

Sound Telecom

The Next Wave in Improving Online Customer Interactions

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Last Updated January, 2009

Abstract:

Web-Chat is a powerful customer interaction and support solution that offers substantial advantages to web shoppers and to e-business enterprises, alike. This article describes the nature of web-chat services provided by Sound Telecom and the positive role Web-chat plays in enhancing the customer care and sales efforts of both e-commerce and brick-and-mortar companies.

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Background

In today's customer-centric marketplace, Web-Chat has quickly become an essential customer interaction tool that personalizes the Internet shopping experience and ensures your customers a positive outcome. This tool can help build sales and generate customer loyalty by enabling live, person-to-person communication.

The Issues

Recent research reveals that top ranked e-commerce sites either are taking longer than 5 days to respond to customer e-mail inquiries, never responding at all or simply are not accessible by email or phone. In addition, poor service was cited as the single most important factor contributing to abandoned online transactions. Customers expect the same level of service and response times with e-mail as they currently get over the phone.

An NFO Interactive survey of 2,134 online shoppers, both buyers and non-buyers, reported that 41% of the respondents said they would be more confident about shopping on sites that allow them to e-mail a sales representative for service. Forty-five percent said they would visit a site more frequently if the company responded to e-mail within 12 hours. Moreover, E-mail is the most preferred method for communicating online-related complaints according to an Andersen survey.

A study by eMarketer conducted in 2000, predicts that retail revenues from online shopping worldwide will increase to 35.3 billion by 2002. However, according to Yankelovich Partners, there is a problem: Nearly two-thirds of Web users are unwilling to purchase products without human interaction.

Reality

Many consumers browse online catalogs, place orders in a shopping cart, then cancel at the last moment. Let's remember that a customer can walk out the door simply by clicking their mouse.

With Voice help or Chat help available only during the typical 8 AM to 5 PM range, many shoppers can't get answers to questions at the very moment they are shopping online – precisely when they need this information. A recent study found that 63% of consumers surveyed did not complete an online transaction because they could not find necessary information. With less than adequate information, they frequently don't buy at all, or end up buying the wrong product and ultimately, return it. In addition, abandoned web sites lose credibility as well as sales.

The biggest challenge is not getting customers to a site but getting them to actually make a purchase. We know they leave full shopping carts because they are frustrated and find the online checkout process difficult. We now have an excellent opportunity to remedy this situation and tap the true potential of e-commerce.

Nearly half of online shoppers visit three to five sites before making a purchase and 90% say they still prefer human interaction. Yet another study showed that 42% of 125 top-ranked e-commerce sites took more than five days to answer customer e-mail, never responded or were not accessible by e-mail at all.

It's obvious that excellent customer service distinguishes a company with a successful e-commerce effort from its competitors.

The Solution:

To address these issues, Sound Telecom offers a powerful, leading edge, web-enabled, customer interaction solution on an out-sourced basis to clients who engage their services. It helps your customers get the support and information they need, when they ask for it.

You can link your website to our call center, 24 hours, around-the-clock, 7 days a week.

Customers will be able to either receive information or conduct transactions, 24 hours a day, with virtually no waiting time. Since we provide e-mail and phone support, customers can choose their preferred interaction style. More choices, more smiles.

Sound Telecom Solution Features Include:

Text-based Chat: Customers and visitors connect immediately to a customer service agent and converse in real-time by sending text messages to each other. Agents provide immediate answers and assistance by "pushing" or sending pre-defined blocks of text, web pages, virtually any type of file (e.g., PDF, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, WordPerfect), audio and video clips.

E-mail Response: Allows our agent to reply to a customer's inquiry with quick, informative and precise responses that build customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Voice Escalation from Chat: Assist your online customer by offering unprecedented human touch while on your website. For example, if a customer wants to talk to an agent during the middle text chat session, this powerful tool allows an agent to do so using either:

Standard Web Call-Back Services: (agent takes down customer's phone number and places an immediate call to them to resolve any issues)

Voice over IP (VoIP) – instead of using a standard phone line, the Internet can be used to talk with a customer, enabling them to stay online, at your website, while simultaneously talking to the service rep.

Push Technology: During a chat session, our agents can, in real-time, "push" or send Web pages and other online content to your customer's desktop to answer questions and assist with other pinpointed information.

Transfer Feature: At any point during a chat session an agent can choose to transfer a customer to another agent (or supervisor) either to obtain a higher level of technical support escalation or for additional information unavailable to the first agent.

Enterprise Data Access: Our agents can access individual customer files that reside on your internal database systems, in real-time, even before they begin chatting with your customer. The database provides information on all previous customer interactions, whether purchases, returns, questions, comments, or any other type of activity.

Customer Interaction History: All previous chat sessions are logged for easy retrieval during subsequent interactions and used by agent to quickly address customer's issues without their having to restate everything to the new agent

Response Libraries: We build, customize and quickly set-up pre-defined text responses, URL's and files using color-coded, tree-folder, Response Libraries that are so easy to use, our agents can drive this information to your customer's desktop in seconds.

E-mail Transcripts: Customers can request a copy of their chat session transcript via e-mail at the end of the chat session.

Exit Survey: Your company can choose to send customers an Exit Survey at the end of the chat session. It can be customized with up to five specific questions plus space for one open-ended response.

Multi-Lingual Auto-Translation: We can provide international, real-time, "on-the-fly" language translation in the following languages: French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and English.

Monitoring: Supervisors and managers can evaluate agent performance by monitoring agent and e-mail activity in real-time and through historical reports.

Escalation of Chat Session Interaction to a Higher Level Agent: Before your customer leaves your site frustrated, we can offer them the option real-time chat- or voice- based customer service.

Security: Chat sessions can be secured for complete privacy. Using SSL (Secure Socket Layer) encryption, chats are encoded from end-to-end, ensuring complete privacy protection for your customer.

Website front and back-end customer support: On the front-end or customer interaction side of the website, agents can co-browse and view exactly what the customer is seeing and help direct the customer, as necessary, to complete forms or a shopping transaction. We can help visitors by instantly sending them answers to FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions) or discuss any concerns or issues they may have.

Agents also have the ability to tap into the back-end or database portion of your website where you collect and store information, such as shipping, billing and customer information. We can go behind the scenes and visit any customized web pages you design just for our agents to use for reference.

E-commerce Credit Card Transaction Processing: When your website is equipped with e-commerce credit card processing capabilities, Sound Telecom agents can simply pop the appropriate URL and process the credit card right on the website, fully utilizing the mechanism and identical form you have already established for credit card processing. This has the advantage of consolidating all credit card processing in one area, avoids the additional cost of setting up separate processing capabilities at Sound Telecom and takes advantage of the secure credit card processing procedures already in place on your site.

Web-Chat Benefits

On-Line Customer Benefits:

1. Fast and accurate personalized information
2. Extended customer service hours. Customer can now contact your company 24 hours- a-day, at their convenience, including evenings
3. Customers immediately receive price quotes, product photos, product reviews, instructions, case studies, forms and updated information of all types in the form of files, web pages and text paragraphs
4. Page and text push of product information allows for immediate comparison shopping

5. Enables customer to get real-time answers as they browse your website and chat with a live agent – without requiring the customer to have an additional phone line
6. Complete chat transcripts can be e-mailed, immediately, to the customer upon conclusion the chat session, alleviating the need to take notes. All URLs and Web page addresses are embedded in the transcript so the customer can revisit those sites, if desired
7. Immediate response to e-mail questions
8. Excellent opportunity to do comparison shopping because of all the good product information one can receive from the company's web help agent
9. Overall, a more enjoyable and personable website shopping/browsing experience

Benefits to E-Commerce Companies

1. Increase customer satisfaction and loyalty to your company. Customers will return to your site because they enjoy the shopping experience
2. Page and text push of product information allows for immediate comparative shopping, shortening the sales cycle and enhancing the closing opportunity
3. Higher on-line revenues as you close more sales and reduce "abandoned" shopping carts
4. Ability to assist customers and "hold-their-hand" as they make large ticket purchases
5. Increase customer visits through frequent customer dialogue
6. Opportunities for cross-selling and up-selling
7. Fewer customer product returns as they make better informed buying decisions.
8. By offering a higher level of service to your customer your company differentiates itself from the competition
9. Company enjoys the security of knowing that accurate and consistent information is being delivered to customers and website visitors
10. Quick response time to customer e-mails are handled efficiently by the same agents using well-defined Response Libraries
11. By encouraging free, online chat sessions with knowledgeable company representatives, company saves money by eliminating most of the toll-free phone charges for incoming customer service calls
12. Multi-lingual chat sessions create a true World-wide presence with unlimited international sales opportunities
13. Immediate customer responses to Company Survey at end of session provide valuable, timely information to the organization
14. Potential to develop customer and web visitor e-mail address database when transcript of session is requested at end of chat dialogue

Pricing Model

Web-Chat is less expensive and more productive than toll-free telephone support. As seen in the diagram on the next page, a single agent can typically handle 3 or 4 chat sessions simultaneously, depending upon the typing speed of the customers. Since agents are using, for the most part, pre-defined text responses, web page and file "pushes", they appear to be much faster "typists" than the customers they are chatting with are.

COST COMPARISON CHART

WEB CHAT AGENT COSTS & PRODUCTION VS. LIVE OPERATOR SUPPORT



VOICE INBOUND CALL SERVICE

Live One-To-One Operator Talk Sessions (No Overlapping Voice Sessions)



Total Conversation Talk Time for 4 People = 45 minutes @ \$0.85 = **\$38.25**

WEB CHAT

Single Agent is Able to Handle Simultaneous Overlapping Chat Sessions with Multiple Customers



Total Accumulated Chat Time for 15 People = 110 minutes

Actual Chat Agent Interaction Time Billed = 45 minutes @ \$.85 = **\$38.25**

Agent Billing Time is Same for Voice vs. Chat. But Look at Chat Productivity!
 – 110 min. vs. 45 min. –
 Total Chat Time Not Billed Because of Simultaneous Conversations is 65 min.

CHAT ADVANTAGE:

Consider the wealth of information a chat agent can "push" instantly to your customer:
 predefined text paragraphs, pdf files, web pages, audio file, video clips –
 All focused on enhancing customer knowledge and experience.