

Striking the balance between

The face of customer service has changed significantly in recent years. The pandemic heightened expectations and changed how end users wanted to interact with brands. A seamless omnichannel experience is now the minimum expectation.

In post-pandemic world companies must assess the role automation plays in the customer journey and ensure it is being used to enhance end-user experience. We asked our expert contributors how they were striking the perfect balance between automation and human interaction, to ensure all interactions left customers delighted.



OLIVER HENNEM
CLOUD BUSINESS

“CX is all about people so human interaction is essential, made apparent by the early days of the pandemic. But the move to remote working shaped what customer service looks like today. Customers chose to self-serve rather than picking up the phone. This led us to rethink our phone system which now integrates with the portal and our CRM, giving customers new channels. Our team provides the same level of service while customers use their preferred channel. Automation doesn’t take away from human touchpoints – customers will almost always need human interaction. The goal is to route them to the right person. A blended approach is essential.”



TRACY HILL
RYDAL GROUP

“The pandemic meant we needed to communicate in different ways to suit customer needs. We had our staff split between home skeleton crew based at the office. We introduced a mobile application on our primary phone system, which is still used across the base, allowing easy adaptation. Some of our processes are now more automated but good communication with the customer is still integral to a great experience. In terms of communication, we find the best experience comes from having conversations and we are guided by our customer needs and how they want to be supported.”



ROAN PRATT
PRAGMA

“The pandemic taught us that we need to be able to react quickly to any change in circumstances. Automation allows the channel to scale more efficiently and provide customer service quicker if delivered in a way that is easy to use. Otherwise, it will only increase the demand for human interaction. The balance relies on knowing your customers and communication is key. We have invested in our systems to speed up the process of ordering and provisioning through further automation and are looking to launch chatbots. We have also invested in our operations team and expanded the sales team to keep the balance of automation and human interaction.”



DUNCAN WARD
ENREACH

“The pandemic made us look at customer’s changing preferences with the lines between tiers of support needing to be constantly re-drawn. We redesigned customer journeys with virtual calls, 24/7 customer support and available technical experts proving essential. AI is giving us the tools and insights to create an excellent customer experience by provided employees access to new analytics, enabling them to make smarter decisions. AI has not replaced human intervention but has allowed us to find new ways to support customers. Digital response solutions will make sure your employees don’t face burn out whilst guiding support requests to the appropriate departments.”



OLIVER BAREHAM
FOURNET

“COVID-19 left with many end users feeling frustrated and unheard. Post-pandemic it’s important to seek improvement and evaluate changes to ensure that customers feel positive in their engagements. By striking the right balance between digital response solutions and human interaction, businesses will be able to create an exceptional customer experience. Giving the customer choice of channel increases the likelihood of them self-serving, reducing demand on contact centres and costs. Choosing the appropriate technology plays a significant role: using conversational AI to contain the conversation within a website, handing off to an account portal and updating the customer via messaging platforms.”



SOHINI RAITHATHA
REDSQUID

“Going digital doesn’t mean a less personal experience. It allows us to have more frequent interactions with each other and our customers. Personal interaction is important as we drive customers through the Digital Transformation, but technology provides us with amazing resources to connect with our customers. Digital interactions have evolved and provide efficient ways to address quick requests. We have implemented a Contact Centre solution into to give our customers a personalised experience, while ensuring they can go through to the last agent they spoke to and have a possibility for call backs. A strong combination is the perfect medium for customer relationships.”



LEE DRISCOLL
NUVIAS UK&I

“The pandemic accelerated the use of remote collaboration tools and created long-term working practices. We don’t feel customer experience was negatively impacted and the investments made in automation have improved our responsiveness. Whilst our teams are now available to meet with customers face to face, the use of MS Teams and collaboration platforms means we continue to engage virtually with people who find this convenient. Automating mundane tasks frees up people’s time to devote to human touchpoint activities that enhance the customer experience. The ideal balance depends on the customer, and one must be sensitive to individual requirements and respond dynamically, offering customers choice in how they engage.”



TeamsLink

Microsoft Teams direct routing, done right

automation and human touch



JEMMA BYRNE
SALESFORCE

"The pandemic pushed customers online, but the convenience made them stay. Eighty-eight percent of customers now argue that the experience a company provides is just as important as its product or services. AI is evolving how companies interact with customers, using data to drive actions at scale, and enabling personalisation. We are still discovering the full potential of automation and humans will always be front and centre to delight customers and build meaningful relationships. Automation frees employees from repetitive work and instead amplifies efficiency, insight and skill sets. It's about understanding the businesses' unique customer needs and delivering a personalised omnichannel experience."



OLIVER CLUTTERBUCK
EVE NETWORKS

"During the pandemic portal usage surged. We know that automation is key to meeting expectations and our systems were designed from the ground up to enable intuitive self-service. We're driving to reduce human touchpoints and look to automate where possible. This reduces human error and boosts efficiency. We are also equipping our support agents with the tools and knowledge they need, so they can deliver brilliant customer service when it's needed. That balance allows us to provide a little bit of sanity into what would otherwise be a completely digital process. Knowing that behind the scenes sits a team of real people gives customers confidence."



VICKI MACKAY
ONECOM PARTNERS

"Pandemic pressures created community but also heightened customer expectations. Digital portals supporting billing, administration and access to information can enable positive and personalised customer experience. We drove investment into these avenues to improve usability to allow self-service under a 24/7/365 approach. Striking the balance between digital and human interaction is case dependant. Sensitive queries requiring empathy may be better handled by a human. The same goes for complex requests. Responses to FAQ's however, are better serviced digitally. Understanding patterns allows you to apply intelligence to drive that engagement. As a result, CX is becoming ever more personalised and seamless, building stronger brand loyalty."



BERNIE MCPHILLIPS
PANGEA

"The pandemic brought mutual admiration for what our industry was doing in finding new ways to communicate and deliver services. Even now, we ensure as much as possible is done remotely without missing out. When it comes to giving customers the best experience, you must adopt a hybrid support model. Automation is king for convenience, but sometimes customers need consultation and don't want to have to go through a maze to speak to someone. You must be accessible and give customers options. We invested six figures into new portal automations, while also doubling our operational support. Both are key to a great customer experience."



CRAIG HERRETT
PROVU
COMMUNICATIONS

"The pandemic has brought us closer to our customers and we are now speaking more regularly to ensure top support. This has proved powerful considering the ongoing chipset shortage, enabling us to share our knowledge and recommend alternatives. Online ordering, provisioning and device management have always been a big part of our business, but human touchpoints continue to play a large part in the customer journey. Some partners just want to order online and never pick up the phone, whereas others prefer to build a relationship with us. The key thing for us to create the optimal customer experience is to listen and adapt. There is no one-size fits all."



DAREN FINNEY
MITEL

"The pandemic has made quality customer experience the bare minimum expectation. Customers look for 24x7 customer service and support features that can be facilitated with the right agile communication tools. AI is making communication more efficient, allowing human touchpoints to focus on interactions that are more complex or impactful. Striking the right balance between human touch and digital interactions is tricky and we're seeing increasing numbers of customers asking for help with getting this balance right. They want to take advantage of chatbots, and agent assist apps but without losing the 'human touch'. An omnichannel CX strategy can often provide the right approach to optimising the customer experience."



HILARY OLIVER
TOLLRING

"When everyone set up at home, the focus was on maintaining CX. Initially, customers were willing to accept delays however soon lost sympathy if poor service became the norm. We have introduced online support through training webinars, tutorials and online help, to widen accessibility and promote engagement. External video meetings have helped us to build closer, less formal relationships, as we glimpse into someone's home life. Automation should save time on both sides, with human touchpoints at exactly the right time. The right balance is critical. The key is to understand your audience, the types of enquiry, the ideal journey and critically when humans should interact."



CHERIE HOWLETT
JOLA

"At Jola, we always start with the desired outcome and work back. Our partners want complete control over their own customer experience rather than picking up the phone to us. The pandemic changed the way we liaised with partners for good. Face-to-face meetings were done on Teams, partner training was easier and more effective and Jola partners closed deals quicker. We hope we have struck the right balance. Portals are available so partners can support customers directly, although they can rely on us to help identify and win new opportunities. Information is readily available for partners to find in our knowledge base however, we will answer the phone within 20 seconds."

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- ✓ Live PowerBI Reporting and API
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0333 234 9911

wavenetwholesale.com

wholesale@wavenetuk.com