

An Enterprise Guide To 21st Century Customer Engagement

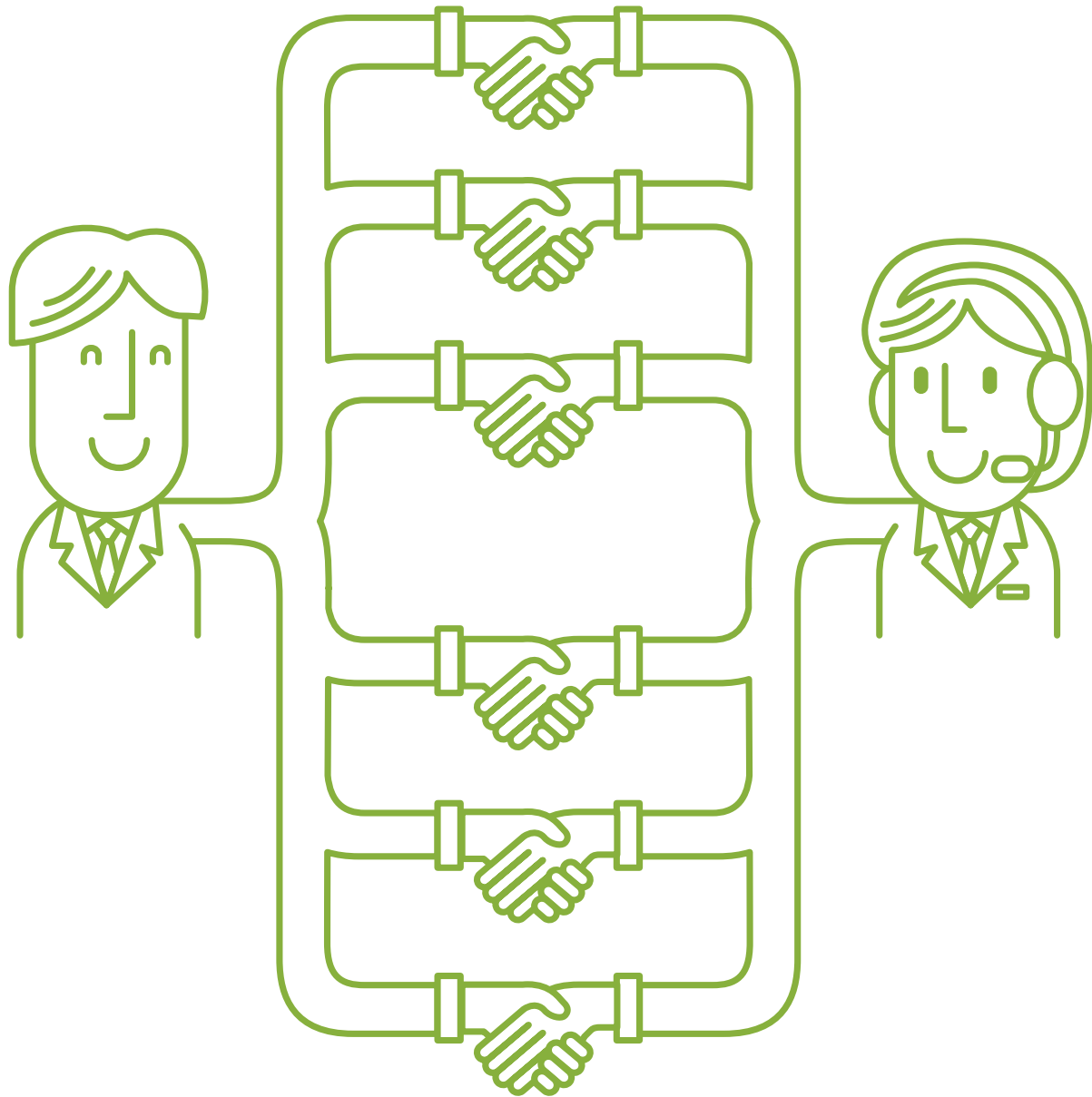


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Conversations around your business and your customers are happening in greater numbers across an increasing number of communication vehicles every year such as Facebook, Twitter, forums, email, phone, live chat, blogs, and more. We live in a world where every business must consider the impact of offering customer support through multiple communication vehicles . . . as well as what it means not to offer it. The cold hard fact is that there has been a “consumer awakening” and customers are now in charge. Enterprises that recognize this, and the special challenges that it presents, are poised to be the new 21st Century customer service heroes.

Rather than allow the proliferation of communications vehicles to overwhelm your customer support and service operations, you have the chance to take advantage of them, and you should. Handled appropriately, they can improve the efficiency of your support organization, greatly increase customer satisfaction, and generate new sales opportunities. Mishandled or not addressed at all, you run the risk of being out of touch and at a competitive disadvantage.

It’s time for the Enterprise to take a stand and elevate customer service to a whole new level: true customer engagement.

Key Considerations for the Enterprise

Let’s explore the reality of multiple customer service communication vehicles – from social media like Facebook and Twitter to the habits of a younger generation of customers to where support will be going in the future.

In addition, the explosion of mobile technology has created a proliferation of hardware devices in many support organizations. Your employees most likely have a laptop at their desk, a smart phone in their pocket, and an iPad in their bag. Your organization may be considering moving some of its work to those devices. Detaching from the desktop and working across multiple platforms – a desktop computer, iPad, iPhone, BlackBerry and/or Android devices – can benefit your support team by allowing them to address tickets from anywhere at anytime.

The adoption of a multi-channel, multi-device approach to support can actually benefit your organization and make your support team more efficient and effective. While it can be tough for any organization to open up new communication vehicles with their customers, it is a bigger risk to avoid opening them. Plus they offer new sales opportunities of which your competitors will surely take advantage.

“New” May Not Replace the “Old”

Newer customer service vehicles – chat, social media – will not replace the old – phone and email. Instead, requests will come through every means available. The customer decides which vehicle he or she prefers.

In addition to the traditional one-to-one communication via phone and email, customer support organizations are also encountering:

- Newer one-to-one channels like SMS and online chat
- More self-service options
- Social many-to-many tools like Facebook, Twitter, and online forums

While phone is still a primary channel customers use to interact with customer support departments, its predominance (along with email’s) is decreasing. Other vehicles, meanwhile, are growing in use. It’s not that phone will go away, but that the field of contact will widen more and more, each vehicle with its own slice of the customer conversation.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are now significant channels for customer support. Almost 20% of people using Twitter seek customer support from a business each month, and 61% seek information about products or services.¹ And the increase is happening in both B2B and B2C scenarios.

Volume of Social Media Interfaces

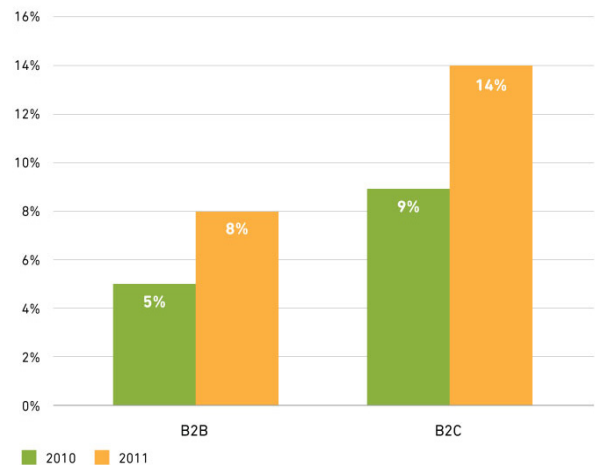


Fig. 1 Volume of Social Media Interfaces (Source: TSIA Social Media Survey)

¹ 5 Social Media Stats and Why Dealers Should Care, ISMDealers.com (November 9, 2010)

Businesses have little choice but to use social media as a customer service vehicle. In recent times, both governments and companies experienced the power of outcries from the masses on Twitter and Facebook. If you're not monitoring these closely and responding in appropriate and timely ways, your organization can be harmed . . . in some cases, beyond repair.

Mobile Technology

On the hardware side, your customers and employees can do more and more on mobile devices than ever before. Whether officially sanctioned or not, many support employees already make use of their smart phones, iPads, and personal accounts like Twitter and Facebook to solve their customers' problems because these channels make the support team's jobs easier. Being able to access your customer service system from anywhere frees them from only doing support while at their desks. Agents who are meeting with clients or working in conference rooms can pull out their iPad and check in with the requests coming in. Your response time will go down and your support will be more flexible.

Rather than fight this trend, the business that sets up its support organization to work across these multiple platforms will be better able to respond quickly to customers.

Moving Beyond Customer Service to Customer Engagement

The importance of customer service and support for a business's bottom line has only been increasing over the past decade as markets go global and digital. According to a survey by Forrester Research, 91 percent of decision-makers said elevating their customers' experience was a mission-critical goal . . . and 68 percent planned to increase their spending in that area.

Customer loyalty is increasingly hard to maintain as more and more options and new products make it to market each year. Rather than use just price or product, companies must differentiate themselves by providing their customers an exceptional experience and by engaging with them in ways never before possible. Offering a great price leaves business open to being undercut; offering the customer a great experience builds long-term loyalty.

What enterprise organizations require is to stop thinking of customer service merely as a cost center, but instead think of customer engagement --- which combines service, satisfaction, and loyalty --- as the key to ensuring both satisfied customers and increased profitability. Below are some tips to optimize customer engagement.

- Be ahead of the curve. It is clear that the younger generations are adopting new and multiple communication channels. Some are your current and most will be your future customers. This Gen Y consumer abandons traditional communication vehicles in favor of online and increasingly social channels. The future customer will want to communicate using IM, Skype, Twitter, and whatever the next hot communication vehicle is.

- Drive proactive rather than reactive customer conversations. Using communication vehicles such as social media and online forums gives your business a chance to more proactively address customer concerns and gather feedback. Rather than sitting back and waiting for the customer to come to you, these give you an opportunity to proactively engage them. This can lead to very valuable feedback and goodwill not as readily available in more traditional channels.

- Save time and money. Offering multiple communication vehicles gives your organization more deflection opportunities – moments when a customer can get the service and support they need without picking up the phone or walking through your front door. There are cost benefits to this.

Customer Service Channel	Approximate Cost Per Contact
Call center technical support	12 and higher
Call center CSR	6 and higher
Web chat or callback	5 and higher
Email response	2.50 to 5 and higher
Web self-service	0.10 or less
Source: Forrester Research, Inc.	

Table 1 Approximate Cost of Service Channels Per Instance

The point is not that offering phone service is bad, but by being where your customer wants you to be, you provide more cost-effective measures for when they are appropriate. Zendesk customer Animoto experienced this directly when they opened up a web self-service channel. Despite an increase of 300% to 400% in customer traffic to its knowledge base, the number of emails and service tickets declined.

- Increased customer support opportunities means more sales opportunities. Operating your support and service across multiple communication vehicles doesn't just divide up your requests; it can potentially increase them. This means you have an expanded influence. At Zendesk, we have seen some of our customers receive 95% more mentions on Twitter than they get email requests. By making themselves available to that increased percentage, they have the potential to reach their customers proactively.
- Working on mobile platforms like iPad, iPhone and Android can reduce support backlogs. By using multiple platforms within your support team, you open up the time and areas in which support can happen. The benefit of a cloud-based solution is that your support team can be connected away from their desks wherever they can get on the Internet.

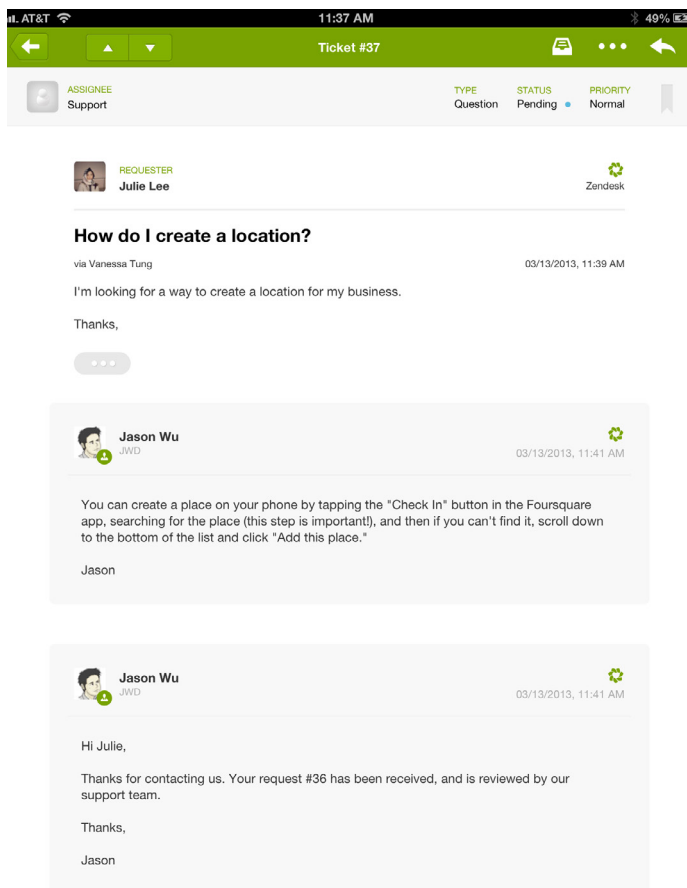


Figure 2 Zendesk for iPad

Optimizing Customer Engagement

The need to engage your customers through multiple communication vehicles must be accompanied by a strategy to maintain and integrate them. It's not enough to open the door if no one is there to greet them.

Understandably, a company may be wary of spreading itself too thin, or of opening up support floodgates. A company that provides multiple ways for contact raises expectations that they will be providing better service. While this is of course a good thing, your organization must live up to it.

To optimize and benefit from your customer engagement strategy, you need:

- Unified tools and processes
- Working cross-channel communication (e.g. when a support request moves from email to phone)
- A strategy of monitoring and engagement
- At least one live – or at least very humanized – communication vehicle

When Conversations Move from Vehicle to Vehicle

To be an effective support organization, you need to capture all your requests in a unified process and set of tools. The proliferation of communication vehicles can lead to a discordant organizational experience with one of your support agents checking email while another is communicating over Twitter. It is a classic problem of the right hand not knowing what the left is doing.

Sadly, that is very often the case. The authors of "The Cross Channel Customer Experience" report that "[w]hile many enterprises have accelerated their implementation of select, new communication channels, very few have tied them together into a complete system of customer care."² The result is a scattered, reactive organization, reaping none of the benefits stated above.

Instead, organizations need all their customer communications to feed into a central tool with a unified set of business processes. While requests may arrive in different ways, the organization should treat them all the same way at some level. This will reduce overlap of efforts, ensure consistent responses, and simplify the management of your support team.

² The Cross Channel Customer Experience: Challenges, trends and gaps in customer expectations across 16 key economies, alcatelWLucent.com (April 27, 2010)

How Zendesk Helps Communication

Within Zendesk, each customer interaction is captured in a single ticket regardless of the communication vehicle. Additionally, all the data you have on that customer, as well as their entire support history, is also easily available alongside that ticket. A customer can post a tweet that Zendesk turns into a ticket; and then turn that ticket into a live chat. All those channels are seamless for the customer while appearing as one interaction to the support agent.

Key Benefits of a Unified Tool

- Keeps things from falling through the cracks. In a page taken from David Allen's "Getting Things Done" system, a singular inbox keeps things from getting lost. By reducing the number of places your support organization must maintain and review, you also increase their efficiency.
- Ensures cohesion in terms of support philosophy and goals. By using a single tool to collect and organize your customer service requests, you encourage a consistent approach to support within your organization.
- Improves Support Center Efficiency. When your organization requires fewer tools, your agents become more focused and incur less switching costs than when trying to use multiple tools to handle their channels.

Zendesk as a Unified Tool

Zendesk supports multiple communication vehicles from email, chat, social media, and phone; and feeds them into a central ticketing system. All your interactions with a customer are captured in this ticket. You can use multiple ways to communicate, but you only need one tool to manage it.

Ensure That It Works

Customers are often switching from one communication vehicle to another when interacting with your company. In a report on cross-channel communication, Forrester found that "[m]ore than 71% of customers reported that they go from the Web to some other channel when researching and buying, and 74% of customers said they move from the Web to another channel when getting service."³

When they switch from one vehicle to another, it is often recorded as two separate interactions by the support organization; while to the

customer, it is simply one continuous experience. The confusion on the support organization side results directly to frustration for the customer. To avoid this situation, you need to lower the confusion on your end.

Ensure that any data that has already been collected from the customer on your end stays with them through the whole interaction. As this is often a technology problem – a chat system that can't talk to your ticketing system – it further reinforces the need for a unified tool.

The important thing is not only to allow your customers to move across channels, but to keep your channels tightly connected so that data flows easily between them.

Zendesk @ Work

With Zendesk, alerts and notifications (emails, texts, Twitter DMs) can be set up to notify agents about incoming tickets and chats, as well as many other points throughout the support process. Also, Zendesk for Twitter and Facebook gives you the chance to create and save searches right within the tool. You can add your industry name, your product name, anything you want to monitor. Any and all mentions of your company can be automatically turned into tickets.

Offer Live and Self-Service Options

While self-service and email support are often enough to resolve your customer support issues, supplying a live vehicle – chat, phone, or even Twitter – is becoming more and more important. While it seems counter-intuitive, the increase in good self-service options for customers – from community forums to knowledge bases – makes live support agents more relevant, not less.

Customers who cannot resolve their issue through a self-service option or the delayed interaction of email need to be able to reach a human. Otherwise they feel helpless and can direct their frustration to their friends and social networks.

The implication is clear: it is important to offer your customers a way to reach you immediately when they need to. It is a balancing act – live support can be time-consuming – but it is one of the most effective ways to ensuring customer satisfaction.

Yet, with good self-service channels in place, as well as all your other channels, you will need fewer live support agents in place than you would otherwise, making multi-channel support much more cost-effective.

Live and Self-Service Channels in Zendesk

Zendesk offers a native live chat feature, as well as a number of integrations with phone services. Incredibly, some large Zendesk customers who have turned on the live chat feature have seen their ratio of emails drop to 30% of their tickets with chat taking the bulk of the 70%.

Strike A Balance Between Monitoring And Engagement

While we've talked a lot about centralizing and integrating your multiple support communications, it is also important to understand how each vehicle is different and treat each accordingly.

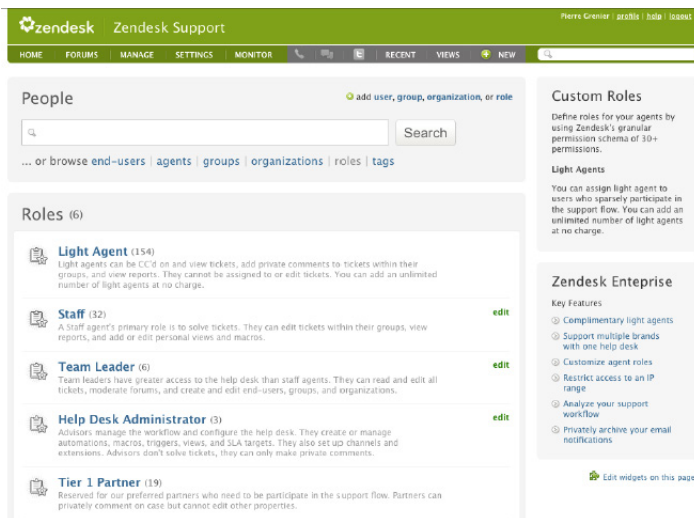


Fig. 3 Zendesk Enterprise delivers increased security, customization and workflows for greater efficiency.

While it is up to your customer service organization to decide on your engagement style, it is always a combination of monitoring the various communication vehicles and engaging the customer.

Email, phone, and chat are very reactive channels – your agents wait for the customer to initiate the interaction. Because of that, they require some immediate engagement from your agents. To facilitate this, alerts need to be set so the agent is notified when an email has come in, a chat has started, or a customer is on the phone.

Social media channels and customer forums allow you to be more proactive. While they have their reactive components, they require much more monitoring. You can create rules that notify you about conversations mentioning specific names. But you don't necessarily need to engage them right away. Sometimes sitting back and listening can be more valuable.

On the flip side, you also don't need to wait for the customer to initiate the conversation. Your service and support organization can also post updates about your product, or initiate conversations about it.

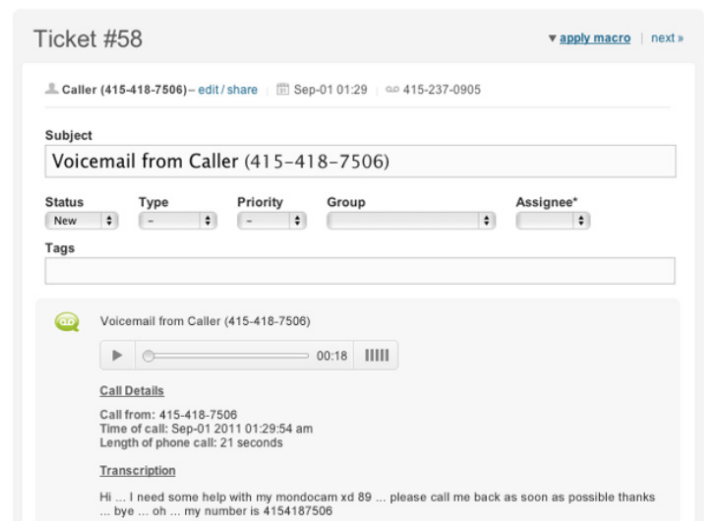


Fig. 4 Zendesk Voice captures phone calls and voice mails as customer service tickets.

Where To Go Next

Customer engagement is happening more and more across multiple communication vehicles. Therefore, the savvy enterprise should open up as many communication vehicles as possible to meet customers where they want to be met. While this can seem like one more challenge to your team, adopting a cross-vehicle approach to support as well as making it possible for your support team to work on mobile platforms will make your support organization more effective and better able to turn support interactions into sales opportunities.

The most important thing to remember when supporting multiple communication vehicles is that you need a unified tool to do it. As channels proliferate, the need to engage with them is not only a best business practice but also a criterion for success.

How to Get Started

Want to take advantage of customer service across multiple communication vehicles but not lose your mind doing it? Sign up for Zendesk. You get a 30-day free trial and we have a lot of resources to help you see whether it's a good fit for you. Already have an account?

Visit us to sign up for a free 30-day trial at www.zendesk.com

About Zendesk

Zendesk builds cloud software for better customer service, bringing companies and their customers closer together. With Zendesk, companies engage directly and openly with customers, building more meaningful customer relationships that last a lifetime. More than 30,000 companies, such as Gilt Groupe, Disney and Box, use Zendesk to provide service to more than 200 million people worldwide. Founded in 2007 and based in San Francisco, Zendesk has offices in seven countries and funding from Charles River Ventures, Benchmark Capital, Goldman Sachs, GGV Capital, Index Ventures, Matrix Partners, and Redpoint Ventures. Learn more at www.zendesk.com.