Building A Digital Engagement Strategy For Customer Service
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Building a Digital Engagement Strategy

The Customer Experience (R)evolution

For more than 100 years, the telephone was the only channel for reaching a company to get help with questions, submit issues, or give the rare compliment. Today, consumers can choose from a plethora of channels or methods to reach a company. Seemingly new channels emerge every few months, keeping brands on their toes.

The newest channels being adopted by companies are SMS/text messaging, web chat, and "interactive" Facebook Messenger. Unlike the previous digital engagement channels, messaging has been quickly adopted and has become the dominant way consumers communicate with friends and family, spending more time on this channel than they do on social networks.

Developing a digital customer engagement strategy is critical to keep up with customer expectations and to differentiate from the competition.

DAILY MOBILE MESSAGING USAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Usage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Text Message</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook Messenger</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other messaging app</td>
<td>32%</td>
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Source: Market Strategies International 2017
These digital engagement channels are quickly replacing the phone and email as the primary form of interaction with companies. Companies are adopting business messaging as a means to keep up with competition and meet consumer expectations.

A recent Forbes article noted that consumers spend five times longer texting each day than they do making voice calls. And that spans all demographic groups, not just millennials. Up to now, texting has been mostly used to talk to friends and family. However, because messaging is the most common and far-and-away preferred channel for consumers, they are turning their messaging expectations to businesses. If you don’t already have consumer messaging capabilities deployed, now is the time.

The age of digital disruption has changed customer expectations, requiring companies to operate at a higher level of ingenuity and sophistication. Businesses today must focus on delivering an exceptional digital customer experience in order to outpace their competition.

While consumers are still performing the same basic activities during their engagement with a company, the channels available, the devices used, and the speed at which these activities take place have drastically changed.
The 4 most common ways consumers engage with brands include:

- Gaining awareness of a product
- Using the product or service
- Asking for support
- Researching and learning more about the product/service

Technology has forever changed customer expectations of how everyone - friends, family, and yes, even companies should engage with them. Customers now expect convenient, effortless, and personalized experiences with brands whether they are asking questions and want speedy answers prior to buying, or they need step-by-step guidance to resolve their issue post-purchase.

The Customer Experience Crisis

In order to deliver world class digital customer engagement you have to differentiate from the average, not set it as the bar to meet.

It is frequently stated that Customer Service is the only long-term differentiator in today’s world. Brand reputations are built or damaged based on the quality of service they provide.

While many companies recognize the gravity of the customer experience and the shift of customer expectations, many only look to keep pace with their closest competitor. In order to deliver world class digital customer engagement, you have to differentiate from the average, not set it as the bar to meet. Forrester reports that only 7% of companies are exceeding customers' expectations and worse, 25% don't feel they even meet customer expectations.

One of the greatest difficulties in delivering superior digital customer engagement is mindset. Intuitively, the entire company, from executive leadership to front-line employees, wants to deliver a consistent, best-in-class digital experience across all channels, but have a hard time differentiating it from traditional customer service.

It is imperative to recognize the gap that exists between traditional customer service and a digital customer engagement. As stated above, customer activities are the same (shopping, comparing, purchasing, seeking support) but access and expectations are vastly different. Consumers no longer walk into a store to browse and talk to a sales person every time they want to purchase something. They no longer have the time or inclination to pick up the phone or email to place an order or ask a question. The traditional channels are being eaten up by the digital channels. Phone calls and emails are being eaten up by the more convenient SMS/text messaging and web chat channels.

Some companies will use the fact that the activities are the same as an excuse not to implement more innovative means to enhance their digital engagement, or do just enough to keep up with the closest competitor. Those are the companies that will not succeed in the long-run.
Customer expectations are quickly outpacing digital customer experience (CX) efforts and it appears that companies are far too complacent of being "just good enough". Forrester reports that only 7% of companies are exceeding customers' expectations and worse, 25 percent don't feel they even meet customer expectations.

This misalignment of customer expectations and company effort is creating a serious crisis that businesses can no longer ignore.

**Defining a Digital Customer Engagement Strategy**

Complacency is not taking action when you know you should or when you can. Complacent is how a lot of companies can be described when it comes to the way they communicate with their customers. If you’re one of the growing number of innovative leaders who are changing the way companies communicate with their customers, from the status quo of emails and phone calls, then we applaud your efforts.

Continuing to do things because “that’s how we’ve always done it” is the battle cry of companies that fail to meet the needs of a changing marketplace. Emails have become overrun with spam and phone calls don't fit the lifestyle of today's busy, mobile customer. The use of messaging, including web chat, are the trademarks of businesses that are vigilant about customer communication preferences.

**Take It from the Top**

A key characteristic demonstrated by companies, that are high performers in customer experience, is the support of senior management. Getting buy-in from executive leadership shows the entire company that customer experience transformation is a priority. If you're an individual within a C-suite role, this is your opportunity to lead the charge within your organization and become a role model of customer-focused leadership in the digital age.

As stated in the multi-part article "The Messaging Mandate", successful adoption of messaging or any communication channel across the company must align channel goals to business objectives. Clearly presenting how the channel can play a role in company objectives and ultimately deliver positive ROI is essential in gaining top level sponsorship.
Research shows that, “successful projects for optimizing the customer experience typically achieve revenue growth of 5 to 10 percent and cost reductions of 15 to 25 percent within just two or three years.”

Leading that change though can be tough. That’s why there’s an entire profession dedicated to Change Management. We share a few lessons learned from our experience helping companies introduce messaging as a new channel into their organization. From executive leadership to front line employees, sharing these three strategic moves can support the adoption of business messaging as the new method of communication with your customers.

**Putting the Customer Center Stage**

Consumers are constantly being bombarded with information and experiences online and off. This onslaught of information makes it harder for us to remember every detail and interaction with brands. While it would be impossible to remember every interaction, your customers will likely remember the first and last interaction.

Today’s digital customer is very likely to have that first interaction on your website or trying to contact your business to ask questions about your product or service from their mobile device. Armed with this information, you can design that first/last-touch experience with the customer’s ideal engagement at centerstage - making it convenient and easy for them.

Enabling your landlines to send and receive text messages, for example, and having web chat active on your website supports these goals. Many Quiq clients are surprised that a lot of their customers are trying to text them on their existing landlines. Think of how surprised and delighted your customer would be to receive the post sale customer support by text message, the preferred means to contact a business, instead of receiving an error message.

Likewise, a customer’s last interaction may very well end with a digital engagement, whether that’s a mention on Facebook or trying to engage with customer service from their mobile device. Wouldn’t you prefer your customers to walk away from that first or last experience, thinking “Wow, that was easy”? 
Mobile-First. Always.
Focusing on digital customer engagement in an age when everyone looks to their mobile device for research or to seek support from brands, means to adopt a mobile-first design for each interaction. Consider and evaluate how an average customer will interact with each of the digital channels, and clearly define what the ideal experience is.

Here are a few considerations:

• **Make digital channels highly accessible**
  Lead with the channels that are preferred and most commonly used by customers to communicate (SMS, Facebook Messenger, Web Chat).

• **Facilitate easy, seamless interactions**
  Information gathered from one channel should be used if and when the customer contacts you via a different channel. Selecting products that can integrate with your existing CRM system to leverage customer information across channels will support this goal.

• **Deliver a visually consistent presence**
  Ensure your company’s branding, voice, and vibe are consistent across all channels. Customers don’t think about “channels,” they think about what they need in that moment and the fastest way to get it. Make sure your brand is consistently represented regardless of touchpoint.

In addition to the above, it is important to realize that customers are much more visually-driven than ever before - emojis, Pinterest and Instagram are evidence that customers are far more comfortable with taking, sharing, and consuming visual content. With this in mind, consider how each channel will use visual media to engage with customers or vice versa.

For example, many Quiq clients encourage customer service agents to exchange emojis, videos, and pictures with customers, which is the way they communicate with family and friends and helps bring context into conversations. They also encourage customers to share photos and videos to more quickly help with purchases or problems.

In our research, we have found that companies which recognize the gap and open up preferred digital channels, such as mobile text messaging, Facebook Messenger, and Web Chat are perceived more favorably by consumers and have higher revenue. Shoppers that engage via digital means are 2.8% more likely to purchase and the average shopping cart is larger by up to 60%.
Connecting Customer Experience to Value

While most leadership within an organization have a general sense for the benefits of delivering a great customer experience, it can be hard to commit to changes to the current modus operandi without properly quantifying the value the change has to the organization.

Delivering a great customer experience is more than just the feel good, right thing to do, it has direct implications on revenue, especially the kind of loyalty-driven revenue companies see from satisfied customers who keep coming back again and again. Research reports by McKinsey state that companies who offer exceptional customer experience can exceed their competitor’s gross margins by 26 percent, while making employees happier and simplifying operations throughout the organization.

Exceptional customer service means meeting customer expectations and meeting customer needs in a way that is seen as easy for the customer. Today’s consumer has the ability to find an abundance of service providers, products, and reviews with a swipe of a finger and they expect your responsiveness and attention to be just as simple. In fact, 75% of customers demand service within five minutes of online contact.

Messaging and web chat are quickly becoming the go-to weapons in the customer experience arsenal for many companies who want to satisfy the “right this instant” expectation of consumers. Just as web chat is the optimal way to engage website visitors who are browsing from a desktop, messaging allows mobile customers to engage with a company through text and social.

When trying to convince leaders who have one eye on profits and the other on what’s right for the customer, be sure to clearly state benefits:

- The economic benefits of messaging are substantial when compared to other channels like phone calls.
- Text messaging takes ~25% less work time versus phone calls or emails.
- Customer satisfaction scores are 5-10 points higher for text messaging over other channels.
- Research shows that messaging is the preferred method of contacting a company over phone and email.
- 44% of online consumers view getting questions answered by a live person an essential feature for websites.

Change leaders can rally support within the organization by sharing the positive impact messaging and chat can have throughout the entire profit and loss statement:

- Increased revenue by allowing customers another channel by which they can overcome hesitations to purchase
- Decreased cost to sales and service through more cost effective and efficient engagement channels
- Overall increased profitability

These are just a few of the benefits. This is the type of information that goes beyond “it’s the right thing to do for the customer” and delivers tangible benefits management can measure, monitor and make informed strategy decisions on.
Best Practices to Launch Web Chat and Messaging

There are a growing number of platforms vying for consumer attention. There are three major digital media channels that dominate the market with herculean strength:

1) Web Chat
2) SMS/text messaging
3) Facebook Messenger.

Here are a few of the nuances of SMS, Live Chat, and Facebook Messenger that make an implementation with best practices so important:

Web Chat

Web chat is the optimal digital engagement channel for those engaging with a brand via a desktop computer. According to [Websitebuilder.org](https://www.websitebuilder.org) 51% of consumers are more likely to purchase from a website that has integrated chat. Even if the consumer never uses it at least 29% of all visitors are more likely to purchase when the option of live web chat is the optimal digital engagement channel for those engaging with a brand via a desktop computer.

Let’s look at the two ways Web Chat is used: Reactive and Proactive Chat.

Reactive Chat (Chat Initiated by the Customer)

Consumers come to your website to see what you have to offer and then purchase it. Reactive chat is simply having a chat button omnipresent on your site for customers to engage if and when they have a question or need help. Consumers initiate the session, so ensure the chat icon is prominent enough to be noticed by considering design elements such as shape, size, and color are essential.

**Reactive Chat Best Practices:**

- The chat icon should appear on the lower right-hand page of every sales or service-oriented website and on all steps of the shopping cart process
- Tailor the colors and text of the chat window to represent your brand voice
- The chat icon should only appear when an agent or salesperson is available
• Keep the pre-chat form limited to a minimum of fields for the consumer to complete. With each question, abandonment can increase by 45%.

Proactive Chat (Chat Initiated by the Brand)

Proactive Chat means that based on some predetermined criteria, you can decide when to “pop-up” a chat box with an offer to help. Proactive Chat allows you to set up rules such as initiating a chat session after a predetermined amount of time the consumer has been on your site or when a visitor lands on specific pages. A proactive approach to chat invitations will dramatically increase both digital engagement and conversion rates.

Proactive Chat Best Practices:

• Invite at least 20% of customers engaged in digital sales or service processes
• Upon issuing a proactive invitation, expect engagement rates to increase approximately 4X
• Eliminate the pre-chat form or keep it the absolute minimum for CRM integration
• Leverage java script on your site to trigger an invitation at a critical “moment of truth” in the sales or service processes

SMS

While SMS or text messaging friends and family is old hat, customers do not expect to exchange SMS messages with you for sales or service! Consumers are not trained to engage with a brand via SMS and need to be encouraged and directed. Since messaging receives the highest sales conversion and call deflection possible, SMS engagement should be promoted on all mobile optimized pages.

Follow these best practices for SMS messaging for business:

• Place an anchored “Message Us” banner on the mobile site as a large touch target to encourage users to text instead of call
• Include a clear call-to-action on the “Contact Us” page
• Partner with Marketing to spread the word to consumers about your company’s new texting capabilities

Facebook Messenger

The average Facebook user in the US spends 35 minutes per day on the app. Brands are leveraging this channel for customer engagement and are starting to invite customers to use Facebook Messenger to engage directly.
There are 2 billion messages exchanged between users and businesses on Facebook Messenger already. This is just one of the reasons 67% of companies believe social customer service is the most pressing short-term priority for the contact center.

**Facebook Messenger best practices:**

- Turn messaging on for your Facebook page. You can find instructions on Facebook's Help Center.
- Enable “Click to Message” ads to send current or potential customers into a Messenger conversation. There is no better time to engage a potential customer about a product than when they are viewing an ad and are excited about your product.
- Invite Facebook visitors to initiate a conversation with you from your Facebook page, ads, and app across other media channels such as your website.
- Place the “Message Us” call-to-action within copy on Facebook ads and your company page to encourage visitors to message your company directly. Remember, this is new to them and they may not know that companies can be messaged just like their family and friends.

**What to Expect After You Launch Web Chat and Messaging**

After you launch web chat and messaging, be sure to track and measure results. Quiq uses a powerful dashboard of the most important stats to allow managers to keep a pulse of the performance metrics that matter the most to your business.

Once you launch web chat and messaging for your organization, you'll start to see efficiencies within the departments where these tools are deployed. Efficiencies such as lower support costs, higher deflection of calls to messaging and an increase in case resolutions per agent are not uncommon for many of Quiq clients who implemented web chat and messaging within their customer service organization.

When web chat and messaging are deployed for Sales enablement, Quiq clients have seen an increase in leads and the ability to accelerate the sales cycle. These efficiencies can be attributed to more streamlined communication between your organization and your customers and the ability to gather customer intelligence in real-time.
Messaging and Chat Won’t Feel like a Change

While messaging and web chat can have profound positive impact throughout your company, implementation doesn’t have to disrupt current operations. The vast majority of customers and employees already use messaging and web chat in their personal lives. Responding to messages, attaching photos and videos and even using emojis are pretty commonplace so there’s really nothing new to learn.

Quiq Messaging makes the implementation of web chat and messaging even easier by providing employees a single place to read and respond to all messages, regardless if your customer chooses to contact you via SMS/text messaging, Facebook Messenger, or chat with you from their desktop. Our simple user interface can also integrate with the system’s your agents already use so agents can quickly access relevant information.

If you’re ready to implement web chat and messaging for your organization, contact Quiq today. Quiq Messaging is an easy to implement messaging software solution that enables companies to engage with customers on the channels they already feel most comfortable with.

About Quiq

Quiq makes it easy for customers to contact a business via Messaging, the preferred channel already in use with our friends and family. With Quiq, customers can now engage with companies via SMS/text messaging, Facebook Messenger, Web Chat, In-App, and Kik for help with their pre-sales and post-sales questions.

Learn more about Quiq today at GoQuiq.com.