Module 12

Online customer service

So your website is up and running, and you have the basics covered. Now it's time to think about turning good to great. Improving your online customer service can deliver big results including increased customer loyalty, reduced business costs, and more sales.

In this module, you'll learn about the basic customer service features every online business needs. You'll also discover new ways to take your customer service to the next level, and opportunities to help your customers help each other.

PART ONE: ESSENTIAL ONLINE CUSTOMER SERVICE FEATURES

Part 1: Essential online customer service features

Most customers now expect the same level of service online as they receive from bricks and mortar businesses. You might want to consider the following.

Your basic website structure

Customers want to quickly find and understand the information they need.

Is your website easy to navigate on computer, tablet and smartphone?

Remember that simple language is always best. If your business is international, think about translating content into other languages.

Contact information

On each website page, include a way to contact you - it could be listing an email address, telephone number, or live chat. Make it easy for customers to be in contact - which includes making your location, location map, postal address, returns address and opening hours available.

Frequently Asked Questions

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page that answers simple queries (such as your opening hours) can save time for both you and your customers. Consider including a search function so customers can quickly locate the information they need.

Customer queries and feedback forms

Make it easy for customers to find out more, and encourage their loyalty by inviting feedback. Make sure you respond promptly so your customers know they've been heard. Consider asking customers for feedback, or conduct a usability study.

PART TWO: OPTIONAL ONLINE CUSTOMER SERVICE FEATURES

Part 2: Live chat

Once you've got the customer service basics covered, you're ready to get more sophisticated. There are a few different low-cost features you can add to your website. But for a truly personal online customer service, live chat could be the answer.

Livechat messages come to you through your computer, smartphone or tablet. One example is Zopim where the livechat messages come through similar to SMS messages, which makes the process of replying to customers extremely easy. You can choose to show customers if you're online or not too - if you're not, customers can type their enquiry and leave a message for you. Increasingly people seek answers straight away so live chats coming through to your phone is a great way to help customers when they need it.

Benefits include:

Reduced customer service costs

While telephone consultants support only one customer at a time, live chat consultants can often manage multiple customer conversations at once.

Increased sales

Live chat is a chance to improve on-the-spot customer service, to troubleshoot, and to help match customers to services that meet their needs.

Live chat is much more than just a way to control costs. Done right, it can improve customer service and increase sales.

Live chat technology

Many software vendors, such as Olark, Zopim, Live Person, Bold Chat, and HelponClick, provide technology to integrate into your website. Some are free and others are surprisingly inexpensive. They also give you options on how you can respond to customers.

For example, you could have:

- Livechat with a customer service rep via instant messenger.
- Click-to-call technology that enables a customer to speak to the same consultant every time.
- Automatically generated responses to common questions.

Making live chat work for you

A few things you can do to get the most out of live chat:

Don't ask your phone consultants to manage your live chat

Unless your company is truly tiny, use different customer service reps to respond to chat and phone inquiries. That way, each staff member can be focused on the task at hand.

Don't overload reps with too many chats

If the questions or products are complicated, you may want a one-to-one ratio. Reps answering more general questions can often manage up to a half dozen enquiries at once.

Don't have a chat button on the site unless there's someone standing by

One of the quickest ways to alienate customers is to have them click 'Chat now' only to find there's no response. Fortunately, chat software can either remove the chat option, or replace it with 'Leave us a message,' when chat reps are unavailable.

Use scripts – wisely

Using pre-prepared / scripted responses can be efficient. Match the tone or content of your organisation and refine scripts to match enquiries.

Go beyond chat

Customer service chat can give reps the chance to promote specific webpages (such as a service matching the customer's need) by including links in their chat messages. With the customer's permission, reps can also take over the customer's browser to assist their learning or troubleshoot. Both can be effective ways to give customers targeted information about your products.

PART THREE:
CREATE AN ONLINE
CUSTOMER
FORUM

Part 3: Creating an online customer forum

Creating opportunities for your customers to support each other through establishing an online forum can be one of the most powerful ways to deliver customer service.

Customer benefits:

- Customers feel they are part of a community.
- Peer support often results in quick answers to common customer queries.
- The answers customers give each other are often better than answers from staff.
- While negative comments may be posted from time to time, a forum can create a better sense of trust between you and your customers.

Additional business benefits:

- You don't need as many resources to answer common questions.
- By monitoring posts, you can quickly identify and address problems.
- A well-informed, engaged forum member could become a future employee.

Online forum technology

Many companies offer the technology you'll need to create an online customer forum on your site, and most online forum technology can be tailored with your own logo and branding.

Further resources

If you want more information about online customer service, these resources may help. All information was current at the time of writing.

www.flyingsolo.com.au/forums - An active online forum for small businesses for you to see how it works.

Forum tool example:

Websitetoolbox.com

Livechat solutions:

Olark.com

Helponclick.com

Boldchat.com

Liveperson.com

Zopim.com