

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

THE
CUSTOMER
OF THE
FUTURE
IS HERE
TODAY

By Elizabeth Cholawsky



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We in the support world have been stuck in an old way of thinking. We wait for a customer to call in with a specific problem. We fix it, and we focus on the efficiency with which we perform those fixes. But, with today's explosion of interconnected devices for the home and business and their complexity in terms of installation and operation, that old way of thinking won't work anymore. This interconnectedness—the Internet of Things (IoT)—demands a new definition of support.

If you think about the word “support,” it means so much more than break-fix. For example, it can mean equipping customers to use all the functionality of a product instead of just the most obvious features. We all know the feeling of excitement we get when a coworker shows us some great little computer shortcut that we never knew about and could have used a dozen times in the past week

alone. If you think about support in that mindset, that feeling of added value is what we need to give our customers. That's what tomorrow's customers need and, more importantly, expect today.

With customers' heightened expectations and increasing familiarity with technology, support has a unique opportunity to become more influential in customers' evaluation of products and, therefore, of the brands behind them. Support can and should be about fulfilling the product promise that the designers and developers intended. It's about helping customers get more value out of the products and services they buy, from setup, through first use, through upgrade or replacement.

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This kind of support embraces customers throughout their entire experience of a product or a service. Along with the use of analytics and advanced support tools for continuous optimization, it's what I refer to as connected support. Here are nine key changes to look for in this evolution:

1

Support organizations will be expected to deliver proactive support when, where, and in the form the customer prefers.

The explosion of complex, interconnected home and business devices will create a need for support access to be available at the customer's fingertips, on whatever device they are using at the moment, without interrupting their flow. Millennial customers and, increasingly, older generations have less interest in and patience for calling tech support, waiting in a queue, describing the problem through lengthy question and answer sessions, and then po-

tentially having to start the conversation over again with a more advanced tech support representative or supervisor.

This desire for personalized delivery of multichannel support will mean that it must become standard operating procedure for tech support operations to use advanced software to enable chat, text, email, and interactive video support, in addition to phone support. And each of these channels will need to be context-sensitive, providing a more intelligent starting point for the support interaction.

2

The support team will need a guidance system at their fingertips.

Support representatives will have a more challenging job to do, because the configuration and use of data-driven devices is much more complex than what customers have been used to.

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It's unrealistic to expect that every support representative will know everything there is to know about every issue on every single product or service available to customers.

They'll need a guidance system that offers, in real-time during customer interactions, the best practices and tips for managing any service or product issue. They'll need to be able to call up and utilize the proven methods of support to avoid having them reinvent the wheel as they often do today. That guidance system will need to have automatic access to device information, executables, customer history, and myriad additional context knowledge that will help it—and whomever it's guiding—be fully informed immediately. As customers continue to use more and more technology, they simply will not tolerate delays that are inherent in traditional support interactions.

3

Support teams will become the primary point of contact for upgrading and upselling customers.

This idea is not so far-fetched. Who has the most contact with the customer after purchase? Who knows more about a customer's experience with a product or service? Who is the most logical person to discuss how additional products and services may make the customer's life even easier? Of course, it's the support team.

The value of the support function is increasingly being tied to its ability to protect and generate revenue. In 2012, the **International Customer Management Institute (ICMI)** found that 51.4 percent of survey respondents ranked the need to increase sales and profitability as a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. And an Internet search of job listings for customer service or customer support representative roles

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will show most of them now include the responsibility of cross selling and/or upselling products or services.

4

Futuristic technologies are making their way into the home and will require more advanced support.

Consider this example: By 2020, a high-quality 3D printer will be available at a price affordable for most average families, [according to McKinsey](#). [Gartner](#) expects the 3D printing market to be worth a staggering \$13.4 billion by 2018. The 3D printing capability offers the potential to allow every consumer to set up his own mini-factory, breaking down thresholds and barriers for almost every industry.

If these predictions are correct, 3D printing technology could single-handedly spawn a new generation of garage industry, similar to the birth of the

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personal computer industry that began in Silicon Valley garages. What does this mean in the context of support? Whether it's a consumer using the product in the home, or an entrepreneur building products with a 3D printer out of a garage, they'll need support to get there—support in the way of setup, configuration, and optimal use.

And when machines and devices are this advanced, user manuals have definite limitations. They will need to be replaced by on-screen and interactive voice and video guidance for configuration, operation, and upgrade as well as troubleshooting.

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5

Tech support specialists will need to engage with the customer at point of purchase and stay engaged through the product lifecycle, all the way through upgrade or replacement.

Simply put, customers expect more today of their products and their reliability than they ever have, and they expect to be supported at every stage. In *What's the Future of Business? Changing the Way Businesses Create Experiences*, Brian Solis, a well-known futurist and expert on the effects of emerging technology on business, marketing, and culture, recently wrote:

THE WAY WE GO ABOUT BUSINESS IS SLOWLY DYING. CONNECTED CONSUMERISM SAYS THAT THINGS ARE NOT ONLY CHANGING, BUT ARE SO RADICALLY DIFFERENT THAT THE BUSINESS MODELS WE HAVE TODAY CANNOT SUPPORT A MUCH MORE DYNAMIC APPROACH TO THE

MARKET. EVEN IF YOU'RE OVER THE AGE OF 35, IF YOU USE AN IPAD OR SOCIAL NETWORKS OR APPS, YOU SLOWLY START TO ACT LIKE A MILLENNIAL. ...THE TOUCHPOINTS, THE SCREENS WE USE, OUR EXPECTATIONS—WE BECOME MORE DEMANDING, MORE INFORMED AND MORE CONNECTED.

6

The support function will become the keepers of the customer experience.

Customer experience has been a focal point of many industries for years, but it's been a function without a home, until now. Because the support function will become proactive, rather than remaining reactive, it will be tasked with responsibility for preventing problems in addition to solving them, by guiding customers in setup, configuration, and use of devices and services. The better this guidance, the stronger the customer experience. And good customer experience correlates

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highly with customer loyalty and revenue. In fact, according to **Dimension Data's** 2015 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report, 57 percent of companies surveyed can already correlate improving customer experience levels to revenue/profit growth. And a global contact center survey by **Deloitte** states that 62 percent of organizations view customer experience provided through contact centers as a competitive differentiator.

7

Customers will demand self-support directly within the apps that run their devices and services.

Tech support operations will need to be able to offer customers self-support at their fingertips, with seamless access to live support if they get into trouble. By providing access to connected self-support, support teams give the customer what they want, when and how they want it, but with the safety net

of an immediately available agent who already has access to the context of the problem, including what steps the customer has taken herself.

8

Tech support teams will need to support cloud software and apps as effectively as if they were running locally.

Forrester Research forecasts that by 2020 the cloud market will grow to \$191 billion USD. Virtually all software and content will be stored in the cloud instead of on local hardware. The cloud will be accepted as the logical replacement by both businesses and consumers. Support teams will need to understand storage, access, and synchronization issues as well as they now understand the file structure on a laptop. When a customer can't take a photo with his new smartphone, the support representative will need to understand that it may be a storage issue rather than a camera issue.

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9

Big Data will begin to have a big effect on support representatives.

Not only will support reps need to be able to manage device-based data storage issues that arise for their customers, but those very devices and machines are now generating data on their own performance. Support teams will need to understand and feed back to product development teams performance data accessed during support interactions. This approach will allow brands to perfect product performance much more quickly and with less trial and error.



In summary, we can see that a lot will be asked of our support technologies and teams in the near future. As we continue redefining support for a connected world, let's make sure we equip our tech support teams with the knowledge and guidance they need

in order to fulfill their mission. After all, they are the front line, ensuring that customers realize the full value of connected products and services. .



About the Author

Elizabeth Cholawsky is president and CEO of Support.com, the leading provider of cloud software and services for next-generation technical support. An award-winning executive with more than twenty-five years of tech leadership, her earlier roles included serving as GM/VP of IT Support and Access at Citrix, responsible for the GoToMyPC and GoToAssist product lines. Elizabeth received her PhD in political science from the University of Minnesota and her BA from Franklin & Marshall College. A weekend triathlete, she also volunteers with **Exceeding Expectations**, using the sport to mentor at-risk children.