Streamlining Customer Service with In-App Support Solutions

IDC OPINION

Today's customer, both B2B and B2C, lives an immediate and connected existence. While the process of buying has been revolutionized since the advent of online commerce in the past 20 years, the promise of convenience and the available options across channels can result in a service experience that is fragmented and inconsistent. There are multiple channels through which a customer can interact with an organization for both initial purchase and ongoing support. Organizations need to meet the customers where they are, reduce the friction of interaction, and deliver timely responses to customer inquiries. Among the channels is the growing presence of mobile options. Indeed, while many established organizations are moving to a "mobile first" strategy, other companies — native, born-in-the-cloud businesses — are starting with mobility-first and digital formats for customer service interactions. Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash are among the companies that are taking a "mobile only" approach. Mobile is their platform and the only place where they do business.

A customer is able to interact with a brand using a number of different channels, including physical stores/in-person sales, email, telephone (land and mobile), fax, chat, text message, video, social, and collaboration/conferencing. Bots and IoT-enabled devices that communicate on the part of a customer will augment this list. Of these channels that can be at play, a majority can be enacted on a smartphone, making a smartphone experience and mobile applications core — and essential — components of the modern digital experience. Whether the organization is a consumer-facing brand, a B2B leader, or an enterprise seeking to enhance employee productivity, well-designed mobile apps that deliver a great user experience play a unique role in building engagement and maintaining loyalty.

Increasingly, the convenience promised by mobile devices and applications serves to increase expectations among today's consumers. As a result, engaging customers effectively requires organizations to provide seamless and timely support in the form of in-app customer service. The market for such software remains in a stage of evolution, and organizations supporting customers are facing internal transformation requirements. While digital transformation has become a market buzzword, companies need to focus as much on the organizational structures and business processes that support such a transformation as they do on the technology itself.

Since convenience is a driving factor for customers to use mobile devices, in-app mobile support will serve to increase convenience. Consequently, applications that include in-app support will garner increased loyalty from users. In turn, this will aid organizations — ultimately, those that can improve their customer loyalty can see an increase in revenue.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mobility has become a core requirement for most enterprise applications today, and the significance of mobility will continue to increase. According to IDC, the market for mobile enterprise applications — defined as packaged applications designed expressly for mobile and wireless environments — reached $3 billion in 2015. IDC estimates that the mobile enterprise application market will surpass $6 billion in 2020, representing a compound annual growth rate of 15.2%. As end users gravitate to mobile devices, customer service applications follow accordingly. IDC predicts that mobile-based CRM will reach nearly $830 million in 2020.

It makes sense that as more customers rely on mobile apps, customer support will reach them in those apps. The reasons for this include the following:

- Real-time response to customer requirements
- Shift to interactions when, where, and how customers want
- Multichannel support that is consistent across channels
- Proliferation of mobile devices
- Customer engagement through branded mobile applications

SITUATION OVERVIEW

End users increasingly rely on mobile devices because the devices offer an experience marked by convenience, ease, consistency, timeliness, and context. For organizations that provide customer support, the various systems and channels through which they do so have evolved accordingly. Traditional support channels are shifting as a result. While self-service capabilities have off-loaded less complex customer inquiries from the traditional call center, the complexity of calls — and the subsequent length of calls — is increasing. Customers bent on convenience want to select their support channel of choice based on availability and needs. In addition to the phone, these channels include email, chat, social channels (Twitter and Facebook), messaging platforms (Facebook Messenger), support forums, IoT (connected devices), and embedded support in the form of in-app options and web widgets.

Systems must be comprehensive. Consider that a customer has an evolving "external" view defined by social interactions and preferred channels. In addition, an organization has an internal 360-degree view of this customer, with the goal of placing the customer in the center. To deliver seamless support — and in effect a customer experience that is both engaging and convenient — the organization must combine both views.

Omni-Channel Interactions Drive In-App Support

With regard to mobile devices, in-app customer service and web widgets can enable companies to offer seamless support through a variety of channels — email, chat, online knowledge bases, phone, and social media. Providing such support can pose technical challenges for developers. Many companies rely on a collection of disparate systems for customer support that were not designed for omni-channel considerations. As such, the data these systems collect is often distributed — leaving customers to repeat important support information if they happen to email an inquiry one day and call the next. In addition, today's 24 x 7 world increasingly demands 24 x 7 support. Add geographic considerations to technical and channel issues, and the customer support experience can be anything but seamless.

Convenience and Less Disruption

In-app support and embedded web widgets can enable companies to offer support via mobile devices that is less disruptive, more convenient, and essentially more engaging – leading to faster problem resolution and increased customer satisfaction. For online ecommerce applications, in-app support can provide essential real-time and in-context responses to customers with an easy way to access support – via chat, email, or knowledge base – without leaving the application they are in. Customers and the support representatives on the other end of the channel can see a history of interactions, thereby mitigating the need to repeat information on the part of the former and facilitating a complete support view on the part of the latter. For customers, the main benefits of such in-app support are convenience and the timely resolution of problems. For organizations, the benefits are fewer and shorter calls to the help desk because many customers can quickly access self-service support. In addition, customers don't abandon an application to obtain support – a key differentiator when ecommerce transactions are in progress. Whatever the situation, a customer receiving a quick resolution to a query is left with a positive experience. Problems that are resolved do not typically lead to an overall negative experience. However, any issues that are problematic to resolve leave a longer-lasting negative impression.

Mobile Development Trends

It is clear that the platform of the future is the one most of us hold in our hands, but for many companies, adding support for mobility to their list of things to do brings new challenges and resource demands to often overtaxed technical organizations. The incorporation of additional channels of customer interactions has caused companies with legacy applications to progressively add new corresponding support channels to the existing environment over time. In the past 15 years, the number of customer channels has increased from predominantly in-person sales, telephone, and fax to include email, cellular, chat, text message, video, social, and collaboration/conferencing. Bots and IoT-enabled devices that communicate on the part of a customer will augment this list. Many of these channels are options from a mobile device. However, for many companies, the resulting infrastructure is becoming brittle and cannot accommodate the elegant addition of more options.

Those in a technical role or an engineering role are currently tasked with bringing order to this environment, evaluating appropriate channels, creating consistency among these channels and – in the case of a mobile solution – bringing everything together on one of the smallest platforms available. Increasingly, those in charge of the mobile platform are focusing on the use case from the customer perspective. This pivot in thinking and customer handling is precipitated by a changed perspective regarding the customer experience. Instead of looking at the problem from the pure needs of the organization, those leading the charge in mobile are among the leaders viewing the problem, and therefore the solution, from the perspective of customers. What are they trying to do on their mobile device? To meet the needs of supplying such an environment, developers need technologies that can facilitate mobility – across devices, operating systems (OSs), and geographies – and that can accommodate multiple communications methods.

From resource, cost, and implementation standpoints, the addition of mobile technology to an existing environment can encounter internal resistance because of the obvious additional cost involved, dedication of existing skills or lack of skills, and time related to development and implementation. The deployment of a mobile app with in-app service requires due diligence to address these considerations. Without planning and resource allocation, a poor app can do more damage than offering no app. The case for the additional cost related to customer experience needs to be made to management. While in-app service may be a technical process, the execution of the process touches the customer directly and is key to supporting customer retention strategies through prompt and contextual customer service.

CONSIDERING ZENDESK

Zendesk provides software designed to deliver better customer relationships through improved customer engagement and enhanced customer understanding. According to Zendesk, its products are used by more than 87,000 customer accounts in over 150 countries. Based in San Francisco, Zendesk has operations in the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, and South America. Zendesk's Web Widget and mobile SDKs allow organizations to embed customer support, live chat, and self-service experiences natively on the web, in mobile apps, and in games. Developers can also customize the mobile SDKs to mirror the look and feel of existing mobile applications. In addition to chat, Zendesk software supports help pages and knowledge bases for customer self-service.

For developers, Zendesk offers the following:

- **Mobile SDKs** enable developers to add Zendesk functionality natively into their own mobile applications with options for an out-of-the-box or entirely customized experience.
- **Web Widget** allows developers to add core Zendesk functionality to a website with an embeddable snippet.
- **REST APIs** can enable developers to build custom integrations between Zendesk and other systems; currently, Zendesk offers more than 400 different API endpoints.
- **Zendesk Apps** is a framework that allows developers to add additional functionality to the interface of their Zendesk product.

For many companies, customer support is a 24 x 7 global operation. Typically, first-tier support representatives interact directly with customers — often, these frontline personnel regularly access customer data in CRM systems as they try to address customer issues. In this era of ecommerce, many companies also need to ramp up and down their customer support operations. In doing so, the systems that support such operations need to be flexible to accommodate fluctuations in demand.

Customer Case Studies

SwiftKey

In 2014, SwiftKey — a provider of predictive keyboard software — was looking to upgrade its customer-facing help center technology. Josh Greenwald, community support team lead for SwiftKey, which is now part of Microsoft, recalls that with subpar reporting capabilities and limitations in terms of advanced ticketing and workflows, the legacy software couldn't keep up with anticipated future needs. In looking for a more robust offering, SwiftKey selected Zendesk.

Initially, Zendesk was used for SwiftKey's help desk and to get the company's help center up and running. (The help center is where customers can search content in a self-service capacity.) "Previously, our help center flow was poor, and search didn't perform well," Greenwald explains. "Also, knowing that we could scale up with agents and add more products as things progressed was also a big value [of Zendesk]," he adds.

Following the implementation of Zendesk, Greenwald began discussing additional use cases and features with Zendesk. One of the topics discussed was creating a native-app support experience within the SwiftKey mobile app. "That was when we decided to move forward with the Zendesk Mobile SDK," says Greenwald.

With the Zendesk Mobile SDK, the help center and ticket submission functions are right inside the SwiftKey app. This certainly makes it easier for customers looking for information or seeking assistance from an agent, yet it also enables SwiftKey to gather valuable customer data. When a customer submits a support ticket inside the app, SwiftKey captures information like the type of device – for example, iPhone 7 or iPhone 7 Plus – the version of iOS, and the language enabled. All this information "allows us to solve issues more quickly for the customer and then escalate the issue immediately to the engineers," says Greenwald.

The integration involved custom development work – a process that SwiftKey accomplished at no added cost because it has the in-house staff. Currently, SwiftKey has 16 licenses for Zendesk and six employees who actively use Zendesk for ticketing and answering direct support tickets. SwiftKey offers support via email, social, and forums, and Greenwald says that approximately 15% of support and customer help volume is handled via the in-app mobile capability. He adds that SwiftKey doesn't do customer transactions via mobile apps, which explains why real-time interactions are not supported.

SwiftKey first launched on Android in 2010 and subsequently arrived in the Apple App Store in 2014. Today, SwiftKey is featured on more than 300 million devices. "We work with some of the world's leading smartphone manufacturers who integrate our technology into their products," says Greenwald.

All told, Greenwald feels that choosing Zendesk for in-app customer service was the right move. "In terms of value and what we get for the cost, Zendesk is really reasonable," says Greenwald. "Since first implementing it," he adds, "Zendesk has added quite a number of features, so it does keep getting better and better."

SaaS Customer

Another Zendesk customer (which requested anonymity) opted to go with Zendesk in part because the company's SaaS model can support a ramp-up in customer service operations during the busy holiday season. Another deciding factor was that Zendesk software lends itself to ad hoc reporting, whereas the company's legacy system required a dedicated reporting specialist. In addition, the chat capabilities of the Zendesk platform proved attractive because customers turn to chat more and more for their support experiences. This global ecommerce company believes that mobile chat support will become a source of competitive advantage. Having a robust mobile app will increasingly require integrated customer support. For this company, such integration is central to its strategy of growing mobile revenue.

CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES

To a great extent, in-app customer service represents a new paradigm of customer service, and with any significant change, there are challenges. Top challenges include the following:

- The need to orient consumers to the fact that service is readily available to them within the app may require marketing and increased branding efforts.
- An increase in the number of contact centers or service personnel may be required to provide rapid response for live agent support; companies must assume mobile app usage among customers in "on the go" situations, thereby necessitating agents to deliver support within relatively brief time frames.
- The ongoing maintenance and upgrading of the mobile app should be prioritized. As devices continue to evolve – larger to smaller and smaller to larger – the app must be maintained for optimal performance on all platforms.

Along with the challenges, in-app customer service brings with it many opportunities, including:

- Increased customer engagement
- Decreased contact center call volumes
- Faster resolution to customer inquiries

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Reducing friction in customer interactions means bringing methods of support closer to the customer and making it as easy and native an experience as possible. In the process, companies can increase customer engagement and expand brand loyalty through the positive and timely completion of service requests.

A better mobile experience helps drive better business performance, particularly for mobility-only companies. By offering better in-app customer service, the app itself should be perceived by its users more positively. This should result in better app reviews, which in turn should drive more interest in the app, thereby creating a virtuous cycle.

Mobile SDKs allow a business to capture very specific information about its end users, which results in more context for the support agent. Diving into how an SDK can capture the OS and app version, configuration settings, and so forth can reduce additional back and forth between the user and the support agent.

As companies increasingly do business in a mobile world, the customer service interaction has the potential to become more complex. With multiple channels to both conduct business and interact with support, companies need to take a holistic approach to offering support that is streamlined for the support agents and convenient for the customer. As mobile technology proliferates and apps continue to drive transactions, companies that deploy in-app mobile support will be at a competitive advantage.

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Global Headquarters

5 Speen Street
Framingham, MA 01701
USA
508.872.8200
Twitter: @IDC
idc-community.com
www.idc.com