

Online Customer Service

Leveraging the Internet for Customer Interaction in a Online Service Business

A White Paper



Telmar Internet Services LLC.

How effectively are you utilizing your website?

In recent years service organizations in both the public sector and private sector have expended significant resources in development and deployment of their Internet presence. Their web sites provide immediate access to information; however, traditional sites provide delayed access to direct communication. Up until about two years ago customer service was almost exclusively delivered over the telephone and email. People would go to the website and when they had any questions they would pick up the phone if they needed real time customer service.

As organizations developed their web strategies, an increasing number started marketing and selling services over the Internet and the old email and telephone based systems for sales and customer support no longer met the business needs. Today clients for services access live information and demonstration. Web sites do not provide interactive communication channels to the customer on their web site.

To maximize the effectiveness of their websites, organizations are creating new strategies to deal with online processes including interactive customer communication channels to gain a competitive advantage. As the service market redefines customer relationship management, a significant factor in achieving online success is the delivery of live interaction for the business client. Service products are complex and require a high level of support through the operational cycle. Service companies must provide multiple types of customer interactions; from self-service product information to fully assisted live customer support. Service businesses that create immediate high level customer interaction create positive customer experience and will have higher customer satisfaction.

The largest cost component of service organizations is the human agent. Service companies have a significantly high cost in customer support. Any communication channel that expands productivity of existing resources materially affects the profitability of businesses and should be explored. Therefore, immediate aggressive low cost communication channels should be implemented to support the customer service process.

Leveraging your website with new technologies

New Technologies leverage existing websites with proven customer interaction. Companies are shifting to electronic interaction to lower the cost of call center operations. The single largest expense in a call center is the cost of the human agent. Direct web based communication does not only benefit the customer with real time assistance, technology companies can expand their customer interaction without expanding their customer support

staff. Electronic interaction enables the sales and customer support agents to service multiple customers simultaneously, while telephone support is done exclusively on a one to one ratio.

Live Customer Interaction for websites

Web-based technologies offer significant advantages for organizations providing live customer service over their web sites. It can improve the productivity of the customer care representative by a factor of 3 to 4 while telephone based customer care is always provided in a ratio of 1:1. In the virtual reality of e-commerce a representative can assist multiple customers simultaneously with it being transparent to the customer. Internet technology allows single or multiple service agents to join in the web based customer care process when live interaction is available. Service staff can guide the customer through information and provide real time answers to product questions and request for information. Immediate, available business interaction is a necessity with the complexity of the decision process involved in the delivery of the service product. It also is proven that live customer support when readily available is a positive customer experience. In a number of systems the customer service representative takes the customer through a set of predefined questions and then makes a decision based on the answers. Web based conversation exchange where the whole system is text based is particularly suited for this. The system can be customized so that the all the questions can be canned in advance and sent to the customer one at a time. The entire text can then be stored in the database for later retrieval and analysis.

Delays in response to customer inquiries have a higher material negative affect for service organizations over other industries. Since customer service involve an ongoing relationship immediacy of communication is a valuable asset. Slow and non-responsive organizations are further eroding the opportunity to build trust in relationships and are therefore missing valuable opportunities and disenfranchising their existing clients. The low level of accuracy of service organizations email responses will eventually drive customers to other more costly communication channels and lower confidence in email as a customer service tool.

Almost all (96 percent) of service organizations offer e-mail customer support, and only 67 percent post a toll-free customer support line on their Web site. Moreover, just 4 percent of the sites tracked offer text conversation with collaboration. Service organizations can meet the expectations for real-time interaction by combining voice conversations with the collaboration aspects that text conversation tools provide.

Once installed, Web sites that utilize live customer interaction report higher customer satisfaction rates.

Benefits of Live Customer Interaction

Leading companies are moving from websites that provide information to transaction sites that support live service. Real time customer interaction is a key to success. Service organization call centers should support web based conversation , email, telephone and fax. To maximize each transaction, customers need flexibility of multiple options based on complexity of the transaction.

With advancements of new technology, Online Support may be readily installed on any website. Its requirements are minimal. The installation is simple and the customer can be up and productive in less than a day. The system is designed to be simple, easy to use and manage. A scalable system it can be customized and integrated with other systems for business with complex requirements.

For live support a CSR using Online Support can handle 120 -150 conversations per 8 hour day versus 25-30 phone calls per day significantly reducing per transaction cost and maximizing productivity. Furthermore, it places customer care where your customer is: your website.

In cyber space physical location has no meaning and the physical location of the customer care representative becomes irrelevant. Web based interaction applications facilitate flexibility for business with e-commerce sectors. They can easily work from different geographic locations or from home and still share the same system. All conversation transcripts and customer information is automatically store in the eBusiness' database for later retrieval and analysis.

Maturing Marketplace

Online Support implements proven strategies from the world of Brick and Mortar to eCommerce. eBusiness customer care requires the same flexibility in implementation, scalability, and ease of use.

It was in this environment that Telmar Internet Services launched our Online Support product line. Online Support is an off the shelf application and/or service that lets eBusiness implement the degree of specialized customer care they require. It comes ready to go live (in under a day) or can be completely customized and integrated with other applications. The system and all related data collected remains in our world class data center, behind our firewalls, enabling the technology to be used for a wider scope of applications, not just online sales support and customer service. Our Online Support Products can be implemented as a private inhouse messaging or help system.

Conclusion

Live customer interaction is a necessity in the technology product sales cycle. Online Support is the most cost effective technology available to software companies presently. In a competitive environment, long hold times, complex telephone mazes and slow e-mail responses quickly evaporate customer loyalty. The customer has chosen the most immediately accessible market to source information. Sales interaction should be immediately accessible as well.

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