

THE 5 DO'S OF

Managing Customer Service During Challenging Times

 replicant



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What can we do now for customer service?

Like many industries, customer service is seeing the impact of unexpected events for the first time. We have had setbacks and events that caused ripples but what is unique about the coronavirus is that it has impacted everyone - across every industry. More than ever, we need to think differently about customer service so that we can still delight our customers. Take a look as we dive into the five most important "do's" that you can consider now for customer service as you navigate uncertainty.

Do #1

Do prioritize interactive customer service channels

“Today, more than half of U.S. adults —more than 136 million—use voice technology each month, with 94% of those users saying that voice as an interface not only saves time but improves their quality of life.”¹

¹ Adobe, 2019

Given the recent lockdowns with coronavirus, we have seen more and more call centers shut down. We have to keep agents healthy and safe, but closing down call centers makes it difficult to meet customer demand. Some industries like travel, delivery, and streaming services are seeing greater spikes in call volumes but are not able to serve customers fast enough with reduced agent capacity. To make matters more challenging, customers prefer fast answers from more personal customer service channels.

When faced with the need for fast responses in a personal way, voice AI for call centers becomes the perfect solution. Voice AI is a great way to scale responsive channels like the phone, as it gives you the ability to elastically meet customer demand. With voice AI, you can:

- ◆ **Triage high call volumes**
- ◆ **Provide 24/7 accessibility**
- ◆ **And at a minimum, collect basic customer information so that an agent can follow-up later**

If your customer is used to reaching you by phone, the last thing you want to do during a crisis is disrupt continuity in their customer service experience by reducing hours or removing it all together. Voice AI lets you keep your phone line running in a scalable way to maintain trust and reliability with your customers. And, if you choose the right call flows for voice AI, you can get much more than elastic capacity. For example, one Replicant customer saw a 40% reduction in order error rates on orders handled by Replicant and another customer was able to reduce call times by 35%, while keeping CSAT at the same levels. That is pretty amazing!

Do #2

Do have elastic customer service capacity

“ The Texas Workforce Commission said that they typically get 13,000 calls a day. On Sunday, they received more than 100,000 calls. Governor Abbott said Wednesday that they are aware of the problem, and are working towards multiple solutions to make sure Texans make it through this time.”²

² KBTX, 2020

With coronavirus, we have quickly learned that our current operating models for customer service will not stand the test of time. We rely heavily on business process outsourcing (BPOs) and offshored call centers to scale customer service. But we have seen that even this strategy is vulnerable during these times. Due to lockdowns, some customers have had to move their outsourced call center operations from one country to another only to find the new country is now on lockdown. It is also much harder for agents to work from home (WFH) in popular outsourcing locations like the Philippines or India as WFH requires a private work space, fast internet, and adjusting to various time zones to serve different regions.

The silver lining:

Both strategies are important. We still need to have BPOs to help us, but we can work smarter with the aid of technology. For example, you might stand up a short-term call center to intake basic customer questions for unexpected high call volumes, but this is costing you more and potentially putting people at risk for something that can be easily managed by voice AI.

Voice AI is one way to help reduce repetitive tasks for outsourced call centers so that they too can be more effective, even in situations like the one we are currently experiencing. It is not meant to be a replacement, but rather a solution to help effectively scale human capacity by acting as our first line of defense for unpredictable situations. Voice AI can be a first line of defense to meet fluctuations in customer demand before increasing or reducing your agent workforce.

Do #3

Do provide your customers with holistic customer service



In order to emerge from this crisis, we are going to have to think about customer service differently. You have probably heard the term:

“360 degree view of the customer.”

Customer service leaders and evangelists have been talking about this for awhile, but it is more important than ever today. To truly know your customer, you have to understand not just their customer service experience, but also their pre and post sales experience alongside how they are marketed to throughout their 360° customer journey.

Crises like coronavirus give us the perfect opportunity to explore the importance of having a “360 degree view of your customer” as it allows us to offer more holistic customer service.

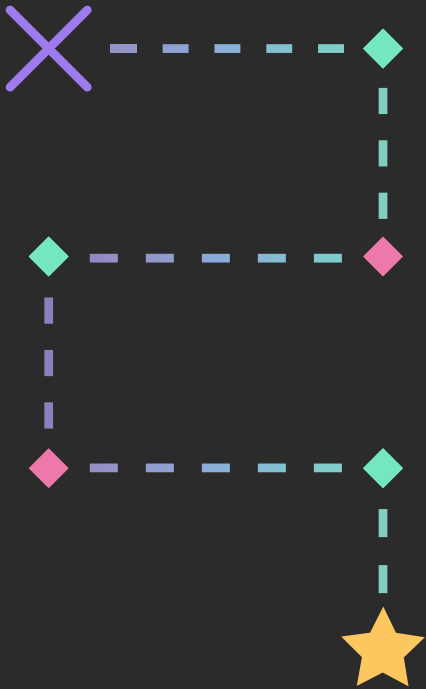
Imagine this:

You are an airline company with several customers waiting on hold to cancel their flight reservations as they can no longer fly from the US to London. This could be a one-off trip or a regular one for others if they travel to London for work or to visit family frequently.

If you know details about your customers, like their historical purchasing patterns, you have the opportunity to turn negative customer experiences (waiting hours on hold) into positive ones. Imagine you offer these same customers a discount on their next flight to London once they are able to

Do #3

Do provide your customers with holistic customer service



travel again. If you make the customer's flying experience more enjoyable it is easier to regain their loyalty, trust and business even if they are hesitant to fly again.

Another great example of holistic customer service

is exemplified in the approach that Crunch Fitness took - Crunch Fitness anticipated that lockdowns would drive members to cancel their memberships, so instead of waiting, they proactively froze all memberships. This helped avoid extra demand on their customer service lines and gave customers peace of mind financially.

A holistic customer service response shows that you understand and empathize with your customers, and at the same time reduce the load on your customer service team. When you are engaged with your customers throughout their entire journey, it makes it easier to recover from a crisis - sometimes even emerging with higher customer satisfaction than before.

Do #4

Do communicate proactively with your customers

“ 67% of contact centers have seen revenue growth since adopting speech technology into their solutions.³”

³ Speechmatics, 2019

It is an understatement,

but good communication is perhaps the best thing you can do from the customer service front. Strong customer service communication means relevant, timely, proactive, and consistent communication. Your customers should be given service messages that are succinct, not too late, actionable, and delivered as few or as many times as needed to be relevant.

Imagine those same customers who have flights booked to London. Instead of having them wait on the phone, what if you identified all flights that had a 70% chance of being canceled following lockdowns and proactively emailed these customers asking if they would like to keep or cancel their flight? If customers have the option to cancel in one click, it is more convenient for them and reduces overload on customer service agents.

In that same vein, you also want to make it easy for your customers to find information by offering more communication channels than fewer. Chat and email channels are good for accessibility, but they are usually slower. In times of urgency, customers want to reach you quickly in the fewest number of steps possible. When your customers' anxiety level is already elevated, waiting hours or days for an email response or long minutes between chat turns, can turn an anxious customer into an angry one. Phone calls are the fastest way to get a response, but if you are struggling to answer the phone due to reduced agent capacity, it may be time to consider a voice AI-powered self-service option for your customers.

Do #4

Do communicate proactively with your customers

Voice AI is a great way to offer self-service over the phone to manage incoming demand and respond to customers quickly. Voice AI can handle tasks such as:

- ◆ **Completing a product registration**
- ◆ **Changing an address**
- ◆ **Paying a bill faster than a human, while making fewer errors**

For routine inquiries, the consistency of voice AI creates more positive experiences for customers, by ensuring no wait times and faster resolutions. Voice AI can work alongside the human agent to document each step it has taken so that information can carry forward should the call need to be transferred to a human agent. In turn, customers do not get locked into frustrating deadends as they do with traditional IVRs and agents see higher productivity by resolving fewer tier-1 cases.

Do #5

Do make customer service your number one value

“ 42% of customers showed more interest in purchasing the product after experiencing good customer service.”⁴

⁴ Zendesk, 2019

And lastly, if it's not already, do make customer service one of your number one company values. Why is this? Because in times of uncertainty, it allows you to make tough trade-offs or be open to new solutions that you may not have previously considered.

Imagine this:

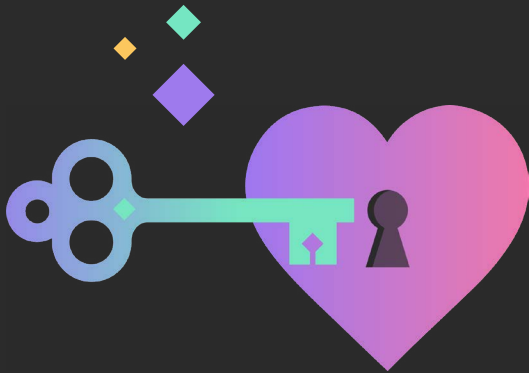
You are in the restaurant business and need to find new ways to service and reach your customers. If you are traditionally used to having customers dine-in this means you may need to consider using restaurant delivery platforms like Postmates, DoorDash, or SkipTheDishes, something restaurants may not have leveraged before. Being open to servicing customers in new ways regardless of the circumstances puts you ahead of the competition, but a mentality like this usually needs to stem from your core values as it allows you to act quickly during uncertainty.

Similarly,

Gig economy platforms may need to adopt new technologies to meet higher delivery demands. If a customer places an order to a non-partner restaurant and an agent in another country calls the restaurant to place the order on behalf of that customer, this may no longer be an option with compromised call centers. In this instance, a delivery platform could rely on voice AI to place orders on behalf of customers so that non-partner restaurants can service customer orders with greater scale.

Do #5

Do make customer service your number one value



Making customer service a top value also means that you will prioritize your customers' needs. In the case of Crunch Fitness, they gave their members an opportunity to put their memberships on pause rather than paying for inactive weeks. A decision like this leads to shorter-term profits, but greater loyalty and business from existing and new customers in the future.

When you put customer service at the forefront of your values, you are more likely to think outside of the box, take risks, and try new ways of doing things to maintain high-levels of customer service.

A note to the future of customer service

Moving forward we are going to have to work as a united front. This means seeing customer service as an integral part of all aspects of your business. It means making customer service a top priority so that you can empathize with your customers during challenging times. It also means considering new technologies that can deliver amazing customer service more efficiently in the face of uncertainty. Replicant is excited to partner with you to deliver amazing customer service today, tomorrow, and in the face of adversity.