

Meeting the advanced challenges of CX in modern manufacturing



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 verticals and industries.

For manufacturing businesses, meeting customer expectations at scale is complicated. And doing so today looks entirely different than it did a decade ago—or even a year ago. As the industry evolves, advancements in technology also bring changes in consumer behavior.

In this highly dynamic environment, delivering an excellent customer experience became a key way to differentiate, as well as a marker of overall success. Realizing that customer expectations evolved, [Stanley Black & Decker](#), for example, took action to improve the post-purchase experience. The company had a vision for getting closer to customers, so they integrated their global contact centers into a unified ecosystem with centralized data. Then, they trained agents—in a single day—on how to handle multi-channel responses. Efficient workflows helped their team adhere to one-hour first-time response service-level agreements (SLAs). Often, the response is closer to 30 minutes, and they’ve seen increasing customer satisfaction (CSAT) ratings as a result.

That is just one success story. You can create your own. This whitepaper will describe how to adjust to and embrace new customer experience challenges in the modern manufacturing world, helping set your business up for success, too.



Understanding the customer experience challenges of today pays off

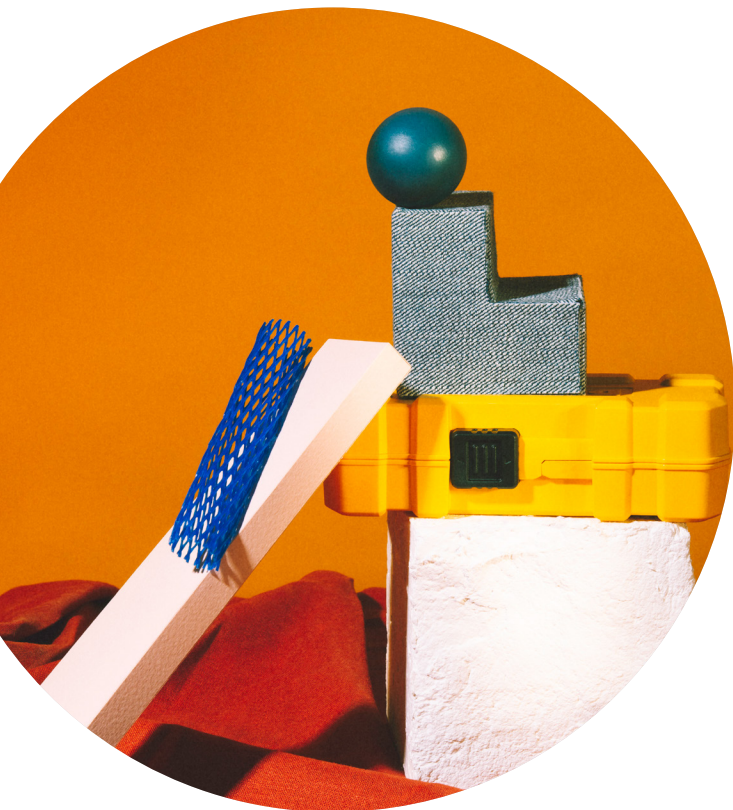
The need to deliver a good customer experience (CX) is nothing new, but to meet growing demand and increased customer expectations, companies need to adapt their philosophy and tactics across the whole business.

Customers expect easy and high-touch access to the brands they do business with, as well as a seamless experience throughout all their 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 generated from loyal customers is 50 percent more than the average from all other customers.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 about your brand. Word-of-mouth evangelism 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

For all the ways in which each company is unique, customer support executives at manufacturing companies face similar issues across the board. These include:

1. Modernizing the existing tech stack

Whether due to end-of-life issues, security concerns, or a lack of development in new features, numerous companies are faced with the daunting task of upgrading legacy technology systems. In many cases, businesses find themselves dependent on platforms that are not only outdated, but also 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 manufacturing 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 new tools. This creates tech and data silos that impact the customer experience and, 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, though. It's important to consider where employees interface with data and how they can use it to deliver the best customer experiences. It's critical to understand your whole ecosystem in order to design for future agility. When choosing a new system, consider factors like:

- Is it easy to customize?
- 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 center 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 by: phone, email, self-service, live chat, messaging, and in peer-to-peer communities.

According to the [Zendesk Customer Experience \(CX\) Trends Report](#), as many as 89 percent of agents say they use two or more channels to communicate with customers daily. And manufacturing companies with the happiest customers are 2.4 times as likely to have invested in omnichannel communication. But being everywhere is costly and difficult, which may explain why 79 percent 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 to help themselves when it comes to less-complicated tasks. And for businesses, it reduces the number of support calls agents must manage, 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 reveals that average weekly knowledge-base views for major companies have increased by 37 percent since the beginning of COVID-19.

Even if you acknowledge the value of self-service, creating, publishing, maintaining, and customizing 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 realize the goal. Our research shows that bigger companies with more resources are more likely to have a self-service strategy, while only 40 percent 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. Our [CX Trends Report](#) reveals that 50 percent of agents aren't able to view most common customer data types across systems. Agents need this information to provide high-quality, fast service. Without it, the standard of the customer experience declines—according to our data, over 26 percent of customers rank 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 within 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 the potential for innovation and exceptional customer experiences. If agents can access relevant details about each customer as they're assisting them, they can provide more personalized, helpful support. But right now, 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 a complete mystery if they don't know the data exists or where they can find it.

A fix to this problem is within reach. To start, customer-service technology can consolidate data from multiple products into one platform with 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 customized to work with apps, integrations, and other data sources. An agile API means that no matter which tech tools are being used, 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. It should be simple to make updates and automate business processes with clicks rather than code, which can help lead to a lower total cost of ownership (TCO). Beware of products that are initially cheaper and “out of the box,” but riddled with hidden maintenance costs.



Using technology to impact CX

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, personalized experiences customers expect.

Today, that means providing multi-channel support, including self service, and using data to consistently personalize customers' experiences throughout 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 inquiries and communications, which we now know as tickets. But today's customers have many more ways to communicate with businesses, and they are eager to use them—on their terms: at their preferred time of day, with the ability to switch channels and still preserve the context of a conversation. Not having to repeat themselves is a must for customers. According to the [CX Trends Report](#), 42 percent of customers say repeating themselves multiple times is a mark of poor customer service. 2020 hasn't made customers more patient; they still have high expectations when it comes to CX. More than 50 percent will switch to a competitor after a single bad customer experience, and 80 percent will leave after several negative experiences.

Customers expect to have conversations with brands on the same channels they use in their personal lives. That includes messaging, email, and the phone. According to the [CX Trends Report](#), 20 percent of people under age 40 have started using social messaging or chat for the first time. In response, companies are adopting new channels, with an emphasis on social messaging, video conferencing, and social media. To put that in context, manufacturers saw a 162 percent increase in support requests come in via SMS/texting during the pandemic.

Customers also expect businesses to listen and respond in these channels and to have the context of previous conversations, orders, and other products being used. Offering a complete omnichannel solution not only helps ensure customers have the experiences they expect, but also makes it easy for agents to access the customer data they need in a simple, intuitive 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.” While adding channels is a big endeavor 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 manufacturing companies are 30 percent more likely to offer support over messaging. These top-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 customer experiences.

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 percent of customers want to resolve as many issues as possible using a company’s online resources. Furthermore, they are happy to use a knowledge base—in 2020, there was a 37 percent increase in community and knowledge base views. But customers are only willing to use a knowledge base to help themselves if they know one is available and tailored to meet their needs with updated articles and sensible navigation.

Self-service bots also go a long way in optimizing the experience. By making the same information in the knowledge base easier to access, an intelligent self-service automation tool can personalize answers for customers in real time. Self-service bots, when supported with machine-learning capabilities, can even get better over time at providing the right answers to customers based on the success of its past responses.

Successfully personalize each experience

With so many different customers and types of products, manufacturing companies face a huge challenge: organizing information to make sure each interaction is tailored to an individual customer’s unique situation.

As discussed above, 42 percent 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 are 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. That way, when they interact with buyers, they’re not subject to those blind spots we mentioned earlier. They’ll also be able to provide the right solution more quickly.

When customer data is gathered and grouped in one place, it gives agents a complete view of the customer, which amounts to more than just a collection of information. If key data is organized in a way that makes it easy for agents to find relevant customer information rapidly, they’re not wasting valuable minutes looking for a needle in a haystack.

A unified platform housing well-organized customer data should then be easily accessible to all agents providing support. And any information an agent collects over one channel should be added to the platform so agents working in all the other channels can see it in real time. It may sound like a lot of work to achieve personalization, but it’s mostly about selecting the right technology that makes it all par for the course.

² Gartner, Magic Quadrant for the CRM Customer Engagement Center, Brian Manusama, Nadine LeBlanc, Simon Harrison, 11 June 2019

Responding to major disruptions in manufacturing



COVID-19 caused several dramatic shifts in the world of manufacturing—increased consumer demand, supply chain issues, and the rapid digitization of commerce. In response, many manufacturers have transformed their business model to focus on a direct-to-consumer approach.

But selling directly to consumers comes with its own set of challenges. To thrive in this world of digital commerce, manufacturing companies must turn their attention toward improving the customer experience—not just the product experience. Here's how to start.

Understand what customers now expect from CX

As shopping shifts from traditional brick-and-mortar stores to more convenient digital channels, customer expectations about what the purchasing process (and the support experience) should look like are also evolving. If you're a manufacturer moving to D2C, staying on top of these changes is critical to running a successful business.

While a [recent Zendesk report](#) shows that most manufacturers (67 percent, to be exact) care more about CX now than they did a year ago, there's still a large disconnect between what companies think consumers want and what consumers actually expect from the customer experience. Before you start to revamp your internal processes, consider the following consumer trends in CX:

1. **Customers expect the ability to shop online.**
[Statista](#) reported that over 2 billion people purchased goods or services online in 2020, and those numbers have continued to skyrocket. COVID-19 forced consumers to get used to shopping online—not just for luxury items but also for everyday goods and services—and it's something they don't want to give up.
2. **Customers expect you to engage with them...a lot.**
According to Zendesk's [CX Trends Report](#), manufacturers saw a record-high 28 percent increase in customer communications over the last year. This surge in engagement has made it difficult for companies to keep pace with growing customer needs, leaving [79 percent of support agents](#) feeling overwhelmed.

By understanding how CX expectations have shifted in recent years, your manufacturing company will be better equipped to improve the digital customer experience and smoothly transition into D2C.

Fine-tune your omnichannel communication strategy

It's not enough to offer an online shopping experience through your site. Today's consumers can interact with brands in many different places, and they're using all of them for the purchasing process. To capture new customers and retain existing ones, you must be able to communicate with them wherever they are—whether that's on social media, an app, the website, or, in many cases, all of the above.

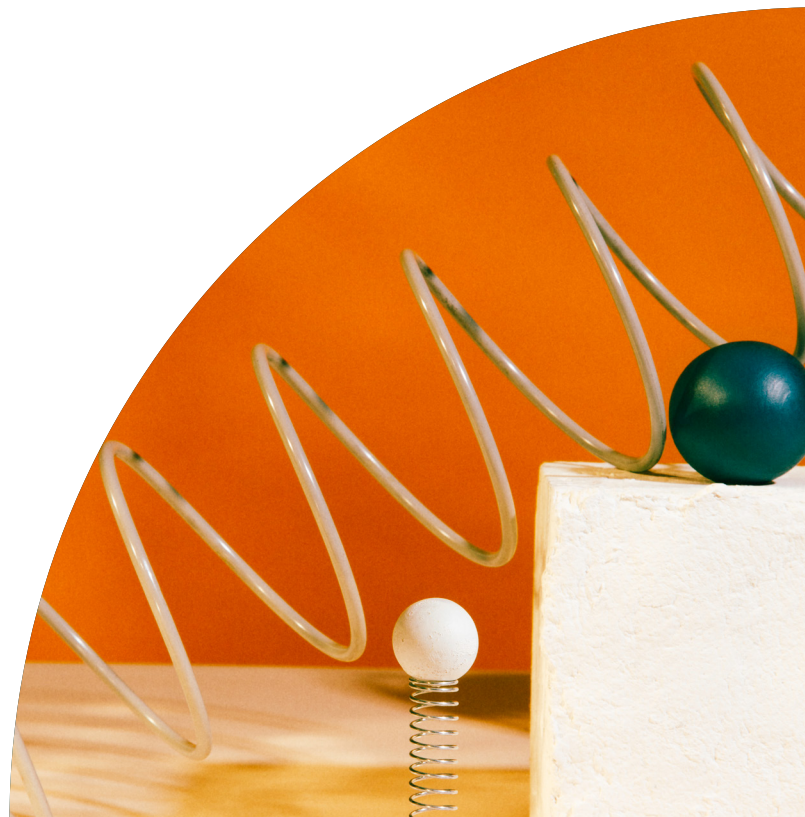
According to Zendesk's [Agility Manufacturing Datasheet](#), 89 percent of agents at manufacturing companies say they use more than one channel for daily customer communications—and that shouldn't come as a surprise. After all, manufacturers with the happiest customers are [2.4 times as likely](#) to have invested in omnichannel communication.

If you don't have one already, start building an omnichannel support strategy. Here are a few things to consider when evaluating (or creating) your omnichannel approach:

- **Make customer communication easier with a CRM.** Simplify the omnichannel communication process by using a [CRM software](#) system to roll out, monitor, and track customer conversations across a multitude of channels. With customer data stored in one place, your team can easily assign tickets to support staff, analyze interactions, and address bottlenecks. You can even use AI-based features to automate responses and improve response times.

- **Embrace messaging.** Zendesk's 2021 [CX Trends Report](#) shows that manufacturers with the best CX results are 1.4 times more likely to be messaging with their customers—and for good reason. During the pandemic alone, manufacturers experienced a whopping [162 percent increase](#) in support requests via SMS/texting, highlighting the need for a strong SMS presence. Don't overlook this valuable avenue when compiling your omnichannel strategy.

Implementing a strong omnichannel communication strategy can take time, but it's essential for any manufacturing company that's selling D2C.



Prioritize agility in your manufacturing workflows

2020 proved that the ability to adapt to changing industry (and customer) demands is essential. As manufacturers continue to experience supply chain issues, inventory shortages, and shifting customer needs, many find themselves searching for ways to improve agility company-wide. That means discovering ways to prioritize agility in their workflows.

Consider the following recommendations to improve your manufacturing workflow agility:

- **Invest in a workflow management tool.** According to Zendesk's [Manufacturing CX Trends Report](#), manufacturers with the fastest resolution times are 2.1 times as likely to use workflow management tools. Such tools—like [Airtable](#), [Trello](#), and even [Zendesk](#)—provide a single place where all tasks, communications, and data can be tracked or updated. This centralization keeps everyone on the same page so employees can swiftly resolve customer issues.
- **Use intelligent technology to streamline the workflow process.** It's critical that manufacturing companies make use of innovations within AI, ML, and blockchain technology to manage strains on both products and supply chains. On the CX side, manufacturers can use automation to eliminate redundant tasks (ticket routing, for example) or implement an AI-powered chatbot to assist with customer communications. Thanks to this technology, you'll be able to spend less time on manual tasks or supply chain issues and more time improving the customer experience.

- **Improve internal collaboration through knowledge sharing.** Zendesk's [Agility Manufacturing Datasheet](#) notes that since the pandemic began, 47 percent of support agents have found it more challenging to collaborate with teams outside of customer service. These silos make it difficult to access necessary information for addressing customer requests. Embrace tools that facilitate cross-departmental collaboration, such as a CRM or a [knowledge base](#). Not only do these tools help with knowledge sharing between departments, but they can also be valuable in the customer support journey.

It can feel daunting to adapt your workflows, but the long-term benefits far outweigh the costs. Data from Zendesk's [Manufacturing Agility Playbook](#) shows that being agile reduced 22 percent of business leaders' costs by 25 percent; additionally, 38 percent of business leaders report cost savings between 11 and 25 percent.

Perfect your CX with Zendesk

As customer demands (and modes of engagement) continue to grow, it's more important than ever that manufacturing companies increase agility and improve their CX through conversational messaging. Offering omnichannel support and staying flexible are pressing challenges but ones that can be tackled with the right solution.

Zendesk empowers manufacturers to provide a tailored CX across a variety of channels, simplifying the omnichannel communication process while emphasizing agility. Use our CX software to improve your team's production with low-code automation features such as intelligent ticket routing, centralize your customer communication hub, and streamline your workflow process for a better customer experience.

Zendesk brings all your CX needs into one place

Manufacturing companies have a lot of moving parts to manage, as it were, when determining the best system for balancing an increasingly complex supply chain with changing customer demands. For growing brands, the

complexity of the supply chain, product mix, and a disjointed customer journey are all evolving challenges, but ones that can be tackled with the right solution.

Zendesk brings aggregate customer data from a variety of sources into one open and flexible platform. Build a complete view of the customer experience by easily connecting and storing information about customer events and business objects, creating a dynamic profile of customer relationships across any system. Monitor diagnostics, automate tickets, and address issues before they become a problem for customers. Track actions with a complete timeline view of critical events related to each asset, like software upgrades, delivery, repairs, or replacements.

