



Retailers Must Manage the Whole Customer Service Journey

Contact centers play a critical role in a retailer's success. Professional agents who are well integrated with the company can deliver an exceptional customer experience and have a significant impact on sales, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. At the same time, advances in digital technology and artificial intelligence are broadening the role of contact centers in providing customer service across the three domains of the customer service journey: digital properties, automated interactions, and live agents.

Radial and CFI Group recently surveyed 500 online shoppers to better understand their experiences throughout the customer service journey. The resulting feedback underscores the need for retailers to manage these domains in concert to deliver an excellent experience regardless of the path taken by individual customers.

DIGITAL PROPERTIES FORM A KEY STEP IN THE JOURNEY

Digital properties for a retailer can include websites, mobile apps, or other online tools and resources. A retail company's set of digital properties forms a critical component of its overall customer service efforts. In fact, 80% of customers say that, most of the time, they try to resolve their issue online (company website, online forums, mobile app, etc.) before contacting customer service.

Customers most commonly visit the company's website before contacting customer service. Since 60% of retail customers first try visiting the company website, ensuring that the site provides helpful tools and resources is critical. The devices customers use when visiting the website are fairly evenly split between laptops (29%), desktops (30%), and mobile devices (34%). Since a mobile device is the most frequently used device, retailers need to ensure the self-service options on the site are compatible.



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With a high proportion of customers first visiting the company website, retailers must manage the website as part of the overall customer service journey. Although 30% of retail website visitors say that the website is "very helpful" as part of getting their issue resolved, there are 21% who say the site is "not at all helpful." The satisfaction gap between these two groups, even after they contact customer service, is quite large. Those who find the website very helpful end up with an average satisfaction score of a high 86 (on a 0-100 scale), compared to a low 40 for those who see the site as not at all helpful.

Since roughly 1 out of every 8 (21% of 60%) customers finds the website to be of no help for resolving their issue, it is important that retailers implement a feedback loop from the agents to the

web team to relay issues that customers are experiencing with the site. In addition, agents should recognize that callers who are frustrated with their visit to the website will likely need to be handled with extra care.

AUTOMATED INTERACTIONS IMPROVE WITH VISUAL IVR

When customers contact customer service, they often first have an automated interaction. Automated interactions involve chatbots or IVR tools that reduce contact center costs while providing enhanced self-serve tools to customers. But customers are generally dissatisfied with the experience. For example, 32% of customers who contact customer service and reach an IVR system try to use the IVR system, but say it was insufficient for their needs and that they needed to talk to an agent. Another 37% simply bypass the IVR menu altogether in an attempt to reach a live agent immediately. In fact, customers who have at least some interaction with an IVR system have an average satisfaction score of 54, compared to 74 for those who never get an IVR system and reach a live agent directly.



But exciting new developments in technology may help improve the customer experience. Visual IVR, for example, is quickly changing how customers self serve, making it easier, faster, and more intuitive for customers to resolve issues on their own. Visual IVR enables the menu options to appear on a mobile device, allowing the customer to see the selections on their phone and click the answers to the voice-recorded questions. As customers increasingly grow comfortable navigating visual menus on their mobile devices, many retailers are beginning to take advantage of Visual IVR's convenient interface. Currently, 18% of those contacting retail customer service are already familiar with Visual IVR, and 55% say they are likely to use Visual IVR with a retailer for service inquiries if given the option.

Visual IVR and virtual assistants are viable solutions for creating an excellent contact center experience. However, contact center executives should be wary of trying to usher unwilling customers through these automated interactions. An ideal customer service

experience allows customers to select their preferred route. If Visual IVR is implemented well, customers will use it, creating both satisfied customers and improved contact center efficiency.

LIVE AGENTS MUST BE INTEGRATED WITH THE COMPANY

There is no replacement for professional live agents. Digital properties can be enhanced, and automated interaction technology can be implemented, but live agents remain the primary driver of contact center satisfaction. In fact, as more self-serve tools resolve issues for customers, the calls that live agents receive inevitably become more complicated, requiring well-trained and knowledgeable agents with advanced skills to resolve customer issues.

Unfortunately, agents in the retail industry have not adapted well, and performance scores have dropped considerably. Agent scores for “helping you find the information you need” and “being empowered to address your issue” fell 11% and 12%, respectively, over the past 24 months.

Much of this performance deterioration can be explained by the need for well-trained, experienced agents who have the tools needed to see a complete view of the customer. Customers cannot directly assess the tools and experience of an agent, but they do form opinions based on the the interaction with agents:

- 38% say the agent was integrated with the company
- 38% say the agent had a lot of experience
- 49% say the agent was well trained
- 55% say the agent had the tools needed to help

Retail contact centers that integrate agents with the rest of the company can expect to see dividends through greater CLV (customer lifetime value). Compared to the average customer, customers who experience a professional agent who appears to be well-integrated with the company have higher customer satisfaction (+19%), stronger customer loyalty (+17%), and a greater likelihood of recommending the company to others (+20%).

About CFI Group (www.cfgroup.com)

Since 1988, CFI Group has delivered customer experience measurement and business insights from its Ann Arbor, Michigan headquarters and a network of global offices. Using patented technology and top research experts, CFI Group uncovers the business drivers and financial impact of customer experience.

About Radial (www.radial.com)

Radial is the leader in omnichannel commerce technology and operations, enabling brands and retailers to profitably exceed retail customer expectations. Radial's technical, powerful omnichannel solutions connect supply and demand through efficient fulfillment and transportation options, intelligent fraud, payments, and tax systems and personalized customer care services.