

The Guide to Achieving Customer-First Service.

Stop resolving tickets and start personalizing conversations.

Customer expectations have evolved past ticket numbers, formal emails (“don’t reply below this line”), and isolated data (“what is your order number?”). In today’s experience economy, customer-first — not ticket-first — enterprises are winning the competitive game across industries. What’s their secret? They’ve shifted to a customer-first approach where each interaction is personalized from start to finish.

Customer-first is more than the mottoes and mantras that have been adopted by every organization. It’s about recognizing that there is an actual person contacting you that expects you to know them as an individual and their history with your business.

The issue is that the customer service software solutions that have become commonplace are built to resolve tickets and lack the data to provide immediate context on the customer or issue beyond what’s in the ticket. As a result, service agents view customers as problems that need to be solved fast, but can’t because they have to ask multiple questions and take time to access other systems to actually resolve the ticket. The resulting experience is impersonal and inefficient.

Achieving standout customer-first service experiences relies on companies bringing together traditional interaction history with customer purchase and activity data your service agents can access from a single workspace. By combining this information in a single platform, agents have data-driven, actionable conversations that are empathetic because they are grounded in the shared history between the customer and the brand. In the end, customers expect brands to always engage them in the same personal manner they would expect from people they are close with in their everyday lives.



A Customer-First Approach.

A customer-first approach to service starts with empathy, the recognition of a shared history, and the ability to communicate across the channels your customers use while maintaining the thread of a conversation even while switching between those channels. Remember their last two orders and returns? Were they happy with the sizing and service? It's this combination of feelings and facts that enable your service teams to deliver personalized, effortless experiences.

Technology is the backbone of a customer-first service experience, and it's important not to settle for the status quo when your competition is innovating. Here are five symptoms that your organization suffers from outdated customer experience technology:

1. Your tech represents customers as isolated tickets or cases, not whole people.
2. Customers have to repeat information every time they switch channels or agents.
3. Your service team needs multiple tabs and system logins.
4. You can't easily access customer data, so proactive service and outreach requires intensive planning and coordination.
5. How you route and prioritize inbound customer conversations is one-size-fits-all.

Sound familiar? You'll want to read on for actionable strategies for a more modern CX — even before you switch tech, cultural and organizational changes can help you deliver a true customer-first approach.

Here's a reminder of how important building a positive CX is for brands:

7 in 10 U.S. consumers

say they've spent more money to do business with a company that delivers great service.

American Express

More than 80%

of organizations expect to compete mainly based on customer experience.

Gartner

75% of companies

believe they're customer-centric, but only 30% of consumers agree.

Capgemini



Four ways to create customer-first service.

Ultimately, a customer-first approach requires having the right people, processes, and technology. Here are four ways to build customer-first experiences, alongside examples from brands that have become leaders by reimagining customer service.

Understand the emotions of your customers.

Do you know what percentage of your customers are happy? Satisfied? Disappointed? Understanding the emotional state of your customers, and adding heart to the conversation makes the experience more meaningful, and agents can have a conversation that can truly help the customer.

We believe the top difference between a good agent and a great agent is their ability to express empathy. And empathy is enabled by sensing someone's emotions. Sentiment scores within your customer service platform should give your agents:

- Updates and reporting in real time
- Customer segmentation by current emotional status
- Sentiment-based workflow automations.

By pairing sentiment data with the right agent skills, it's easier than ever to master the skill of mirroring to make customers more comfortable. Mirroring, even if doing something as simple as using casual terms and dropping in an emoji after the customer does first, can go a long way in building a customer friendship. A customer service agent must know the appropriate tone to use to calm frustration, convey understanding of the issue, and express empathy.

Anomalie

Anomalie is a direct-to-consumer wedding dress company that makes custom gowns to fit brides' unique style, size and budget. Before making the switch to Kustomer, Anomalie stylists had to log into separate systems for text, phone, chat, email and data visualization. Now, stylists are able to bring all the information about their customers into a single timeline view and communicate with them seamlessly across channels.

Having all relevant information in one place allows stylists to react faster to prospective customer inquiries and focus on building trust as well as meaningful communication with their brides. In fact, in the three months following the implementation of Kustomer, Anomalie's sales doubled while their marketing spend stayed flat. The team attributes a lot of this to being able to contact brides more quickly and in a more personalized way after signup using Kustomer.



A Customer-First Approach is Personal.

	<i>Transactional</i>		<i>Personal</i>
Availability	Only available 9-5 ET weekdays	▶	Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
Comms.	One channel at a time. Disconnected conversations.	▶	Shared history of conversations & moments
Context	Starts from scratch, customers repeat answers	▶	Knows everything about customers.
Sentiment	Cares about being fast, treats customers like a problem to be solved	▶	Cares how customers feel, aims to deliver value
Frequency	Waits until there's a problem to solve / ticket to resolve	▶	Proactively reaches out to delight and prevent problems

Encourage actual conversations.

This requires a mindset shift from transactional service to conversational service. Conversational service focuses on helping agents build long-term relationships with customers, rather than resolving a series of issues. Agents are there to provide real value, not just to solve a problem or process a transaction. They use context and conversations to make it easy for customers to get help while allowing agents to provide more personalized service at scale.

Embrace omnichannel and break down silos.

Another feature of conversational service is channel flexibility. Think about how often your texts with friends or family turn into phone calls. In the same way, your teams and technology need to provide omnichannel support for this type of asynchronous interaction.

Meeting customers when and where they want pays off. [Harvard Business Review](#) found that customers who received a response to their query on social media were more likely not just to remain a customer, but to also spend more money with the brand. The brands that deliver omnichannel support (and also are flexible enough to continue conversations across multiple channels without losing the context) will win additional brand loyalty.

The benefits of being channel agnostic.

[HopSkipDrive](#) is a tech-enabled service that provides rides for kids 6+ with fully-vetted, fingerprinted caregivers. The company is dedicated to using technology to help kids reach their full potential by providing a safe, dependable way to get them where they need to be.

One of the challenges for HopSkipDrive's Community Experience team is supporting three distinct communities: CareDrivers, parents, and schools. SMS is a popular channel for the HopSkipDrive community, but many customer service platforms don't show it love.

However, Kustomer has SMS capabilities deeply integrated as part of a single timeline view, so it's a smooth experience to respond to texts or any conversation channel the customer prefers.

Don't think it's just "newer" channels like Facebook Messenger and social media that need your attention, though. "Your business results depend on your brand's ability to retain and add customers," says [Olive Huang](#), Research Director at Gartner. "You must win at every interaction the customer has with your organization, whether that be a marketing campaign, a call to a contact center, an invoice, or a delivery reliant on the supply chain. Every department must play its part in a coordinated fashion."

The days of viewing contact centers as isolated contact centers are gone. As Gartner notes, [in a world increasingly built around collaboration](#), CX leaders need to partner and collaborate with other departments to [make improvements](#) throughout the entire client life cycle.

Reinvent your CS titles and hiring processes.

Names are powerful things, and for a brand's service team, the name sets the tone for customer experience engagements. An "agent" is a transactional term, ideal for reactive problem-solving. Many customer-first service organizations are reinventing the names, skill sets, and trainings of their teams because of the importance of the experience to customer value and business success.

Obviously you can't call your service agents the "Happiness agents" if they consistently deliver low CSAT numbers and aren't empowered to actually generate happiness. As [HBR](#) reports, "Names set expectations. Above all, make sure your product delivers on them." That's where the principles of a customer-first approach all need to work together to deliver true value.

There's also increasing amounts of research on the characteristics to hire for to deliver exceptional service experiences. Just last year, [Gartner](#) found that "Many service organizations still hire the same type of rep they would have hired 5 or even 15 years ago." The Gartner research found that management should instead consciously begin changing hiring and training processes to emphasize more successful characteristics in customer service professionals.

At Priority Bicycles, everyone takes a turn

Everyone on the [Priority Bicycles](#) team, from product design to accounting, has a login to Kustomer. Why? Because customer service is provided 7 days a week, 365 days a year. To accommodate this, everyone in the company, including the CEO, has an evening or weekend shift. This leads to everyone fully understanding customer preferences and issues. This commitment to their customers helps build trust, loyalty and repeat business.



Key Customer-First Takeaways

1. Customer-first means delivering a personalized, efficient, and effortless customer experience from the start of every interaction.
2. Outdated customer service technology and practices are probably holding back your brand growth.
3. Conversational service requires empathy, sentiment analysis, and true omnichannel support.
4. De-silo the customer experience (it can't live only in Customer Service or Marketing) and collaborate across your organization to improve service and product offerings.
5. Audit your hiring and training processes to ensure the right people are leading customer interactions.

Glossier's gTeam shakes up the customer service world

Glossier, which just recently topped a [billion-dollar valuation](#) and uses the Kustomer platform, is known for its differentiated customer experience, led by [the gTeam](#) editors.

Glossier's gTeam is considered part of its marketing team, and insights from customer conversations are regularly used to help inform broader brand strategy and product development. "They're part of a full feedback loop that can lead to organizational change," said Erin Miller, Glossier's director of customer experience to [Digiday](#).

About Kustomer.

Kustomer is the omnichannel SaaS platform reimagining enterprise customer service to deliver standout experiences – not resolve tickets. Built with intelligent automation, Kustomer scales to meet the needs of any contact center and business by unifying data from multiple sources and enabling companies to deliver effortless, consistent, and personalized customer service through a single timeline view.

Today, Kustomer is the core platform of some of the leading customer service brands like Ring, Rent the Runway, Glossier, Away, Glovo, Slice, and UNTUCKit. Headquartered in NYC, Kustomer was founded in 2015 by serial entrepreneurs Brad Birnbaum and Jeremy Suriel, raised over \$113.5 million in venture funding, and is backed by leading VCs including: Tiger Global Management; Battery Ventures; Redpoint Ventures; Cisco Investments; Canaan Partners; Boldstart Ventures; and Social Leverage.

Let's chat.

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