

Meeting the advanced challenges of CX in modern manufacturing



While building positive, long-term customer relationships has always been important to business success, the methods for doing so are evolving faster than ever across verticals and industries.

For manufacturing businesses, meeting customers' expectations at scale is complicated. And doing so today looks entirely different than it did a decade ago – or even a year ago. As the industry evolves, advancements in technology also bring changes in consumer behaviour.

In this highly dynamic environment, delivering an excellent customer experience became a key way to differentiate, as well as a marker of overall success. Realising that customers' expectations evolved, [Stanley Black & Decker](#), for example, had a vision for getting closer to customers by improving the post-purchase experience. They took action and integrated their global contact centres into a unified ecosystem with centralised data. Then, they trained agents – in a single day – in how to handle multi-channel responses. Efficient workflows helped their team adhere to one-hour, first-time response service-level agreements (SLAs). Often, the response is closer to 30 minutes, and they've seen increasing customer-satisfaction (CSAT) ratings as a result.

This white paper will describe how to adjust to and embrace new customer-experience challenges in the modern manufacturing world, helping set your business up for success too.



Understanding the customer-experience challenges of today pays off

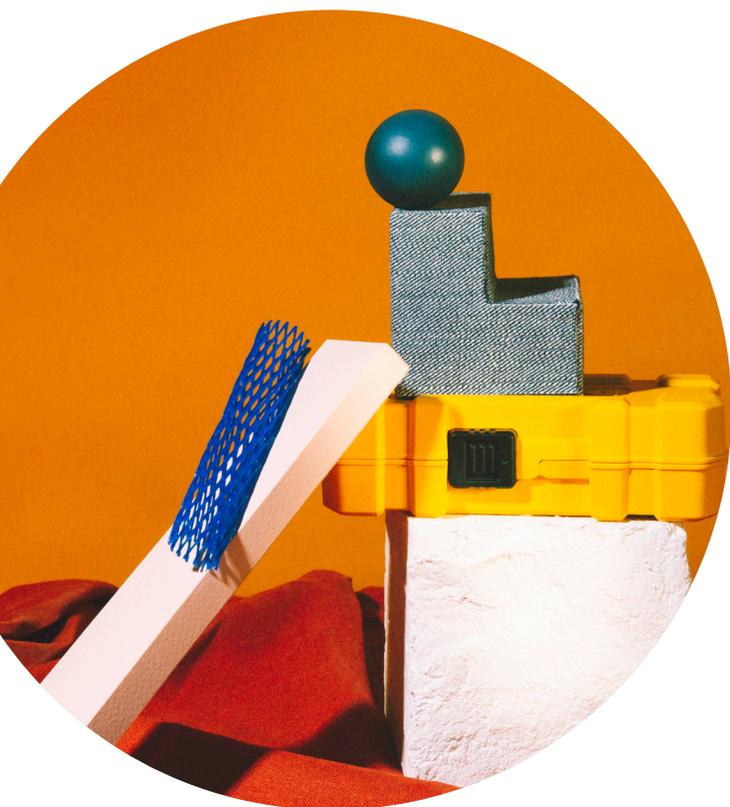
The need to deliver a good customer experience (CX) is nothing new, but to meet growing demand and increased customer expectations, companies must adapt their philosophy and tactics across the whole business.

Customers expect easy and high-touch access to the brands that they do business with, as well as a seamless experience throughout all these interactions. But that can add significant complexity at the back end – especially for businesses with a huge number of customers, orders and products.

While meeting these growing expectations is a challenge, the investment pays off on the top and bottom lines. Forrester recently found that businesses that are customer-experience leaders grow revenue 5.1 times faster than their peers who are CX laggards.¹

Making an investment in delivering the best possible experience for customers within every interaction they have with your company increases your chances of winning these customers' trust – which is always a reliable path to higher revenue. Not only are loyal customers likely to spend more – via increased renewal rates, faster product adoption and return business – but they'll also tell other people what they think. Word-of-mouth evangelism also brings new business and encourages a new wave of loyal customers to come on board.

However, before a business can reap those benefits, it's necessary to understand what the modern customer wants, as well as the challenges that must be overcome to deliver it.



¹ Forrester Research, Improving CX Through Business Discipline Drives Growth, Harley Manning & Rick Parrish, 11 September 2019

Four top CX challenges to overcome

For all the ways in which each company is unique, customer-support executives in manufacturing companies face similar issues across the board. These include:

1. Modernising the existing tech stack

Whether because of end-of-life issues, security concerns or a lack of development in new features, many companies are faced with the daunting task of upgrading legacy technology systems. In many cases, businesses find themselves dependent on platforms that are not only outdated, but also built using proprietary technology that makes them inflexible and difficult to update. It's a problem that becomes increasingly difficult to manage as a business grows.

Overhauling legacy tech solutions helps a team operate more efficiently, leverage data effectively and stay competitive in the modern manufacturing landscape. For example, outdated tech systems can pose a security risk because they keep the company tied to outmoded features and procedures. And as a company's tech stack grows, the legacy system can't always integrate successfully with new tools. This creates tech and data silos that affect the customer experience, but also puts blinders around the agents' view of the customer's journey.

Updating systems to make operations more efficient and transparent isn't as easy as completing a series of 'rip and replace' projects. It's important to consider where employees interface with data and how they can use it to deliver the best customer experiences. It's critical to consider your whole ecosystem in order to design for future agility. When choosing a new system, consider factors like:

- Is it easy to customise?
- Does it integrate seamlessly with our current technology?
- Will it be easy to integrate with any future technology that we may invest in?
- Can it support growth in employees, customers and users?

A modern tech stack isn't one focused only on today's requirements. It must meet current requirements, while providing the adaptability required to accommodate future needs.

2. The proliferation of new channels

Perhaps you could get by with only a customer call centre a few years ago. But now, customers want the option of contacting companies via whichever channel they prefer. This means that businesses need to be

accessible by phone, email, self-service, live chat, social media, messaging apps and in peer-to-peer communities. To be present on so many channels, staff must be trained and have access to the tools they need to ensure that customers are having a consistent experience across these channels. And they need access to the right tech infrastructure to manage customer conversations effectively, wherever they are taking place.

Being everywhere is costly and difficult. This explains why [Zendesk Benchmark data](#) found that fewer than 30% of manufacturers offer live chat, social messaging, in-app messaging, bots or peer-to-peer communities. But when a business isn't accessible where customers expect it to be, it can lead to disappointment.

3. Lack of resources for self-service content

Providing self-service resources is a win-win situation. Customers like having the option for less complicated tasks. And for businesses, it reduces the number of support calls that agents have to handle, giving them more time to focus on the more complex issues that require the human touch. In fact, data from the [Zendesk Customer experience \(CX\) trends report 2020](#) shows that high-performing manufacturing companies are 72% more likely to provide self-service content and that its adoption by customers more than tripled after unveiling the option.

Yet, only a third of manufacturing companies offer self-service support options. Even if you acknowledge the value of self-service, creating, publishing, maintaining and customising a self-service portal requires time and resources. Content needs to be written and maintained, and the experience itself must be designed and branded. In many companies, the desire to build out self-service support content is there, but it isn't matched with the necessary resources to realise the goal.

4. Difficulty with using available customer data

Enterprises are awash in data, which is captured across many touch-points between the customer, products and employees. However, without a good way to put that data into a format that you can understand and use properly, the information isn't working as hard as it could for you.

There are proven benefits to getting a better handle on customer data, wherever it might live. The CX trends report found that manufacturing companies that leverage customer data more effectively see 36% faster resolutions, a 40% reduction in waiting times and solve seven times the number of customer requests.

Leveraging data effectively is a two-step process. It must be both formatted and aggregated. Furthermore, the larger the company, the bigger the technology stack – many with hundreds of applications and data sources. To discover the insights hidden in the data, it needs to be accessible and meaningful. This requires finding a way to connect all the different data sources and repositories – which requires bridges to be built.

An open, agile platform makes it possible to create a unified view of the data (and, by extension, of the customer experience) by connecting existing sources that can accommodate new data sources easily over time. But none of this is easy – especially when working with inflexible legacy systems that aren't configured to integrate with other tools.

If any of this sounds all too familiar, let's start talking solutions.

A future-proof approach to CX

Integrate customer data into one view

That abundance of customer data represents potential for innovation and exceptional customer experiences. If agents can access relevant details about each customer as they're assisting them, they can provide more personalised, helpful support. But right now, that can be a big ask.

If data is stuck in silos, agents may be able to access some of it. But other pieces of information may be inaccessible to them, or a complete mystery if they don't know that the data exists or where they can find it.

A solution to this problem is within reach. To start with, customer-service technology can consolidate data from multiple products into one platform in a unified view. This immediately simplifies the CX tech stack and makes it easy to understand the customer's complete journey.

To ensure that platforms and software can evolve with a growing company's requirements and connect to other sources of data, it's critical to have open, flexible APIs that can be customised to work with apps, integration and other data sources. A flexible API means that no matter which tech tools are used now, the system will be able to connect current and future software – ensuring that data stays within one convenient view. There are customer-service products that offer out-of-the-box technology-partner integration that makes this process simple for common business technology.

Although making big tech updates is a headache, the goal is to implement a solution that can evolve easily over time. As business needs change, an open platform will help ensure adaptability and a smooth transition.

Choose technology that's relatively easy to maintain – something that doesn't require a team of specialists just to help keep one product working. Beware of products that are initially cheaper and 'out of the box', but are riddled with hidden maintenance costs. Ensure that it's easy to make updates and automate business processes with clicks rather than code, which can help ensure a lower total cost of ownership (TCO).



Using technology to make an impact on experience

Finding the right tech solution that connects disparate tools and brings customer information into one view makes the job much easier for CX teams. But ultimately, simplifying and future-proofing is only half of the equation. The rest is just as important: delivering the convenient, personalised experiences expected by customers.

Today, this means providing multi-channel support, including self-service, and personalising customers' experiences consistently using data about their journey.

Provide always-on, context-rich support

For decades, phone support was enough. The idea of email support came along many years later, as did an agent-friendly platform for managing enquiries and communications that we know today as tickets. But now that customers have many more ways to communicate with businesses, they are eager to use them, on their terms: at their preferred time of day, with the ability to switch channels and still maintain the context of a problem. Not having to repeat themselves is now table stakes for customers – according to the CX trends report, 42% of customers say that repeating themselves over and over again is a mark of bad customer service.

Customers expect to have conversations with brands using the same channels that they use for communicating in their personal lives. This means

social media, messaging apps, email, and yes, the phone too. Customers expect brands to listen and respond on these channels, while also having knowledge of previous conversations, orders and products being used. Offering a complete omni-channel solution ensures that customers have the experiences they expect, while making it easy for agents to access the customer data they need in a simple, easy-to-use interface.

According to the CX trends report, only a third of managers say that they're communicating with customers via their preferred means of contact. In many manufacturing companies, this is because they haven't caught up with the newer, preferred channels of the day: messaging apps.

According to Gartner, 'By 2022, 70% of customer interactions will involve emerging technology such as machine-learning applications, chatbots and mobile messaging, up from 15% in 2018'.² While adding channels is a huge endeavour operationally, companies that provide support via channels that customers care about get better results for their efforts. Benchmark data shows that third-party messaging apps get the highest customer satisfaction score – 98% – of any live-support channel.

Far from deciding to leave these legacy channels in the dust to embrace what's new and shiny, the question is how businesses can unify the power of each channel to provide quality experiences overall.

Supply an array of self-service options

It should be easy for customers to reach a helpful human being if they want to, but the truth is that they don't always want to. Many customers are happy to use a knowledge base, as long as they know that one is available and that it's tailored to meet their requirements with updated articles and sensible navigation.

Self-service bots go a long way in optimising the experience. By making the same information in the knowledge base easier to access, an intelligent self-service automation tool can personalise answers for customers in real time. Self-service bots, when supported with machine-learning capabilities, can even get better over time at providing the right answers to customers based on the success of its past responses.

Successfully personalise each experience

For manufacturing companies, a huge challenge is that with so many different customers and so many different product types, organising customer information to make sure that each interaction is tailored to their unique situation is a tall order.

But, as discussed above, 42% of customers say that repeating themselves over and over again is a mark of bad customer service. Customers hate having to provide all the details about who they are, what products they are using and what problems they're experiencing every single time they get in touch.

The dream state is a system that ensures every agent has access to relevant customer data every time they interact with a consumer, decreasing the likelihood of customers being subject to the blind spots that we mentioned earlier. Furthermore, agents can provide the right answer for the problem more quickly.

When customer data is collected and organised, it paints a complete view of the customer, which amounts to more than just a collection of information. This is why it's important that all of the information is easily accessible and organised for agents providing support over all channels, ensuring that they're not wasting valuable minutes looking for a needle in a haystack.

² Gartner, Magic Quadrant for the CRM Customer Engagement Centre, Brian Manusama, Nadine LeBlanc, Simon Harrison, 11 June 2019

Responding to the unique requirements of manufacturing

Gathering and curating customer data is a two-way street. Any information collected by an agent over one channel should be added to the shared platform, ensuring that other agents can see it in real time. It may sound like a lot of work to achieve personalisation, but it's mostly about selecting the right technology that makes it all par for the course.

Years ago, to succeed as a manufacturer, it was sufficient to make high-quality products and price fairly. The game has changed, and what once was a clear path to success has become more complex. Worldwide competition has ramped up, especially as direct-to-consumer brands come onto the scene, most of them built with a customer-centric mindset that appeals to digital natives. Amid the evolution, many manufacturing companies are forced to think about the customer experience in brand-new ways.

At first, a growing emphasis on CX may seem like just one more thing for manufacturers to invest in to keep up, joining new, but crucial trends like AI, 'smart' devices equipped with technology – a phenomenon known as the Internet of things (IoT) – and blockchain. Still, its benefits go a lot further than a resolved customer-service call. With the right system for enabling a unified CX experience, a company can also facilitate more efficient processes across the business. To help us visualise how, let's look at a couple of examples.

Bridging the gap between suppliers and customers

Manufacturing companies must manage an increasingly complex global supply chain, which involves maintaining relationships with a huge network of other businesses, including suppliers, distributors and retailers. Staying organised and keeping operations running smoothly requires the management of different systems, communications and workflows.

In addition, it's standard for manufacturing businesses to support a vast array of product lines that vary widely in complexity. The more products a company sells, the more challenging it can be to maintain the support resources required to keep agents and supply chains successful and customers happy.

Customer-experience platforms can streamline communications, and capture business-critical information such as delivery delays, part defects and questions from retailers into one unified platform that provides a complete picture of global operations. For example, if a batch of parts from a particular supplier has been recalled, a manufacturer must ensure that these parts are not included in any new products. They may also have to contact retailers and consumers who have purchased products containing the part to offer a refund, repair or replacement via a return merchandise authorisation, or RMA.

A unified communication platform that aggregates customer and product data across the supply chain makes it easy to remedy problems like these with a supplier, while offering proactive outreach to retailers

and customers to correct the error before issues arise. This builds trust and loyalty across the entire ecosystem, and it enables a seamless experience at the back end for the manufacturer.

How manufacturers gain a complete view of customers

When customers require support, agents need easy access to all the relevant data in order to provide the best assistance: who they are, what products they are using, when they bought them, their warranty status and any support tickets that they might have opened in the past. Because manufacturers frequently sell through many channels – including through retailers and vendors – there’s often a gap between the manufacturer and the end users.

One way for manufacturers to capture end-user information about customers, no matter where they bought the product, is to make it easy for them to register it. This transmits their name, contact information and other key details to the manufacturer.

For products used by customers in the field, filling in forms is inconvenient, which can create friction and increases the likelihood of it not being done. Providing customers with easy mobile options for registration, like a QR code that automatically opens a form to register the device online, can streamline this process. The system can be set up to fill in distributors’ details automatically, which further reduces the manual workload on the customer and on internal teams.

Once customers have taken the step of registering their product, customer-relationship platforms (CRM) become immensely more powerful. A CRM can automate the process of sending preventative maintenance reminders and help ensure that all the customer data is organised easily, so agents can pull it up quickly when a support request comes in. And for products that may last for decades, this information can remain easily accessible for the full length of product ownership.

Zendesk brings all your CX needs into one place

Manufacturing companies have a lot of moving parts to manage, as it were, when determining the best system for balancing an increasingly complex supply chain with changing customer demands. For growing brands, the complexity of the supply chain, product mix and a disjointed customer journey are all evolving challenges, but ones that can be tackled with the right solution.

Zendesk brings aggregate customer data from a variety of sources into one open and flexible platform. Build a complete view of the customer experience by connecting and storing information easily about customer events and business objects, creating a dynamic profile of customer relationships across any system. Monitor diagnostics, automate tickets and address issues before they become a problem for customers. Track actions with a complete timeline view of critical events related to each asset, such as software upgrades, delivery, repairs or replacements.

