

Understand and be understood

Unbabel

The customer experience handbook for the gaming industry



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Introduction

A small white dot zips across a pitch-black screen.

Two 28-pixel-long paddles on each side of the screen swing back and forth. The small white dot picks up speed, until, eventually, it disappears beyond the screen, triggering an 8-bit roar of approval: another point on the board.

This could only be Pong, the first commercially successful video game. It was publicly introduced almost 50 years ago, in November 1972, and it quickly became the mass-culture phenomenon that launched Atari, along with a new generation of entertainment and an industry that today reports earnings in the billions of dollars.

It may be hard to imagine now. We've grown accustomed to AI-enhanced, hyper-realistic, massively multiplayer online games, as well as Esports competitions that attract millions of diehard fans and casual gamers from around the world. All this spawned from a simple two dimensional game, housed in a bright-orange wooden cabinet with just two knobs and the letters P-O-N-G written on it. That's it. A little white dot swinging across the screen that paved the way for PokemonGo, League of Legends, and Fortnite. A little white dot that now lives, half-forgotten, in obscure Halls of Fame and in the dustier corridors of our collective childhood nostalgia.

But today's highly fragmented and competitive online gaming scene is not just about graphics, compelling storylines, and playability. What makes or breaks online games these days, especially those sporting the freemium model, is their ability to attract players, and more importantly, keep them as happy, paying customers. And so customer experience is no longer "nice-to-have," or as *First Round Review* puts it, "the second cousin who's only invited to a wedding when slots open up on the attendee list."

Every touchpoint is an opportunity to delight customers — or else a failure to have done so. Game studios and publishers are quickly catching on, investing in always-on, omnichannel customer service. Frustrated gamers, stuck in a shadowy underworld of demons and ghouls (the game, not customer service!), require timely, thoughtful, and accurate responses. And increasingly they expect that support to be delivered in their own language.

What are your players looking for?

How can you engage them and support them?

In this report, we'll explore how you can design a world-class support strategy and stand out from the crowd. You'll learn:

- Where the gaming industry stands, and where it's going
- Why customer experience is a key differentiator in gaming
- How multilingual customer support boosts your player experience, nurtures trust, and ultimately wins over customers
- How artificial intelligence solutions can be implemented, at every stage of the customer journey and at every level of your organization, to achieve operational efficiency, increase player satisfaction, and reduce costs.

Ready to get started?

Press Start

Full disclosure

We'll try to keep our sales pitch to a minimum, but we're full believers in Unbabel's Translation as a Service Solution for Customer Service. That enthusiasm might wend its way into the report. All the same, we've tried to compile valuable insights that should prove useful, no matter how you choose to support your players. Thanks for reading.

Key Takeaways

THE GAMING INDUSTRY IS BOOMING

The gaming industry is booming and will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. Mobile is the main sector to see growth, with revenues in excess of \$70 billion US — more than half of total digital gaming revenue.

The Asia-Pacific region dominates the industry, leading with revenues of \$71.4 billion and 52% of the global market.

Mobile helped games become more easily accessible to a broader audience. Everyone can be a gamer now.

INFINITE LIST OF GAMING OPTIONS

Gamers have a virtually infinite list of gaming options to choose from. Offering great customer service is essential to customer satisfaction and retention.

GAMERS ARE EVERYWHERE

Gamers are everywhere, so customer support should be everywhere, too. Email and phone support are no longer enough.

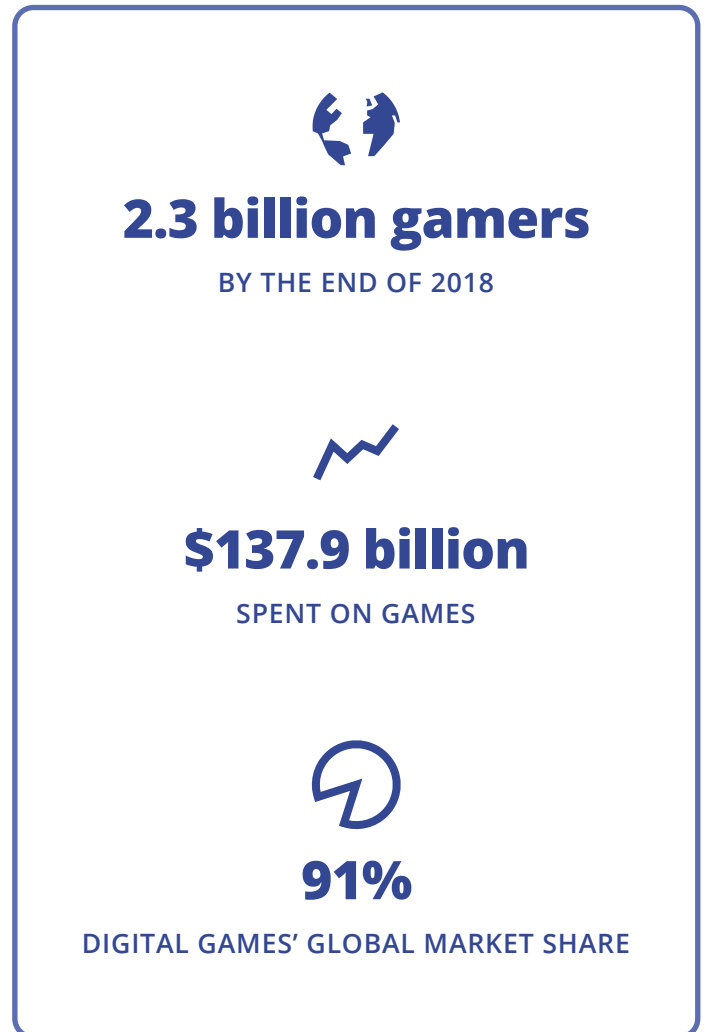
Customer support needs to be knowledgeable, multilingual, personalized, and available 24/7.

An industry that keeps leveling up

The gaming industry is booming. [Newzoo's latest update to their Global Games Market Report](#) predicts that, by the end of 2018, the 2.3 billion gamers all around the world will have spent \$137.9 billion on games, an increase of 13.3% compared to the previous year. The biggest share of revenue will come from digital games, with \$125.3 billion, or 91% of the global gaming market.

Asia is home to two of the three largest gaming markets worldwide. China is number one, both by number of players and by revenue, and it's safe to say that it will maintain its position through 2021. It is followed by the United States, in second place, and Japan in third. Even though it stands lowest on the podium, Japan is where the money is. Japanese gamers are the biggest spenders on gaming, especially when it comes to mobile gaming. According to Newzoo's data, the average spend per payer is one-and-a-half times higher than in North America, and more than two-and-a-half times higher than in Western Europe.

If we take a closer look at the digital gaming market, we see that mobile is still the largest segment. Newzoo estimates mobile will grow by 25.5% year on year and will surpass the \$70 billion mark in revenue, for the first time making up more than half of total digital gaming revenue. If this growth continues to follow the same trend, by 2021 it will generate \$106.4 billion in revenue, almost 60% of the entire games market. Mobile is followed by console gaming as the second largest digital gaming segment (\$34.6 billion in revenue in 2018), and, in third place, we find PC games, with \$32.9 billion.



In terms of hardware, smartphones lead the way with 80% of mobile revenue, while the remaining 20% comes from tablets. According to Limelight Networks' [report on The State of Online Gaming](#), mobile phones are also the primary gaming devices on a global scale, but preferences vary by country. In France, Germany, and the U.K., computers are the most common device used for gaming. In Japan, South Korea, and the U.S., mobile phones are used most often. The use of gaming consoles is highest in the U.K. and lowest in South Korea, where mobile phone usage is the highest.

But mobile isn't the only trend reshaping the gaming industry. Take **Esports**, for example. Professional video game tournaments are becoming more and more popular among competitors and consumers, especially with the advent of platforms such as Twitch. Not only that, but given the chance, nearly one-third of gamers who work would quit their job and become a professional gamer if they could support themselves by doing so. Esports revenue has [been increasing since 2012 and estimates put its revenue at \\$906 million by the end of the year](#), making it a trend that should be top of mind for companies in the industry.

Another trend making its way through the gaming sector is **battle royale**, a type of game that stages a fight between many different people until only one fighter, or one team, remains standing. The most recent example of the hype around this gaming category is Fortnite. Released for PC just last year, it reached [125 million players in June 2018](#). Given this huge success, other companies are looking into this type of game and debating whether or not to include them in their future line-up of products.

So, what does it all mean? First, that there are a lot of gamers out there, playing a lot of different games. Second, the label "gamer" no longer applies only to the total devotees who spend countless hours in front of their computers or Playstations. Thanks to smartphones, all of us are gamers now. In other words, the gaming community has grown more diverse and their needs more complex — which means that, thirdly, gaming companies, particularly their support teams, need to be prepared for everything.

The future of gaming lies in customer experience

We'll be blunt: in gaming, the competition is fierce, often with low or no barriers to entry, and churn is a real concern. When things go south — be it a glitch, a computer issue, or a less-than-smooth interaction with other players — it's very easy for your customers to lose patience and go running towards the competition.

It's no longer about creating merely the best game, but also the best experience. This is especially true in the freemium model, pioneered by casual gaming, in which players' default choice is not to spend anything, really. What's more, they have nothing to lose by jumping ship. Gamers need to feel engaged both by the game and the company that created it.

So who are gamers these days? Let's take a look at the profile of a typical customer in the gaming industry:

- **They expect very short response times:** if a game crashes, it completely ruins the experience for the person playing it. Gamers expect the problem to be solved as soon as possible, so they can resume their game.
- **They are active in online gaming communities and forums that also serve as support centers:** gamers are usually very active in forums, where they exchange opinions and tips about their favorite games. These message boards can also serve as support centers, where gamers reach out to other gamers to see if anyone has experienced the same issue they are experiencing and can help find a solution. By the time a gamer contacts your support

team, they will most likely already have tried to solve their problem in a different way. And they will probably be angry!

- **They don't see the game as just a product:** gaming is an experience and, in many ways, a source of identity and community, connecting gamers around the world. Having your game crash isn't exactly the same type of issue as your printer not working.
- **They are willing to pay for games, even if they can get them for free:** Limelight Networks reports that, when it comes to paying for video games, only 55.3% are willing to pay, compared to 84.7% who will download free games. This doesn't mean that they'll completely rule out a game if they have to pay for it, but they expect a little extra something out of their purchase — say, great customer service. To encourage gamers to buy more titles, companies might offer free trials for a limited period of time or enable in-app purchases, giving players a range of gaming options that fit different budgets.
- **They have more options to choose from:** when it comes to gaming, there is a lot to choose from. Games now come in all shapes and sizes, so when gamers have a bad customer

service experience, they can just move on to the next game. [Ryan Racioppo, creator of the popular Roshpit Champions game](#), says, “If they’re not having fun, they can quit. If their friends don’t play, they’ll quit. If they get angry, they’ll quit. The bottom line is that your customers have so much choice, they can jump ship at anytime.” So don’t take your players’ loyalty for granted. [As described by Telus International](#), gamers aren’t typically one-time customers. If a developer earns their loyalty and enthusiasm with a great game, they might very well become longtime supporters.

- **They no longer fit into a predictable category:** as we’ve mentioned before, everyone can be a gamer now, thanks to mobile gaming, which inevitably means fielding requests from customers who may not even know the basics of gaming. Not only that, but once they’ve purchased a product, gamers can use it anywhere in the world, at any given time. There is no way to predict where the biggest influx of queries will come from, or during what time of day.

As the industry continues to grow, and more talent and resources are poured into it, it’s becoming especially important for companies to rise to the occasion and provide a world-class customer experience. And it’s not just about keeping existing customers, but also winning new ones. Bad customer service leads to bad reviews, resulting in higher user acquisition costs.

How to win at customer experience

So how do you support your entire player base all day, every day, in every language, on every channel, at a low cost and a high level of quality?

Your customer support team needs to be a well-oiled machine, ready to tackle all sorts of challenges. That begins with the agents you hire.

The most important thing you should look for in your agents is **expertise**. No one understands gamers better than other gamers. The best people to hire are those who also play, or intimately understand, the game. But gaming expertise alone is not enough. Your customer support team must receive proper training and have access to resources, information systems, and internal knowledge bases in order to have an understanding of what fixes what, as well as to ensure the **quality** of the solutions provided. Additionally, agents must be quick on their feet. **Speed** is essential when replying to customer queries, because the more time gamers spend getting answers, the less time they have to play — that is, if they don't just start playing something else. Finally, you should demonstrate that you value your customers with **personalized replies**. In an age of bots and mass emailing, the ability to show empathy and care is becoming increasingly important.

Once you have a good customer success team in place, there are some metrics you'll need in order to assess the quality of the support you're providing. As we've mentioned before, **response times** are crucial. Customers should be acknowledged as quickly as possible, and so it's important to measure [First Response and Average Reply Times](#). Keep in mind that

customer expectations vary according to different channels (e-mail, chat, social media), so plan your response time strategy respectively.

However, it's not just about getting back to them quickly; you also have to solve their issues as quickly as possible. **Resolution time** helps to understand the time it takes to do just that, and it is measured as a percentage of requests solved in a determined period. It reflects effectiveness and shows you how many times a ticket was solved on the first interaction. When it comes to customer requests, you also need to look at your team's **backlog**, which refers to unresolved cases that pile up when there are more support requests than can be handled. Additionally, by monitoring **ticket distribution** you can uncover issues with the product, service, or even your agents. Last but not least, the **customer satisfaction** metric determines whether customers are happy and gauges their perception of the business/service.

The next challenge is to figure out how Customer Support teams should use these metrics to understand the problems at hand. If there is an unexpected increase in the number of support tickets, or too many interactions per ticket, it often means that the customer is not getting the right support.

In addition to having a strong team, [we've put together](#) seven [golden rules](#) for how we believe companies should position themselves in the gaming market in order to be successful at customer service:

- **Be proactive:** Don't expect users to reach out when they have an issue. Some players don't complain; they simply stop playing.
- **Be supportive:** Build plenty of options for them to interact with you. Ideally, this should happen within the game, through the product itself, a keyboard shortcut away. You don't want gamers to pause their session to look for help — [after all, nothing breaks an immersive experience like suddenly needing to reach out for help](#). In-game tools are a great option, so are Help Centers and FAQs.
- **Be fast:** The faster, the better. No one likes to wait for help, especially in the middle of a game.
- **Be multilingual:** Speak your customers' native language whenever you can. It increases trust, empathy, and loyalty. [Localize your help center](#) and games, provide [live multilingual support](#), translate User Generated Content (UGC), in forums and communities.
- **Be available at all times:** Gamers can and will play your game at any time of the day, so expect them to reach out at any time. Support should be available 24/7, especially for massive multiplayer online games. [And real-time chat is always a great option](#).
- **Be everywhere:** Be there for your customers, no matter where they are. Of course, phone and email are important, relevant, and must-have supporting channels. But don't ignore other

channels, like chat or social media. Take Pokemon Go, for example. It took the world by storm back in 2016, immediately becoming one of the biggest mobile games in history. As more and more people tried to use the app though, Niantic's servers kept crashing. The company reacted in a way that Telus International considers an [example of good customer service in gaming](#): by posting regular updates on social media and its official website, "[Niantic] kept Pokémon Go's devout fans abreast of its progress in fixing bugs such as distorted audio, GPS issues and server connectivity problems."

- **Be personal:** It all comes down to this. You want your users to be happy and loyal. Gamers tend to be extremely loyal if their experience is fun and hassle-free, start to finish. Sure, bugs will appear, and gamers will overlook instructions. Mistakes will be made on both sides, but if you can quickly solve an issue before it escalates, it will pay off in the long run.

To sum it up: given the variety of gamers, games and gaming experiences out there, your customer service needs to be just as personalized.

Multilingual Customer Service

The gaming tribe is unique. Most gamers are between the ages of [21 and 35](#), and they speak a wide variety of languages. Accordingly, game storylines and audio have been localized in terms of both language and cultural references for a number of years, with varying degrees of success. Indeed, niche translation and localization services aimed at the gaming market have proliferated. Now after-sales support is catching up.

With the rise of Asian communities and other non-English speaking countries, [multilingual customer support](#) is becoming a big concern for the gaming industry, opening new markets across borders, boosting global sales, and expanding franchises. Localization nurtures trust, builds brand image, and ultimately wins over customers.

According to the Common Sense Advisory [Can't Read, Won't Buy](#) report, 84% of your potential customers are more inclined to purchase products online when related information is presented in their own language, and nearly three quarters of respondents said they would be more likely to purchase the same brand again if after-sales care is in their language.

Take [Wargaming Mobile](#) as an example. This year, at Game Quality Forum, they revealed that they more than doubled their in-app upgrade rate once players realized they could get [customer support in their native language](#).

User-generated content (UGC), such as community content, forums, blogs, and customer reviews, are also considered powerful tools for improving the multilingual customer experience. Gaming companies that provide translations for

Multilingual customer support is an increasingly important part of customer service for companies looking at international markets. Speak to customers in their own language, and you gain their trust.

— Vasco Pedro, co-founding CEO of Unbabel

this type of content are more likely to turn customers into advocates. In other words, the more content you give them in their own language, the happier your customers will be.

Software companies are already driving translation services, and — with gameplay now routinely localized for different markets — the fast and accurate translation of gaming queries, complaints, and conversations will be an increasingly important differentiator in years to come.

But that doesn't mean you have to hire an international community of customer support agents that rivals the Eurovision lineup.

By harnessing the power of human and machine intelligence, businesses can understand, and be understood by, their entire player base. They can unlock languages with volumes too low to justify hiring native speaker agents; get consistent multilingual coverage 24/7, including during peak seasons, holidays and sick leaves; and hire agents for their people skills, not their language skills.

Translation isn't easy — not for human beings, and especially not for machines. There's context, there's culture, and there are things that only humans can understand — and these things are extremely difficult to pass on to machines.

The latest advances in translation involve “Neural Machine Translation” (NMT), which has rapidly become the new state-of-the-art. It's essentially a computer system which uses billions upon billions of data points in order to help make sense of online content and acts more like a brain by imitating biological neural networks. This lets it progressively learn and improve the more data it's given.

But machine solutions don't yet provide a quality translation experience. And human solutions — or translators — are expensive and hard to scale. So we believe that a world without language barriers will only be possible if machines and humans come together: machines do the initial work, and then a community of humans refine the AI translations to native-speaker quality.

The future won't be AI vs. Humans, but rather AI + Humans.

This kind of operational efficiency doesn't just allow organizations to scale across borders while keeping a lean customer support team. It also considerably reduces costs, and increases customer satisfaction.

In the end, it's all about keeping your players happy. Happy players tend to stick around.

Getting by with a little help from AI

Artificial intelligence in gaming is by no means a recent innovation. Even the first video games developed in the late '70s — for example, Space Invaders — used AI to determine the behavior of computer-controlled non-playable characters (NPCs).

Gaming website GamaSutra notes the many ways that [AI techniques are contributing to the gaming experience](#): “There have already been successful implementations of AI in commercial games ... there’s Black & White (machine learning), F.E.A.R (context-sensitive behavior), Façade (natural language parsing), Spore (data-driven life form simulations) ... to name a few.”

All of these techniques subscribe to two fundamental threads: more realism in artificial environments and/or more naturalistic interfaces between players and those environments. Allied to this is a further evolution in which environments will be spontaneous — instead of pre-scripted plots, developers will create only the environment and its mechanics, allowing AI to generate personalized scenarios and spontaneous challenges.

Another essential function of artificial intelligence in gaming is the interpretation of user data. Traditional games were downloaded “whole” and then played in a linear, unchanging fashion. But the rise of mobile casual gaming giants like Rovio, Supercell, and Zynga has taught the gaming industry that gameplay itself is a marketable concept that can be adapted to perfectly meet user expectations.

The casual gaming business pioneered the freemium model, in which a title’s profitability depends on its audience relevance, and the mobile gaming community became expert at deploying user data (plus feedback, ratings, etc.) to optimize the product experience. Today, the same AI techniques used by marketing professionals to assess user sentiment are being deployed to maximize the relevance and enjoyability of games.

But the utility of user data goes beyond game experience. By analyzing user behavior and data across the entire player journey, brands can design highly personalized customer experiences, detect and address behaviors of impending churn, identify ways to engage — and re-engage — customers, deploy conversational agents to provide immediate assistance, and even speak to their customers in their native languages.

More recently, following Gamergate and other events that brought attention to the consequences of unchecked behavior in the gaming community, companies are responding by using AI to create healthier, safer environments — detecting foul language, flagging abuse, automating the complaint process — making for more effective community management.

According to Telus, that’s exactly what the immensely popular online game League of Legends did. “Players were able to teach an AI what constituted as racist, homophobic or misogynistic language, and with time, the AI was able to recognize when abusive terms were used, and send feedback to offenders.”

To bot or not

Today's consumers demand 24-hour access to customer service.

In a study conducted by eMarketer, when asked about the most important aspect of a good digital customer experience, 38% of users said it was getting their issue solved in a single interaction, while 26% said it was receiving a speedy and timely response.

They expect to be able to self-serve if possible and, if not, get help using live chat, email, or phone. They want an immediate response, and will curse it from the social media rooftops that you failed to meet their heightened service expectations.

As such, automation in customer service operations is rapidly taking many forms, from multilingual customer communication to AI-powered chatbots. In fact, Gartner predicts that [by 2020, only 15% of customer interactions will be handled by humans.](#)

Automation is also very cost-effective. Sinitic, a natural language processing (NLP) company, realized that on average, 75% of chat is just mundane chit-chat or FAQs, and only 22% is what has been termed multiturn, or longer-form, complaints. Which means that 75% of customer support costs — currently 50–60% of Asian iGaming company's Costs of Goods Sold — are being wasted on easy-to-automate conversations.

This allows agents to dedicate more time to the most challenging cases, which often call for a human touch.

Technology frees us to have the good conversations. People don't want to talk to you about the straight forward, easy stuff. They want to talk about more educational and complex issues. Those are the real conversations and they're the thing that builds loyalty.

— Daniel Mooney, Head of Support at GoCardless

But it goes beyond mere chatbot applications. Automation can be deployed at almost every level of your organization and customer journey: from creating omnichannel, multilingual experiences; to helping your customer support agents quickly find information and analyze data (which in turn enables them to make better decisions); to bridging fragmented back-end systems such as CRMs, billing, and payment management.

Thoughtful automation frees both your customers and agents from repetitive, time-consuming tasks. It removes communication and language barriers, decreases ticket volume, and speeds up ticket resolution — all of which increase customer satisfaction and reduce operational costs.

It weds human intelligence, empathy, and intuition with a machine's sheer computational power.

In the end, it's all about choosing the right touchpoints to automate. Whether you already have a system in place or are still considering introducing this solution to your organization, [there's a simple ground rule you should always follow.](#)

Automation is great, if — and only if — it brings you closer to your customer. Anything else is a bad move.

And that's a wrap

Here we are, fifty years after that small white dot first grazed an arcade monitor. Who knows what the future will bring to the gaming industry? What we do know: it's not showing any signs of slowing down. Experts predict increases in revenue through 2021, driven mostly by the growing popularity of the mobile sector. Other trends, like Esports and Battle Royale games, show there is still a lot of untapped potential in the industry that companies can explore to continue diversifying their product catalog.

The growth of the market isn't all fun and games, though. In fact, it is making it increasingly difficult for companies and developers to stand out from the crowd. In a world where the next gaming option is just a click or a download away, we believe exceptional customer service is key in retaining customers and ensuring their loyalty.

But what are your players looking for? And how can you engage and support them?

We hope to have helped you answer these questions, by shedding some light on what we think are some of the best practices your business can implement to excel at customer service.

Feel free to reach out to us if you want to discuss any specific solution and be sure to check out our blog, where we regularly share insights into customer service, translation, artificial intelligence, and much more.