

THE RISE AND RISE OF OMNI-CHANNEL IN RETAIL

Retailers across the world are boosting sales and enhancing their user's shopping experience by building mobile apps based around indoor positioning and data analysis.

By KT Prasad, Director of Zendesk India

All for one and one for all. This is the guiding principle behind omni-channel, the most significant and relevant trend in retail, today. Omni-channel experience is an integrated approach to marketing, selling and serving customers with the aim to create a seamless retail experience. To survive and thrive in an increasingly competitive environment, retailers must re-jig their businesses to ensure that the shopping experience is quick, smooth and glitch-free.

THE NEW MANTRA

Customer service—an integral part of the retail experience—has undergone immense transformation in recent years. A few years ago, a customer could either call or send an email to contact a company. Today, s/he can call, send a text, email, get on a live chat or video call and use social media.

The retail customer, however, wants more than just multiple points of contact as part of the omni-channel experience. Every channel must remain at par with

the other in delivering a consistent and integrated message to ensure effortless switching between multiple channels while offering the same service quality.

WHY DO YOU NEED AN OMNI-CHANNEL STRATEGY?

With an omni-channel customer support model, you can provide service to your customers in a convenient and effective manner while improving your brand's image and credibility. A glitch-free conversation with your support team makes the customer feel valued and connected with your brand. At the same time, by creating an intuitive flow of communication from one channel to the next, your agents also gain a single view of the customer, helping them gain a better understanding customer requirements.

RETAIN CONTEXT: An omni-channel solution helps create a centralised ticket history that retains the context of each conversation. This action can significantly reduce handle

time and make life easy for both agents and customers. With access to historical data, agents gain a context to kick start troubleshooting.

INTEGRATE METRICS: Being able to provide support through multiple channels is great, but pulling metrics from multiple systems can get tedious. An omni-channel solution saves the trouble by providing channel metrics in real-time while allowing making changes on the fly.

CUSTOMISE CHANNEL OFFERINGS: Every channel that works towards an omni-channel solution can be easily calibrated and adjusted to suit customers and support teams. Channel offerings can be added and altered to match changing trends or customer preferences.

WHAT MAKES UP AN OMNI-CHANNEL STRATEGY?

Customers and their convenience are the nucleus of an omni-channel strategy. Retail habits and preferences of customers determine the natural journey of each channel. Your customers

should be able to switch easily between each channel just as your agents can. When it comes to an omni-channel strategy, one size doesn't fit all. Ask yourself a vital question: What is the natural route your customer might take to contact you? The answer will help you build your omni-channel strategy. The following components are the building blocks of an effective customer service strategy:

SELF-SERVICE: A large section of your customers expect businesses to make it easy for them to solve their issues themselves. Design a comprehensive FAQs page to empower your customers to help themselves.

SMS: Texting is a popular customer service channel for many industries owing to its versatility. Restaurants and salons are using text messages to book tables and send appointments, while local kirana shops send promotional texts and greetings via SMS. At the same time, verticals like banks and insurance companies use this personalised medium of communication to respond to claims or financial queries.

CHAT: Facilitating a two-way communication, a chat option gives customers quick access to a real person. In an ideal omni-channel solution, agents should be able to view the path the customer took to get to the chat option. These include help articles they may have viewed, or FAQ pages

visited. This helps agents to cut to the chase and avoid repeating information.

CALLS: Some customers may have sensitive problems that need a more personalised conversation. In such cases, phone or video support is the ideal communication channel. With an omni-channel strategy you can tie up the call option to other channels like email and chat, to help agents get an idea of all previous customer conversations when on the call.

SOCIAL MEDIA: With their high consumption of social media, millennials often reach out to companies via their social media handles such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. While dealing with young customers, it's important to reduce response time and train agents to provide quick and effective solutions. Remember that social media is a public platform and it's important for your team to deal with customer grievances promptly to preserve your brand image.

THE FUTURE OF RETAIL COMMUNICATION

On the back of factors like rising incomes, changing lifestyles and growing digitisation, the Indian retail market is expected to cross \$ 1 trillion by 2020. As customer expectations change and grow, your retail business must keep up with the times by adopting latest innovations and

strategies. An efficient software is the foundation of any omni-channel solution. It allows agents to move fluidly between channels while retaining the context of the conversation and providing solutions. But no software can function efficiently without a human touch. This is where a unique omni-channel experience steps in. It's imperative for staff members to understand and be trained in omni-channel systems to address customer concerns and boost a positive brand image. It may be a new phenomenon for the uninitiated but omni-channel is a definitive strategy which will go a long way in increasing your customer retention and improving bottom lines. 😊



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