



# 4 steps to an exceptional customer service strategy in times of disruption





# Adjust your approach

With the recent global pandemic, most businesses have had to suddenly shift to a fully digital and distributed model, with employees working from homes that may not be fully equipped with the same technology and hardware they're used to. Meanwhile, many organizations are experiencing dramatically higher call volumes from customers in need – and agents are feeling overwhelmed trying to keep up.

You can meet customer expectations and leave a lasting impression long after the pandemic has passed, by following these four steps:

**1 Show customers that you care**

**2 Support your agents**

**3 Drive costs out of the system**

**4 Refine value-add strategies**

# Show customers that you care

If there has ever been a time to demonstrate empathy to your customers, it's during this moment. When everything else feels uncertain, your organization has the opportunity to step up and provide your customers with a sense of comfort and normalcy. So, how can you make sure your customers know you care? Here are a couple of key ways:

## Boost self-service options: Be sure you're available 24/7

In a world where the workday, evenings, and weekend look more similar than ever, and customer needs are at an all-time high, it's simply not enough to operate on the same-old call center paradigm. It's time to step it up. Augmenting your self-service options with chat-based intelligent virtual assistants (IVAs) can make all the difference. IVAs can understand each individual's journey and deliver real-time, contextual information around the clock.

## Expand digital messaging channel support: Meet your customers where they are

Your customers are on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Apple Chat. Are you? If not, it's time to be available wherever your customers choose to contact you. Whether through web chat or any other digital channel, you need to be prepared to respond quickly. These channels arm your agents with the ability to address multiple requests at the same time, particularly when the customer request volume is higher than ever.

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## Support your agents

In a typical call center environment, service agents often act as a team – collaborating to solve challenging customer issues, sharing best practices, and providing a sense of camaraderie to one another. Agents, who are suddenly working from home instead of side by side in call centers, will need a new means of digital communication as well as automated coaching strategies that take the place of guidance from managers. You can better support your agents during this time with these two key strategies:

### Enable agent collaboration and guidance: Close the gaps

As customers face new challenges and circumstances, the nature of their inquiries is changing. Many agents may not be proficient in solving these new types of questions yet. A range of fast-to-implement capabilities for collaboration, automation, knowledge management, and artificial intelligence can help you to close the gaps that agents may be experiencing. Providing better support to your agents, through system-guided interactions or greater access to knowledge management articles, helps them solve customer issues with efficiency and ease.

### Simplify agent tasks with automation: Reduce manual work

This is the perfect time to consider how robotic process automation (RPA) can help speed up processes and ease the burden on agents. As an unattended form of automation, RPA can handle rote tasks such as copying and pasting information across disparate tasks, or wrapping up after each interaction. This enables your agents to focus on higher value-adds, like demonstrating empathy to customers and providing compassionate service.



## Drive costs out of the system

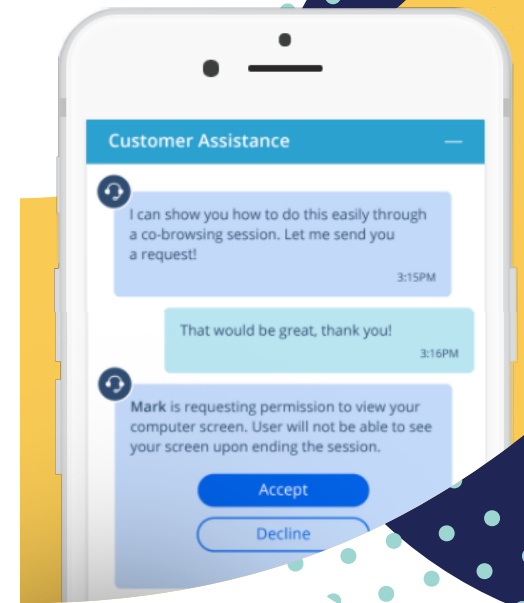
Customers are always at the heart of your service efforts. During tough economic times, it's just as crucial to be able to monitor costs and save money wherever possible. Throughout this global pandemic, companies will need to ensure that they can optimize spend on customer service. And that means driving down the cost-to-serve, even as customer service requests skyrocket. To rise to the challenge, you will need to find ways to:

### Triage current volumes: Minimize your backlog

As many businesses face an influx of customer inquiries, the average wait time to connect with an agent is often several hours. Calls are coming through non-stop. Emails have piled up. And there's no sign of customer needs slowing down while you triage current volumes. It's time to expand your digital messaging support to enable concurrent interactions – giving agents the ability to handle approximately three times the volume of customer inquiries at once. Meanwhile, email bots can comb through the pile of emails and provide automated responses, or determine intent, and intelligently assign requests to cases and the right agents – speeding up how quickly your representative can empty their inboxes.

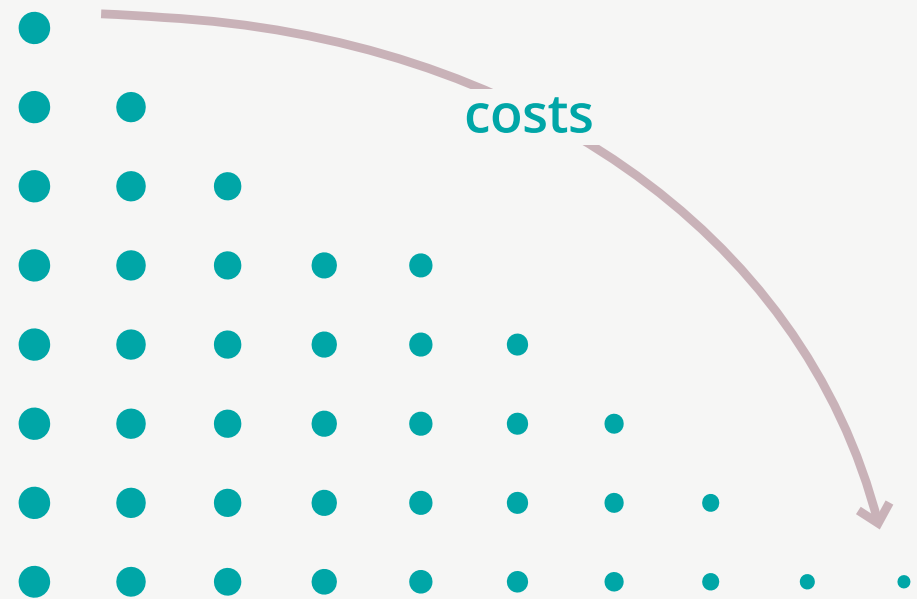
### Increase efficiency: Shorten durations and reduce costs

Dynamic case management can help reduce average handle times (AHT) and drive down the cost-to-serve. Ensuring case continuity across the full customer journey can help speed up service interactions, eliminating non-value add work. Paired with intelligent guidance across automated and agent-assisted channels, case management makes it possible for customers to switch channels without having to repeat themselves. Carrying the relevant customer context across channels, such as from web self-service through to an agent, can help you drive down AHT, while increasing first call resolution.





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# Refine value-add strategies

As the economy is on a downward turn, protecting your organization's cash flow is critically important. You must retain business and become more innovative in your strategies to keep your most valued customers – whether that's through compelling retention incentives, new value-add solutions, or setting up payment plans to let people off the hook until businesses and individuals have had a chance to recoup their losses from the pandemic.

## Right-size retention: Focus on the individual

The last thing you want to do is set your business up for more devastating losses that are avoidable. Recognizing that certain customers will be struggling to keep up with payments or may become more conservative in their spending habits means that it's time to focus on retention. You don't want customers walking away forever just because they are temporarily short on funds. Treat your customers with empathy and work with them to find solutions – from pausing payments to providing discounts to offering retention or renewal incentives – that maintain their business. Additionally, look to next-best-action analytics to right-size retention offers to the individual. This ensures each retention offer is aligned with each customer's specific lifetime value, without giving away too much.

## Deliver greater benefit: Provide relevant solutions

Consider what benefits you can provide your customers beyond just resolving their current inquiry. What additional solutions might be useful or impactful for them during this time? For example, a customer that finds themselves suddenly short on funds may benefit greatly from a timely overdraft protection offer. With next-best-action decisioning, you can provide compelling and relevant offers to the right customers – protecting other customers from unrelated conversations that lead to frustration, and needlessly lengthen AHT.





# Solving today's challenges – and tomorrow's

These four steps can help you face the new challenges of a work-from-home world, while setting you up for greater success in the future. Demonstrating empathy to your customers and supporting your agents should be permanent fixtures in any customer service strategy. Reducing the cost-to-serve for each customer by switching to more digital channels (while still delivering the same quality service) is the fundamental goal of the digital transformation efforts so many organizations are working toward. And protecting key streams of revenue should always be at the forefront of executives' minds – especially when potentially disruptive events can arise at any moment.

If you are struggling to keep up with the demands of today, focus your efforts on solutions that have staying power and will continue to serve you – no matter what tomorrow brings. These strategies are not simply temporary solutions; they form the bedrock for achieving larger-scale digital transformation – no matter what the "new normal" may turn out to be.



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