

Redefining Customer Experience Through Self-Service

Thirteen Principles to Creating
Customer Interactions in the Digital Age

ORACLE WHITE PAPER | MARCH 2016





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By 2017, two-thirds of all customer service interactions will no longer require the support of a human intermediary.

GARTNER

WHY YOU NEED TO RETHINK YOUR CUSTOMER SELF-SERVICE STRATEGY

MARCH 2015

Executive Summary

Consider the customer journey: how we find providers, learn about products, pay for purchases, and ask for help. The customer journey is shifting increasingly toward self-service. More companies are moving in this direction not only to reduce costs, but as a way of differentiating themselves in the market, improve customer engagement, and enhance the user experience.


The problem is too many companies are failing to execute self-service in a manner that actually serves customers and prospects. Initially, organizations primarily focus self-service on customer acquisition over customer support and retention, says Troy DuMoulin, vice president of research and development at Pink Elephant, a global training, consulting and conference service provider in IT soft skills.¹ Web-based companies force people to search their websites endlessly before they can find a contact number. Some companies don't publish their phone numbers and force customers to e-mail their questions or submit them online. Even worse, some companies are penalizing customers by charging fees when a customer needs help from staff.

Rather than helping, poorly executed self-service can leave the customer feeling frustrated, incensed, and exhausted by the hoops they have jump through. It increases the risk of neglecting—and ultimately losing—their customers. Without proper planning, companies will fail to reap the benefits of self-service. Gartner estimates that by the end of 2016, at least 80 percent of organizations that fail to plan their self-service implementations will incur higher customer service costs and will not achieve the savings and benefits expected.²

Digital disruptors like Uber and AirBNB have shown that self-service—when done right—can fundamentally change entire industries in just a few years. How can organizations design self-service in a way that empowers their customers rather than forcing additional burdens on them? It all comes down to focusing on the customer in every part of the business. Creating standout experiences

¹ Troy DuMoulin, interview by Millie Lapidario, 23 February 2016

² Gartner, Why You Need to Rethink Your Customer Self-Service Strategy, Brian Manusama, 17 March 2015



requires companies to aggressively study their customers, understand them on multiple levels, and constantly innovate. This can present a major challenge especially for large, mature organizations suffering from service inertia.

This white paper offers a closer look at self-service and the new customer expectations for greater control. You'll see how customer communications offers a prime opportunity for every organization to add more value to customers and prospects. The paper also provides 13 principles to creating customer interactions in the digital age, packed with examples of lessons learned from multiple industries.



The Mindset

In the digital age, self-service is part of our everyday lives. There is nothing new about online banking and airport kiosks or online chat and FAQ pages. As the culture becomes further connected to technology, companies must continue to analyze the evolving mindset of their markets.


Hyperconnected consumers are constantly becoming more empowered through new tools, mobile apps, and experiences from digital-first companies. Not only are people more curious about how to solve their problems and more eager to control their transactions, they have an unwavering confidence in their own ability to get things done. Marketing CEO Aaron Shapiro calls them “digital do-it-yourselfers.”³ They want to know everything, understand everything, and do everything online—better yet, on their smartphones. In the digital age mindset, the internal dialogue is, “Make it fast. Make it convenient. And let me do it myself.”

If presented with the option to type or talk to a fellow human, digital do-it-yourselfers are more likely to type. Digital channels will almost always be the first place to go for customer service issues. In fact, 80 percent of customers visit a company website prior to calling a service center, according to John Goodman, vice chairman of Customer Care Measurement and Consulting (CCMC).⁴

For better or worse, there's a sense of freedom that comes with self-service and avoiding human interaction. Research from Duke University's Fuqua School of Business found that people were more likely to place complicated

³ Aaron Shapiro, *Users Not Customers* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2011), p. 181.

⁴ John Goodman, interview by Millie Lapidario, 12 February 2016



pizza orders (e.g., triple bacon topping) when they ordered online compared to ordering from workers. Apparently, customers didn't have to worry about negative reactions when ordering behind a screen.⁵

From the self-service above all mindset, human interaction inherently comes with baggage: uncertainty, delays, errors, misunderstandings. Speed and convenience are the top priorities, and the new mentality equates self-service with both of them.

In insurance, call centers are already witnessing lower call volumes because more policyholders are using self-service tools to change their mailing address and bank account information, inquire about claim status, or make changes to their household contents, according to McKinsey.⁶ When customers have the right tools, they're happy to do the work themselves. In fact, they prefer it.

Defining Self-Service

A broad view of self-service is an effective starting point when developing innovative ways to enhance the customer experience. Self-service is a strategy or mechanism that enables people to accomplish tasks on their own. Examples run the gamut from online tools and mobile apps to websites and kiosks. If it enables customers to serve themselves—e.g., finding information, making purchases, booking reservations, managing money, checking in—consider it self-service.

Organizations exploring new offerings and analyzing their existing offerings should keep in mind self-service from a macrolevel and microlevel. On a macrolevel, there are entire business models like Amazon and eBay that run on self-service. On a microlevel, a self-service analysis can drill down to the language you use to communicate with your customers. For example, is your company content helping your customers help themselves?

Self-Service Evolves, Speed Becomes King

In the IT support world, self-service originated more from a need to reduce costs and optimize resource time rather than enhance customer experience. DuMoulin, a help desk manager in the 1990s, recalls the majority of people who called his unit needed help on simple issues like password resets. His company and many others tried self-service options primarily to lessen the workload on tech support and free up time for more meaningful projects.


The forward-thinking companies eventually came to see self-service as a way to differentiate themselves and increase value to their customers, DuMoulin said. Self-service offered customers the luxury of choice and promoted the message that customer engagement was a high priority for the company.⁷

Meanwhile, customers also went through a transformation. Francie Mendelsohn, president of Summit Research Associates, has been consulting with companies about kiosks for more than 20 years. When she first started studying customer experience through kiosks in the early 1990s, she sensed some hesitation among people to choose self-service over speaking to a live person. Many seemed intimidated to use kiosks because they weren't very familiar with technology, she said. In recent years, as technology has become so engrained in the culture, the old fears have been replaced with a new fervor to conduct transactions with the click of a button. Mendelsohn

⁵ "How Self-Service Influences Customer Behavior," Duke University Fuqua School of Business, 3 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1OvKNw2>

⁶ Sylvain Johansson, Ulrike Vogelgesang, "Insurance on the Threshold of Digitization: Implications for the Life and P&C Workforce," McKinsey & Company, December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1RoFsv0>

⁷ Troy DuMoulin, interview by Millie Lapidario, 23 February 2016



believes that as the population has become increasingly dependent on their smartphones and mobile apps, they've warmed up to self-service technologies like kiosks.⁸

The ability to do things quickly also became a top priority for most consumers. According to The 2015 National Customer Rage Study, the most frequently cited damage resulting from customer problems was lost time.⁹ Because people have become more confident in their ability to use technology, they're also convinced they can accomplish tasks more quickly with self-service tools as opposed to depending on others.

Even the perception of speed can be a powerful motivator. The self-service checkout line at the grocery store is not necessarily faster than the staffed check-out lines, according to Mendelsohn. However, people are still drawn to self-service checkout because they believe they can get themselves through the line faster.

The most frequently cited damage resulting from customer problems was lost time.

THE 2015 NATIONAL CUSTOMER RAGE STUDY
CUSTOMER CARE MEASUREMENT & CONSULTING
W.P. CAREY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
DIALOG DIRECT

Prime Opportunity to Improve Self-Service through Customer Communications

Based on the premise that self-service is primarily about giving customers the information and tools to empower them, customer communications is a critical area to examine for all industries—especially those that rely heavily on long-term customers. The insurance industry, in particular, is seriously lacking in customer communications.

Ernst & Young recently discovered some telling figures from its Global Consumer Insurance Survey:

- » **Insufficient frequency:** A full 44 percent of insurance consumers have had no interactions with their insurers during the last 18 months.
- » **Low satisfaction:** Only 14 percent of consumers report being very satisfied with communications from their insurers.
- » **Digital readiness:** About 80 percent of consumers, including seniors, want to use digital and remote channel options for many different tasks and transactions.¹⁰

The research shows the prime opportunity for insurers and financial services companies to strengthen their customer communications in many ways. Consider customer communications as an ongoing self-service where the company is continually educating the customer and offering useful and relevant information, while giving them the tools they need to conduct their own transactions. Given this model, organizations from all industries can make huge strides in communicating with their customers.

Consider the following scenarios of self-service customer communications in multiple industries:

- » A utility sends a text message or e-mail reminder of upcoming payment deadlines
- » An insurer sends a welcome letter to a new homeowner's insurance policyholder with a tip to consider an additional rider to cover valuables beyond the coverage limit¹¹

⁸ Francie Mendelsohn, interview by Millie Lapidario, 10 February 2016

⁹ "The 2015 National Customer Rage Study: Why Is The Level Of Customer Service In America Still Declining?" Customer Care Measurement & Consulting, W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University, Dialog Direct, 13 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Qelwsu>

¹⁰ Bernhard J Klein Wassink, Kaenan Hertz, and Melanie Henderson, "The Why and How of Simplified Customer Communications," Ernst & Young, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1S1Ygm6>

- » An auto insurer enables its policyholders to access their auto insurance cards online and print from home
- » A financial services company sends contracts with e-signature functionality through a secure online portal
- » An investment bank allows account holders to view complex financial statements through an optimized view on a mobile device, along with a chat function in case the account holder has questions
- » A manufacturer creates a customized quote and order confirmation the customer can view on any mobile device

All of these types of customer experiences can drastically expand a company's value proposition with the help of an advanced customer communications management system (CCM) such as [Oracle Documaker](#). This powerful CCM system is a complete customer engagement platform that transforms disconnected, uncoordinated communications to engaged conversations. Oracle Documaker enables customers to see their documents through interactive mobile apps and web pages.



Thirteen Principles to Creating Customer Interactions in the Digital Age

1. Simplicity over complexity

Avoid complication, clutter, or ambiguity at all costs. Design your self-service offering in such a way that the customer will know exactly what to do to accomplish their task. Assume that any room for confusion, misunderstanding, or error will lead to a frustrated customer. Steve Krug put it best in the title of his book on human-computer interaction and web usability, *Don't Make Me Think*. Your customer should never have to spend their time and energy trying to figure out how to use a device, navigate a website, or access information.

Google is the perfect success story illustrating the beauty of simplicity. Everyone is familiar with the Google homepage featuring a single search bar in the middle of the screen, surrounded by white space. Many insurance websites including Progressive and Geico also capitalize on simple designs tailored for prospective customers searching for personalized quotes. Esurance has a very user-friendly self-service design. Website visitors start by selecting the type of insurance product they're looking for and their zip code. Then they're presented with two options: (1) scenic route, which allows them to enter information manually, and (2) express lane, which has Esurance look up vehicle information directly. Taking the express lane allows website visitors to get multiple insurance quotes in 10 minutes. By presenting a simple design, you're able to move forward quickly through each step.

¹¹ John Goodman, interview by Millie Lapidario, 12 February 2016

2. Anticipate your customer's needs

Uncertainty and unpleasant surprises are the most common sources of customer complaints, according to Goodman. The most successful companies of the digital age go beyond servicing their customers and addressing problems as they arise. They know how to fulfill the customer's needs before the customer realizes they need help, particularly through optimizing and automating customer communications. Automated bill reminders via text message or e-mail, for example, are easy solutions that reflect a company's commitment to the customer.

Uncertainty and unpleasant surprises are the most common sources of customer complaints.

JOHN GOODMAN

VICE CHAIRMAN

CUSTOMER CARE MEASUREMENT & CONSULTING

For P&C insurance policyholders, the single biggest pain point is the surprise premium increase, Goodman said. Regulations typically require insurers to notify policyholders of rate increases from 20 to 45 days in advance depending on the state insurance code, type of insurance, and whether or not the policy will renew. Goodman advises insurance companies to notify policyholders 90 days in advance. He says insurers usually hate that advice because the wider timeframe gives policyholders more time to shop for other insurance providers. However in his research, the early notifications helped attenuate customer anger by 80 percent, and less than 2 percent of policyholders switched to other insurance providers. The advance notice also reduces sensitivity to price increases.

Phone directories also tend to aggravate customers, especially in cases where there are too many options or worse, the options are unclear and the customer gets routed to the wrong person. Customers often give up on listening to the menu and simply press zero repeatedly until they can find a human. To avoid this scenario, Goodman advises companies to post the directory wherever the company publishes the customer service number. This increases proper use of the menu and satisfaction while reducing opt-outs by 20 percent.¹²

3. Gain a profound understanding of the customer and design the experience on their terms

The business motto "Know your customer" is taking on a new meaning as mobile devices are becoming the primary means of getting things done. As IDC pointed out in a recent survey, the new shopping experience does not instruct the customer on how to interact with the business: "It finds you where you want to transact, whether that be online, on a mobile device, or in a store, and makes the transaction happen there."¹³

Tesco, a multinational grocery and general merchandise retailer, provides the best example of an artfully designed self-service experience. In 2011, Tesco pushed a localization initiative in South Korea, where the population works long hours and spends much time commuting on public transportation. The retailer created virtual stores in prime locations: subway stations and bus stops. As people waited, they could shop along the displays, which resembled grocery store aisles. Using a mobile app, the shoppers would scan an item's barcode and place an order that could be delivered that evening.¹⁴ Wait times were transformed into potential shopping times, and Tesco reported

¹² John Goodman, interview by Millie Lapidario, 12 February 2016

¹³ Vanessa Thompson, "The Opportunities and Challenges of Delivering Superior Experiences: IDC's 2015 EXPERIENCES Survey," IDC, 11 June 2015

¹⁴ Martin Petit de Meurville, Kimberley Pham, and Courtney Trine, "Shop on the Go," Business Today, 15 February 2015, <http://bit.ly/24qeiLE>

tremendous success later that year. New registered members grew by 76 percent and online sales went up 130 percent.^{15,16}

4. Put the customer in control

Technology allows companies to offer customer-controlled self-service at the most granular level. Never underestimate the amount of control your customers want over their transactions. In some cases, customer control may be a higher priority than speed.

In banking, for example, more banks are experimenting with cardless ATMs. This new feature allows customers to initiate transactions using their mobile phones instead of a debit card using either QR codes or NFC (near-field communication). Regardless of whether or not a few smartphone taps saves time over a card swipe, the value to the customer is greater control. They can start the transaction from the comfort of their smartphone—a device most people already use multiple times a day. By starting the transaction from their personal devices, the customer cuts down on the time they spend physically standing in front of the ATM. More importantly, because customers no longer have to swipe their debit cards, they're protected from skimming, a technique thieves use to steal debit card numbers and PINs by installing skimmers in the ATM.

BMO Harris Bank, which began using cardless ATMs in March 2015, reported that the number of users is going up every month faster than the company predicted.¹⁷ Bank of America and Chase are also planning to release NFC-enabled ATMs over the next few months.¹⁸



In the book *The Best Service Is No Service*, the authors reference a customer communications scenario that played out differently between two unnamed health insurers, Fund A and Fund B. Both companies concluded that responding to customer e-mails by phone was more efficient than responding via e-mail, which would simply prolong the process with additional inquiries. When Fund A would call the customers to resolve their inquiries, customers were often angry. They were caught off-guard and asked why the company was responding to an e-mail with a call. On the other hand, Fund B had used a simple technique to give customers more control. In their e-mail template, they included a check box requesting permission to call the customer and asked for a preferred time of day.

Not surprisingly, Fund B customers welcomed the service calls and expressed that they had been expecting the call. Fund B's strategy required the company to give up some control, however, their plan ultimately strengthened their reputation among their customers.¹⁹

15 "Tesco Homeplus Virtual Subway Store in South Korea," 24 June 2011, <http://bit.ly/1hXhZaQ>

16 Despite Tesco's success in South Korea, Tesco later sold its South Korean business to pay down debt and rework its UK business. "Tesco sells South Korea stores for £4bn," BBC, 7 September 2015, <http://bbc.in/1LGLFhE>

17 Maria Lamagna, "What the ATM of the Future Will Look Like," *MarketWatch*, 5 February 2016, <http://on.mktw.net/1KZLa1H>

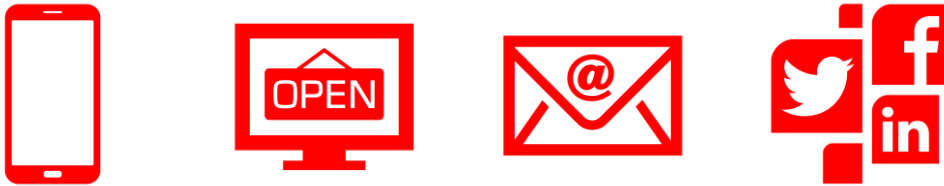
18 James Rufus Koren, "Big U.S. Banks Will Roll Out ATMs That Take Smartphones, Not Cards," 31 January 2016, *Los Angeles Times*, <http://lat.ms/1PqWw4e>

19 Bill Price and David Jaffe, *The Best Service Is No Service* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), p. 86.

5. Consider the customer's comfort level and privacy concerns

Sometimes, speed and convenience aren't as important as how comfortable customers feel using a self-service option. Of course, the best self-service incorporates all of these factors. Goodman offers an example of the loan application process. He says many people applying for a mortgage in particular may feel anxious. There are loan tracking solutions that allow the customer to see the status of their loan documents all the way down to whose desk the application is sitting on. "Not only is the supervisor supervising the system, the customer is supervising the system," Goodman said.²⁰

The customer's comfort level is an especially important consideration for self-service kiosks. Mendelsohn recalls a New York bank's unsuccessful attempt several years ago to use kiosks to educate customers on the bank's various investment funds. The kiosks, located in the midst of other banking activities in the branch, asked questions about the customer's income and net worth. At the time, people worried about prying eyes. They didn't feel comfortable answering those questions on a kiosk at the center of activity, she said.²¹



6. Offer multiple ways for customers to reach your organization

People not only prefer to have multiple contact options; they expect companies to offer them. An informative FAQ page and online forum may be useful methods for customers to find answers. However, many might prefer to ask questions through Twitter, Facebook, or chat. Even the same customers who turn to online methods of communication primarily may prefer to call customer service when their inquiry is more complex or a situation at a given moment makes a call more convenient.

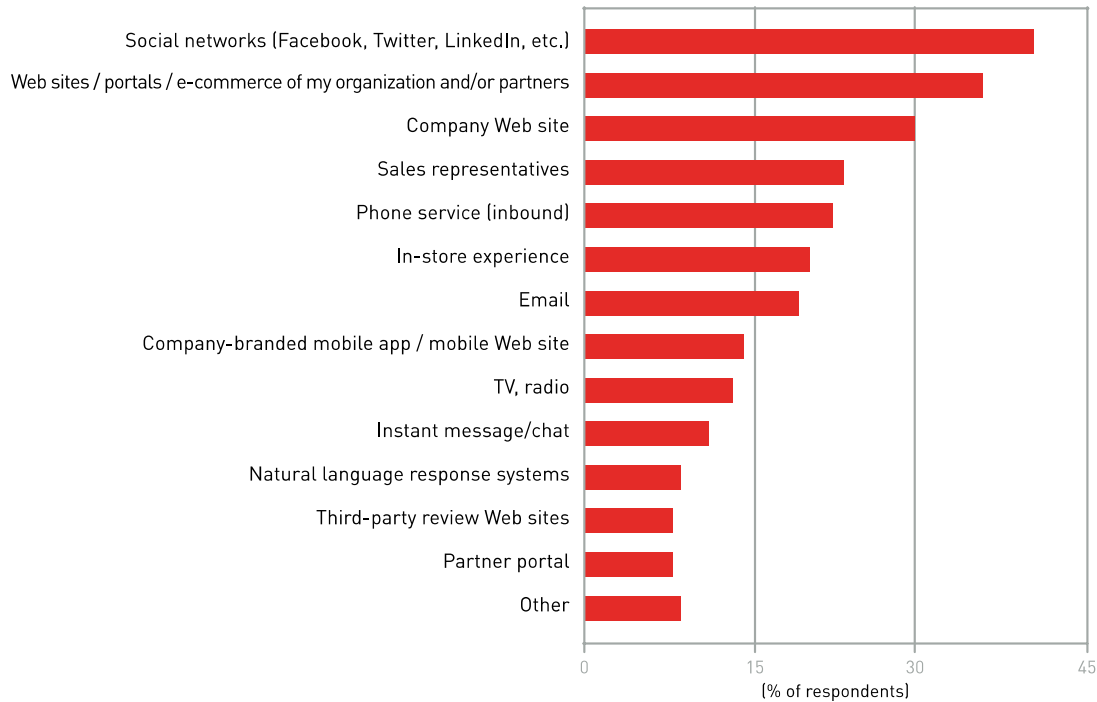
A recent IDC survey asked 799 senior level U.S. executives what they believed were the top communication channels for ensuring superior and unified customer experience. More respondents chose social networks and websites than sales reps.

²⁰ John Goodman, interview by Millie Lapidario, 12 February 2016

²¹ Francie Mendelsohn, interview by Millie Lapidario, 10 February 2016

Communication Channels Used to Deliver Superior Customer Experience — Top Responses

Q. In your opinion, what are the top 3 communication channels today for ensuring a superior and unified customer experience?



Source: IDC, IDC's 2015 EXPERIENCES Survey: The Challenges and Key Factors in Achieving Superior Customer Experiences Doc No. US40343915, 21 December 2015

7. Remember the customer's desire for self-improvement

Part of the hyperconnected mindset is feeling empowered to figure out almost anything by looking up information online. Curious minds are eager to try out self-improvement tools, apps, and resources to boost productivity, track fitness goals, sleep better, and many more. Rather than turning to full-service experiences, many people are more inclined to learn new skills and figure things out on their own. This is one reason instructional videos on YouTube are incredibly popular. Forward-thinking companies are noticing this trend toward self-improvement and self-awareness. More companies are experimenting with self-service offerings that go beyond their products to enhance their customers' lives.

UBank, a subsidiary of National Australia Bank, created a website that allows website visitors to compare spending habits with their fellow Australians from similar demographic groups. PeopleLikeU.com.au, self-proclaimed as "the world's first econography tool," leverages big data, mobile, and cloud to empower its customers to better understand their spending in a broader context through data. By using the self-service tool on the website, Australians can see how people in similar situations spend their money, the stores they frequent most often, the average amount they spend per visit, and more. The website helps users analyze their own transactions to help with personal budgeting.



8. Language matters

Too often, discussions on optimizing customer communications neglects to address the basic building blocks of communication: words. Engaging self-service offerings speak to the customer in plain, jargon-free language that requires no extra effort to comprehend. Customers should not be subjected to learning a company's internal processes or translate terminology to make a transaction or access information. When customers are trying to pay a bill or find information about their account, the language on their screens should move them forward—not put their task on hold.

Bill Price and David Jaffe offer an example where a UK bank, First Direct, presents account holders' information using headings like "What I Own" and "What I Owe," which speak more to the customer rather than terms an accountant might use such as "Balance," "Assets," or "Liabilities."²²

In an example of jargon slowing down the self-service experience, Bank of America customers may be familiar with Bill Pay versus Bill Pay Choice. The former option is the place to click to pay virtually any bill, and the latter option enables customers to pay their Bank of America credit card. Customers are not interested in understanding the difference Bill Pay between Bill Pay Choice—they simply need the fastest way to pay their bills online.

9. Reliability is crucial

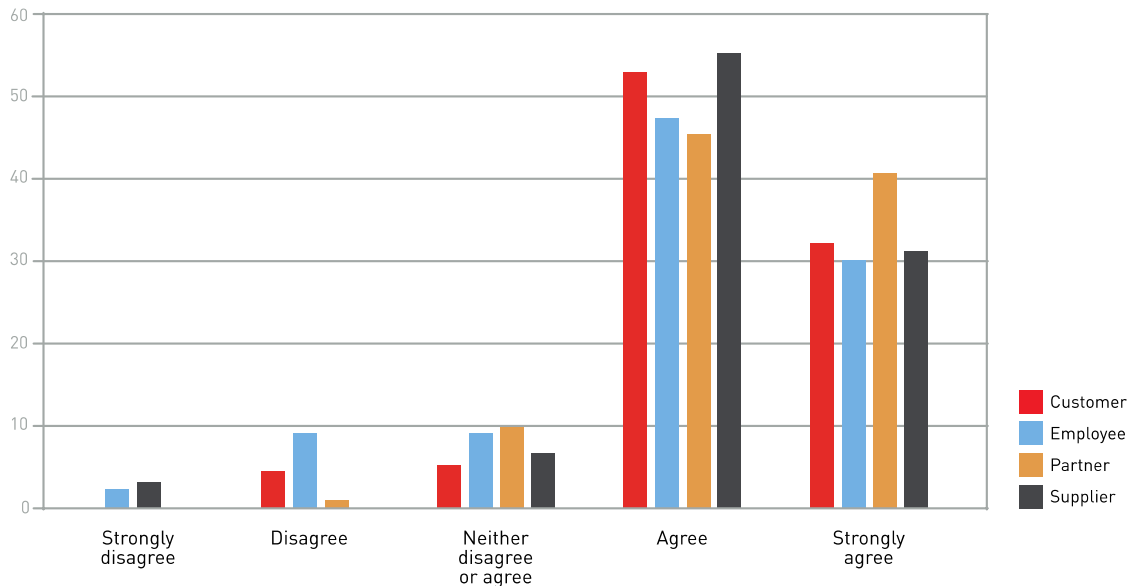
There are many things that can go wrong with self-service options: A chat button doesn't work or an FAQ page has a broken link. A social media account goes unattended or a mobile app constantly freezes. Whenever a malfunction or deficiency prevents a customer from accomplishing a task, the value of the company diminishes from the customer's perspective. The end-to-end experience must be smooth, with no hiccups, every single time in order for the customer to trust that solution.

Online forums or online communities can provide positive experiences if they're managed consistently and people see them as a reliable source of information. Many executives see online communities as an important interaction channel, according to IDC's 2015 Experiences Survey.

²² Price and Jaffe, 78.

Role of Online Communities as an Important Interaction Channel

Q. Please indicate your agreement with the following statement about the role of online communities in your operations: Our community is an important interaction channel with our customers, employees, partners, and suppliers.



Source: IDC, The Opportunities and Challenges of Delivering Superior Experiences: IDC's 2015 EXPERIENCES Survey, Doc No. 256564, 11 June 2015

An employee needs to be diligent about checking the forum, answering customer questions, providing members with links to articles or step-by-step directions that solve their problems. The unfortunate reality, according to DuMoulin, is that most forums at web-based companies are “unmanaged, ungoverned, and unhelpful.” All too often, customers end up advising each other without input from the company itself, fostering an environment where “the blind have to lead the blind.” DuMoulin believes customers turn to online forums because they’re desperate for help.²³


Reliability is especially important for insurance companies involved M&A, as Ernst & Young points out in their report 2016 U.S. Property Casualty Insurance Outlook.²⁴ Uninterrupted access to self-service customer portals will help ensure a smooth transition and support brand loyalty.

10. Give equal weight to customer acquisition and retention

The problem for many companies, as DuMoulin has observed through consulting, is they tend to focus self-service investment to support customer acquisition, but neglect customer retention. Oftentimes, the sales organization is under a different executive structure from the support organization, which results in differing objectives. The support

²³ Troy DuMoulin, interview by Millie Lapidario, 23 February 2016

²⁴ 2016 U.S. Property-Casualty Insurance Outlook, Ernst & Young, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TSDyrx>



organization—typically viewed as a cost center—tends to be more focused on providing minimal support and keeping costs low, he explained.

“If you truly want to have the end-to-end experience, any service organization has the responsibility to provide support as part of its value proposition.”

TROY DUMOULIN

VP, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

PINK ELEPHANT

DuMoulin sees live chat as the most important engagement tool for self-help. He says the online chat function works well in our culture, where people don't like talking on the phone or waiting for answers. The chat function, however, is typically available to support sales rather than support.

“If you truly want to have the end-to-end experience, any service organization has the responsibility to provide support as part of its value proposition,” DuMoulin said.²⁵

11. Strive to create the best of both worlds: self-service and full-service

Despite the widespread shift to self-service, customers still expect first-rate one-on-one interactions with service agents in all industries. In fact, the role of customer service agents has become even more important in the self-service era because the problems they resolve tend to be more complex. Because customers are accustomed to handling minor issues on their own, they're less likely to call an 800 number to change their contact information, for example. The more common scenario for a call center agent is a customer who has exhausted all self-service options. By the time the customers make the call, get through the phone directory, and reach a live human, they're aggravated and more anxious to resolve their problem right away.

Interactive teller machines (ITMs), also known as virtual or remote tellers, are a prime example of self-service that also offers a full-service experience. Through ITMs, a live teller appears on the screen through a video call to help customers conduct almost all of the same transactions they would normally conduct inside the bank, such as paying loans and credit cards or dispensing smaller bills and coins. Depending on the bank, a customer could speak to a teller in English or Spanish. And if the customers forget their debit card, they can present their driver's license to the virtual teller.


Big banks and a few credit unions have been experimenting with ITMs in the last few years as a way to expand service hours and reduce costs. According to *The Washington Post*, tech company NCR has installed more than 400 interactive tellers around the world since 2012.²⁶

12. Train customer service agents on self-service options

Consider this scenario: A customer calls the service center and goes through the normal routine of navigating through a telephone directory, dialing in her account number, and waiting on hold for several minutes. When she finally reaches a live person, she asks if she can change her statement delivery preferences to paperless billing. The call center agent says the customer must make this change online. When the customer asks the agent to walk her through the process, the agent cannot help. The call center agent has not been trained on this self-service function.

²⁵ Troy DuMoulin, interview by Millie Lapidario, 23 February 2016

²⁶ Abha Bhattarai, “Banks Turn to Video Tellers to Cut Costs,” *The Washington Post*, 20 April 2014, <http://wapo.st/1TmX2BA>



This scenario is all too common. Make sure all your support staff not only has been trained in self-service offerings, but has also gone through the steps themselves. This should be done regularly, so service agents are always able to guide customers.

13. Get customer feedback through multiple methods

There are many ways companies can seek input from their customers. Because self-service options typically rely on technology, using data to help your organization continue to improve should be relatively easy.

As a quick diagnostic, website analytics can be a gold mine of insights on your customers' experiences. Goodman recommends that companies study the instances where a website visitor typed in a search that generated a "no results" message or a negative response to a "Was this helpful?" question. Most likely, the topics of the failed searches are the same issues call center agents have to address regularly. "If you take the top failed search topics and answer them directly on your website, expect to see at least a 10 percent drop in your call center workload," Goodman said.

While data analytics can be extremely helpful, customer feedback should come from multiple channels. "One channel alone won't give you a true perspective," says DuMoulin, emphasizing the importance of holistic, multidimensional research. He recommends companies conduct focus groups, observe directly how customers use their service, hire secret shoppers, and distribute customer surveys, as a few examples.

Other types of self-service are especially suited for researching the old-fashioned way: watching customers with your own eyes. This is most appropriate for studying self-service kiosks, check-out machines, ATMs, and other devices.

Mendelsohn points to the Global Entry kiosks at airports, where international travelers entering the United States check in and scan their passports. The kiosks are part of a program by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Although Mendelsohn was not hired to study those kiosks, she noticed from her own travels that many travelers were confused by how to scan their passports using the kiosks. The Border Patrol agents see the problem happen all the time, she said, but they're not able to leave their posts and assist people. What ends up happening all too often is this: people think the kiosk isn't working, so they move to another line to try another kiosk, and encounter the same problem. If the responsible agency had simply watched how travelers interacted with those kiosks from the beginning, they could have easily solved the problem with clear instructions.

When customers have the right tools, they're happy to do the work themselves. In fact, they prefer it.

Conclusion

The benefits of self-service are undeniable. All industries will inevitably move toward empowering their customers through increasingly more intelligent systems. The best way to help your customers help themselves is through enriched, meaningful interactions. Customer communications can be a powerful self-service offering for every industry. Providing your customers with automated bill reminders, advanced notifications, and mobile-friendly views are just a few examples of how your organization can give customer communications a much-needed boost.

As technological innovations continue to present new possibilities through artificial intelligence, the cloud, and the Internet of Things, the consumer mentality will continue to evolve. The challenge for all companies will always be to understand their customers, especially mature organizations that are slow to adapt. The only way to create worthy



customer experiences is to constantly study the complex mindset of your customers—their need for control, speed, convenience, reliability, connectedness, and more.







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March 2016