

DELIVERING A DELIGHTFUL CUSTOMER SERVICE IN B2B

HOW AND WHAT.



Introduction

The B2B customer service addresses 3 types of profiles: companies, companies' customers and companies' employees.

Regardless of the client's profile, customer service excellence delivery is a rising focus in B2B organizations as customer experience drives satisfaction, loyalty, and revenues.

This statement gets even more crucial in a business to business environment where clients are fewer but represent a large source of income, up to billions of revenues in some industries.

At the same time, the digital is establishing new standards for fast and seamless customer services: final clients and prospects' expectations as personal consumers are progressively migrating into the B2B space.

This article focuses on highlighting insights Sia Partners believes to be key to insure B2B customer services' excellence.

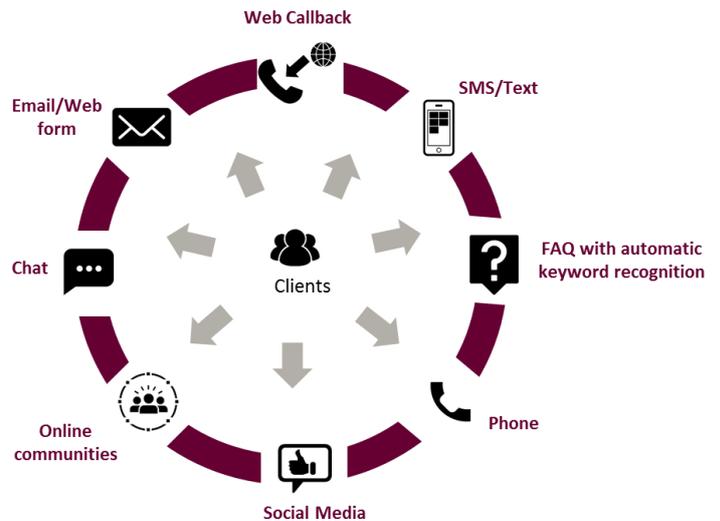
Invest in digital and strengthen legacy capabilities to deploy a multi-channel vision tuned to the multispeed customers' agenda

An increasing use of digital channels in conjunction with traditional channels

Phone and Emails remain the most used channels respectively at 70% and 25% across industries. However, we see that more and more customer services implement chat which is now considered as a minimum standard to allow real time interactions with their customers. The other digital tools remain of marginal use: for example, full service communities which enable customers to help themselves and collaborate via comments and answers.

According to us, multi-channel customer services need to fulfill customers' expectation of a same level of service and a seamless communication across all channels offered.

FIGURE 1: NEW DIGITAL TOOL OFFERS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE INTERACTIONS



Innovations pulled by customers' expectations and mapped to specific use cases

Customers drive innovations as the deployment of alternative channels strictly depends on their ability to address customers' needs and to provide added value. In some industries, offering a chat service is not necessarily relevant when requests are too complex to be formalized in written form: in these cases, traditional phone interactions remain the most efficient means to solve clients' requests. Similarly, we observe that some customer services are primarily solicited in case of emergencies which cannot be addressed by non-real-time digital tools.

In contrast, when enquiries are simple to express, the deployment of self-service tools will enable customers to get quick answers at all times, even out of the customer services' operating hours or during peak demand.

Operating hours adapted to customers' profile and the type of situations to cover

The service availability should be set on larger time frames when addressing clients' employees who are the end users of the service/product. Furthermore, 24/7 availability

is key to cover specific use cases, namely critical issues or emergencies.

This extended availability can be provided either through cold channels with respect of the relevant service level agreement, or through hot channels, mainly by phone.

Find the right organization set up to serve B2B customers’ efficiently and in a personalized way

The right balance between a global core customer service model and a multi local organization addressing market specificities

Sia Partners considers that B2B customer services need to achieve the right balance between a global organization with unified processes and a multi-local organization granting the autonomy of the local service centers.

One possible strategy is to establish core shared processes whilst making some adaptations at local level to take into account country specificities.

An alternative could be to consolidate a multi-local organization driven by markets’ specificities and to recommend to continuously exchange on best practices between countries and locations.

This siloed organization will be rather applicable to customer services which have been delivered locally since their inception, in which case the organization is not mature or agile enough to build a core business model standardizing the customer services’ activities.

Core functions’ internalization for expert recommendations provision and outsourcing to provide extra services

It is vital to provide the core service internally to ensure that the customer services can respond to the clients’ enquiries based on an extensive product or service knowledge. Whereas customer service outsourcing is often considered as a cost-effective solution, the risk however is to lose on service quality and efficiency due to the lower expertise of external agents. Also, external agents are less likely to embody the company’s values and culture which is key as being often the first point of contact.

However, outsourcing can be used for specific use cases such as peak of charge cover, new technologies usage or multi-language support.

Understanding and integration of the diversity of clients’ types and journeys into the customer service offer

The B2B customer services need to address the complexity of customer journeys and stakeholders’ diversity in B2B through their offer.

Sia Partners suggests to map the customer service offer to the client segmentation and journeys to insure a personalized service adjusted to customers’ specific needs along their journeys. Such segmentation is to be conceived depending on the company business, for example by client profile (B2B versus B2B2C), type of customer contract, client size, or client location.



FIGURE 2: EXAMPLE OF A CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING IN THE CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFER

Identify the right function for the customer service within the company organization

A relevant collaboration between sales and customer service for an improved customers' experience

Sia Partners expects B2B customer services to collaborate with the sales departments, which does not necessarily imply that the customer support should perform sales. It is perfectly feasible to dissociate sales' teams from customer service's teams, but some measures should be in place to identify leads. For example, the incentivization of transfers from the support team to the sales department, or the sharing of all relevant information related to requests addressed by the client to the customer service. It is also legitimate to conceive a higher degree of collaboration which integrates sales through service. This way, customer service agents can best advise products and service to customers due to the unique insight they have on how customers use the product or service. In this case, the customer service is entitled to proactively offer value-added solutions which better fulfill their business needs and thus improve customer satisfaction.

Customer services as an intermediary between the customers and the product team

Customer services often face complaints on product or service incidents, failures, inability to serve the customers' needs, which they

cannot solve when they are inherent to the product or service nature.

Reporting these complaints to the product team ensures customers' needs drive product enhancements and consequently increase customer satisfaction and retention.

Reciprocally, the product team should share with the customer service the product upgrades so that the customer support is able to explain to the clients the improvements made in response to their feedbacks.

Conclusion

Like in B2C, customers are become more and more complex with evolving needs. They know everything and want to be more actor of their choices. They expect the agents in customer services to have the right background information to solve their issues with only relevant and few contacts.

Companies should offer more digital options to interact with the customer service (self-service, chat, social media, ...), with each option delivering the same level of service in a seamless communication.

Companies should offer the right service at the right time on the right channel.

This requires for B2B companies to build the adequate service offer in a customer centric organization, based on three main pillars

- Customer service integration within the company organization (function)
- Capabilities enforcement
- Right global organization set up



FIGURE 3: ADEQUATE PILLARS WHEN BUILDING A CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFER

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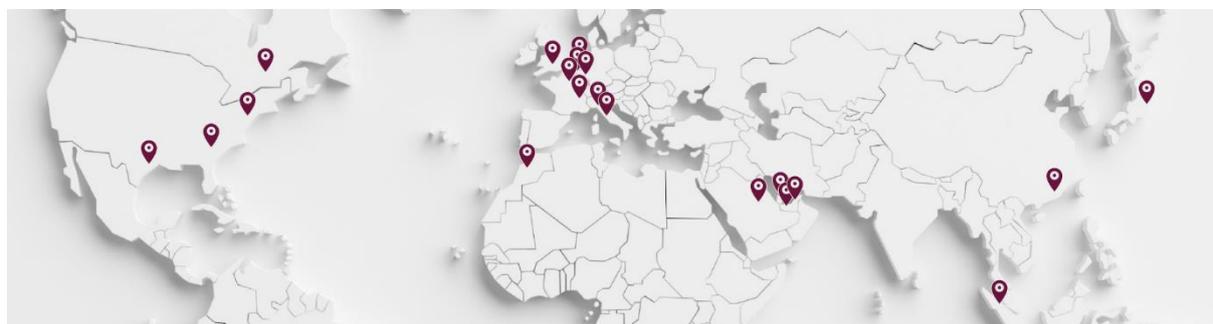
A DETAILED STUDY IS AVAILABLE ON DEMAND

This article is based on a study conducted on a sample of international companies representing all industry sectors.

In addition to its expertise, Sia Partners has identified key insights on B2B customer services delivered by best in class companies in this area.

ABOUT SIA PARTNERS

Founded in 1999, Sia Partners is an independent global management consulting firm with over 850 consultants and an annual turnover of USD 155 million. The Group has 20 offices in 16 countries, including the U.S., its second biggest market. Sia Partners is renowned for its expertise in the Energy, Banking, Insurance, Telecommunications and Transportation sectors.



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