



OPTIMIZE YOUR
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
TO WIN THE

COMMUNITY SUPPORT GAME

**Improve engagement,
loyalty, and retention with
a flexible, open customer
support platform.**



OVERVIEW

In today's customer centric economy, online support and customer community management should be a cornerstone of any organization's digital experience and customer retention strategy. It presents a powerful extension to your brand experience, and the engagement and affinity you gain from a well-tuned solution is integral to your brand equity and position in the market.

In this era of seamless customer experiences (CX), efforts span across online and offline channels. Consumers want to receive support when and where they need it. To succeed, a reimagining of the customer support platform is necessary — one that can grow and evolve as your business, the technology landscape, and consumer behaviors change.



The Past

Over the past decade, offering customer support in digital channels proved to be a strong supplement, if not a cost-effective alternative, to traditional support channels, allowing customers to help each other and themselves.

Online models proved effective at:

- Decreasing response times
- Increasing service success rates
- Increasing customer lifetime value
- Increasing customer satisfaction rates
- Generating positive brand mentions in social channels
- Providing feedback on the product and brand perception

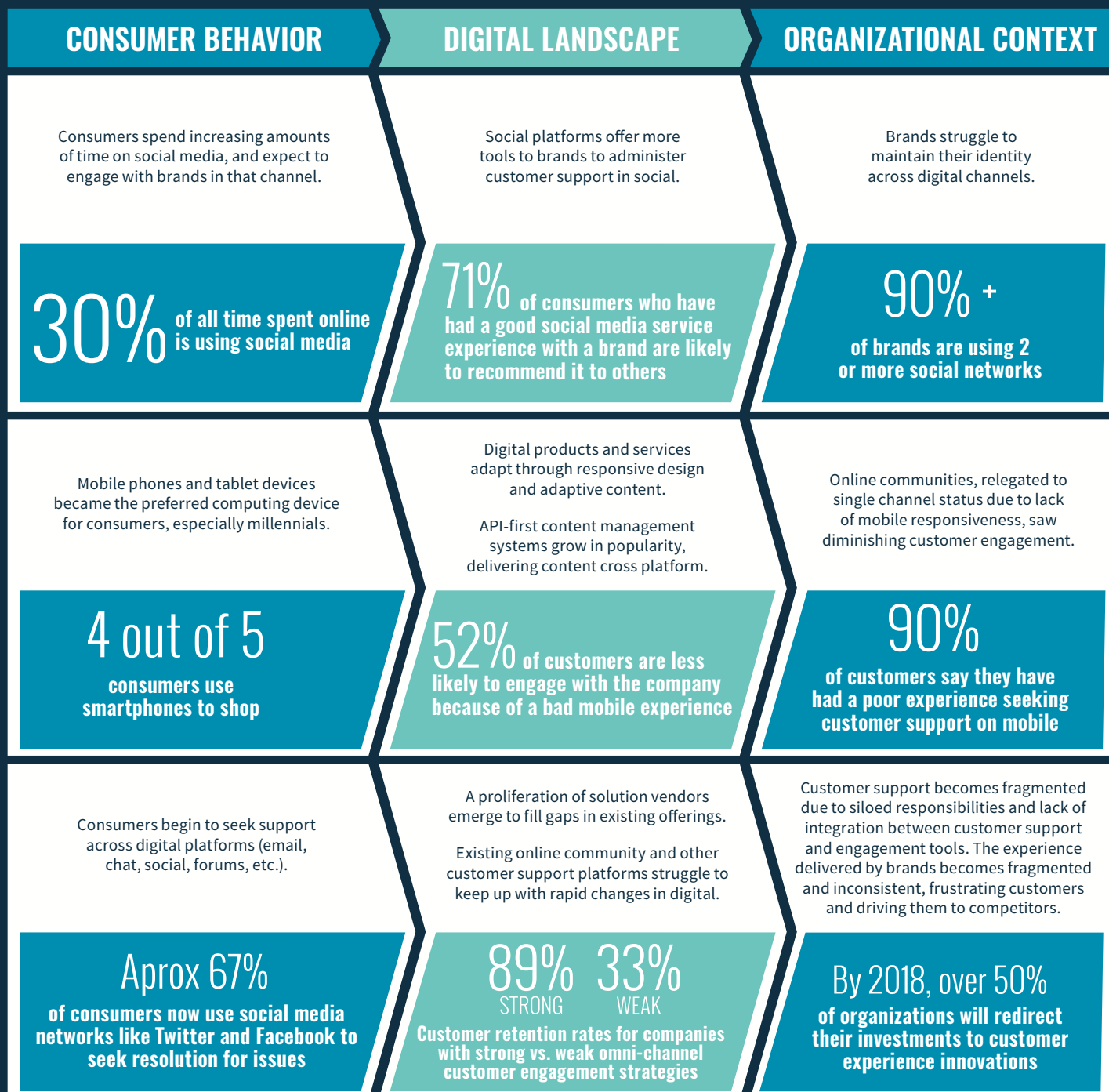
Today and Beyond

The recent changes in the digital landscape have caused incredible change in consumer behavior, which in turn is changing the customer service game. If you are finding that it is increasingly challenging to effectively build and manage customer communities and support systems on legacy platforms, you aren't alone. Traditional solutions lack the flexibility and customizable user experience that organizations need to keep up with the multi-channel, multi-platform demands of today's digital ecosystem.

In order to thrive in today's landscape, organizations must invest in flexible, open platforms that can deliver an engaging experience across digital, and evolve with their brand and users' needs.

HOW THE CUSTOMER SUPPORT LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED

The landscape has changed drastically due to rapid advancements in digital technology, mainly due to the following trends:



HOW TO ADAPT TO THE NEW CUSTOMER SUPPORT LANDSCAPE

We have entered a new era.

Given changes in consumer behavior and the digital landscape, organizations are operating in a different context.

They are struggling to:

- Get organizational buy-in for investing in online support efforts
- Obtain funding to grow online customer communities
- Develop and manage engaging customer support across digital channels

The demands of this landscape require more coordination and consistency between customer experience efforts. In order to adapt to this changing landscape, you should:

1. Optimize Content and Transform the Support Experience

Consumers engage with your brand wherever and whenever it is most convenient for them. Your organization needs a unified approach to manage consistent branded content and interactions across various channels.

So how do you go about this?

CENTRALIZE CONTENT INTO A “KNOWLEDGE HUB”

Customer support has become democratized because consumers expect information to be available on demand, rather than on terms defined by a brand.

First address the siloing of knowledge within your organization by taking inventory of the knowledge assets (content, tools, and systems) available across teams and departments. Then, take stock of the business requirements met through the various technologies used to provide support to consumers across digital and offline channels.

Once you have a comprehensive understanding of your customer support knowledge and business requirements, you should embark on developing and centralizing content into a knowledge hub that can organize and distribute information across platforms and channels. This hub will effectively replace fragmented legacy systems used across the enterprise.

This platform should be modular in nature and provide:

- Intuitive administrative interfaces
- Robust workflows
- Streamlined search
- Personalized dashboards to support customer service reps
- Recommendations of content to best service users

ADOPT AN API-FIRST PLATFORM STRATEGY

User behaviors evolve quickly, and new channels emerge routinely. Modern platforms should not be tied to any one channel, but instead, they should leverage a lightweight framework extensible enough to integrate with relevant digital services and channels.

Begin by making your content available to external systems and channels via an application programming interface (API). An API will empower you to more easily meet customer expectations when navigating your digital touchpoints, systems and screens. From an operational perspective, the ability to quickly spin up or deprecate individual features accelerates time to market while reducing long term maintenance costs. It will also give you more flexibility in the user experience you can deliver to consumers by freeing you from the constraints of legacy, single channel systems.

Once established, integrate your platform with the optimal channels to reach your existing and potential customers. You should also begin to explore delivering support through emerging platforms, such as voice assistant technology and chatbots, which will become more prominent in the coming years.

Taken together, a well thought out and properly executed API strategy will lower the total cost of ownership for your digital initiatives, deepen customer engagement and, most importantly, increase your total addressable market.



Delivering an Impactful Experience For Workday's Customers

Workday's customer community has grown to over 70,000 members in past two years — a 60% year-over-year increase. In light of their rapid growth and evolving customer needs, Workday re-imagined their online customer community platform to create a flexible, streamlined user experience that more closely mirrors Workday's innovative suite of products. Using the Drupal 8 platform as a base, Workday integrated disparate systems and connected content to create a seamless customer experience across a variety of digital touchpoints. Simplified navigation and enhanced content sharing, forums, and product feedback tools help Workday lower customer support costs while increasing member engagement.

2. Create A Seamless Brand Experience Across Channels

Every touchpoint in a customer's experience should feel like a natural extension of their last brand interaction.

So how do you go about this?

CRAFT YOUR BRAND EXPERIENCES USING A DESIGN SYSTEM

Delivering your brand experience across a variety of digital assets can quickly become disjointed, as different lines of business and teams can apply distinct brand interpretations. Leading organizations recognize the value of instituting a common mechanism through which digital brand standards can be shared and enforced.

Develop a componentized system — a living style guide — which defines the branded design components and interactions that should be used to construct experiences in various channels. This system should contain both visual and content advice to make identity guidelines easy to access for any potential stakeholders.

The design system approach will enforce brand consistency and improve the user experience across digital by ensuring stakeholders adhere to common user interface and interactive elements. It will also allow you to prototype and optimize user experience components quickly and with minimal technical investment.

ARCHITECT A BETTER USER EXPERIENCE WITH MODULAR APPLICATIONS

Technologies evolve, and the tools you use today to engage your customers may not provide the functionality you need to keep users engaged in a year or two from now. Monolithic, legacy platforms can box organizations in and prevent them from adapting due to their inability to keep their product features aligned with fast changing consumer behaviors.

When architecting the user experience for customer support channels, think plug and play. A network of single purpose, extensible systems will collectively provide the functionality users need without compromising their digital experience. This way, when systems can no longer provide the functionality needed to deliver the experience you want, they can be deprecated and replaced. Open source solutions, such as **Drupal 8**, present the greatest opportunity for this type of architecture.

It is also important to develop a technology lifecycle management plan that will set in place processes for how you will experiment with, introduce, and sunset technologies for delivering your customer support experience. Establish an internal committee responsible for evaluating tools at regular stages to determine where each technology fits in your roadmap and assess whether it is delivering the desired value and ROI.

3. Empower Your Users and Amplify Your Brand Evangelists

Brands can no longer control the conversation about their products and services. Customers will engage with each other and discuss your product whether you provide a platform for them to do so or not. Your company should seek to embrace this democratization of the web, participate with your users to create a community around your brand, and create an environment that harnesses the energy of your most enthusiastic users. By nurturing your community member's participation, engagement, and promotion of your products and services, you can improve customer retention and increase brand awareness.

How do you go about this?

MAKE PRODUCT INFORMATION EASILY ACCESSIBLE AND SHAREABLE

In this new era, your customer service strategy is a two-way conversation. Your content needs to be accessible to users across a variety of channels and devices. Empower users to support each other, discuss your products, offer feedback, and share content on social channels.

Incorporate functionality into your customer experience that makes sharing of content easy for your users. Social plugins make distributing your content to a user's social network quick and easy. Allow users to share content via email, social, and private messaging applications to respond to the modern business communication environment.

Lastly, proactively deliver content to your users. Don't wait for them to come to you seeking information — empower users with valuable and relevant content whenever possible.



ENCOURAGE AND REWARD CUSTOMERS WHO ENGAGE WITH AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER

Positive re-enforcement of certain customer behaviors or interactions can be a powerful way to build brand loyalty and convert customers to evangelists. Your super fans are one of your greatest assets in expanding brand awareness, fostering trust, and converting prospects to users of your product or service.

While there is debate in the industry about the effectiveness of giving users badges as rewards, gamification is still a powerful means of rewarding contributors. Users who provide the most support can be given:

- Points that can be redeemed for prizes or discounts
- Access to special content or events
- A seat on a user steering committee that provides valuable insights and feedback to your company
- Early access to new features and feature enhancements

These same tactics can be leveraged on non-owned digital properties. If a user supports another through Twitter or some other social channel, extend the same form of rewards to them as appropriate. In some cases, the reward given to a user on a non-owned channel can be relevant to it, such as highlighting that user's generosity through a tweet or Facebook post.

PROVIDE FEEDBACK LOOPS FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS

Providing an avenue to receive feedback and feature ideas from your users helps to develop brand mindshare. This practice builds loyalty and trust with your customers and can convert passive users into engaged product evangelists. The first step is to know your customer and how they feel about your product or service — get access to your customers thoughts and behavior by providing feedback opportunities. This can be done by incorporating customer surveys within your product or service, offering customers opportunities to provide feedback after receiving support from your brand, and running beta programs for select users to test out new features and designs.

Monitor the conversations about your product or service that are happening across the web, as consumers will share more honest opinions with their peers than they will with you. Leveraging social listening and other monitoring tools — such as Radian6, Crimson Hexagon, and CXSocial — will give your organization a better sense of user sentiment and can uncover valuable insights into how your brand is perceived.

ACHIEVEMENT UNLOCKED



KEY CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN BUILDING YOUR NEW CUSTOMER SUPPORT PLATFORM

Adopting a new-age platform requires shifts in the way your organization produces content for, manages, and engages with consumers through digital customer support channels.

Below are some key things to consider when looking to adopt this approach:

Your content should be on-brand and consistent in voice, but adaptable to different platforms and devices.

- Create structured content types rather than “blobs”, so only relevant elements of content can be distributed to appropriate platforms.
- Leverage microcopy (shorter versions of key content fields) that can be better displayed for various screen sizes.
- You may need to create channel-specific versions of content to ensure adherence to that service’s norms and best practices.

How to Maintain Your Authentic Brand Voice Across Touchpoints

“...It really comes down to putting yourself in the shoes of the information consumer.

If you were at the receiving end of this message, would this make any sense to you, or would this just be confusing or annoying? We all have our communications goals, but if we are not making our case in the right way and getting the point across we are missing the mark.”

Karyn Snyder
SENIOR ANALYST



Ensure your content is marked up appropriately to improve discoverability across channels.

- Markup content with structured data (RDFa, Facebook Open Graph, etc.) so it can be easily consumed and displayed on search engines and social media.
- Develop taxonomies and tag content with terms aligned with how your users think about and search for information.
- Optimize content for search engines, using metadata that not only describes the piece of content, but identifies the canonical source, language, location, format and other relevant categorizations.
- Assign unique identifiers that indicate which platform, channel, and brand content is associated with so content is disseminated appropriately.

Digital analytics and customer feedback will need to be tied together to fully understand performance to optimize customer support efforts.

- Analytics and feedback should be tied back to the individual piece of content used in the interaction to fully understand how content performs.
- Analytics and feedback should also be tied back to the customer record in order to analyze customer support performance across various segments of your audience(s).
- Disparate types of data, such as ticket response time, sentiment analysis, and self-service success will need to be standardized to effectively report on business ROI.



IN CLOSING

Unifying your customer support services into a flexible, open platform, such as Drupal 8, sets your organization up for long-term success. This approach is the future of customer support experiences and community management. As consumers demand personalized engagement wherever they are in the digital landscape, organizations must adopt an omni-channel approach that serves the needs of consumers and adapts to evolving business goals.

Addressing the trends and best practices outlined in this whitepaper will put your organization ahead of the curve, preparing you to maneuver and adeptly respond to changing consumer behavior while boosting customer satisfaction and retention. Over time, as your customer support platform scales and matures, you'll have an ever-improving solution that provides tremendous insights into your users' needs, wants, and behaviors. Most importantly, the efficient and engaging experience your brand delivers will attract new customers and convert everyday users into brand loyalists.

Of course, you don't have to do this on your own. If you're ready to call in the experts, **contact Phase2 to get started.**



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