

COLUMNS

Customer service goes mobile with multimedia chat

October 28, 2011



By **Yuval Moed**

Not long ago, consumers seeking support from brands might have been satisfied by the support available from a call center representative or with the availability of text chat on a desktop computer.

Those days, however, have passed.

Nowadays, customer service is an integral part of the shopping experience, and that experience is increasingly mobile.

Shopping is currently an activity best done with mobile device in hand. Particularly for consumers researching big-ticket items, it makes sense to go see the item live and simultaneously research it on a mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet.

Businesses capable of reaching prospects on these devices have a significant advantage in their markets.

Pat with chat

By delivering superior customer service wherever and whenever it is required brands create relationships that lead to satisfaction and sales.

Beyond text-based messages, enhanced chat can include live voice and video chat, interactive whiteboard, screen sharing, document co-editing and joint form completion.

Once a mere operational function, modern customer service is now a proactive, valued differentiator closely associated with marketing and sales objectives.

Live, mobile multimedia collaboration opens up numerous opportunities for enhanced customer service and sales. Additional benefits include productivity, accessibility, better internal communications, competitive differentiation and increased sales.

In terms of productivity, mobile multimedia chat applications increase efficiency for brands and their customers.

Consumers and business users clearly want to get more done during the day, whether they are in the office, at home or on the road.

Tablets increase their productivity to a point.

For users to realize the full potential of their mobile devices, those with whom they do business must enable mobile applications. This is true in customer service, as well, which is increasingly aware of the need to meet customers wherever they are.

If company A requires a consumer to seek service on the phone or via a desktop computer and company B is accessible via mobile device, it is easy to predict which organization will win more business.

Mobile-ready customer service also makes brands more accessible to consumers, and therefore more attractive.

Even in the aisle of a competitor's establishment, a customer service representative can offer a guided video tour of a rival product via mobile device. Or, companies that prefer to deliver their own guidance on products stocked by others can add a "scan for live help" bar code to let shoppers connect to knowledgeable service agents via audio, text or video chat, all via mobile device.

For example, a consumer standing in front of plasma television in a big box store can access a guided video tour of the TV's features by opting in for enhanced chat on his handheld device. In this way, the mobile-friendly business wins sales through better service.

Living the live

Internally, mobile-enhanced chat can support underlying business initiatives that feed into better customer experiences.

Many online retailers rely on dispersed teams to run their businesses, and those teams need to replicate the level of communication that might come easily were they all to inhabit the same office space.

Mobile multimedia chat can provide the basis for virtual meetings, product collaboration and other mission-critical business activities.

This, too, affects sales, since the outcomes of such internal collaboration extend to product quality, marketing messages, sales outreach and every other aspect of the business.

Customers notice these outcomes as competitive differentiators.

Particularly in saturated industries, market share often comes down to which company offers the best service.

For example, a couple registering for wedding gifts can choose from a half-dozen home goods stores. They will likely opt to do business with the one who helps them and later their guests choose the right gifts.

A vendor who can supplement live sales assistance with multimedia mobile applications is uniquely positioned to provide a superior experience to the couple in this example, who in turn will prompt dozens of their friends and family members to shop in the store.

Finally, businesses see the results of mobile customer service options reflected in their bottom lines.

Numerous research studies indicate that consumers are at least three times as likely to make a purchase when they receive live support.

High-quality support enhanced with video, document sharing and other value-added apps can boost average order value and increase repeat business from loyal customers.

THE GROWING POPULARITY of smartphones and tablet devices should prompt businesses to re-evaluate the way they look at customer service.

Consumers are no longer tethered to their desktops for shopping purposes, and brands must reflect their understanding of this shift.

By delivering rich support to prospects anywhere and on any device, companies are better positioned to solve customer problems, encourage increased average orders and lay the foundation for repeat business.

Yuval Moed is cofounder/CEO of [VeriShow](#), West Bloomfield, MI. Reach him at yuvalmoed@hbrlabs.com.