

Adapting to rapid change



How small businesses can deliver
better customer experiences
with leaner teams



No one can deny that 2020 brought forth a host of unexpected challenges. Government responses to the global health crisis forced small teams to adapt to previously unthinkable scenarios — entirely remote workforces and new rules that govern how businesses and customers interact.

In uncertain times, swift decision-making can help small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) deliver meaningful customer experiences when they're needed most. But as they move quickly to adapt, small teams have seen customers reach out in record numbers, overwhelming support staff at faster rates than those seen by companies 10 times their size.

As customers continue to expect a higher level of service from companies, even just one bad experience is reason enough for half to consider switching to a competitor, according to Zendesk's [Customer Experience Trends Report 2020](#).

And in the current economic climate, customer support is playing an increasingly important role. Small firms must go above and beyond to meet the needs of their customers, even as budgets tighten and workloads rise.

How can smaller teams punch above their weight to deliver exceptional customer service, even during times of rapid change? To better understand the impact of COVID-19 and how many small businesses are responding to meet this challenge, we turned to the Zendesk Benchmark, our data index of companies powered by Zendesk. Using this dataset, we looked at the support operations of more than 13,000 SMBs worldwide.





Success story...

The team at TuneCore has been using tools like macros and triggers to help ensure that tickets get to the right person while volume is up. Automated replies can also save agents valuable time and set customer expectations around response times.

“ Automation is less about replacing human interactions, but making the human interactions that you do have more effective. ”

Erica Clayton

Director of Customer Care, TuneCore

tuneCORE



New York

SMBs must do more with even less

Small businesses are less likely to have a defined support strategy in place, according to our CX Trends Report, but as they rapidly transform their day-to-day operations in response to the crisis, they have the unique opportunity to build leaner, more efficient support teams. **About 17 percent of SMBs in our dataset have managed to keep resolution times stable and customers happy, even though they're processing more tickets than they ever have before.**

How? By stretching the reach of small teams and lightening the load on agents (see the case study at the end of this report for more details on their support strategy!). Help centers, businesses rules for timed follow-ups, and even artificial intelligence can be used to scale support operations and help teams better prepare for what comes next.

Looking ahead, agility is key

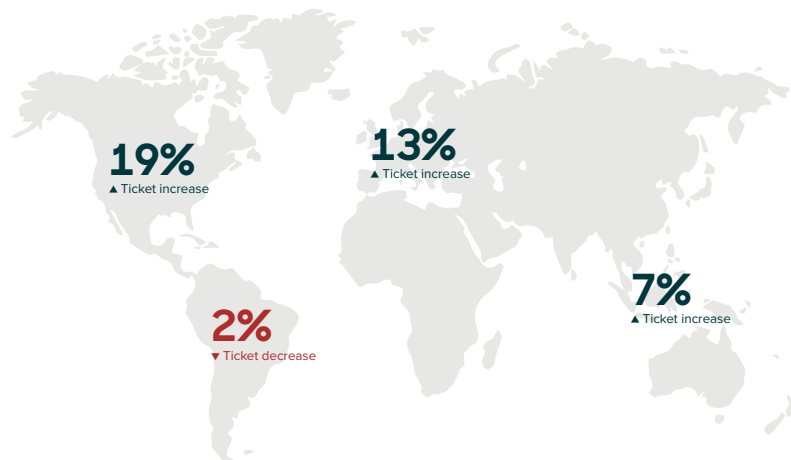
Tickets may be up globally for small and mid-sized businesses, but they fluctuate wildly across regions and even sectors. And in this new market, even customers are changing the way that they communicate and interact with support teams. With volatility expected for the foreseeable future, support operations must be able to scale up and back at a moment's notice to ensure that teams continue to deliver exceptional experiences for their customers.

Here are a few of the key trends that are impacting small teams:

01 Ticket volatility

Global requests may be up, but not all regions or even sectors have seen the same levels of growth. As tickets tend to rise and fall with where a region is in its pandemic response (initial spikes often follow news of increased case numbers or tightening restrictions, while dips occur as countries cautiously reopen), companies must be prepared for second and even third waves.

In June, SMBs in North America had the highest ticket increases (at 19 percent) since the crisis began and some of the worst infection rates, followed by Europe (up 13 percent), Asia-Pacific (up seven percent), and Latin America (down two percent).

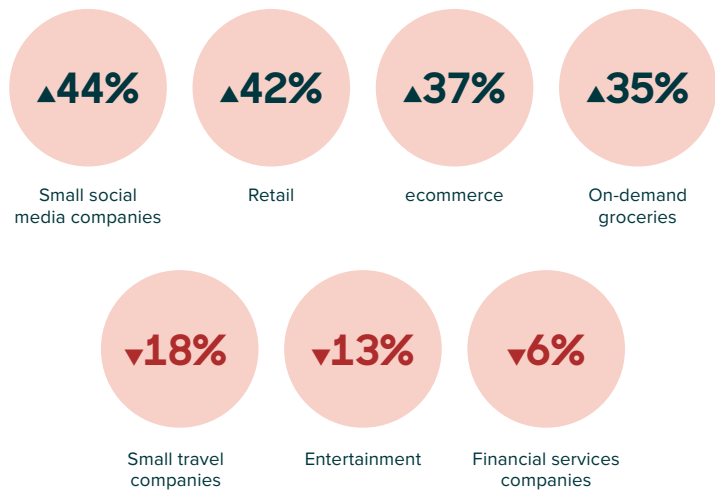


Side by side regional trends

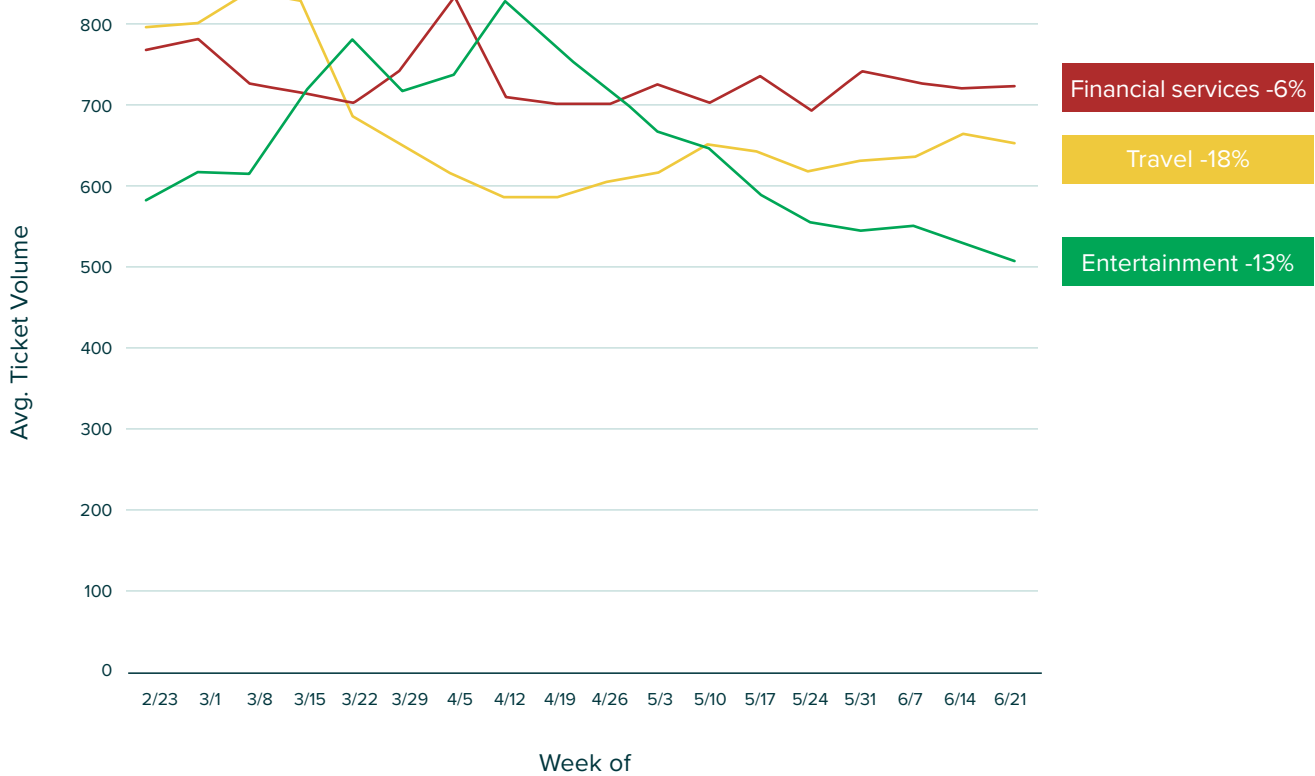
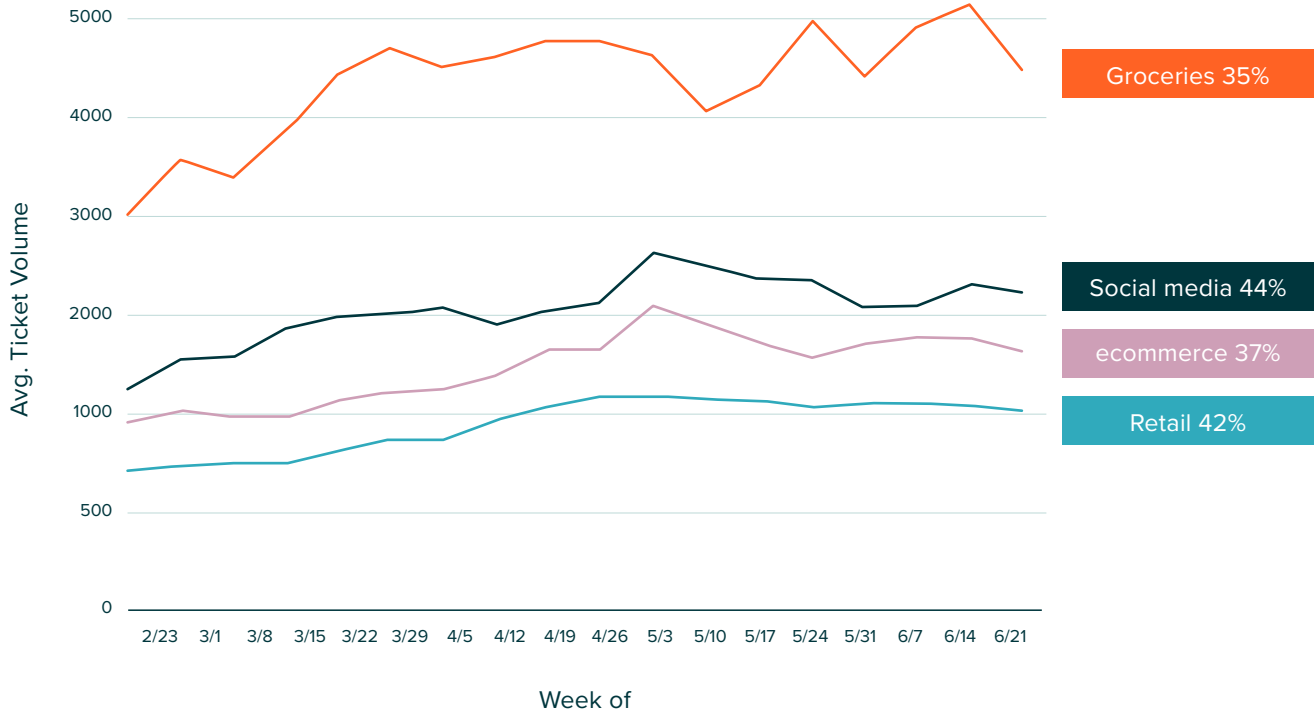


Sectors have also been disproportionately affected by surging or falling demand, with some of the largest jumps seen by small social media companies (up 44 percent), retail (up 42 percent), ecommerce (up 37 percent), and on-demand groceries (up 35 percent). On the other end of the spectrum, small travel companies have seen 18 percent fewer requests during the same time period, followed by entertainment (down 13 percent), and financial services companies (down 6 percent).

Highly impacted sectors



Average ticket volume by company size and sector



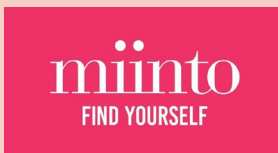


Success story...

Eveline Poetsema, the operations manager at Miinto, has calculated that Zendesk Chat saves the equivalent of a third of a full-time employee.

“ Zendesk Chat has reduced our call volume by 40%, which is huge for our business. It’s more effective because our agents can have several conversations at the same time. ”

Eveline Poetsema
Operations Manager, Miinto



Copenhagen

Agility tips:

- Add integrations between tools to remove duplicative work.
- Find a Business Process Outsourcer partner to help build flexibility into your teams to ramp up and down as needed.
- Create a playbook to document best practices for the next time a spike happens and be sure to get input from your people.
- Develop email templates based on your FAQs, so resolving those requests is a breeze for your support team.

02

Changing customer behavior

We all seek out comfort in times of crisis, and customers are no exception. So much so that they're changing the way they communicate with small businesses.

Messaging channels typically used to chat with family and friends have become popular choices for ticket requests — an acceleration of trends even seen prior to the pandemic.

Submissions over WhatsApp and text jumped an average of 76 and 56 percent, respectively, between February and late June — faster than both email (up 10 percent) and chat (up 3 percent) — as SMBs try to make quick decisions on where to scale their support efforts.

WhatsApp has seen the highest use among customers in Latin America (up 157 percent) and Asia-Pacific (up 118 percent), while customers are turning to text messaging in Europe (up 79 percent) and North America (up 55 percent).

Research

76%

Average increase of WhatsApp submissions between February and late June, to SMBs

56%

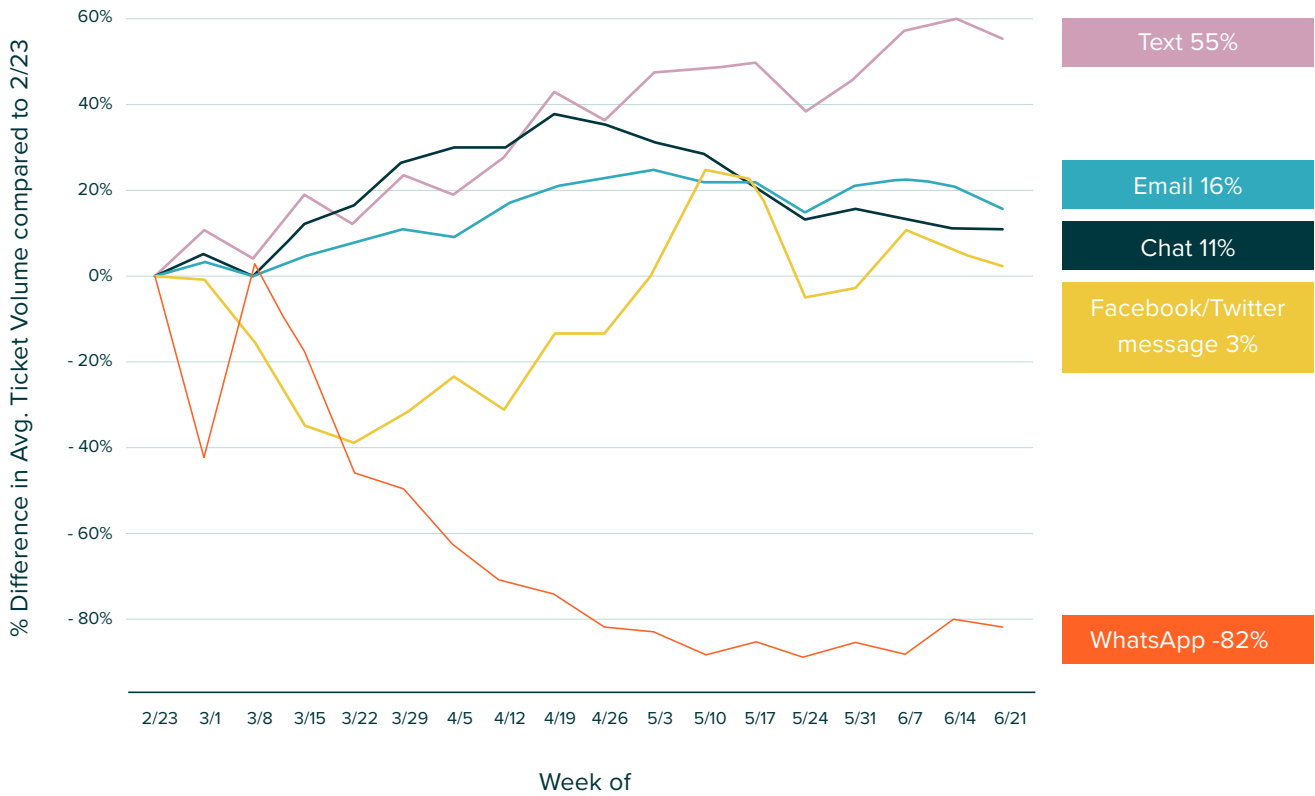
Average increase of text submissions between February and late June, to SMBs

Source

Channel usage SMB - SMBs see highest growth in tickets over messaging and texting



Channel usage SMB - AMER



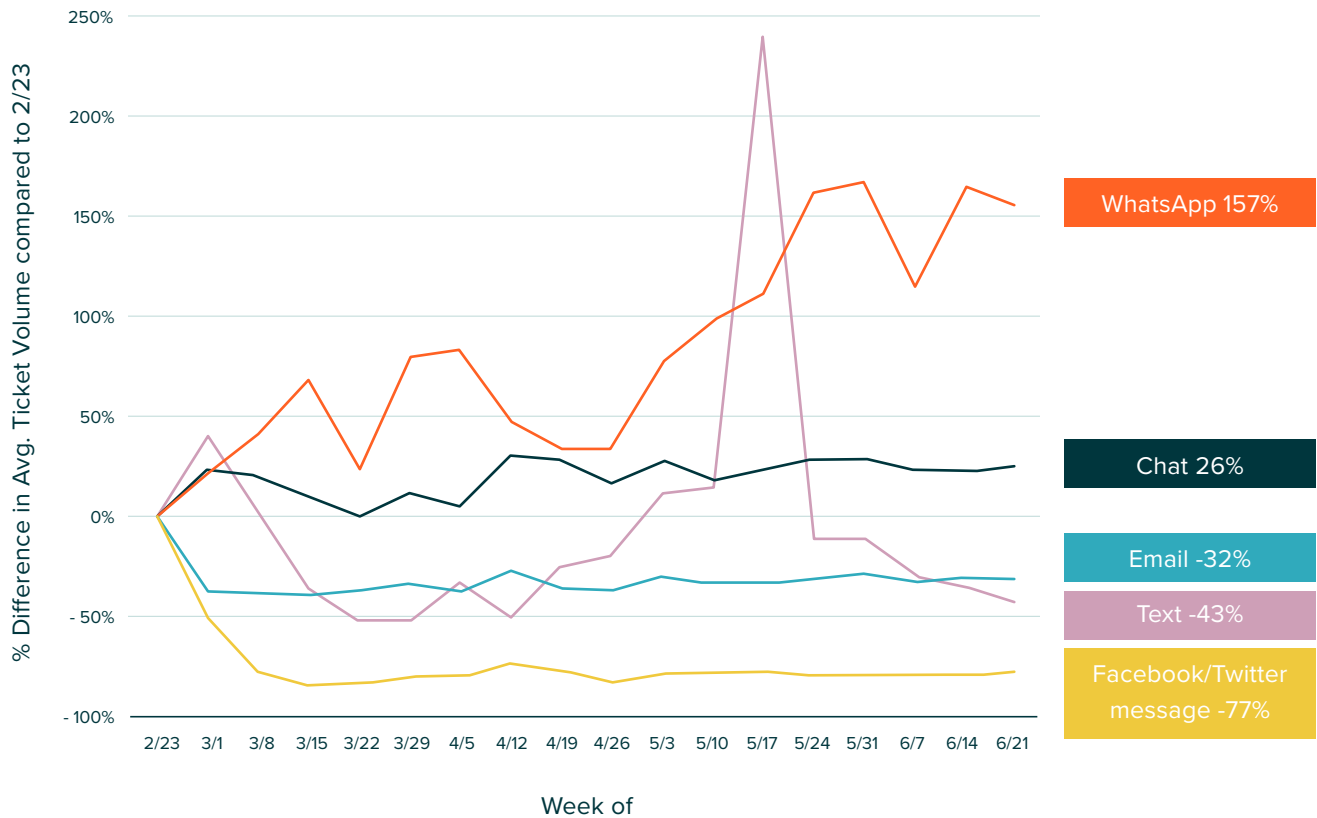
Channel usage SMB - APAC



Channel usage SMB - EMEA



Channel usage SMB - LATAM

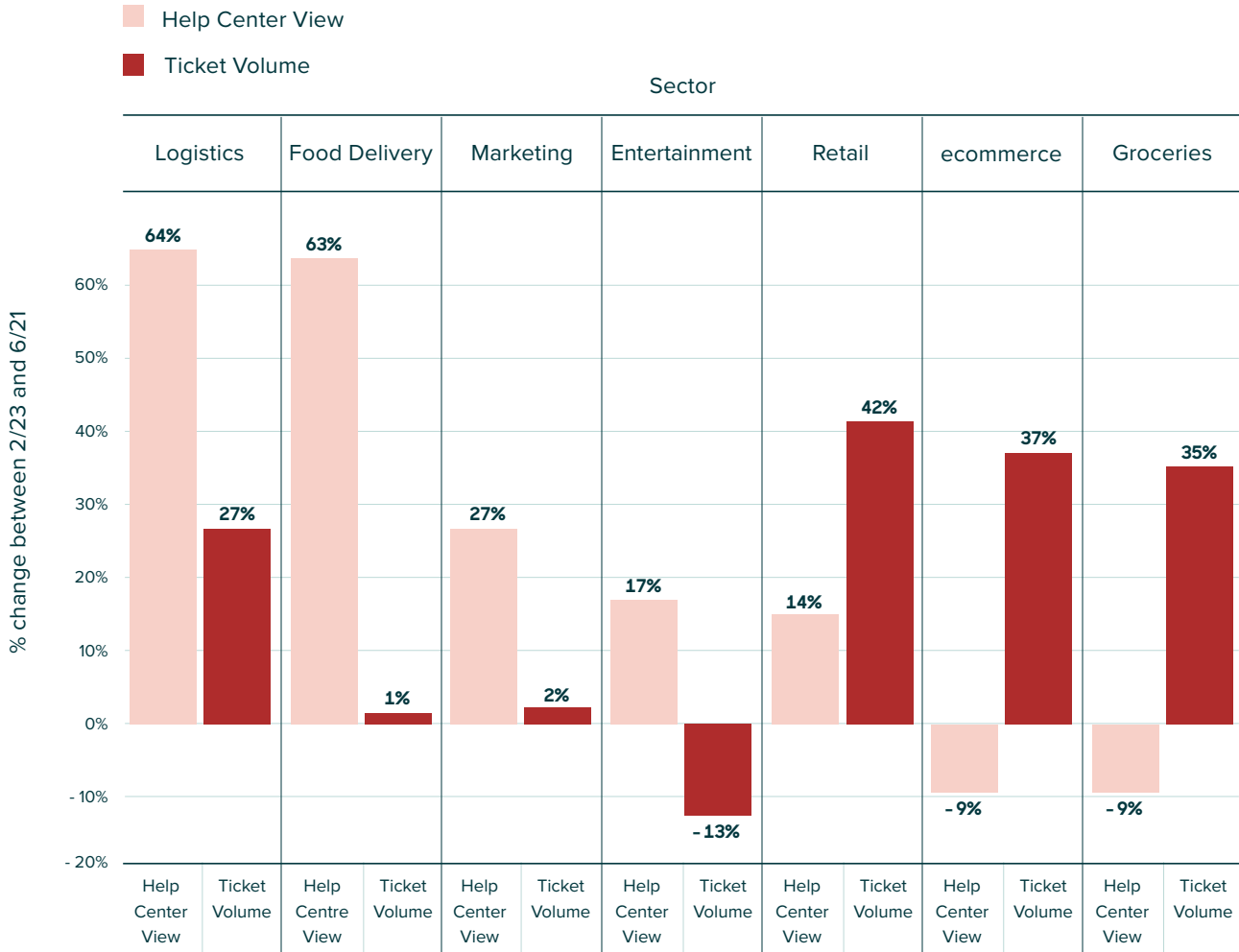


Messaging channels such as WhatsApp, text, and direct messaging over Facebook and Twitter are most commonly used by small retail and ecommerce businesses.

Customers are also increasingly willing to search online for quick answers. And tools like online help centers or an FAQ page can be vital ways for smaller businesses to answer common customer questions without needing to involve an agent. **Across all regions, Self-service views for small businesses are up 12 percent** and for some sectors they're actually outpacing the growth in new tickets, which means that support teams have more time to spend on complex issues.

Sectors that are doing it well include small food delivery companies (where online help center views grew 13 times faster than new tickets), logistics, marketing and entertainment companies. Those that saw only modest gains in self-service use (including retail, on-demand grocery, and ecommerce) may be missing opportunities to take full advantage of their help centers.

Self service views vs. Ticket growth





Success story...

" PRISM+ was able to manage between 500-699 tickets daily - up from about 350 a day pre-pandemic - and improved our CSAT score to 90% by utilizing Zendesk's Support Suite with Social Media add-ons, and Explore "

Jon Ng

Head of Sales and Operations, Prism+

PRISM+



Singapore

Agility tips:

- Create listening mechanisms (could be surveys or research groups) to better understand the needs and expectations of your customers.
- Shift agents to messaging channels where they can work on resolving multiple tickets at once.
- Train agents on multiple service channels so you can be more agile as tickets come in.
- Deflect would-be tickets by building out your help center with answers to common customer questions. If your one-touch resolution rate is greater than 70 percent, you may need a better deflection strategy.
- As you scale, consider adopting an AI-powered chatbot to increase the reach of your help center.

03 Rising response and resolution times, and forgiving customers

As global ticket increases reach record highs, small teams have struggled to keep reply and resolution times low. Customers reaching out over messaging channels like WhatsApp, and text are seeing especially long wait times:

- It's now taking nearly two hours longer for an agent to respond to a customer question over messaging (a 30 percent increase) and almost an hour longer (a 9 percent increase) to resolve customer issues, though smaller teams are outperforming their larger peers.
- Teams are also taking longer to respond over email and webform, the main drivers of support traffic for SMBs, but they're doing so more efficiently than before — wait times for an agent response only rose 4 percent despite a 14 percent increase in total tickets.
- Resolutions over live channels (phone and chat) also saw a 5 percent increase to 27 minutes, but phone support can be difficult for smaller teams to scale. Currently, it takes smaller teams 50 percent longer to resolve a live channel ticket than large enterprise firms.

Wait times may be up, but customers aren't taking it out on agents. In fact, customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores for small businesses have actually gone up, even as customers are waiting longer to get their issues resolved. Live channels (phone and chat) rose from an average of 90.1 to 91.2 since late February, and asynchronous channels (email and webform) increased 0.1 percentage points to 89.5. Though higher than normal wait times resulted in a CSAT drop for messaging channels, they've since rebounded for an average of 96.5 — the highest of any channel.

CSAT changes





Success story...

With the help of Zendesk Support and Guide, the Calm team was able to manage a 33% increase in inquiries and a 50% increase in help center views, mainly from people asking about how to access the resources they made available during this time. Despite rising volume, agents are fleet with their replies, earning the team a CSAT improvement. By making valuable content and nimble support readily available, Calm is helping people around the world live happier, healthier lives.

Calm



San Francisco

Agility tips:

- Focus on meeting customers where they are and staff channels accordingly, either in-house or outsourced.
- Use webform instead of email to better triage customer problems and highlight urgent issues that you may want to address first.
- Leverage Zendesk's Service Level Agreement functionality to support prioritization of tickets within your dashboard.
- Find ways to deliver exceptional customer service, especially with higher than normal wait times — what you do now for your customers now may earn you a lifetime of loyalty.

How agile SMBs are keeping resolution times low

These days, getting customer support right is more important than ever. And if small businesses can lighten the load on their most important assets (their people), they can deliver better experiences for both customers and support teams alike.

Thousands of small businesses in our database have kept resolution times stable, despite rising tickets and workflow disruptions, and they've done so by responding quickly to changes in customer behavior and building even greater efficiencies into their teams.

Since February, these agile teams have scaled to meet the challenges of volatile workloads by:

Meeting their customers where they are:

More customers are reaching out on messaging channels, which can boost the efficiency of small teams by allowing agents to handle multiple tickets at once. Among these companies, we saw a 34 percent increase in the adoption of messaging channels like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Line.

Empowering customers with self-service:

At least 57 percent of these teams have added new articles and resources to their online help centers. By continuing to assess and anticipate common customer questions, they're providing quick answers while also freeing up their agents to handle stickier issues.

Streamlining workflows and processes:

They've added 8 percent more workflow management tools (automations, macros, and triggers) that can help companies set business rules and define automated responses or actions in repeatable and scalable ways.

Ramping up live channels:

Phone and chat support are still the fastest ways for small businesses to resolve customer questions, and these teams have increased their adoption of live channels by 11 percent. A third that are using phone and live chat have also seen resolutions over these channels rise by at least 10 percent.

Start a trial for support suite

Visit zendesk.com



zendesk