

Ten Customer Service and Customer Experience Trends For 2017

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Amazon.com Inc. unveiled technology that will let shoppers grab groceries without having to scan and pay for them -- in one stroke eliminating the checkout line. Photographer: David Ryder/Bloomberg

Each year, new data comes out that indicates customer service and the customer experience (CX) are more important than ever. According to [Forrester](#), 72% of businesses say that improving the customer experience is their top priority. A study from [NewVoiceMedia](#) indicates that companies lose more than \$62 billion due to poor customer service. No company can afford to be a customer service laggard. So, what can leadership do to ensure they stay up, stay competitive and stay relevant? Pay close attention to what's trending in the world of customer service and CX. Here are 10 trends you shouldn't ignore. There's something here that will impact every type of business.

1. Customer service is getting better (even if it doesn't look like it). With the \$62 billion statistic mentioned above, one might think customer service is getting worse. I believe that it's actually getting better. What's happening is the best companies are setting the bar and creating a new, higher expectation. There is a new benchmark, and other companies, even with their efforts to improve, aren't able to keep up with customers' newfound expectations. The good news is that companies *are* making the effort, they are improving, and they can catch up to those new expectations.

2. Value and experience continue to trump price. Unless a company wants to be recognized as a low-cost provider, the value proposition of good customer service can make price less relevant. That's how smaller independent retailers can compete against big box stores. Think about how Ace Hardware stores compete against big box stores like Home Depot and Lowe's. Ace Hardware stores are typically a fraction of the size, don't have as wide a selection, and may not have the lowest price, yet they not only survive, they thrive. This concept is not limited to retail. It crosses into all types of businesses and industries.

3. Personalization creates a better customer experience. Technology has made it easier than ever to track customer preferences and history. Big data gives us trends and insights with uncanny accuracy. There is no reason to not create a more personalized experience that caters to a customer's individual needs.

4. AI and IA assist those who assist the customer. Artificial Intelligence is coming to the forefront of how a company creates a better CX. Machines' ability to interact with humans is stronger than ever. AI will help us make better business decisions, many of them positively impacting the customer. AI won't necessarily take over the human function, although in some places it can and will, but it will assist customer support people, becoming an IA , or Intelligent Assistant.

5. Chatbots are getting better. This ties into AI. The online text conversation we have with a company's customer support center may not be with a live person, but a computer. When a machine can create a positive experience for the customer, everyone wins. The best chatbots are able to not only respond to requests and questions, but also recognize when the customer is confused and seamlessly hand off the conversation to a live customer support rep.

6. There is more focus on "customer success." While it is not new, the concept of "customer success" seems to be gaining in popularity. There are certain products that seem to have higher levels of frustration or need for customer support. The goal of a customer success program is to ensure that the customer has success with the company's products. For example, when I recently bought a new software program, the company provided three coaching sessions that were scheduled at the time of purchase. This eliminated the frustration I might have experienced as I learned the new program (good for me, the customer) which would keep my follow-up support calls to a minimum (good for the company).

7. Proactive customer service is gaining in popularity. Companies are getting better and spotting problems and fixing them before the customer notices and complains. There are software programs that can alert companies to issues so they can be proactive in mitigating or eliminating problems. A good proactive service program creates trust and confidence.

8. The phone is being used less and less. Alternative customer support channels such as chatbots, social media customer care, self-service, etc., are gaining in popularity as customers learn how to use them more efficiently. It is doubtful that the phone will ever disappear completely as a way for customers to connect with a company. Some difficult-to-solve problems require that human-to-human interaction, but as a quick first line of support, the alternative channels are becoming the norm rather than the exception.

9. Fast, Faster, Fastest! Customers want a response. Numerous surveys have revealed abysmal results for response times to customer comments, complaints and questions on support channels such as social media, email, etc. For example, a 2016 study by Eptica showed that email response times averaged more than seven hours. The good news is that recent studies are showing the response times are speeding up. And by the way, the company that responds faster than its competition will stand out and win.

10. Convenience wins the day. This may be your ultimate customer service and CX weapon. How easy and convenient are you to do business with? Good service is table stakes. Your competitor is trying to outdo your customer service. So, all things being equal, how can an organization tip the scale in its favor? Convenience. Amazon is the poster child for today's concept of convenience. For example, its Dash button makes it as easy as pushing a button to order consumable supplies such as detergent, ink cartridges and much more. Amazon is even revolutionizing shopping with its new [Amazon Go](#) grocery stores. By featuring the most advanced technology, they have eliminated lines and the checkout process – you grab and go. If you want to win in business, figure out how to be more convenient than your competition.

There are dozens of other trends that I could have included here, but these are the ones that stand out to me. And it's because these 10 customer service and customer experience trends are all about the customer. They are the trends you must consider as you strategize on how to remain competitive and relevant to your customers. With that, I wish you a Happy New Year. Hoping your 2017 is the best year yet – with more great years to follow.

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