

# CUSTOMER SERVICE: BEYOND THE CALL CENTER



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# Introduction

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## What is a call center?

The words “call center” first developed meaning in the 1980s. When customers had a customer service issue, their only option was to pick up the phone. In response to this, companies implemented call centers, where anywhere from two to 20,000 people sat in a room, answered the phone, and dealt with customer service issues.

With the arrival of the Internet, call centers then evolved into “contact centers,” as customers now had email as an option to air their requests and complaints. In more recent years, social channels, like Twitter and Facebook, have become another option for customers to use to get support, as well as online communities. (Gartner’s 2013 [CRM customer engagement center Magic Quadrant](#) looks at vendors that respond to the challenge of this “any channel” customer service engagement.)

## So what does this evolution mean for small businesses?

Small businesses don’t have the luxury of 20,000 dedicated support reps and typically have as little as two people who answer customer service requests over all possible channels. The good news is, with the help of technology, there are now many ways for them to handle these requests, outside of the traditional call or contact center.

The intention of this e-book is to define customer service for companies who may lack a traditional call or contact center, by examining the following topics:

- Understanding the modern customer
- Thinking outside the call center
- Defining customer service without a call center
- Providing service without a call center

First up, let’s take a closer look at the customer of today.



The average customer service response time on Twitter is 4.6 hours.

- Customer Service on Twitter, Simply Measured, June 2013)

## Understanding the Modern Customer


One of the biggest keys to offering exceptional customer service today is understanding what the modern customer wants: an effortless experience. When issues arise, they want them resolved quickly, on the channel of their choosing, and with as few headaches as possible. Because of this trend, many consumers are returning to small businesses to get

the level of detailed, frictionless service they are after. Your business can exist without a call center. But it can't exist without a smooth customer experience.

Next, let's dig deeper into what it means if you need to offer service without a call center.

Consumers are two times more likely to share their bad customer service experiences than they are to talk about positive experiences.

- 2012 Global Customer Service Barometer



Consumers prefer assistance over the following channels: phone (61%), email (60%), live chat (57%), online knowledge base (51%), “click-to-call” support automation (34%).  
- eConsultancy

## Thinking Outside the Call Center

As referenced in the previous section on the modern customer, small businesses should view customer service as a key competitive advantage for a company their size. In addition, they should in no way feel that they are at a disadvantage when it comes to offering great service if they don't have a call center in place.

Here are several reasons why:

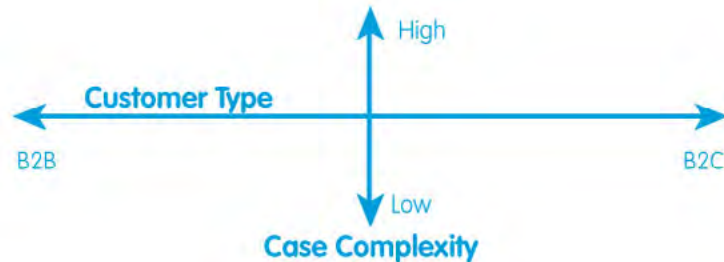
- Small businesses are typically not locked into expensive and outdated legacy systems.
- Small businesses are typically more focused on delivering exceptional service.
- Small businesses can be agile in implementing a customer service experience strategy.

**42% of service agents are unable to efficiently resolve customer issues due to disconnected systems, archaic user interfaces, and multiple applications.**

- Forrester

# Defining Your Strategy Without a Call Center

When defining a solid customer service experience strategy, first determine where on the below axis your business and your customers lie.



From here, you know which technologies and channels you need to implement to support your customers' needs.

## **B2B or B2C/Low Complexity**

Most of your customers' service issues can be handled over email, social channels, or a self-service site, typically created over time as similar questions from customers present themselves.

*Examples:*

B2C – A video game company. They receive a lot of

questions, but most are regarding specifics about a game  
B2B – A machinery company. Customers need a part for their bulldozer and the company provides it.

## **B2C or B2B/High Complexity**

These businesses typically have fewer customers, but require a highly trained staff handling a low volume of service issues over the phone.

*Examples:*

B2C – An insurance company that provides coverage for personal, home, and car. There are likely a lot of parameters that need to be discussed with customers.  
B2B – A computer chip company that provides chips for smartphones. Customers require highly involved conversations on complicated topics.

The next chapter takes a deeper look at communities and their benefits.



45% of companies offering web or mobile self-service reported an increase in site traffic and reduced phone inquiries.

- CRM Magazine

## Empowering Customers Through Communities

As customer expectations evolve, more and more companies are turning to collaborative self-service communities to empower their customers to help themselves, and find the answers they are looking for. Communities accomplish this by combining the value of traditional self-service portals with more collaborative discussion forums.

For years, self-service portals have provided an online destination for customers to log support cases, search the company knowledge base, access account

information, and more. The problem was they lacked a collaborative component.

Communities take the self-service portal and add a social, peer-to-peer element. Customers can ask questions of each other, share ideas, and network. What's key here is that the community is tied directly into the company's central case management system, so agents can also engage and answer questions when needed.



# Empowering Customers Through Communities

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Here are just some of the benefits a community can offer:

## **1. Customers serve as a “Tier 1 Support” team.**

The peer-to-peer service communities enable your customers, who often possess superior product knowledge, to answer questions for each other.

## **2. Increased brand loyalty and revenue.**

Customers who can find answers to their questions tend to be more satisfied. This makes them more likely to work with your company again and to refer others via word-of-mouth. Both can translate into revenue for your business.

## **3. Customer service costs decrease.**

Because your customers are helping to answer product and service questions in self-service communities,

there are fewer inbound inquiries for your business over expensive channels like the telephone.

## **4. Agents are free to focus on complex issues.**

The answers to frequently asked questions are easily found in communities. This allows your agents to put their time and energy into accurately resolving more complex customer issues faster.

Before we wrap up this e-book, let’s examine some ways you can “wow” your customers.



70% of buying experiences are based on how the customer feels they are being treated.

- McKinsey

## Providing Amazing Service without a Call Center

Now that your customer service strategy and technologies are in place, let's examine additional ways you can "wow" your customers.

**1. Know your customer.** Build your level of understanding so you know who the customer is, where they live, why they chose your business, and the information they'd need from you. Maintain that information in one place so everyone who needs it can find it.

**2. Understand their preferences.** Don't oversell your customers or offer products and services that are out of their range or won't interest them.

**3. Build knowledge over time.** A great example of this is how Netflix builds an understanding of the types of movies its subscribers prefer over time. Make a point to learn during every customer engagement something new about them that will help you offer great service going forward.

**4. Do something cool.** As you gather this information over time, use it to do something that will surprise and delight your customers. A simple gesture like a free gift on their birthday can go a long way to bring some "wow factor" to solid customer service.

# Things to remember:

- Amazing customer service is a key competitive advantage, no matter what the size of your business.
- Today's customer just wants what they need to be handled really well, on the channel they want it handled, and with minimal headaches.
- Because of this desire for better service, many customers are returning to small businesses to get that level of detailed service.
- Your business can exist without a call center. But it can't exist without great customer service.
- Determine if your customers are high complexity or low complexity, and implement the communication channels that will offer them the best service.
- Take the time to get to know your customers and then "wow" them.



# CUSTOMER SERVICE SOLUTIONS THAT WILL MAKE YOUR BUSINESS MORE PRODUCTIVE

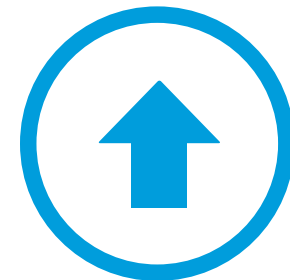
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