the customer expectations in each channel and plan accordingly.
Virtual assistants allow virtual conversations. This artificial intelligence capability is growing in popularity as customers want to interact in a conversational way. With seamless escalation to live chat, this channel offers a new low-cost alternative.

Wearables and the Internet of Things. Looking into the future, customers may start a service interaction directly from their car, washing machine or other device. Be ready for this new wave of expansion in omnichannel.

X marks the spot. Use analytics to find areas to improve over time. By leveraging speech and text analytics to find interactions with unhappy customers, long handle times and low success rates, you can pinpoint areas to improve.

You can never stop improving. This project will never be fully complete. As your products, services, customers and channels evolve, you must always be looking for new ways to improve the service experience.

Zoom in, zoom out. Areas of improvement can occur at the micro or macro level. Zoom into individual customer interactions to see what could be improved, and zoom out to the big picture to spot trends that can be changed.
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