

Why Today's Omni-Channel Strategies See a Disconnect Between Brands & Consumers

Exploring why there is a disconnect between brands and consumers; Why omni-channel strategies struggle when they're only focused on sales.



Overview

Omni-Channel Customer Service Trends

Omni-channel is now widely accepted as the strategy that will drive retail into the future. But the finer definitions of that strategy are clearly varied. Heck, it's still to be determined exactly how omni-channel is spelled (is it omnichannel??). Sure, in its simplest form, omni-channel is defined as a retailer's ability to sell its goods and services in both online and offline environments, with as close a consistent manner as possible.

But the broader retail strategy must be about more than just sales, right? It must be about branding. It must be about the customer experience. It must be about the multi-screen experience ([98% of Americans](#) switch between devices the same day¹). It must be about incorporating the social economy. This list could go on and on, and that's where the phrase omni-channel merges with contextual commerce – the ability to sell in a digital world, while also realizing people still want to shop in a physical store when most convenient.

One key area missing in that list is customer service. Omni-channel is often thought of as a sales strategy, but it's also as much a customer service strategy. This is especially critical since companies with strong omni-channel customer engagement experiences [retain roughly 89% of their customers](#), according to the Aberdeen Group². This white paper will explore the current state of omni-channel, and it will address the evolving role that customer service plays into the broader omni-channel strategy.

Omni-Channel Customer Service

The Current State of Omni-Channel

Larger retailers have typically been the group to make an attempt so far at incorporating an expansive omni-channel strategy. And even many of these retailers' strategies vary to some degree of sophistication. Part of the reason why is that many retailers are simply estimating what their omni-channel strategy should be, rather than knowing for sure what, exactly, their customer really wants. It's quite possible that a retailer is forcing more online options at the customer when in reality the customer still wants a physical store-heavy experience in some instances. For example, many in the automotive retail world want to drive more online leads, but are you ready to buy a car without going to the dealership?

This is where omni-channel gets interesting, and also why it has to be about more than just sales. A customer experience is shaped far beyond the point of sale. Tracking inventory, shipping logistics, and managing returns all have omni-channel implications, yet aren't directly involved in the actual selling of a product. Sure, inventory and shipping are indirectly involved, but most people who buy in a store or online are probably focused on price, features, and benefits. Perhaps mostly online buyers may take shipping lightly into consideration during the decision to purchase.

What is clear, though, is that entering 2017, two key areas will be distinct drivers of omni-channel that will shape the strategy going forward: The consumer's desire to shop wherever they want, and how they want; and the fact that they will further embrace technology as part of the overall experience no matter the channel in which they choose.

Omni-Channel Customer Service

Omni-Channel Is More About Customer Experience Than Sales

No doubt, omni-channel represents great opportunity for businesses of all size, and in every industry. A key part of this will certainly be the reliance on continuously evolving e-commerce technology platforms that run everything from inventory, promotions, marketing, re-targeting, inventory, fulfillment, and order tracking. But it is now also running customer service.

And because all this technology makes for larger efficiencies in the shopping process, the customer realizes a better overall experience. However, there remains a significant disconnect in how brands are evolving customer service into their omni-channel strategy, and what consumers today want for their customer service experience.

Omni-Channel Customer Service

Just How Omni-Channel Is Today's Customer Experience?

Case in point, a recent online survey³ presented to roughly 550 brand marketers across a wide number of industries revealed that when it comes to the customer service experience in an omni-channel environment, 31.9% said they encourage calls to customer service agents, 24.6% said they encourage social media interaction, and 18.8% said they encourage in-store visits.

With those three representing the top three answers, two of which represent legacy customer service strategies, rather than a focus on what plays a large role in today's omni-channel environment – online. In fact, only 1.4% said they encourage the use of online FAQs for their customer.

However, a similar online survey was presented to approximately 2,250 consumers across the U.S., and the largest response to their desired customer service experience was at 23.9% who said “online materials and brochures”.

Omni-Channel Customer Service

Are We Properly Leveraging Predictive Analytics?

Another key element to the omni-channel strategy is the ability to predict what a customer wants. Some of today's largest online retailers do this masterfully with their focus on suggesting cross-sale options, or sharing with you what others also purchased along with your selected cart item. Again, predictive analytics is being used for sales, but not for customer service. The same survey above said that 55% of marketers collect data but aren't analyzing patterns of behavior during customer service, and 16% even said they do not collect any data at all. This means that 70% of marketers and brands are driving their customer experience with blinders on.

Disconnect & Frustrations During Engagement

Still too often, customers get bounced around from one customer representative to another. In the survey, 31% of customers said they get transferred two and three times per call, and another 39% said they get transferred at least once. This means there is still a lack of first call resolution for brands, which not only costs them dollars through customer service inefficiencies, but it also decreases the overall customer experience with their most loyal customers. Even worse, 48% of customers said they still have to input their personal information two or three times per customer service call.

Brands admit they have a long way to rectify many of these situations. A whopping 65% of brands admitted their customer service experience isn't designed to store customer personal information during a call.

Omni-Channel Customer Service

Summary

Today's omni-channel approach taken by many brands remains focused largely on the sales environment. However, their lack of inclusion of the customer service experience into a true omni-channel strategy only hurts their bottom line through increased customer experience frustration, leading to higher defection rates down the line.

How brands are approaching the customer experience through support, and what consumers expect remains far apart, even for some of today's largest brands in leading industries. A true omni-channel customer experience goes beyond just the selling point to also include customer service. And this in itself must extend beyond legacy strategies like in-store support and call centers to also include a wide variety of digital self-support materials, FAQs, interactive guides, tutorials and videos. With this approach, customers will have quicker, easier personalized access to the support materials they need, as well as customer service agents who no longer need to rely on outdated call scripts.

About DeviceBits

DeviceBits supports organizations driving toward a self-service customer support strategy by providing an integrated content delivery and information collection platform that efficiently aggregates multi-institutional, multi-national and public data into an analytics repository. The power of statistical analytics requires a sufficiently large dataset across a wide range of data types, including searches, forums, usage patterns, outcomes feedback and customer specific support and relationship management tooling. No one organization, even the very largest, has sufficient data to allow for true personalization of the user experience statistical analysis. However, by combining and integrating public and organizational data, sufficient scale can be achieved for statistically valid and actionable analysis.

Support data is both domain-specific and incredibly diverse, coming from multiple data sources, each with their own data structures and schemas or sometimes with no structure at all, known as free text. Each part of the organization has its own tools for support including; Sales, Technical Support, Customer Support, Marketing and Executives. This diversity creates challenges and opportunities to build patentable technologies around the collection and lexicon of the data sources. With this diversity, organizations can tear down their data silos and provide customers with a better experience with their brand through integrated, automated and self-optimizing support, known as DeviceBits SupportPredict.

All DeviceBits applications – Academy, Virtual Device Lab and DBAssist BOTS – are driven by this same data asset. Thus, DeviceBits implementations present a domain-familiar user experience to allow users to ask questions in a variety of ways, serve their needs in a variety of content models, and deliver answers in a medium where they are already spending screen time, all of this done easily and quickly based on the DeviceBits data science being applied in SupportPredict. Questions and troubleshooting, which once took several minutes or sometimes hours, can now be done in a few seconds. Users can resolve their issue or answer their question and expand their knowledge in a behavioral way that is backed and understood by the DeviceBits’ years of experience and millions of known user journeys.

This level of flexibility is essential to a “self-service” design principle in the Academy offering, allowing any user to serve their own requests without requiring them to understand an organization’s website, mobile app or website. This usability drives higher adoption of the platform on an accelerated timeline ensuring organizations can realize the immediate benefits of self service operations and the DeviceBits offering.

For more information or to schedule a demo, visit www.DeviceBits.com.

Appendix

- 1: “[Omnichannel banking: A consumer-first, not bank-first, experience](#)”; Mobile Payments Today; Jan 23, 2015.
- 2: “[Why an omnichannel strategy matters](#)”; DigitalCommerce360.com; Dec.31, 2013.
- 3: Online survey presented to 550 brand marketers, and 2,250 consumers across the U.S. April 2017; commissioned by DeviceBits.