

The background features a hand interacting with a large, glowing cloud icon within a circular frame. To the left, a smaller circle contains a laptop icon. Abstract white lines and circles connect these elements. The bottom right corner has a solid orange shape.

Driving Innovation: Six Ideas to Get Ahead of the Competition

When you think of innovation, what comes to mind?

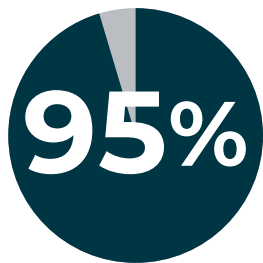
Most people automatically think of innovation as major advancements in technology that change our lives instantly. Things such as your smartphone, streaming video, and social media come to mind as examples. Our world is always coming up with a new and better way of doing things, and oftentimes technology is the means to do that. Interestingly enough, most innovation doesn't happen overnight.

DRIVING INNOVATION

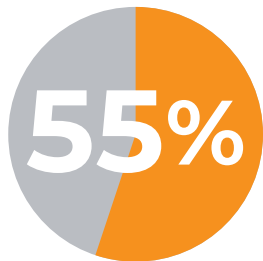
You may have innovative ideas every day without even realizing it. Solving problems using a new technique, thinking of a way to optimize operations, or making improvements in customer service are all forms of innovation. What seems like small, everyday actions can actually be a form of micro innovation. Several of these steps together can become the fabric of what propels an organization into the future.

Innovation can take several forms. In this whitepaper, we address innovation as it relates to keeping up with customer expectations and managing the experience. It used to be, if you had a problem or a question about a product or service, you'd just pick up the phone. Today, consumers demand more than just a phone call. They want a variety of ways to reach out, and your organization needs to be able to provide multiple ways and modes of communication for consumers to get their problem resolved the way they want to. Otherwise you could be turning away consumers without even realizing it. To keep your consumers happy and coming back to you with their questions, your organization needs to stay innovative.

To help spur innovation in your organization's overall customer experience, we've provided six ideas that could be implemented to put you ahead of the competition.



of customers use more than one channel to contact customer support.



of customers now prefer automated self-services.

INNOVATION #1: MULTI-CHANNEL

Today, customers are increasingly turning to electronic forms of communication as an alternative, from email to social media to live chats. In fact, according to research group Forrester, more than 95 percent of customers use more than one channel to contact customer support and 55 percent of customers now prefer automated self-services; a number that has doubled over the past five years.

First-class customer-focused organizations know that it is not just important to make channels available to customers but it is equally important to think about how those channels are integrated together to build a seamless, consistent customer experience (multi-channel).

The goal of multi-channel is to deliver a personalized and consistent experience for the customer, no matter what communication method they choose to use.

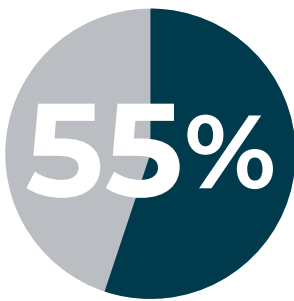
For example, a customer may commonly find himself going to a website, and then calling to get support on something that can't be resolved online. While they're on the phone with the agent, they work together with the online components to make sure the experience is as enriched as possible. This is the multi-channel experience, where a consumer is demanding multiple channels at the same time.



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However, the biggest task is having to handle and manage all of the channels at the same time. Since multi-channel requires a consistent experience throughout every channel, there has to be constant management to ensure that is the case all the time with every interaction.



Multi-channel contact centers had 55% less customer complaints.

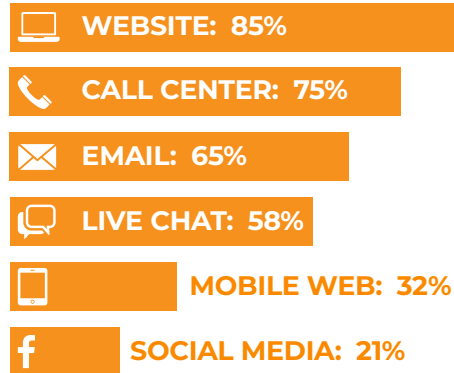
It's not enough to just offer the customer more than one way to reach out and engage with the brand. These different channels need to integrate seamlessly and intuitively not only with each other, but also the customer support model. If a brand offers a mobile app, but it doesn't offer a practical way to engage with customer service, it's a missed opportunity. Engaging customers in a personalized way across channels allows for a deeper connection and increased loyalty within customer relationships.

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INNOVATION #2: PREFERENCES

An effective way to determine what specific channels are most important is to look at your contextual support and see how your customers prefer to contact you and how they get to that point. This can help with prioritization, and determining if just a couple channels are sufficient, or if a multi-channel approach would improve the customer experience.

Fonolo, a leading provider in cloud-based call-back solutions, determined the following most popular ways that consumers like to communicate.



It's interesting that website has overtaken call center/phone as the preferred way for consumers to get answers to their questions. However, this shouldn't be too surprising, as our culture is spending more time on the internet and mobile devices. In fact, Salesforce predicts that mobile app support requests will increase by 38 percent in the next 12 to 18 months.

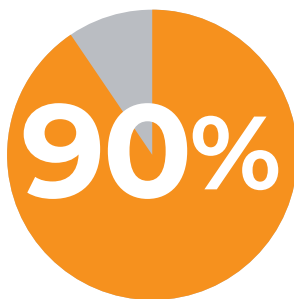
Since websites are the first thing that many consumers turn to, it's vital for organizations to integrate support channels into that experience and to provide more than one way for consumers to get their problems resolved. While a website is a good starting point for the consumer, it may not be able to solve their issue. Organizations need multi-channel support, which gives them the ability to easily guide the consumer from their website to a phone call, email, or live chat, etc., whichever is the consumer's preferred way to communicate, and also multi-channel support, so they can transition easily between the different channels.

INNOVATION #3: SELF-SERVICE

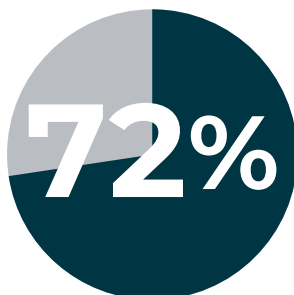
A major preference that's on the rise is self-service. People want their problem resolved as quickly and painlessly as possible, and sometimes that means looking for a way to solve it themselves. Salesforce ran a report that determined that 72 percent of people think using self-service features is a fast and easy way to solve their issue. Another statistic from Microsoft states that 90 percent of customers now expect self-service support, and 60 percent have a more positive view of an organization if their self-service support is mobile-responsive.

As demand for self-service applications rises, it is important to ensure the other channels are integrated into that experience, so that a customer can get help when needed. There needs to be representatives managing it and making sure that customers are getting their problems resolved.

Another important statistic to consider is that 75 percent of users think that calling is still the most effective way to get a quick response (New Voice). So, although self-service is a preference that's gaining traction, making a phone call is still the main way that customers get their issues resolved. This is likely to transition from phone to chat, SMS, and social over time. No matter how the consumer chooses to reach out, they will still demand personalized support when needed.



*of customers
now expect self-
service support.*



*of people think
using self-service
features is a fast
and easy way
to solve their
issue.*

INNOVATION #4: VIDEO CHAT

Doesn't everyone just love being on camera? Not so much, but that does not seem to be slowing to rise of video chat. Believe it or not, customers are asking for video chat. According to Customercare, 36 percent of customers want to use video chat for their customer service.

Customers want to be heard and appreciated, and knowing that they're dealing with a real person that can understand them and work to resolve their problem over video is a sign of great customer service.

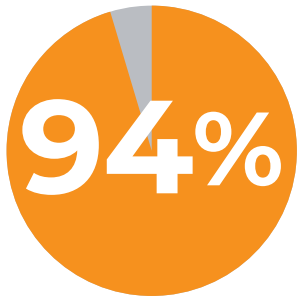
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More Ways To Communicate

For organizations that launch video chat as part of their customer service, they may be surprised at the dramatically new experience it creates for both the customer and the agent. While it does need to be carefully introduced, due to it being unfamiliar to customers, it adds a whole new element to the customer experience. It lets the agent and the customer use non-verbal cues, a significant factor in effective communication. This can help provide important insights into the customer's emotions and overall mood.

When implementing, focus on providing comprehensive agent training. It's likely new for them too, and the nuance of their actions can have a significant impact on its success. Things such as their own facial expressions and items as simple as looking into the camera instead of the screen can be critical to creating the right experience.

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of customers who live chatted with an agent were either somewhat or very satisfied with their service.

Increases Quality And Speed

Video chat can also lead to greater profit, quality, and loyalty, if implemented correctly. Customericare reported that people remember video 85 percent better than they remember text after three days. According to a study by Zopim, 94 percent of customers who live chatted with an agent were either somewhat or very satisfied with their service.

Why are more people satisfied with chat than other customer service channels? It seems to be the ease of access and speedy answer. The same Zopim study found that after interviewing consumers, 42 percent said that live chat's biggest selling point was that it provided instant availability to an agent, without having to wait.

Who Else Is Doing It

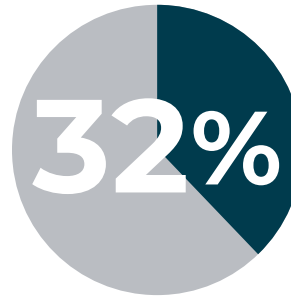
Amazon is one of the many companies that have hopped on the video chat train. They currently have thousands of agents that work solely with video chat customer service.

As more and more organizations implement video chat into their customer service strategy, it's a good idea to start considering if your own organization could benefit from it as well.

INNOVATION #5: THE CLOUD

According to a recent study by IDG Enterprise, 48 percent of enterprises are moving to the cloud to replace on premise, legacy technology, and 25 percent of total IT budgets will be allocated to cloud computing in 2016. Whereas cloud security used

to be a primary concern for many businesses, the perception is slowly changing to the point where security is now one of the primary selling points of using cloud-based services.



According to a Forbes report, 32% of IT budgets will be spent on cloud computing by 2021

For some contact centers, cloud technology allows them to become more agile, scalable, and able to react to changes in customer behavior faster, in order to gain a competitive advantage. It means they can scale back or add agents easily. Instead of having to build, assimilate, and oversee on premise hardware, they can use integrated cloud solutions and make changes without using developers. This allows for greater growth within the contact center by increasing the level of service that companies are able to offer. According to recent surveys, 36 percent of contact centers were using a cloud-based format by 2018. Expect those numbers to continue to rise as cloud technology becomes the preferred platform going forward.

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Having said all of that, moving to the cloud is not the right solution for everyone. There are several factors to consider around features, scalability, viability, and other areas. This is a great example of being innovative, but also exercising good common sense before proceeding.

INNOVATION #6: THINK LIKE A CUSTOMER

24/7 Support

It's important that innovation always be geared towards the customer's needs. An example of this is the concept of 24/7 service. Technology is an integrated part of our lives like never before. Since customers are constantly connected, they expect someone to be there when they have a question. That "someone" also needs to be available in a way that is convenient to the customer. That means online chat, email, social media, or even a do-it-yourself step-by-step resource on your website, as well as being available by phone. Wherever customers are trying to find you is exactly where you need to be, and that service needs to be available at all times.

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Customer-Driven Optimization

The idea of customer-driven optimization is something that is more prevalent now than ever before. Take for example how the Internet of Things (IoT) has changed the way companies are able to gather customer information. The IoT continues to expand the amount of information available to companies. It monitors how customers are using your product, what they're saying about it, and also uses your own data and analytics to continuously improve the product and expands its uses with other IoT products and services. Customers feel valued when they are heard. You already are receiving feedback through customer service interactions, social media, online reviews, and you probably (or should) have data tracking in place, so use this information to your advantage. Products and their capabilities will continuously evolve, and using



"Someone" needs to be available in a way that is convenient to the customer.

insights to adapt your product to the features customers want and need can help keep your product relevant and interesting, even as newer items are added to the IoT.

But the IoT is not the only area where this concept is important. Make sure you are constantly thinking of ways to listen to your customers through surveys, online reviews, social media platforms, and others.

Knowledge Drives Loyalty

The more value you offer to your customers, the more loyal they become. This is especially true with customer service. When customers call for support, they expect the representative to know everything about the product, including how it interacts with other products, mobile apps, services and more.

The more you're able to help solve their problem, even if it isn't directly or solely related to your product, the more value they will place in the time they spent with your customer service rep. A person's time is valuable, and if your service is top notch, that sticks with the customer. Innovation that is geared towards enabling your team to meet customer demands during that critical moment of an interaction will help your brand succeed.



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CONCLUSION

All of the ideas above have one thing in common: the customer wants their experience with an organization to be customized, personal, and easy. Knowing what your customers want, how they want it, and the easiest way to give them what they want is essential to providing a customer experience that keeps them loyal customers for the foreseeable future. Consider which idea you will start with and where you will begin. If you're not sure, ask someone that has experienced it before, or pull together a group of people in your organization for an ideation session to get the best thoughts on a go-forward plan.



Your customer base is always changing and so are their expectations.

Don't innovate just for the sake of innovation, but do know that your customer base is always changing and so are their expectations. It's your responsibility to stay in front of them, both in terms of envisioning the right customer experience and in executing on it day to day.

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