

Customer Service Roles are Now Being Utilised as Empathetic Impact Officers

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Insight from KURA Chief Culture Officer, Julie McIntosh

The role of customer services has changed and evolved, along with the customer experience. Now, customer services teams are on hand to support customers with problem-solving and emotional support, as well as traditional after-sales support.

Julie McIntosh, chief culture officer at UK based global outsourcing provider [Kura](#), said: “In a variety of commercial settings, empathetic customer service means better customer experience and improved loyalty. It also means fewer mistakes where conflict can lead to lost custom.

“Many now agree empathy is not a soft subject in customer experience design, but a genuine component part that should be nurtured deliberately.”

Here, Julie takes a look at the different roles the customer support teams play in the current climate.

Traditional customer services roles

The traditional role in customer service was to provide after-sales care and support. Businesses would have an internal customer service line team. As businesses have grown, many have gone down the route of [customer service outsourcing](#) to enable employees to focus on other areas of the business.

After-sales care and support, making sure that customers are satisfied with purchases, and dealing with any complaints or issues effectively to protect not only the customer but also the reputation and performance of the brand, remains an integral part of the customer service journey.

Emotional support

Nowadays, with a cost-of-living crisis upon us, a lot of customer service teams offer emotional support in addition to the more traditional offering of support with a product or service. In times of hardship, many businesses are utilising customer services to reach out to customers and offer them advice or support.

This was the case, and continues to be so, during the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020. Many people were left alone, unable to have face-to-face contact with anyone for weeks – or for the more vulnerable, even longer.

While there were charities on hand to offer support to those in need, some companies and even football clubs utilised staff to offer support too.

Manchester City had staff from all departments, not just customer support, reaching out to elderly and lonely people in '[welfare checks](#)'.

This was also the case with banks and building societies during the same period and the current climate – Halifax just one of the banking firms [checking in with members and customers](#) to see how they are coping and if there is anything they could help with in the challenging times we are experiencing.

Such examples of companies showing they care can only be a positive thing in the minds of the consumer, ensuring they are more likely to remain a customer going forward.

Being empathetic

Being empathetic is a major part of a customer service role.

Dealing with complaints and issues is the bread and butter. When dealing with a customer, whether a customer service agent is helping with a complaint or otherwise, it is essential to put yourself in the customer's shoes.

This is different to the age-old theory of 'the customer is always right', as it is more about offering compassion to the customer and working to relieve their burden – regardless of being able to resolve the issue.

Empathy can have knock-on effects for both customers and the organisation. Relating again back to the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, empathy was key in customer services – albeit on this occasion, quite possible a two-way street between the agent and the customer.

The empathy shown, in turn, made the customer feel good. It makes them feel they are dealing with an organisation that cares.

Furthermore, when shopping in the same industry in future, customers are likely to remember this exchange, giving the organisation an advantage over competitors.

Empathy is about seeing the person you are dealing with, not just the summary of their journey, and it is important to let this come through in the conversation.

Listening to a customer's story empathetically is an essential tool to wield in what is becoming an increasingly automated world.

Problem-solving

Sometimes a customer may not have a complaint or an issue with a product or service; they simply need a helping hand to work out how to get the most out of it. Some roles will require an agent to know the internal workings of a product, process or service inside out, so you can seamlessly pass this knowledge onto the customer.

Customer services teams and agents that are fully trained in products and services add another string to the bow of your business. Customers are buying and engaging in different markets and through different sources; and customer services teams, often with the increasing involvement of AI, are on hand to respond and assist customers on a variety of outlets.

Overall

In an increasingly digital world, it is imperative that businesses do not lose sight of that human touch, or underestimate the customer's needs.

[Automation of services, whether by using chatbots or other AI tools](#), is important – but customers will seek out a human when they have an issue. To thrive, businesses need to provide that people-first solution.

As Julie McIntosh said: “To customers themselves, it may feel counterintuitive to hear that companies that aim to improve customer service are investing not only in technology, but also in human skills. But technology is only one part of the equation. There's a blend, a balancing act.

“While technology is changing the way we live our lives, we all still want someone to talk to when we have a real problem that needs solving – there's still value in human interaction, there's still power in empathy.”

Sources

[Man City are ringing their OAP fans to check in on them during the coronavirus lockdown – Manchester Evening News](#)

[The importance of empathy in customer service – Microsoft Dynamics 365 Blog](#)

[Halifax Health Centre](#)

[People are the BIGGEST disruptors – KURA white paper](#)