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DIGITAL-FIRST ENGAGEMENT: THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

SEAMLESSLY PROVIDE YOUR CUSTOMERS WITH THE RIGHT EXPERIENCE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT ON THEIR CHANNEL OF CHOICE.

Introduction

In today's digital age, customers expect fast, convenient, and personalised support experiences across all channels. With the rise of digital technology, businesses need to adopt a Digital First Engagement strategy to stay ahead of expectations and meet their customers' needs.

What Is DFE?

Digital First Engagement is an approach to customer support that prioritises digital channels over traditional ones, such as phone or email. It involves providing personalised and seamless support experiences across all digital touchpoints, including social media, chabots, community posts, knowledge bases, messaging apps, and mobile apps.

Adopting a Digital First Engagement strategy can provide numerous benefits for businesses, including increased efficiency, improved customer satisfaction, and stronger customer relationships. However, implementing this approach can also be challenging, especially for businesses that are newer to digital engagement or have a customer base that is used to using traditional support channels.

In this comprehensive guide, we will explore the benefits of Digital First Engagement for customer support, and provide a step-by-step approach to help businesses implement this strategy successfully. We will cover everything from understanding your customers and choosing the right digital channels, to using automation and measuring performance. We will also discuss emerging trends and technologies in digital engagement, such as chatbots and virtual assistants, and provide real-world examples and case studies to illustrate how other businesses have implemented Digital First Engagement successfully.

By following the best practices outlined in this guide, businesses can transform their customer support experience and build stronger relationships with their customers, all while staying ahead of rising expectations.

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Customers expect to interact with brands in much the same way they do with friends and family. This means that businesses must engage across a wider range of channels than ever before.

– Verint

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THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL-FIRST ENGAGEMENT FOR CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Adopting a Digital-First Engagement strategy for customer support can provide numerous benefits for businesses, including:

1. Personalised Support Experiences

Digital channels allow for personalised support experiences that cater to the individual needs and preferences of each customer. By collecting customer data and using analytics to gain insights into their behaviours, businesses can create tailored support experiences that build stronger relationships with their customers.

2. Efficiency and Scalability

Digital channels can provide more efficient and scalable support options, such as chatbots and automated responses. By automating repetitive tasks and providing self-service options, businesses can reduce the workload for their support teams and handle a larger volume of inquiries with ease.

3. 24/7 Support Availability

With digital channels, businesses can provide support around the clock, which is especially important for customers in different time zones or those who prefer to contact support outside of business hours.

4. Real-time Insights and Analytics:

Digital channels provide businesses with real-time insights and analytics into customer behaviours and preferences, which can help them identify trends, patterns, and opportunities to improve their support experience.

5. Multichannel Support options

By offering support across multiple digital channels, businesses can provide their customers with more options and flexibility for how they want to access support. This can help improve customer satisfaction and build stronger relationships.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMERS

To provide effective digital support experiences, you need to understand your customers and identify their needs and preferences. This requires collecting customer data and using it to create targeted support experiences.

Importance of Customer Data

Customer data provides valuable insights into customer behaviour, preferences, and pain points. Businesses can collect customer data from a variety of sources, including website analytics, public conversations, chat logs, and customer surveys.

This data can be used to create personalised support experiences that cater to the individual needs and preferences of each customer. However, it's critical to make sure you have access to this data, something that is often restricted when using public platforms.

Identifying Customer Needs and Preferences

Once businesses have collected customer data, they can use it to identify customer needs and preferences. By understanding what your customers need and want, you can tailor their support experiences to better meet those needs and preferences.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMERS

For example, recognising and interacting through a customer's preferred communication channel. It's a simple idea and not something customers will actively recognise. But they will remember how convenient it is to access your support services.

Segmentation and Targeting Strategies

One way to tailor support experiences to customer needs and preferences is through segmentation and targeting strategies. This involves dividing customers into different groups based on shared characteristics, such as demographics, behaviour, and purchase history. You can then create targeted support experiences for each segment, which can include different channels, messaging, and offers.

By better understanding customers and their needs and preferences, you can provide more effective digital support experiences that build stronger relationships with your customers.

However, how do you choose the right digital channels for your support experience?

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT CHANNELS?

When it comes to Digital First Engagement, choosing the right digital channels is critical to providing an effective support experience for your customers.

There are a wide variety of digital platforms available today, from social media platforms to messaging apps to email and chatbots.

However, not all digital channels are created equal. Each one has its own strengths and weaknesses, and it's important to choose the ones that align with your customer's preferences and needs.

With an increasing number of channels available, it can be challenging to choose the right ones.

To choose the right digital channels for your customer support experience, consider the following:

1. Customer Preferences

What digital channels do your customers prefer to use when seeking support? Are they active on social media or do they prefer messaging apps like WhatsApp or Messenger? Data will determine the digital channels your customers use most frequently.

Consider factors such as age, location and industry, as these can all impact their expectations.

2. The complexity of the issue

Some issues may be more complex and require more detailed explanations or personalised support. In these cases, channels like email or phone may be more appropriate than a knowledge base or chatbot.

DFE isn't about replacing these channels, it's about filtering out support tickets where users can easily solve their own problems and take the pressure off human channels.

There will always be a need for human interactions – that is until AI makes us obsolete.

To choose the right digital channels for your customer support experience, consider the following:

3. Response Time

Different digital channels may have different response times, which can impact the level of satisfaction of your customers. For instance, chatbots provide a faster response time than email, where customers may expect a response within a few hours.

It's critical to understand the response times for each channel and consider whether they align with your customer's expectations for solving a particular problem.

For example, if your electricity goes out, you want an immediate response. If you're looking for advice on reducing electricity use, you're probably happy to post in the community and wait for other customers to chime in with answers.

4. Availability

Support hours of 9-5, Monday to Friday, are a relic from the past.

By restricting the window and the channels for support, you create bottlenecks and longer waiting times (and put more pressure on reps).

This is a great way to turn frustrated customers into angry customers. There is nothing more annoying for customers looking for help than finding they've missed the daily window for support.

Likewise, you've probably experienced companies who make it intentionally difficult for you to find the customer support phone number. This is not Digital-First Engagement. You need to give customers the choice to use their preferred channels, but the option to reach a human should always be within reach.

To choose the right digital channels for your customer support experience, consider the following:

5. Integrations with other channels:

Customers often use multiple channels to seek support, so it's important to ensure that they can easily switch between channels without having to repeat their issue.

Therefore, one of the core tenets of Digital-First Engagement is making sure that the digital channels you choose integrate with other channels.

You may know this by another name; omnichannel.

However, rather than just having several support channels, the evolution to DFE is about allowing customers to begin a support ticket on one channel and seamlessly continue later via another.

You give them the flexibility to match the support channel to their changing needs but avoid asking them to provide the same information again and again and again and again.

For example, if a customer begins a chatbot interaction, but is about to drive home and wants to start communicating via voice self-service, they absolutely do not want to start over on the new channel.

BEST PRACTICES FOR DELIVERING EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FIRST ENGAGEMENT

To deliver effective digital-first engagement, businesses need to create a customer-centric culture, encourage employee engagement and empowerment, build trust and transparency, and continuously improve and innovate their support experience. By following these best practices, you can deliver effective digital-first engagement that meets the needs and preferences of your customers.

Creating a Customer-Centric Culture

A customer-centric culture is one where every employee is focused on delivering the best possible customer experience. This means that businesses need to prioritise the customer in everything they do, from product design to customer support.

By creating a customer-centric culture, businesses can ensure that their support experience is always focused on meeting the needs and preferences of their customers.

Encouraging Employee Engagement and Empowerment

Employees are at the front line of customer support, which is why it's important to encourage their engagement and empowerment. This means that employees should have the tools, resources and data they need to deliver effective support experiences and the autonomy to make decisions that benefit the customer.

Instead of asking reps to balance numerous support tickets, customers will begin solving their own problems and reps will have more time to spend on each interaction.

What's exciting is how AI tools will likely change how customer service reps interact with customers. We will get to a point where triaging customers and processing security questions is handled by an AI assistant with the voice of the customer service rep, who seamlessly takes over when needed.

Building Trust and Transparency

Trust and transparency are critical to building strong customer relationships. You need to be transparent about your policies and practices and use of customer data–especially when data is the backbone of Digital-First Engagement.

Consumers are becoming more aware of data privacy concerns, but these concerns generally dissolve when you are already a customer of the business.

By building trust and transparency, you can create a support experience that helps to strengthen customer relationships over time.

Continuous Improvement and Innovation

To stay ahead of the competition, you need to continuously improve and innovate your support experience. This means that you should always be looking for ways to improve your support processes and innovate with new solutions that better meet the needs and preferences of your customers. By continuously improving and innovating, businesses can stay ahead of the competition and deliver a support experience that sets them apart.

This doesn't mean jumping on every new trend or tool that pops up. But it does mean utilising tools or platforms that are continually investing in improving their offering or give you space to develop on top of their tools.

For example, over the last few years video functionality has become a core part of our everyday lives as we video chat with friends, family and colleagues more than ever before. Despite this, very few platforms offered this functionality.

We reacted and built a headless integration which can be added to any website or app, giving businesses an opportunity to engage with customers face-to-face in real-time.

3 EMERGING TRENDS AND TECHNOLOGIES IN DIGITAL FIRST ENGAGEMENT

As digital engagement continues to evolve, you must stay current with the latest trends and technologies to remain competitive.

Here are some of the emerging trends and technologies that are shaping the future of digital engagement.

1. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are rapidly transforming the landscape of customer support, making it faster, more efficient, and more personalised than ever before. They will only make self-service options even more appealing.

By analysing customer data, AI algorithms can make highly accurate customer preferences and behaviour predictions, allowing you to tailor your support strategies accordingly. This can help you anticipate customer needs, provide personalised product recommendations, and create more effective marketing campaigns.

Another way AI and ML are transforming customer support is through predictive analytics. Predictive analytics uses AI and ML algorithms to analyse vast amounts of customer data and predict future trends and behaviours. This allows businesses to anticipate customer needs, identify potential issues before they arise, and provide proactive support.

AI and ML are also being used to improve the efficiency of customer support reps. For example, AI-powered search tools can quickly sift through vast amounts of data to find relevant information for customer service representatives, enabling them to provide faster and more accurate responses to customer inquiries. Likewise, AI can be used to automatically categorise and prioritise support tickets, allowing agents to focus on the most urgent issues.

With text-to-voice becoming indistinguishable from real speech, don't be surprised to see AI-generated customer support reps tackling routine problems.

3 EMERGING TRENDS AND TECHNOLOGIES IN DIGITAL FIRST ENGAGEMENT

2. Voice Assistants and Smart Speakers

Voice assistants and smart speakers are also gaining popularity in customer support. These tools can be used to provide customers with quick and easy access to support, such as answering questions or providing product recommendations.

Voice assistants, such as Amazon's Alexa, Google Home, and Apple's Siri, are increasingly being used to enhance these digital-first customer experiences.

These assistants leverage natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning to interact with customers in a conversational manner, allowing them to use voice commands to search for products, place orders, get product recommendations, check order status, and even make payments.

This not only saves customers time and effort but also provides a more seamless and personalised experience.

Of course, it's important to first identify the specific use cases where a voice interface would be most beneficial for customers.

For example, a retailer might find that customers are using voice search to find products or check stock availability, while a banking institution might find that customers are using voice commands to check account balances or transfer funds.

3 EMERGING TRENDS AND TECHNOLOGIES IN DIGITAL FIRST ENGAGEMENT

3. Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality

Augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) can transform customer support by providing immersive and engaging experiences for customers. With AR, virtual elements can be added to the real world, while VR offers a fully simulated environment.

One exciting use case in customer support is providing virtual walkthroughs or interactive tutorials. Customers can see how a product works in real-time or virtually troubleshoot problems. Where this has exciting application is in simulating and simplifying complex problems.

In addition, AR/VR can also be used for remote support services. Technicians can use AR to provide on-site support and troubleshooting for customers in real-time. This can help to reduce downtime and improve resolution times.

Integrating AR/VR with knowledge-base solutions can also be beneficial in providing immersive and engaging support experiences. For example, a customer with a technical issue can access a virtual support session where they can see the problem-solving process in action, rather than just reading a text-based solution.

As AR/VR technologies continue to improve and become more accessible, the possibilities for customer support are growing. As is the potential for immersive and interactive experiences that increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

FINAL THOUGHTS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Digital-first engagement has become a key aspect of modern customer support, with businesses across industries embracing the latest technologies and tools to deliver more personalised and efficient experiences. As we have explored throughout this ebook, the benefits of digital-first engagement are growing, including increased customer satisfaction, improved efficiency and cost savings, and greater insights into customer behaviour and preferences.

To fully leverage the potential of digital-first engagement, you must invest in the right technologies and tools, while also prioritising the needs and preferences of your customers. This means taking a customer-centric approach to every aspect of your support strategy, from the channels you use to the tools and technologies you employ.

As we move forward, it is clear that emerging trends and technologies such as chatbots, AI, voice assistants, and AR/VR will play an increasingly important role in delivering effective customer support. By embracing these technologies early, you can gain a competitive edge and deliver more personalised, efficient, and engaging experiences for your customers.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that technology alone cannot solve all of the challenges of customer support. To truly succeed in the digital-first era, you must also invest in creating a customer-centric culture, fostering employee engagement and empowerment, building trust and transparency, and continuously improving and innovating your support strategies.

Whether you are just starting out or looking to take your existing support to the next level, the key is to stay focused on the needs and preferences of your customers.

By doing so, you can build stronger relationships with your customers, increase loyalty and retention, and drive growth.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

If you've made it this far, it should be clear how Digital First Engagement will transform your customer support experiences. If you skipped ahead to the key takeaways, we promise it's worth the read.

Otherwise, here's a summary:

- Digital channels are increasingly the go-to resources for customers
- Choosing the right digital channels is key to success
- Integrating data across channels can help to improve efficiency and provide a personalised support experience
- Stay focused on the needs and preferences of your customers
- The benefits of DFE are increased customer satisfaction, improved efficiency and cost savings, and greater insights into customer behaviour and preferences
- Creating a customer-centric culture and encouraging employee engagement and empowerment can help to improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Emerging technologies, such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence, can be used to create more engaging and effective support experiences

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Be where the world is going.

- Beth Comstock

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