Key Considerations for Implementing Live Chat in Your Service Center

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Are you considering transforming your service delivery model but are unsure about what capabilities and tools to include at launch? Have you been considering advancing your existing shared services center or contact center to the next level by implementing chat capabilities? You're not alone.

Chat is not a new technology platform for most companies. It is a common way for teams to keep in touch and communicate that does not involve physically picking up the phone or sending an email. This has become especially true with the increase in virtual work environments. However, using chat is a newer channel for service centers interacting with their customers. Studies have shown that 70% of customers are willing to use chat or messaging to reach customer support.

There are a couple of different types of chat. Live chat is a functionality that allows a customer to communicate with a customer service representative in real time. The interaction is usually via a web portal and allows the customer to virtually speak with a human representative. The cadence is similar to texting a friend on your phone. A chatbot, however, is not a live representative on the other end. A chatbot is a program designed to simulate conversation using programmed responses.

Live chat support can provide numerous benefits to an employee and the service center, such as:

Increase the number of channels customers can use to interact with the service center

Maintain a personal element compared to more automated technologies, such as chatbots or self-service

Decrease the volume of phone calls and wait times, leading to better customer experience and more efficient service center operations

Help customers in real time rather than customers submitting a request and waiting

Do any of the above sound appealing to your customers or your service center staff? If so, live chat may be a good capability to explore.

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Is Live Chat Right for You?

There are a few considerations to keep in mind when starting your live chat journey. The most important considerations are your business objectives:

- Are you focused on **efficiency**? Live chat agents may be able to handle two to three customer requests at the same time, improving overall productivity.

- Are you most focused on increasing **customer satisfaction**? Customers may prefer chatting with an agent rather than submitting a form or placing a phone call. However, if agents are handling concurrent chats with multiple customers, customers may experience longer wait times between responses. Customers often have varying expectations for chat versus phone and may expect an even faster time to first response via chat. Different service level agreements may be necessary for different communication channels (i.e., phone versus chat).

- Are you breaking ground with **new technology** capabilities? If this is the first instance of chat technology at the organization, it may be a good idea to informally pulse your employee population to gauge potential adoption of live chat tools and features. Not only does live chat require training for service center agents, but it also requires training for customers.

Operationally, there are many different decisions that must be made prior to implementation. For example, will you operate concurrent chats? If so, how many? How important is average handle time to your overall customer experience? How do you want to handle the record creation of chat (e.g., are the conversations stored or automatically deleted)? Do you have the skill sets in the service center to effectively provide chat? Will you have dedicated chat resources, or will you rotate between chat and phone?

Your organization's appetite for change, desire for quick responses, and preferred method of communication will all influence whether live chat is the right move for you.

What Does Live Chat Mean for Resourcing?

There are several different approaches to resourcing for live chat. These approaches include agents dedicated to one channel (e.g., a dedicated chat agent), agents rotating between phone, chat, and web (cross-trained for multiple channels), or all agents working all channels simultaneously.

We do not recommend all agents working all channels as this can create confusion and decrease agent efficiency and effectiveness. To decide between multichannel agents or dedicated agents, consider points such as:

- Where are agents most skilled? Live chat/live chat software requires advanced technology skills and better writing and grammar skills. Dedicating agents to the chat channel can allow these skill sets to prosper.

- Do communication channel volumes change dramatically throughout the day? Multichannel agents can flex as needed to handle surges in phone calls or chat requests.

It is crucial to consider the customer traffic to your service center as a resource input. ZenDesk research indicates more than 50% of chat requests occur between the peak hours of 10 AM and 3 PM, and most

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chat requests occur primarily on Mondays and Tuesdays. Live chat can help alleviate some voice calls, which have similar peak hours.

You may be wondering if automated chat is a better solution than live chat. Keep in mind that while automated chat may require fewer resources to run post-launch, this technology requires more time upfront to build out scripts, algorithms, and a knowledgebase from which to draw answers. If your organization can dedicate continuous improvement efforts and resources to ensure these are all maintained, accurate, and meeting customer needs, automated chat may be a viable solution.

When and How Should I Launch Live Chat?

If you've read all the above and decided live chat is an attractive option, it is crucial to consider the timing of deployment. Since it is difficult to anticipate the demand or how customers will interact with chat, we recommend first launching your service center **without** chat technology. You can also phase in chat features by first launching "reactive chat" where the customer must click on a widget to submit a request, followed by "proactive chat" where a window automatically pops up. Additionally, live chat **does not** have to be available at all times and can be turned on just during peak call-volume times.

Once operational, you can collect a baseline of data used to make informed decisions around chat resources, hours of availability, and service level agreements. These decisions can help you optimize service center effectiveness while enhancing the customer experience.

Conclusion

While live chat is not new technology within service centers, it might be new for your organization or your operation. Understanding your customer expectations and your resource skill set is crucial to a successful launch. If implemented correctly, live chat can help your service center increase efficiency and customer satisfaction and potentially be a pioneer of technology in your organization.

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About ScottMadden's Corporate & Shared Services Practice

ScottMadden has been a recognized leader in corporate and shared services since the practice began decades ago. Our Corporate & Shared Services practice has completed more than 2,100 projects since the early 90s, including hundreds of large, multi-year implementations. Our clients span a variety of industries from energy to healthcare to higher education to retail. Examples of our projects include service delivery strategy and business case development, corporate service assessment and improvement, shared services design, shared services implementation, and shared services improvement.

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