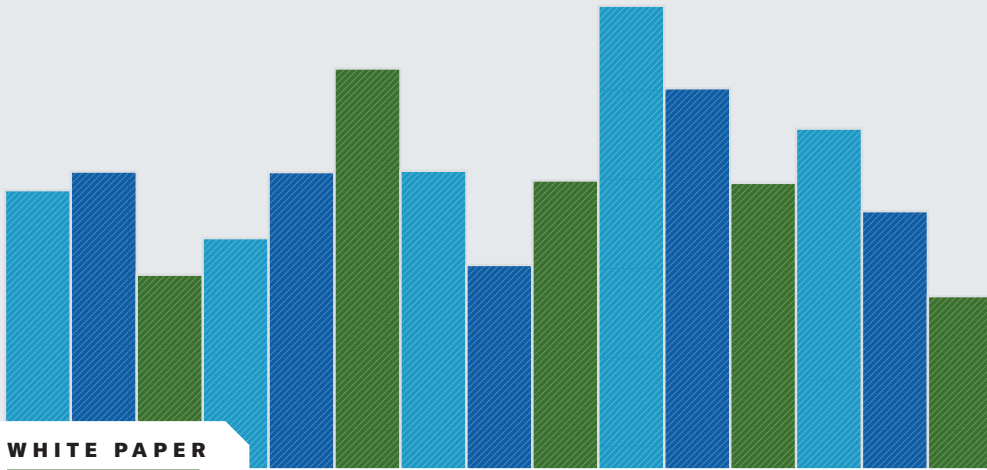




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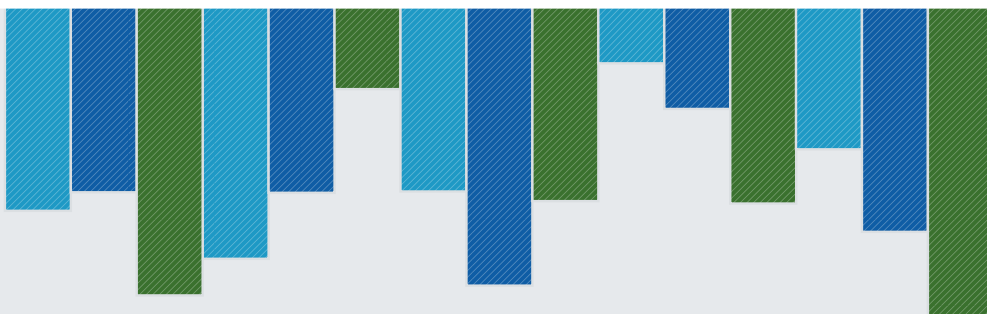
ANALYTIC SERVICES



WHITE PAPER

A Modern, Post-Covid-19 Model for Customer Care:

Successful Support Requires a Digital-Plus-Human Approach



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 **Teleperformance**

Delivering Personalized Experiences in Today's Virtual World

More than ever, people are seeking customer support and patient care through digital channels. The global crisis accelerated both the adoption of new channels and a permanent shift to remote work for millions. The result? When people need help, they want access to it via virtual means. However, they also still want experiences that feel personal—customized to meet their need in that moment.

At Teleperformance, we're in the people business. For more than 40 years, we've been connecting people with their favorite brands by providing the right balance between advanced tools and human empathy. We refer to this as our high-tech, high-touch approach, and it has always been core to our mission. Now, this fine balance has become even more essential for delivering the care today's post-Covid-19 customers expect.

People—consumers, clients, patients, members—want the right experience at the right time. What does that mean? That companies need to offer support via the right channels, in the right languages, and with the right level of support to address each individual need or request. They don't want to wait on hold to ask a live agent for store hours and locations. They also don't want to explain a complex issue to a bot. They want options.

People want to self-serve for simple inquiries, engage a bot for product-related questions, or seamlessly transfer to a live agent for more unique or complicated situations. They want moments that matter, connections that count, and support that's seamless.

They want the right experience at the right time, every time.

Experts at making virtual support feel personal, we combine advanced technologies that empower people to choose their own path, empathetic care when human understanding is needed, and actionable business insights that uncover trends to anticipate new customer needs.

Companies also want more flexible staffing and service delivery options. Whether they transitioned to work-at-home by choice or necessity, many have come to recognize the significant business benefits that come from offering employees a better work-life balance. With remote work here to stay, secure, advanced delivery models have also become a more pronounced business imperative. Our innovative Cloud Campus work-at-home model was designed from the ground up before Covid-19 to provide the most state-of-the-art virtual support model in the industry. That's why many of our clients have chosen to permanently include remote delivery as part of their operational mix so they can optimize business agility, ensure long-term business resilience, and access a broader, more talented workforce.

That's the future of CX and advanced business services, and it's here today.



Daniel Julien
Founder and CEO
Teleperformance

A Modern, Post-Covid-19 Model for Customer Care: Successful Support Requires a Digital-Plus-Human Approach

Covid-19 spurred a rapid deployment of artificial intelligence-driven tools and digital channels to meet new surges in customer contacts at a time when organizations struggled to connect consumers with live customer service agents. Since then, chatbots, automation, and other innovative technologies have proven their ability to bolster customer support, accelerate digital transformation, and empower agents.

Many of the world's largest brands now rely on chatbots to provide fast responses to customer inquiries using conversational dialogue. Data analytics tools can drive customer satisfaction and financial performance by empowering agents with knowledge. Even automating back-office functions, such as accounting, can boost business agility and improve customer experience.

Just ask Qingyi Sun, chief quality officer, at China Lodging Group, a hotel management company headquartered in Shanghai, who says, "Automation can better assist humans, improve efficiencies, accelerate response times, and reduce errors." In fact, the hotel management company relies on a wide variety of digital channels, including chatbots, a website, a mobile app, and self-service modules, to support its customers.

But the transformative power of technology isn't the only valuable takeaway from recent events. Daniel Hong, research director at Forrester who focuses on customer engagement, says a meteoric rise of customer queries and pressing concerns has transformed some customer service representatives into "empathy agents"—individuals whose mission is to provide the human touch required to diagnose a customer problem, understand any mistakes that might have been made, and ultimately find a solution.

As a result, a new model for customer care is fast emerging that combines the convenience of online self-service with instant access to a human

HIGHLIGHTS

A new model for customer care is fast emerging that **combines the convenience of online self-service with instant access to a human agent** when problems get confusing or complex.

For all the advantages of AI and chatbots, **the sheer volume of contact center solutions can overwhelm organizations**, making it difficult to prioritize human connections over digital channels.

A balanced approach to customer care involves **allowing interactions that focus on simple, much-asked-for information to be handled automatically by cognitive agents**, such as chatbots, while recognizing that some questions are better resolved by an experienced agent.



“Automation can better assist humans, improve efficiencies, accelerate response times, and reduce errors,” says Qingyi Sun at China Lodging Group.

agent when problems get confusing or complex. This way, organizations not only reap technological efficiencies; they also deliver the human empathy and emotional intelligence that only live agents can provide for increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. Better yet, by meeting these complex customer service needs with the right tools, third-party expertise, proper timing, and human touch, organizations can achieve a competitive advantage for sustainable growth and profitability.

This report delves into the importance of knowing how to deliver the human and technology-driven interactions customers need, when they need them, and via the channel of their choice. Using real-world examples, the report shows how each and every customer interaction is an opportunity to engender trust, transform people’s lives, and gain a competitive edge.

An Evolving Customer Care Landscape

A couple of key factors have pushed consumers of all ages to rapidly embrace innovative digital channels. For one, during the early months of Covid-19, call volumes reached unprecedented heights, forcing many consumers to embrace digital service channels such as online chat, messenger apps, and video support.

Another driving force has persisted for decades: the narrowing generational digital divide. Chatbots and self-service platforms, once the primary domain of tech-savvy Millennials, Zoomers, and other young generations, are

now more often the go-to support solutions for Boomers and those who might otherwise have relied exclusively on human agents.

This changing consumer landscape sets an extraordinarily high bar for customer service teams who must cater to a wide variety of expectations and varying degrees of comfort with key digital channels. On the one hand, social media and mobile-savvy consumers expect organizations to be available online at any time with high-quality customer experiences. They typically demand fast and seamless customer service on their own terms and often prefer finding answers and solutions themselves. In fact, Gartner predicted that by 2020 customers would manage 85% of their relationship with organizations without interacting with a human, largely due to the fact that Millennials prefer to handle customer service issues themselves.¹

Consumers from older generations, on the other hand, typically refuse to sacrifice the quality of overall customer care for the added convenience and technical efficiencies of digital channels. Accustomed to face-to-face interactions, many continue to demand a seamless, personalized experience, even when in-person isn’t possible—whether they are inquiring about an online purchase with a live agent or using a chatbot to solve a technical glitch, they expect a meaningful and consistent experience.

In fact, delivering a high-quality, personalized, and seamless customer experience across all channels, business lines, and products ranks as “important” or “very important” to the vast majority—88%—of the 256 respondents surveyed in May

2020 by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services. **FIGURE 1** Yet only 13% of respondents rate their organization as being “very effective” in delivering a personalized and seamless experience, showing that there’s room for improvement.

To truly create an omnichannel customer experience, organizations must adopt a blended digital-plus-human touch approach to service and support. Doing so not only promises to meet the ever-evolving expectations of consumers of all ages but it can also provide organizations with an opportunity for differentiation in a crowded marketplace.

The New Role of Technology

Fortunately, organizations are discovering new and innovative ways to strike a balance between the hybrid demands for both digital service and human touch. A perfect example is the increasing use of chatbots. This AI-enhanced software can quickly answer simultaneous customer inquiries on routine issues from multiple customers, freeing up agent time and resources.

At China Lodging Group, for instance, Sun says customers initiate more than 5,000 chatbot interactions per day. What’s more, he adds, “We have developed the outbound-call



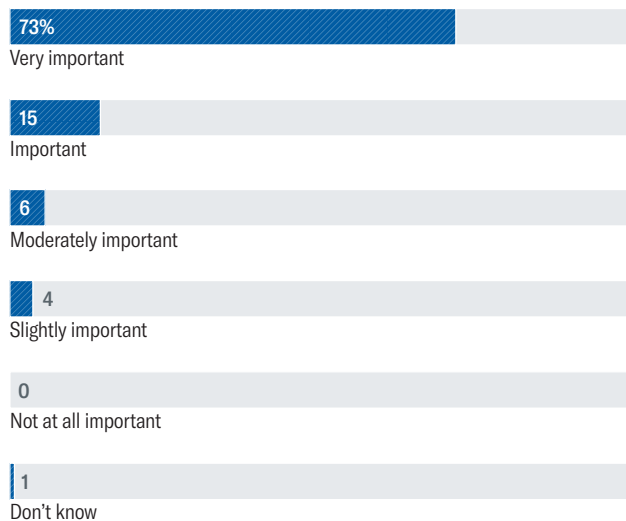
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FIGURE 1

The Customer Experience Mandate

A positive customer experience tops corporate priority lists—with plenty of room for improvement

How important is delivering a personalized and seamless customer experience (i.e., delivering a high-quality experience across channels, business lines, and products) to your organization’s overall business performance today?



Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, May 2021


robot ‘Hua Xiao Ai,’ which uses robots to replace humans in frequently outbound-call scenarios in hotels, which greatly improves frontline efficiency.”

But while chatbots can provide fast answers to customer queries, these requests tend to be routine and easily understood. More confusing or complex issues more often require the advice and guidance of a highly qualified agent.

Samsung Electronics Benelux took this distinction to heart when it came time for the distributor of computer electronic products to expand its roster of valuable service channels in 2018. According to Daan van der Mijden, director of customer service at Samsung, the goal wasn’t to “build a chatbot to solve all of our issues.” Rather, AI-powered chatbots handle 20% of Samsung’s digital conversations, the majority of which originate from Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp.

However, van der Mijden says, despite chatbots’ increasing sophistication, the software still can’t contextualize data—a fundamental requirement for human-like conversation. “If at any moment the chatbot recognizes that it is not leading a customer to an answer, it will automatically transfer to a live agent.” Nor can chatbots provide the human reasoning needed to diagnose certain customer concerns. Yet by allowing AI-based software to collaborate with live human agents, Samsung optimizes its interactions with customers while handling a higher volume of interactions than would be possible with a human workforce alone.

Another advantage of a blended approach to customer service is knowledge transfer. Samsung’s chatbots can confidently handle customer questions online until the chat is passed to a human agent via an automated customer service process flow. The result: the company’s live human agents can pick up the conversation where the chatbot left off, armed with important details such as the customer’s previous interactions with the company and attempts to resolve an issue.



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“Essentially, the chatbot collects valuable information from the interaction, which is then passed on to the agent so that he or she has a kickstart on the conversation,” says van der Mijden.

But chatbots aren’t the only part of a tag-team effort to improve customer experience. Once a digital conversation is transferred to a live agent, the agent turns to an AI-driven customer support solution for algorithmically accurate guidance. Dubbed “Collective Memory,” this system relies on sophisticated machine learning algorithms to continuously “read and interpret what the customer and agent are saying,” says van der Mijden. Based on this input and previous interactions, Collective Memory makes predictions and helps the agent offer the best solution or course of action for customers.

Agents can opt to reject or modify these recommendations or pass them along to the customer. In the event that an agent rejects any of the answers offered by Collective Memory, the system will analyze that choice and continue to learn, adapting through machine learning and improving its answers based on previous responses and interactions with other employees and customers. By making recommendations rather than simply replacing a live service agent, Collective Memory combines the best of both worlds—the predictive powers of machine learning algorithms and the natural instincts and knowledge of highly qualified human agents.

Adobe is another organization capitalizing on the symbiotic relationship between data analytics and human reasoning.

As with any software company, Adobe’s customer support agents are often critical players in reducing customer churn. For this reason, Nitesh Chetri, Adobe’s director of customer service and support, says the company relies on data analytics to provide agents with detailed information “on how long a customer has been with Adobe, the type of subscription they have, and how they use our solutions.” Using these granular insights, agents can provide customers with personalized and targeted incentives to maintain or renew their subscriptions, while still protecting the company’s recurring revenue model.

But data gleaned from purchase histories and routine queries aren’t the only building blocks for quality customer care. For years, organizations have relied on supervisors to manually review thousands of hours’ worth of customer service calls to flag everything from commonly asked questions to serious complaints. The problem, says van der Mijden, is that while supervisors “can check the logs of agents, they aren’t always the most complete or reliable, especially when agents must answer thousands of calls every day.”

Enter speech and text analytics. These AI-powered tools can provide deep insights into customer-agent conversations by converting unstructured data stored in the audio of recorded calls into structured data that can be parsed and analyzed for insights.

Take Samsung, for example. In the past, when the distribution company launched a new product, van der Mijden says, “all we could do was ask agents to listen to calls and maintain logs on customer feedback. But with speech and

text analytics, suddenly we discovered that voice is big data. After a few days, we had massive amounts of really valuable insights for our sales and product development divisions.” These insights might range from the shortcomings of a new product feature to common delivery complaints. Either way, speech and data analytics allow Samsung supervisors to mine vast volumes of voice data for information that could lead to product enhancements, warehouse inventory changes, and ultimately, better customer experiences.

Another valuable use case for speech and data analytics is agent performance. For instance, Samsung carefully mines its customer call data for significant pauses in conversation—moments of silence between agent and customer that could indicate a lack of knowledge or poor training.

“With speech analytics, we can identify silent time in voice conversations,” says van der Mijden. “From there, we can start working to improve the quality of agent-customer conversations.” In some instances, this might entail training agents to become more empathetic, respond more politely to queries, or take ownership of a difficult conversation. Regardless of the need for improvement, van der Mijden says the upside is typically “reduced handling time and improved customer experience.”

Roadblocks to Excellent Customer Care

For all the advantages of AI and chatbots, the sheer volume of contact center solutions can overwhelm organizations, making it difficult to prioritize human connections over digital channels. “We get so wrapped up around mobile or AI, we get mired in the mechanics of technology and lose the meaning of the work,” says Jeanne Bliss, a customer experience adviser and keynote speaker. “All of these parts must come together to present respect, trust, and awareness to give customers what they desire, when they need it.”

Part of the problem is knowing where to draw the line between human and machine. A balanced approach to customer care involves allowing interactions that focus on simple, much-asked-for information to be handled automatically by cognitive agents, such as chatbots, while recognizing that some questions are better resolved by an experienced agent who can connect with the individual at an emotional level.

For this reason, Bliss says, “intuitiveness must be wired into a chatbot so that it’s able to recognize when a customer is at the point at which they need to interact with a human.”

But determining the precise moment at which to relinquish an online interaction to an empathic agent is not always easy, particularly if an interaction is in a language other than English. In the case of Samsung, for example, van der Mijden says, “sentiment analysis in Dutch or French is not reliable enough for a chatbot to recognize if a customer is angry.”



“We get so wrapped up around mobile or AI, we get mired in the mechanics of technology and lose the meaning of the work. All of these parts must come together to present respect, trust, and awareness to give customers what they desire, when they need it,” says Jeanne Bliss, customer experience adviser and keynote speaker.

One way to address this issue is by ensuring customers can seamlessly and easily transition from chatbot to human agent at any given time. “Customers must have the ability to opt into the conversation mode that’s right for them in the moment,” says Bliss. “For example, if a customer is in chat and needs to switch to a human agent, companies need to figure out how to make that segue happen quickly and easily.”

Best Practices for Better Service

There are best practices organizations can embrace to overcome challenges and balance human touch with automation to deliver a thoughtful customer experience.

One way to keep customers happy and agents productive is to regularly monitor and modify technology solutions for increased accuracy. For example, given Samsung’s wide array of products and services, van der Mijden says it wasn’t always easy for the company’s system to accurately diagnose customer issues and provide agents with a highly accurate course of action. By regularly monitoring the system, however, he says the company was able to detect “if a certain cluster of answers received a lot of negative feedback from agents or were rejected or not used”—a key indication that experienced agents were repeatedly overruling the guidance of an algorithm, often for good reason. Indeed, only by drawing from the feedback and actions of agents was Samsung able to truly optimize its digital system to deliver a compelling omnichannel customer experience.

Another best practice for balancing human intelligence and digital channels is embedding customer experience in a company’s DNA. “As the brands we provide become more and more abundant, customer needs are becoming more and



“[Customers] don’t want to get in touch with an agent; they want to help themselves. That’s where live agents come in—there are complex issues that need a human touch and there are matters that don’t need a human touch and can be solved by customers themselves,” says Nitesh Chetri, director of customer service and support at Adobe.

more diverse and individual,” says Sun. “We need to provide more warm and personalized services.”

To achieve these goals, and make customer experience central to its corporate mandate, Sun says China Lodging Group “established a golden handbook as the criterion and guidance for [customer] service, emphasizing the spirit of treating guests like relatives and friends.”

Nevertheless, experimenting with new and innovative digital channels, from chatbots to speech analytics, can present considerable risks to companies where customer experience is not their core competency. In fact, selecting the right mix of people, processes, and technology can be overwhelming for in-house customer care teams, especially as technology solutions multiply. For this reason, partnering with a seasoned digital and integrated business services provider can help by allowing clients to tap into decades of experience and innovation. What’s more, third-party providers work with a wide array of industries, across continents, which allows them to spot market changes, as well as trends in customer support, at an early stage.

Recognizing a customer’s contact preferences early on in a session can also ensure technology enhances humans on the job—and vice versa. “A lot of customers are much more comfortable helping themselves,” Adobe’s Chetri. “They don’t want to get in touch with an agent; they want to help themselves. That’s where live agents come in—there are complex issues that need a human touch and there are matters that don’t need a human touch and can be solved by customers themselves.” Creating a solution that seamlessly migrates a customer to a self-service portal, chatbot interaction, or live agent can mean the difference between a positive and a negative customer experience.

In fact, self-service channels, such as online communities that allow customers to share product information and tips, are increasing in popularity as customers become more and more tech savvy and information flows more freely between company and consumer. “Anything that empowers customers to find information themselves or conduct transactions themselves we’ll see more of,” predicts Hong of Forrester.

Still, legions of consumers continue to put their faith in live human agents to resolve complex issues. In response, customer experience adviser Bliss says, organizations must embrace “the attitude that call center agents are an integral part of a company’s customer growth engine.” More than simply responsible for troubleshooting products, she says, if trained properly and given the necessary tools, these “customer rescue artists” can better ensure that “when a customer finally reaches a human, they’re capable of giving more than just a pat answer. Rather, they are able to truly problem solve” with equal parts knowledge and empathy.

Conclusion

Certainly, as new market realities emerge, technology solutions such as AI-powered chatbots, data analytics, and self-service channels will multiply, providing customer care teams with new ways to think about the future of customer service. But technology efficiencies should not come at the expense of human connection and empathy.

“Technology is here to help us, not take over,” says van der Mijden. “Rather, the combination of human and machine is the ideal situation.”

Indeed, while innovative technologies can quickly address simple issues, they can also free agents to work on more complex and personal customer concerns with an empathic ear and personalized touch. Finding a partner with expertise and experience can help organizations strike the right balance between digital and human. The key benefits of achieving this balance extend far beyond deflecting customer traffic and accelerating issue resolution. Notes Chetri: “If you’re able to solve a customer’s problem in a way they want, when they want, that customer will become a promoter of your business—and that can go a long way.”

Endnote

- 1 Gartner, "Gartner Customer 360 Summit 2011," 2011. https://www.gartner.com/imagesrv/summits/docs/na/customer-360/C360_2011_brochure_FINAL.pdf.
Note: looking for updated numbers



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