



Traditional Service in a Digital World

*Organisations need to reconsider how they interact with customers. **Criticleye** explores why leaders must introduce digital strategies alongside established principles of good service to meet increasing customer expectations*

Many businesses are losing customers because they've forgotten some of the long-established principles of good service. Now it's a case of going back to basics, while coming to terms with what has really changed – the speed at which customers want things done and their assumption that it will be delivered in a way that is tailored to their needs, regardless of channel.

Sue Willis, Managing Director of Customer Experience & Channels for UK Banking at Santander, comments: "I don't think the definition of good customer service is changing. For me, it's still about meeting and, if we can, exceeding expectations – what I do think is evolving is how you meet those expectations. Fuelled by technology, customers want convenience, individualisation and speed."

A shift has occurred which means many organisations need to completely rethink how they perceive and interact with customers. **Bill Payne**, Vice President for Customer & Industry Practice at business outsourcing company Concentrix, says: "Companies are now waking up to the fact that even the most digitally savvy of us want to feel as though we're special – we want [customer service to be personalised](#) in both the physical and digital domain."

Make no mistake, it's an unforgiving environment. **Paul McNamara**, Group Chief Executive of financial services concern IFG Group, comments: "Customers expect organisations to be very well-organised internally in the way they're managing data. If they, for instance, do something as simple as changing their name and address

“Fuelled by technology, customers want convenience, individualisation and speed”

or contact details in one part of the company, they'd expect the whole organisation to know."

In addition to this, companies need to be able to deftly manage a two-way dialogue with newly empowered customers. **Anthony Fletcher**, CEO of online snack retailer Graze, says: "The major change is how nuanced you have to be online and how rapidly you have to respond. Occasionally you have to go and enter into conversations which were not originally designed to include the brand, especially in social media.

"For example, some people took a lot of offence to the fact that Graze started to retail a meat product and within hours this had become a very live debate on certain forums. There was definite pressure for Graze to respond and you have to decide how you're going to intervene and enter into what could be a personal conversation. It's a complex issue."

In practice, companies are struggling to come to terms with the practicalities of closer customer relationships across multiple channels. **Horace Chow**, General

Manager for Hong Kong & Macau at Microsoft, comments: "You need to define the scope of your services strategy very clearly so you don't overkill your commitment. There are things that we'd love to do but it takes immense investment.

"You must therefore have the ability to segment your customers based on whether they are high, low or medium value because you cannot provide the same type of service to everyone."

JOINING THE DOTS

Understandably, there is a lot of discussion about the use of analytics.

Paul says: "Particularly in financial services there's a huge amount of data, but the key is how you bring all of that together to learn and to spot the patterns and, importantly, to pull out the things which can help you to make decisions."

Sue says: "As much as our customers are using technology, we're doing the same at our end, analysing customer data to understand their digital footprint. It's completely transforming the way we understand our customers and helps us to provide the service they want."

It's allowing companies to be far more proactive. **Horace** says: "Customer service is evolving into two streams. One is still how you let the customer approach you when they need help. The other, which is becoming increasingly important, is for the company to tap into their customer community before they ask.

"You are not just reacting to your customer's request, you're actually anticipating what [they] will be looking for once they've procured your service." ►

Andy Boulton, UK Regional Vice President for Support at cloud and data centre provider Oracle, makes a similar point: “We do need to be good at what we call ‘fix on fail’ but actually our ideal is to try and identify where those problems might occur and then work proactively to prevent them before the customer even experiences them.”

However, data analytics isn’t going to provide a silver bullet. **Dominique Turpin**, Criticleye Thought Leader and President of IMD business school, says: “You can’t sit in your office and expect to understand what the customer really thinks. You have to go out and talk to them yourself.”

5 Tips for Delivering Great Customer Service

- 1. Breakdown silos** – customers expect employees to know the answers to their questions, regardless of where they sit in the organisation
- 2. Join the debate** – don’t shy away from social media, it provides the opportunity to have valuable conversations with customers
- 3. Use data** – analytics should be used in order to understand customers’ patterns of behaviour and the insights gained should be distributed among customer-facing staff
- 4. Locate value** – you can’t invest in everything. Identify your most valuable customers and spend where you’re likely to see the best ROI
- 5. Be proactive** – use customer complaints and product data to find where problems are likely to arise and fix them before they’re realised

If companies are to retain that personal touch, training and development will be essential. “There needs to be a process but staff have to be able to act and respond as individuals in unique situations,” says **Laura Haynes**, Chairman of brand consultancy Appetite.

“There have been some real success stories when employees understand the brand and its parameters but have the opportunity to make judgements and decisions at the point of contact with customers.”

Bill says that “many organisations need to upskill so the workforce can understand more about brand, service ethos and customer requirements without being scripted in everything they do”.

Fergus Graham, who until recently was Sales Director for Solutions at De La Rue, a supplier of identity and product authentication services to governments and multinationals, says: “What we needed to do was recognise how the customer perceived us and how they wanted to deal with us, and we then organised ourselves accordingly.

“For example, rather than, let’s say, two people dealing with the same customer, you’d have one person dealing with them across all of the services or products that we supply.”

If organisations are to attract and retain customers they’ll need to listen to them, look at what’s changed and find ways to take advantage of improved levels of engagement. **Anthony** says: “We can now have this direct relationship with our customers, whether it’s email, talking to them directly or through social media.

The key is to recognise this is an opportunity to build your brand. That’s the side of it to get excited about in my mind.” ■

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This article was inspired by a Global Conference Call which explored how the notion of ‘good service’ is changing. Find out more [here](#)

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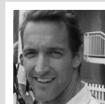
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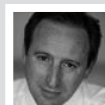
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