



Customer Engagement 2020

Why the digital journey changes everything and how to keep up



Introduction

With each successive chapter of customer experience thought leadership, a new word often gets introduced to describe the mindset and operational shifts that companies must undertake to improve their support offerings and capacities (think multichannel and omnichannel.) Digital omnichannel is the next word in customer experience.

Advances in digital technology are constantly influencing consumer expectations, providing new opportunities for heightened customer experiences and revenue growth. Companies wishing to take full advantage of this ongoing digital evolution are embracing new customer journey models that enable more effective communication across a range of channels and generate greater loyalty.

So, what is digital omnichannel? Why do companies need to be aware of it, and how can you implement a cohesive digital omnichannel engagement strategy for your business? This white paper will answer all your digital omnichannel questions, and help you structure your digital customer journey around your customers' needs and preferences.

What is Digital Omnichannel?

Within the realm of customer service, digital omnichannel involves different digital touchpoints blended seamlessly and effortlessly into a unified view of the customer. At its core, the digital omnichannel promise is simple; it means supporting customers effectively and cohesively across all digital channels without ever losing sight of their history.

In a successful digital omnichannel approach, data is not held in a silo. Instead, customer information and conversations are accessible to agents in real-time through a unified console. Agents can view every interaction that a customer has had with the company, no matter the channel. This visibility lets them create a cohesive, deeply personalized customer profile that enables higher quality service.

The ability to unite customer data gathered from both “real-time” and “anytime” channels is what sets omnichannel apart from a simple multi-channel approach. Real-time channels like live chat allow customers to get instant, on-demand support from an agent or a bot. “Anytime” channels — like social media, SMS, and email — are channels where customers can contact your company even when someone may not be online to assist them. The very nature of these channels implies that an immediate reply is not expected (more on this on pages 5-7).

By combining the information gathered from real-time and anytime channels with pre-existing data found in customer databases or CRM systems, companies can eliminate the blind spots and roadblocks that result from siloed customer service systems and deepen the customer experience for a frictionless and more successful customer journey.

Why Adopt Digital Omnichannel?

In theory, digital omnichannel aligns perfectly with the existing philosophies of many companies, which are to serve customers quickly, efficiently, and effectively. But what tangible benefits can businesses expect from this approach? Here are some of the ways that digital omnichannel is helping companies meet their customer service goals and drive operational efficiency:

Optimized agent capacity

For agents, digital omnichannel engagement means simpler and easier customer communication. With a unified view of the customer across all channels, agents can resolve queries faster, increasing their overall capacity.

Faster time-to-resolution

With all your information in one place, a digital omnichannel approach makes it easy to speed up resolution without sacrificing quality. Businesses are then better positioned to implement and enforce service level agreements (SLAs) and response time requirements. Being transparent with these SLAs helps set better expectations with customers.

Pro Tip

Decrease response times even more with an [agent-facing intelligent assistance solution](#) that reduces the time it takes to find answers.



Increased customer satisfaction

Customers expect agents to have access to their whole story when they reach out for support. According to a survey conducted by UBM, 75 percent of participants cited [having to repeat themselves](#) as their biggest issue when communicating with a brand. With digital omnichannel, agents have both the tools and the context they need to bring about a satisfying resolution and even increase their [first contact resolution rate](#) (FCR) so your customers never have to repeat themselves again!

Reduced costs

Improving customer satisfaction can indeed increase revenue — but it can also reduce costs. According to McKinsey, brands that improve the customer journey see their revenue increase by 10 to 15 percent while also [lowering costs by 15 to 20 percent](#).

Increased agent satisfaction

When a channel becomes secondary to the customer experience, it also becomes secondary to the agent experience. According to McKinsey, companies that invest in their customer experience also observe an [improvement in employee engagement](#) by roughly 20 percent on average. Increased engagement helps to reduce employee churn and avoid all the costs that come with attracting, hiring, training, and retaining new employees.

Structuring your journey

Adopting a digital omnichannel customer service approach has 3 main components:

Identifying your channels | Strategizing your journey | Choosing your technology

Step 1

Identify Your Channels

The channels that you choose to include in your digital omnichannel strategy should depend on where your customers are interacting with you. While you don't have to connect every channel in the book, here are the top digital channels we recommend. (Want to be sure? Ask your customers!)

Real-time channels

Live chat

Live chat enables consumers to connect directly to a customer service agent via the internet. Available on both company websites and mobile apps, live chat is adored for its speed, accessibility, and convenience. According to a study by J.D. Power, [customers prefer live chat](#) over email and social media for communicating with brands online. A [study by Econsultancy](#) reveals that 79 percent of customers prefer live chat because of the immediacy it offers, while 51 percent prefer chat because it allows them to multitask.

Interesting fact: As a customer support channel, live chat offers a great deal more than just texting back and forth through the chat window. Truly enterprise-ready live chat solutions include audio and video chat, co-browsing, file sharing, and even automatic translation to make the service experience even more personalized and productive.

Chatbot

According to the Aspect Consumer Experience Index, [61 percent of consumers](#) feel that having chatbots in customer service is the way of the future. On live chat platforms, they reduce operating costs and are a cost-effective alternative to a 24/7 human customer service team. They also have a high success rate of solving customer inquiries, freeing up agents to tackle

more complex issues. Comm100's 2020 Live Chat Benchmark Report found that [bots completed 68.9 percent of their chats without human involvement](#) — up from just 25 percent in 2018. With customer-facing interactions on live chat, SMS, social messaging, and more, chatbots can be found on both real-time and anytime channels.

Interesting fact: When integrated with core business systems like CRM, order processing, and e-commerce platforms, chatbots can do a great deal more than just answer simple questions — they can essentially do anything a mobile app can do, only in a natural, conversational way. Chatbots aren't just useful for customers; [agent-facing AI](#) can assist customer service representatives by suggesting knowledge base articles, building standardized response models, and facilitating agent training.

Anytime channels

Pro Tip

For those times when your chatbot is out of its depth – or for those customers whom you would rather not serve this way – it's critical to enable effortless escalation to a human agent. Make sure your chatbot knows when and how.



Ticketing and email

Ticketing lets businesses manage more complex customer queries that require either more time to resolve, collaboration from multiple agents, or both. Tickets form the backbone of most mature customer support teams and are generally channel-agnostic. In the digital era, many companies automatically create tickets from email submissions while also allowing messages from other channels — chat, social, SMS — to be converted into tickets as well. Complete messaging history can be attached to tickets so that agents have access to the customers' full story, even if the issue switches hands (or channels).

Interesting fact: ticketing systems are far more agile and effective for customer service teams than a simple email inbox because these systems allow for easier routing and collaboration, yielding quicker resolutions and happier customers.

Messaging

SMS texting is the [single most used smartphone feature worldwide](#). It's the dominant method of communication between individuals, and soon will be between individuals and the brands they support. Even people aged 55 and up send and receive more than 16 text messages a day. Messaging is the quickest and most convenient way to communicate from a mobile device — Imagine the possibilities of letting your customers text you with a question, and then replying to it just as you would if they were chatting or emailing.

Interesting fact: Texting is so ubiquitous and trusted that it is the ideal channel for sharing important information with your customers that requires relatively quick action. From appointment or shipping confirmations to security alerts and product recalls, texting should be a standard channel for every organization.

Social media

Social media brings brands into customers' personal spheres and lets customers engage with companies publicly or privately. Customer interactions on this channel are important for managing public opinion of your brand and building brand affinity (public), and for responding to direct inquiries (private). With a digital omnichannel approach, agents can handle social media queries directly from the agent console, just as they would any other channel.

Interesting fact: According to a survey by Twitter, 85 percent of SMB Twitter users say it's important for businesses to provide customer service using the network. Of the customers surveyed, 83 percent said that getting a reply on Twitter improved their opinion of the business.

Knowledge base

[More than six in ten U.S. consumers](#) say that their go-to channel for simple inquiries is a digital self-serve tool, according to a study by American Express. Knowledge bases are available to customers at any time of the day and are critical for customers who prefer to take matters into their own hands. Since information distributed through this channel is consumed at the customer's pace, when and where they want, this tool can help customers understand the product or service better before purchasing, and helps increase customer loyalty post-purchase. It also relieves pressure from your support team by reducing chat volume.

Interesting fact: Knowledge bases aren't just for your customers. An internal knowledge base is a vital part of any internal knowledge management (KM) program. And they don't exist in a vacuum — you can provide access to your external knowledge base right inside your chat window, and to your internal knowledge base inside the agent console, so no one has to think about where to go to find answers.

Pro Tip

Ensure easy access to your knowledge base by connecting to it right from your chat window – it's the first place visitors go on your website for help!



Step 2

Structure Your Digital Customer Journey

Once you've mapped out your desired digital touchpoints, you can begin to envision the digital customer journey — the entire digital experience that a customer has with your company. It follows the complete lifecycle of a customer — from awareness to loyalty.

Your digital customer journey should consider and incorporate your key objectives, customer personas, and digital touchpoints. Here are a few communication strategies to consider when structuring your digital customer journey:

Social Media vs. SEO Marketing

Reach & Acquisition

How your customer found you can result in different digital touchpoints and follow up actions.

New customers in the pre-purchase stage may reach out on social media if a post or advertisement catches their eye. On social media channels, how quickly you should follow up with these interactions depends on which social channel the customer is using. On Facebook, for example, [85 percent of customers](#) want a response from companies within six hours. Meanwhile, 64 percent of customers on Twitter expect a response within just one hour. If a customer interacts with your company privately via direct messaging, they may also expect a faster response than they would for a public post.

Your website visitors often use live chat as their first digital touchpoint, especially if the [live chat button](#) is made readily available. Live chat users expect to be connected with an agent in a minute or less; according to Comm100's 2020 Live Chat Benchmark Report, customers using live chat waited an [average of just 46 seconds](#) to be connected with an agent.

For new customers who land on your website outside your normal office hours, a clear knowledge base and a helpful chatbot are two channels that can keep your leads moving through the digital customer journey.

Inbound vs. Outbound

Acquisition & Conversion

Responding to a leads' inbound request is a helpful way to guide them towards conversion. However, with digital omnichannel, waiting for your customers to come to you is not the only option. Sometimes a little outbound action is the perfect push for a lead who is still in the decision-making process.

With digital omnichannel communication, you can automate outbound correspondence at key points to help guide the visitor through the customer journey. These automated interactions can be set based on custom rules and will be sent only to website visitors that meet the requirements of those rules.

For example, if a first-time customer is browsing a web page for a predetermined amount of time, a chat window could appear inviting that customer to chat ("let us know if you have any questions!"). For a customer who is visiting a second time, or from a specific location, a personalized deal might be offered instead ("see something you like? Ask us about our free shipping codes!").

Comm100's 2020 Live Chat Benchmark Report found that about 5 percent of outbound chats are accepted by web visitors and turn into meaningful interactions with the brand. If you can automate outbound messages, why not engage and convert more?

Outbound messages aren't only for capturing leads — they can be used as an important part of inspiring loyalty from existing customers. For example, if a customer complains that a product was damaged in shipping, agents could issue a replacement order, then set up a time and date to automatically check back in with the customer via email or SMS. This kind of nurturing lays the groundwork for greater loyalty and a higher customer lifetime value.

B2B vs. B2C

Conversion & Retention

B2B and B2C digital journeys involve their own set of channel preferences. With B2B, the person who is experiencing your journey is often a member of the company who has purchasing power, and may not be a direct user of your product. B2B communication tends to involve more traditional channels, such as email, and responses are often expected within 1-24 hours.

B2C consumers, on the other hand, tend to prefer live chat, texting, and social media communication. They often want and expect a faster response, and will use the channels that are most known for their speed and convenience. When B2C customers are in the early stages of their customer journey, the immediacy of your agents' response may impact whether they abandon their shopping cart or defer to a competitor.

Private vs. Public Retention & Loyalty

With digital omnichannel engagement, agents can easily switch between channels, allowing them to easily relocate, transfer, or escalate a situation that may otherwise require the customer to make a second contact.

For example, if a customer publically reaches out on social media about an account issue, agents can switch uninterrupted to a secure SMS or email correspondence. This keeps agents from compromising the customer's data by continuing the conversation on a public platform, and it keeps the customer from the frustration of having to reengage with the company through another means and open another support ticket.

Still, it is important to consider that forcing a customer onto a different channel should only occur under the most carefully considered circumstances. As a rule of thumb, channel switching should be avoided as much as possible.

For customer interactions that require a secure exchange of information, live chat is the safest private platform for data exchange. Live chat providers such as Comm100 adhere to strict privacy and security protocols including HIPAA, PCI CSS, and SOC 2, satisfying the requirements of even the most data-sensitive industries like healthcare, government, and banking. Tools including data encryption, obfuscation, IP restriction, and others make sharing credit card, health, or other sensitive information easy and secure. This gives organizations in these verticals the confidence and peace of mind they need to fully adopt digital channels.

Mobile vs Desktop

Reach & Loyalty

The demand for mobile chat is growing and shows no sign of slowing down. According to Comm100's 2020 Live Chat Benchmark Report, [74.5 percent of all live chats were sent from a mobile device](#). With over 42 million mobile chats, this marks an 82 percent increase from the year before.

With customers continuing to shift from desktop to mobile as their primary online device, companies must optimize and prioritize mobile digital touchpoints when planning their digital customer experience. This includes optimizing your company website to accommodate the increasingly mobile customer journey and adopting live chat and SMS as key digital omnichannel communication points — especially for B2C sectors.



Step 3

Choose your technology

It won't matter that your company has a customer-centric philosophy if your operations don't back that up. The impact of overcoming obstacles caused by siloed communication systems with multiple logins and improving the digital customer journey is huge: Research by MIT shows that companies that embrace digital transformation are **26% more profitable** than their peers.

Once you have identified your chosen channels, it's time to find a digital omnichannel software platform that supports them all effectively. You don't want to spend resources trying to cobble it together yourself because that will introduce a technical and administrative price that isn't worth it. The ideal solution will integrate with your other core business systems, including CRM, and will scale as your company grows and new technologies and channels are introduced.

The right digital omnichannel solution should also have top-notch routing, prioritization, and analytic capacities. Tools such as **intelligent routing** ensure that your customer's inquiry gets to the right person at the right time, with the flexibility you need to define your own unique routing procedures. Being able to segment your customers your way — by geography, historical sales, industry, etc. — will further help you offer a more specialized and effective customer service program.

On the analytics side, you'll want to be able to set the right KPIs, keep close tabs on them, and learn from what's going on so you can tweak and improve how you're delivering. Cutting corners on these components will handicap your efforts to master the digital customer journey.

A final word on technology: in this day and age there should be no compromise on security and privacy. Whether you're in a heavily regulated industry such as healthcare or banking and are subject to strict compliance standards like HIPAA and PCI DSS, or your organization simply holds itself accountable to a higher standard, you'll need to find a technology partner that meets or exceeds your expectations. Ask them the tough questions because you don't ever want to deal with the consequences of a data breach.



The Wrap-up

Digital omnichannel customer engagement gives companies the infrastructure they need to take the stress out of channel and data integration and places the customer journey front-and-center. By equipping companies to interact with customers where they want and when they want, businesses can grow customer loyalty and improve their bottom line.

New and improved digital services are raising the bar in every industry as customer expectations of personalized, superior service drive efforts to advance and refine digital solutions. For companies that respond to customer demands for a seamless digital experience, the rewards will be great (think the Amazon effect) as they continue to shape customer expectations.

Contact our team today to learn how Comm100 can fulfill your digital omnichannel needs.



Let's chat

Comm100 is a leading global provider of omnichannel customer engagement solutions with a mission to make online service and support delivery more genuine, more personalized, and more productive through meaningful conversations.

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