

Why omnichannel customer support is no fairytale



Debunking the top 5 myths

You've heard "omnichannel" mentioned in meetings and conferences, and you might be skeptical about its staying power—or that it even exists in the real world, outside of those meetings and conferences.

You want to focus on your customers' immediate needs, and you're not sure the O word is important enough given the other priorities on your plate.

But if customers told you about a defect in your product, you'd find a way to address it—lest a competitor swoop in and do it first. If customers were calling or emailing with the same questions, every single day, you'd make sure they got answers quickly before you lost their hard-earned loyalty.

Customers are actually asking for seamless support all the time, and this white paper will show you how to hear what they're really saying by filtering out the noise. It'll also show you how the right solutions, and the right partner, can set you up for success.

Approximately 61% of customers report being less patient than they were just five years ago with poor customer service, according to our [2017 investigation into changing customer expectations](#). How, when, and where you provide info about your products and services, as well as how you address issues, matters to customers. Omnichannel is how we meet them where they are, wherever they are.

If you're still skeptical, let's first debunk five common misconceptions about omnichannel support, demonstrating that it's far more than a fairytale for customer service leaders like you.

Myth #1:

Omnichannel is just a buzzword. My customers aren't expecting it, and I can't justify a new platform just because.

Even if they aren't calling it omnichannel, customers are asking for it with their frustration, every time they start from scratch with an agent over the same issue. And they state it loud and clear when they cancel an order, mid-transaction, because contextual, real-time support wasn't available when and where they needed it.

Email and webform still compose the biggest share of tickets, by a wide margin, based on data from Zendesk Benchmark companies: a crowdsourced index of customer service interactions from 45,000 participating organizations across 140 countries. But in terms of both ticket volume and number of customers using them, chat, phone, and Facebook are the fastest-growing channels, outpacing the conventional ones. Makes sense, as a majority of customers who opened more than one ticket used more than one channel to do so. And while we all have preferences when it comes to support channels, consumers say they'd forgo their preferred one if it meant getting a problem resolved more quickly.

In addition to having preferences for support channels, customers' expectations differ for each. This means companies must understand the nuances of how, when, and why customers might choose one channel of engagement over another to ensure they meet expectations across the board.

For example, customers tend to look to self-service as a first point of contact, with 76% of customers preferring self-service to alternatives, according to our Benchmark data. Increasingly, customers only expect to speak to an agent if they can't answer or solve the question on their own via a help center.

With email and webforms, customers expect a timely, though not an immediate answer. The expectation for live chat being just that requires a much faster first response time (FRT), whereas agents managing phone and IVRs should be prepared for complex, high-touch issues, as customers still turn to phone support as the fastest way to get a complicated issue resolved.

Across companies, there tends to be a shared approach to rolling out channels: Launch first with asynchronous channels, such as email and webform, then roll out a self-service platform. Within their first month of using Zendesk, most companies in our sample then start examining how live channels can further improve on how they engage with customers. So even if customers aren't using the word omnichannel, rest assured that it's not merely the technology flavor of the week.

Myth #2:

Different contact channels *should* operate in silos because they're different beasts.

Siloed support functions are especially bad news for agents, the team, and the bottom line. They add operating debt and they scale poorly. If you're using one vendor for phone support and another for live chat, for example, your agents don't have a singular record of a customer's history of queries, making the agent experience, not just your customers', a negative one.

Among customers in our Benchmark, those using an integrated omnichannel solution outperform those who stick to a limited number of channels or operate channels in silos. Their customers spend less time waiting for responses, resolve their issues faster, and are less likely to require any follow-ups. We found that Twitter, SMS, and chat generate the biggest reduction in wait time for customers, causing it to decrease by about 22% for Twitter and roughly 16 percent for both SMS and chat.

The key in these omnichannel times is hiring adaptable, versatile agents who embrace multitasking and working in different channels day to day. Two-thirds of organizations have agents who are multi-skilled across contact channels and skill types, according to Dimension Data. And, among Benchmark companies, the average number of multitasking agents has tripled since January 2017. The writing is on the wall—breaking support silos is by far the better business approach for your support teams and for your customers.

Myth #3:

More channels (especially live ones) = more problems, more staffing, more \$\$\$

We've examined how companies orchestrated their channel rollout across target audiences, industries, and company sizes to understand what they should take into account when going omnichannel. We learned that companies of all sizes are interested in adding new channels, but have concerns about "turning on the firehose": allowing a flood of inbound tickets that require more staffing and more operational oversight.

An omnichannel solution can actually save money and operational headaches, and you'll likely start seeing the benefits right away. [Self-service](#), for example, is a proven way of deflecting tickets, allowing you to serve more customers without increasing agent headcount. Taking it a step further, when [knowledge from the self-service platform is integrated into other tools](#), such as Support and Chat, this omnichannel approach can help agents solve high-touch tickets that much faster.

As live channels continue outpacing and outperforming traditional ones like phone and email, it means they're becoming table stakes for your customers. You're in for healthier bottom lines and tangible ROI if your company can meet this increasing customer demand for synchronous support. So add channels and be thoughtful about integrating them: You're in for less operational spending in the long run.

Myth #4:

There's no reliable way to measure the benefit of multiple, seamless channels.

Demonstrating the ROI of an omnichannel solution is half the battle. You absolutely need analytics and business intelligence to see whether your new support solution is working. A noticeable jump in deflected tickets, time to resolution, or CSAT rating speaks volumes. A decrease in inbound calls does the same. You might even notice increased agent satisfaction and less agent turnover. Reporting capabilities and easy-to-read data dashboards are a must-have component of any omnichannel solution, providing this data and more when you're evaluating team performance or making budgetary decisions.

[Stanley Black and Decker](#) is one company that was able to quantify, impressively and quickly, the impact of its omnichannel solution. With the goal of improving the customer experience after product purchase, company leadership needed a better way of handling an average of 10,000 tickets per month. Within three weeks of implementing Zendesk Support, Guide, Chat, and Talk, the globally dispersed Stanley Black and Decker support teams were up and running on all channels after only a single day of training. The team now boasts a one-hour first response time—which is actually closer to 30 minutes—and an average customer satisfaction score of 90%.

With Zendesk Guide and the Knowledge Capture app, the company was able to deflect tickets—a big deal since between 40-60% of all website visits are to the company's support pages. The right tech partner will not only improve these metrics, but provide that data at your fingertips to help you illustrate and demonstrate your return on investment.

Myth #5:

Omnichannel transformation is complex. I don't even know where to start.

You don't have to, and you shouldn't do it alone, anyway.

When we think about what is required to deliver truly frictionless omnichannel support, we look at it through three lenses:

- For the customer, it's about delivering seamless conversations, across any channel, where context of the interaction is not lost.
- For the agent, it's about providing simplified workflows through an easy-to-navigate, contextual workspace, regardless of the channel.
- For the admin, it's all about having all the data in one place, being able to manage operations with cross-channel reporting.

Technology apps and integrations enable support teams to collaborate effectively and provide a consistent customer experience across platforms and tools. Most Zendesk Benchmark companies rely on apps and integrations, with 60% of companies in our sample using at least one. Apps and integrations help teams answer customer inquiries faster—companies that used at least one app saw a 10% improvement in the median wait time as compared to companies that didn't use apps.

Tech partners like Zendesk provide an [omnichannel experience out of the box](#), which integrates with hundreds of other applications and tech alliances. We recommend integrating channels natively—for example, combining Zendesk Support, Guide, Chat, and Talk), then explore additional apps and integrations, such as Knowledge Capture or Web Widget, as needed.

Omnichannel isn't magic, made up, or a myth—it's a must-have.

Learn more about how [The Zendesk Suite](#) can provide the tools, the integrations, and the data your team needs to meet your customers where they are, wherever they are.