

Digital Customer Service (DCS): 7 Best Practices to Go from Dreadful to Delightful

Driven by generational preferences and accelerated by the recent pandemic, consumers have gone from digital-first to often digital-only when it comes to customer service. The only exception is transactions that cannot be done over digital channels or a very complex query that requires human involvement and/or brick-and-mortar interaction. Yet, the predicted decline in phone volumes has not quite matched reality. According to Gartner, the main reason phone



Done right with a rich, proven solution for conversation management, knowledge management, and analytics, and infused with AI and ML, DCS can take your customer service from dreadful to delightful at warp speed!

calls persist is because businesses are not doing a good job with digital customer service (DCS), leaving customers no choice but to resort to the dreaded phone customer service (Source: Advance an All-Digital Customer Service Initiative by De-emphasizing Telephone Calls by Steve Blood). The result? Horrendous phone wait times, clueless conversations, and customer rage! No wonder industry benchmarks like the Forrester CX Index have been stuck in neutral with the 2022 CX Index being exactly the same as the one for 2018! The question then is what is the path to DCS excellence? Here are six steps to getting there.

1. Make self-service smarter

One of the biggest reasons customers pick up the phone for service is that they cannot find answers or resolve problems on company websites. In fact, in a survey of nearly 18,000 consumers, CEB (now part of Gartner) found that 58% of callers had unsuccessfully tried self-service on company websites when they reached out to the call center. A survey of 5,000 consumers by Forrester Consulting also found that the inability of companies to answer

customer questions on their websites is one of the top pain points in DCS. No wonder consumers pick up the phone in anger and frustration, which is not good news for agents, who have to bear the brunt of it all!

Make sure you back your digital self-service with a robust knowledge management (KM) system that helps customers find answers with search methods that go beyond simple keyword search to include virtual assistance, natural language search, faceted search, and AI search (e.g., instant answers, leveraging Large Language Models (ala ChatGPT)). You can then take it to the next level by leveraging AI reasoning for self-service. Reasoning technology solves problems and provides advice to customers through a conversation like a human expert would. Here are a few examples from our clientele:

- Clothing and home décor retailer deflected 40% of phone calls to contextual digital self-service and agent-assisted digital messaging
- Fortune 200 manufacturer, whose name is synonymous with tires, serves OEM clients and customer service associates in hundreds of retail stores with our digital-first conversation hub, using virtual assistance, messaging, and chat, backed by our knowledge and AI hub
- Hypergrowth digital retailer in the UK was able to deflect up to 90% of phone calls with digital self-service through knowledge-guided self-service across multiple brands

2. Push the digital CX limit

When you design customer service processes, think digital-first, if not digital-only. Don't be constrained by the limitations of legacy systems that lack cutting-edge digital functionality or point products for digital engagement that break down when the interaction calls for rich capabilities or the process involves more than one digital touchpoint in the same interaction.

Beyond digital self-service, a best-in-class DCS solution would provide deep capabilities to engage customers through messaging (SMS and social messaging apps), text and video chat, AI-guided digital self-service, secure cobrowse with simultaneous chat or phone conversation to handhold customers through website navigation and form-filling, proactive DCS through omnidigital notifications, etc. Best-in-class DCS solutions also deliver a connected experience across those touchpoints through a conversation hub.

For instance, channel-integrated, knowledge and AI-enabled chatbots can answer queries, take customers on a website tour, push relevant web pages, and escalate with context to a live agent, when needed, with all the context intact. Secure, cobrowse-aided form-filling with concurrent chat or phone conversation (such interactions are called "multimodal") can help avoid an expensive customer interaction in a branch office. In fact, cobrowsing leads all touchpoints in CSAT at 78%, according to Forrester! Likewise, video chat might help avert a field visit by an insurance claims expert or reduce the need for shoppers to drive to a retail store. This reduces effort for the customer, cost for the business, and even damage to the planet! Here are some examples from our clientele:

- Fortune 10 company sends 1.5 billion digital notifications per year for proactive and preemptive customer service, informed by knowledge and powered by our conversation hub.

50%

reduction in agent
training time

37%

improvement in First-
Contact Resolution

30%

improvement in Net
Promoter Score

- Behemoth US government agency deflected up to 70% of incoming calls to knowledge-backed virtual assistance, reduced case handling time by 25%, and elevated agent engagement to 92%, beating their industry benchmark of 67%!
- The retiree service arm of one of the most populous US states serves over 2.6 million retirees with our secure cobrowse capability, where customers can fill forms online to claim retirement benefits without having to go to a branch office. eGain Cobrowse enables the contact center to hide sensitive information such as the customer's social security number and allows only the customer to complete online transactions, compliant with regulations.

3. Don't forget the agent desktop

Businesses forget that today's contact center agents, who are mostly millennial and Gen Z, are also digital. They are used to digital-life tools and expect their work tools to have the same ease of use and digital richness. However, many businesses still have the '90s-style phone-first desktop tools for contact center agents and branch advisors. No wonder 84% of agents across industries say that their tools do not help them handle service issues when the customer is on the line, according to a Gartner study. The solution is to go with a modern, digital-first omnichannel desktop for agents.

4. Make agents smarter

Did you know that the human mind forgets 75% of anything new that it learns in just two days and 97% after just a month, according to cutting-edge research in the field of psychology? Moreover, millennials and Gen Z, who constitute most of today's contact center agent workforce, have short attention spans (12 seconds for millennials and 8 seconds for Gen Z) and they hate traditional classroom training, which has been interrupted anyway by the pandemic and hybrid work. These challenges underscore the need for the delivery contextual knowledge and process knowhow in the flow of work—in the flow of customer conversations for contact center agents since that is the work they do. Conversational AI and reasoning technologies can guide agents every step of the way, telling them the next best thing to say and the next best thing to do during the course of a customer interaction. This kind of AI and knowledge augmentation of human agents has transformed agent experience and performance and is essential in today's hybrid work environment. Here are a couple of examples from our clientele, using our eGain Knowledge and AI Hub:

- Leading health insurance company reduced agent training time by 33% and sustained agent performance even when their 2000+ agents had to go remote overnight when Covid hit.
- Leading telco improved First-Contact Resolution (FCR) by 37%, while reducing training time by 50% across 10,000+ agents and 600 retail associates and improving Net Promoter Score (NPS) by 30 points.
- Global bank improved FCR from 70% to 95%, while reducing agent training time from 10 weeks to 4 weeks while being compliant with regulations.

5. Analyze, analyze, analyze

Continuous measurement and improvement is a must to optimize contact center customer service operations. Make sure you have an analytics hub that can provide you insights into digital and omnichannel conversations, customer journeys, knowledge, and conversational guidance. Journey analytics helps identify points of friction and do A/B testing with interventions such as contextual content or offers. Best-in-class KM solutions also trigger workflows with service levels attached to content creation and management tasks. An analytics hub also offers connected insights. For example, the hub can make the connection between an ineffective knowledge base article and escalation from self-service to a human agent for certain queries or topics. Moreover, the eGain Analytics Hub includes a whole slew of best-practice dashboards and reports, while allowing you to build your own custom ones with ease.

6. “Hub” it all together

Silos, whether in multichannel customer conversations, knowledge, or analytics, create nothing but chaos while driving up cost of ownership and ruining stakeholder experiences across customers, frontline employees, or business managers. It is important to take a unified, omnichannel hub approach to all these three critical areas so employees have a 360-degree view of customer conversations, and all stakeholders have access to a trusted hub of knowledge and knowhow with an analytics hub providing insights within and across these areas. Make sure these hubs are built on a common composable experience platform with pre-built connectors to existing systems and a rich API library to extend and innovate the solution.

7. De-risk it

Many solution providers pretend to share risk, but most foist all of it on the buyer. Gartner recommends that companies negotiate deals only with vendors that start with proofs of concept (POC) and build on them before making an investment. As a SaaS solution provider, eGain takes it to the next level. Many of our clients have taken advantage of a safe and unique consumption model that we offer, called “Innovation in 30 days.” It is a no-charge production pilot with free best practice-guidance to success and no obligation to buy after the pilot. Most of the companies that tried this program moved forward with eGain! Recent examples include a top 10 US insurance carrier, a leading international airline, a name-brand consumer product manufacturer, and a leading US asset management company!

Final word

Done right with a rich, proven solution for conversation management, knowledge management, and analytics, and infused with AI and ML, DCS can take your customer service from dreadful to delightful at warp speed!

