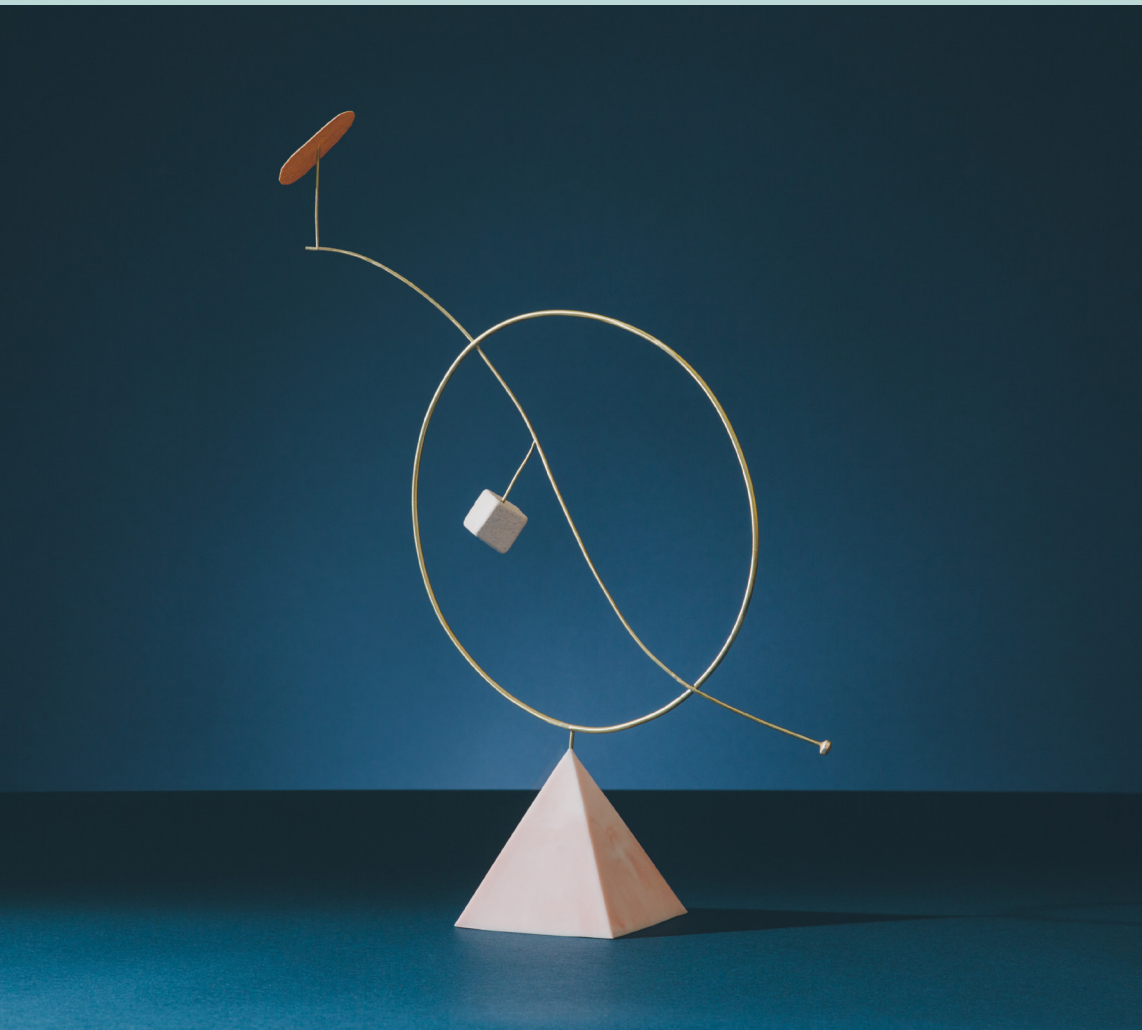# Meeting the advanced challenges of modern CX

While building positive, long-term customer relationships has always been important to business success, the methods for doing so are evolving faster than ever across industries.

For large organisations, meeting customer expectations at scale is complicated. And doing so today looks very different than it did a decade ago – or even a year ago. As industries evolve, advances in technology also bring changes in consumer behaviour.

In this highly dynamic environment, delivering an excellent customer experience became a key way to differentiate, as well as a marker of overall success. This whitepaper will describe how to adjust to and embrace new customer experience challenges in the modern world.

Understanding the customer experience challenges of today pays off

The need to deliver a good customer experience (CX) is nothing new, but to meet growing demand and increased customer expectations, companies need to adapt their CX philosophy and tactics across the whole business.
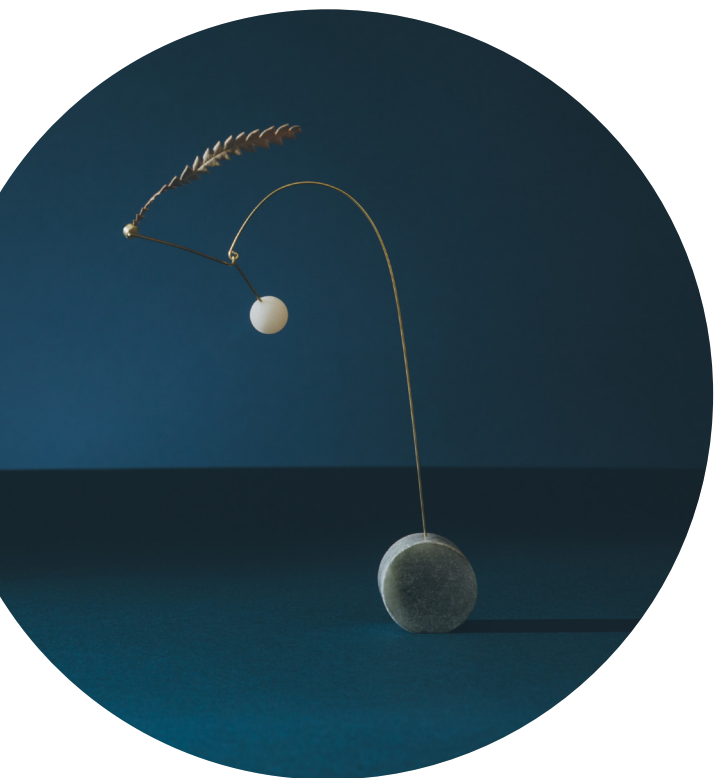
Customers expect easy and high-touch access to the brands they do business with, as well as a seamless experience throughout all these interactions. But that can add significant complexity on the back end – especially for businesses with a huge number of customers, orders and products.

While meeting these growing expectations is a challenge, the investment pays off on the top and bottom lines. Forrester found that the average revenue per loyal customer is 50% more than the average of all other customers. In the hospitality and retail industries, revenue per loyal customer is more than 100% higher.[1]

Making an investment in delivering the best possible experience for customers within every interaction they have with your company increases your chances of winning those customers' trust – which is always a reliable path to higher revenue. Not only are loyal customers likely to spend more — via increased renewal rates, faster product adoption and return business — but they'll also tell other people what they think. Word-of-mouth also brings new business and encourages a new wave of loyal customers to come on board.

But before a business can reap those benefits, it's necessary to understand what the modern customer wants and the challenges that must be overcome to deliver it.

1 Forrester Research, Improving CX Through Business Discipline Drives Growth, Harley Manning & Rick Parrish, 25 January 2021

4 top CX challenges to overcome

While every company is unique, customer support executives face similar challenges across the board. These include:

1. Modernising the existing tech stack

Whether due to end-of-life issues, security concerns or a lack of development in new features, many companies face the daunting task of upgrading legacy technology systems. In many cases, businesses find themselves dependent on platforms that are not only outdated, but built using proprietary technology that makes them inflexible and difficult to update. It's a problem that becomes increasingly difficult to manage as a business grows.

Overhauling legacy tech solutions helps a team operate more efficiently, leverage data effectively and stay competitive in the modern business landscape. For example, outdated tech systems can pose a security risk because they keep the company tied to outmoded features and procedures. And as a company's tech stack grows, the legacy system can't always integrate successfully with the new tools. This creates tech and data silos that impact the customer experience, but also puts blinders around the agents' view of the customer journey.

Updating systems to make operations more efficient and transparent isn't as easy as completing a series of "rip-and-replace" projects. It's important to consider where employees interface with data and how they can use it to deliver the best customer experience. It's critical to consider your whole ecosystem in order to design for future agility. When choosing a new system, consider factors like:

- Is it easy to customise?

- Does it integrate seamlessly with our current technologies?

- Will it be easy to integrate with future technologies we may invest in?

- Can it support growth in employees, customers and users?

A modern tech stack isn't one focused only on the needs of today. It must meet current needs, while providing the adaptability required to accommodate future needs.

2. The proliferation of new channels

Maybe you could get by with only a customer call centre a few years ago. But now, customers want the option of contacting companies on whatever channel they prefer. That means businesses need to be accessible via phone, email, self-service, live chat, messaging and peer-to-peer communities.
According to the Zendesk Customer Experience (CX) Trends Report, as many as 72% of agents say they use two or more channels to communicate with customers daily. Being everywhere is costly and difficult which may explain why 69% of agents report feeling overwhelmed.

To be present in so many channels, staff must be trained and have access to the tools they need to ensure that customers have a consistent experience across those channels. They also need access to the right tech infrastructure to manage customer conversations effectively, wherever they are taking place.

3. Lack of resources for self–service content

Providing self-service resources is a win-win. Customers like having the option of less complicated tasks. And for businesses, it reduces the number of support calls agents are managing, giving them time to focus on more complex issues that require a human touch. In fact, the Zendesk CX Trends Report shows that high-performing service teams have 2.3 times more self-service content than low-performing teams. Customers are also slowly but surely moving to adopt self-service. Our data shows that average weekly knowledge base views for major companies have increased by 37% since the beginning of COVID-19.

Even if you acknowledge the value of self-service, creating, publishing, maintaining and customising a self-service portal requires time and resources. Content needs to be written and maintained, and the experience itself must be designed and branded. At many companies, the desire to build out self-service support content is there, but it isn't matched with the necessary resources to realise the goal. Our research shows that bigger companies with more resources are more likely to have a self-service strategy, while only 40% of small and midsize businesses have one.

4. Difficulty using available customer data

Enterprises are awash in data, which is captured across many touchpoints between the customer, products and employees. But without a good way to put that data into a format you can properly understand and use, the information isn't working as hard as it could be.

A bigger problem is the lack of access to customer data. The CX Trends Report shows that 50% of agents globally aren't able to access most customer data types across systems. Agents need this information to provide high-quality, fast service. Without it, the standard of the customer experience declines. Our data shows that over 26% of customers ranked agents not having sufficient information as one of the worst aspects of a bad customer experience.

Leveraging data effectively is a two-step process. It must be both formatted and aggregated. Furthermore, the larger the company, the bigger the technology stack – many with hundreds of applications and data sources. To discover the insights hidden in that data, it needs to be accessible and meaningful. That requires finding a way to bridge all the different data sources and repositories.

An open, agile platform makes it possible to create a unified view of the data (and, by extension, of the customer experience) by connecting existing sources that can easily accommodate new data sources over time. But none of this is simple — especially when working with inflexible legacy systems that aren't configured to integrate with other tools.

If any of this sounds all too familiar, let's start talking solutions.

A future-proof approach to CX

Integrate customer data into one view

The abundance of customer data represents potential for innovation and exceptional customer experience. If agents can access relevant details about each customer as they're assisting them, they can provide more personalised, helpful support. Otherwise, that can be a big ask.

If data is stuck in silos, agents may be able to access some of it. But other pieces of information may be inaccessible to them, or remain a complete mystery if they don't know the data exists or where they could find it.

A solution to this problem is within reach. To start, customer service technology can consolidate data from multiple products into one platform in a unified view. That immediately simplifies the CX tech stack and makes it easy to understand the customer's complete journey.

To ensure platforms and software can evolve with a growing company's needs and connect to other sources of data, it's critical to have open, flexible APIs that can be customised to work with apps, integrations and other data sources. A flexible API means no matter which tech tools are used now, the system will be able to connect current and future software – ensuring data stays within one convenient view. There are customer service products that offer out-of-the-box technology partner integrations that make this process simple for common business technologies.

Though making big tech updates is a headache, the goal is to implement a solution that can easily evolve over time. As business needs change, an open platform will help ensure adaptability and smooth transitions.

Choose technology that's relatively easy to maintain – something that doesn't require a team of specialists just to help keep that one product working. Beware of products that are initially cheaper and "out-of-the-box" but riddled with hidden maintenance costs. Ensure it's easy to make updates and automate business processes with clicks rather than code, which can help ensure a lower total cost of ownership (TCO).

Using technology to impact customer experience

Finding the right tech solution that connects disparate tools and brings customer information into one view makes the job much easier for CX teams. But ultimately, simplifying and future-proofing is only half of the equation. The rest is just as important: delivering the convenient, personalised experiences customers expect.

Today, that means offering multi-channel support, including self service, and consistently personalising customers' experiences using data about their journey.

Provide always-on, context rich support

For decades, phone support sufficed. The idea of email support came many years later, as did an agent friendly platform for managing enquiries and communications we know today as tickets. But now that customers have many more ways to communicate with businesses, they're eager to use them on their terms: at their preferred time of day, with the ability to switch channels and still keep a conversation in its context. Not having to repeat themselves is now a must for customers – according to the CX Trends Report, 42% of customers say repeating themselves multiple times is a mark of bad customer service. 2020 hasn't made customers more patient – they still have high expectations when it comes to CX. More than 50% will switch to a competitor after a single bad customer experience and 80% will leave after several bad experiences.

Customers expect to have conversations with brands in the ways they communicate in their personal lives. This means social, messaging, email and – yes – the phone too. According to the CX Trends Report, 20% of people under 40 have started using social messaging or chat for the first time. In response, teams are adopting new channels with an emphasis on social messaging, video conferencing and social media.

Customers expect brands to listen and respond in these channels, while also understanding the context of previous conversations, orders and other products being used. Offering a complete omnichannel solution helps ensure that customers have the experience they expect, while making it easy for agents to access the customer data they need in a simple, easy-to-use interface.

According to Gartner "by 2022, 70% of customer interactions will involve emerging technologies such as machine learning applications, chatbots and mobile messaging, up from 15% in 2018."[2] While adding channels is a big endeavour operationally, companies that provide support through channels that customers care about get better results for their efforts. The CX Trends Report shows that high-performing companies are 30% more likely to offer support over messaging. These high-performing teams are a step ahead as messaging is predicted to become the norm.

Far from deciding to leave those legacy channels in the dust to embrace what's new and shiny, the question is how businesses can unify the power of each channel to provide quality experiences overall.

Supply an array of self-service options

It should be easy for customers to reach a helpful human being if they want to, but the truth is that they don't always want to. According to the CX Trends Report, 60% of customers want to resolve as many issues as possible with a company's online resources. Furthermore, they are happy to use a knowledge base – in 2020, there was a 37% increase in community and knowledge base views. But customers are only willing to use a knowledge base to help themselves, as long as they know one is available and it's tailored to meet their needs with updated articles and sensible navigation.

Self-service bots go a long way in optimising the experience. By making the same information in the knowledge base easier to access, an intelligent self-service automation tool can personalise answers for customers in real-time. Self-service bots, when

supported with machine learning capabilities, can even gradually get better at correctly answering customers based on how successful its past responses are.

Successfully personalise each experience

With so many different customers and various types of products, large organisations often find it challenging to organise customer information in a way that ensures each interaction is tailored to their unique situations.

But, as discussed above, 42% of customers say repeating themselves multiple times is a mark of bad customer service. Customers hate having to provide all the details about who they are, what products they're using and what issues they're experiencing every single time they get in touch.

The dream state is a system that ensures every agent has access to relevant customer data every time they interact with one, decreasing the likelihood of customers being subject to previously mentioned internal blind spots. Furthermore, agents can find the right solutions faster.

Gathering and curating customer data is a two-way street. Any information an agent collects over one channel should be added to the shared platform so other agents can see it in real-time. When customer data is gathered and organised in one place, all agents have access to a complete view of every customer, which amounts to more than just a collection of information. If data is organised in a way that makes it easy for agents to find relevant customer details quickly and seamlessly, they aren't wasting valuable minutes looking for a needle in a haystack.

A unified platform housing well-organised customer data should then be easily accessible to agents providing support in all channels – from email to phone and messaging to live chat. It may sound like a lot of work to achieve personalisation, but it's mostly about selecting the right technology that makes it all par for the course.

How to do it all: Zendesk

Providing customers with a unified, personalised experience is a matter of finding the right customer experience platform. With Zendesk, companies can build a complete view of their customer experience by easily connecting and storing information about customer events and business objects, and creating dynamic profiles of customer relationships across any system.

Empower agents with quick, easy access to the specific customer details they need during each interaction. Allow them to have conversations with customers in the channel of their choice, all within the same platform. Plus: the software provides plenty of room to innovate – an open platform means that integrating future tools and products will likely be smoother in the years to come.

Meeting the expectations of the modern customer in an increasingly competitive landscape isn't easy. But the right software gives teams the means to pull it off.

zendesk