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Improving Customer Loyalty and Operational Efficiency through Business Messaging

by Rohan Ganeson

Millions of customers use messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp to keep in touch with friends and family, yet when it comes to customer service and support, their first instinct is still to pick up the phone. Part of this has to do with long ingrained behavior, but the other part has to do with the fact that many businesses have not yet embraced messaging as a channel for engaging customers.

In today's world, it makes little sense to pick up the phone every time you need to contact a company, which often means long wait times and having to re-state information when you finally reach a customer service agent. Even live chat sessions follow the same paradigm as phone service models, which require customers to stay online to connect with an agent and remain with the agent until an issue is resolved (or not). By contrast, messaging offers businesses an opportunity to transform customer support, and even has the potential to reduce voice as the channel of choice, but there's some confusion among business leaders about exactly what messaging is and how it differs from the traditional live chat or phone support models.

Like live chat, messaging is about the exchange of information in a conversational digital interface, however, unlike live chat, messaging can be asynchronous, meaning customers can "park" a conversation at their convenience and return to the thread at a later time without having to start over. This functionality can be integrated in any channel such as your web page, your app, or enabled via Apple Business Chat, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Google's Business Messages.

Think about a traditional customer support experience. First, the customer has to set aside time to call the company and work through their issue. This can take anywhere from minutes to hours depending on wait times, what they're calling about, and what needs to be done on both ends of the call to reach resolution. And if it turns out the issue hasn't actually been resolved the customer will have to start the process all over again with a repeat call. It's time consuming and frustrating.

Now, consider the same interaction in an asynchronous messaging setting. A customer can open up the messaging app at their convenience—for example, on a morning commute. They can open up their favorite messaging app (e.g. WhatsApp iMessage, Google Business Messages, etc.) send a message to their service provider to change their billing address by saying "I want to change my billing address." But then the train arrives and they put the phone away, forgetting about it. On the way home, the next day, or even several days later, they can return to the messaging app at any time and pick up the conversation right where they left off.

Most customer support contacts begin with a web search. Traditionally, search engines have responded with a phone number, however, now with Google and Apple moving to messaging support on phones and in organic search, businesses can respond with a "click to message" option.

By enabling your messaging option to be easily findable on search engines like Google, enterprises can funnel those contacts through the messaging channel first. At the same time, you're making things better for your customers—which is always better for business. Here are a couple of examples of what that looks like:
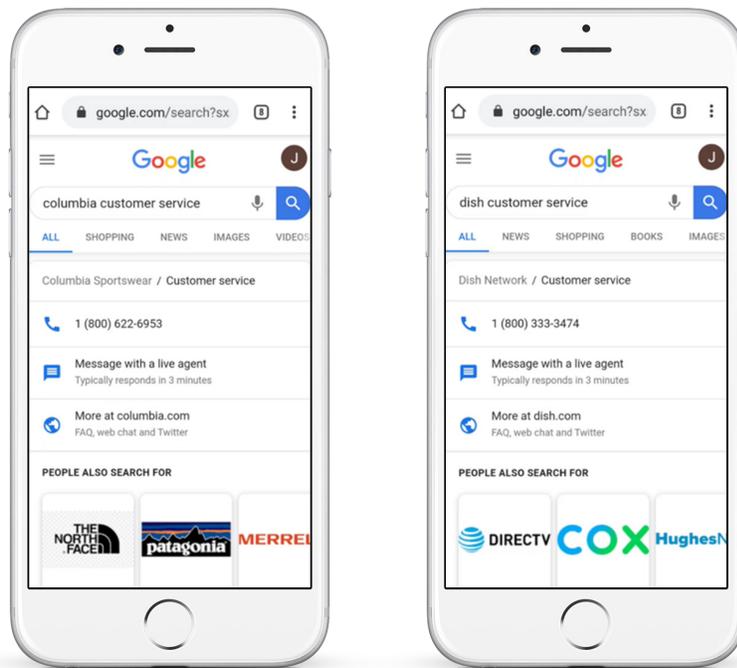
There are many advantages to implementing asynchronous messaging. They enable businesses to:

- **Meet customers where they are**—Customers are already using messaging apps in their personal lives, and want to use them to connect with your business. It's convenient, familiar, and less work than going through traditional support channels. Providing this option makes it easier for customers to get things done the way they want.

- **Interact on customers own time**—One key feature that sets messaging apart from regular chat is the ability to carry on conversations or interactions over time. For example, a customer could start a conversation in the evening, go to bed and continue the conversation the next morning. This is a game changer for busy customers and also a game changer for customer service.

- **Be a game changer for customer service**—As messaging is intended to be asynchronous, there is no pressure for a single agent to address a customer issue while a customer is waiting. Interacting on customers own time enables service managers to rethink the service model. Messages need to be thought of in terms of a customer's intent. Understanding the intent enables the service manager to assign urgency and response times. Further a team of experts can handle a message in the background and respond with the most appropriate action. This changes the traditional models for calculating contact rates, handle times and the corresponding contact center heads.

- **Improve experience**—Messaging can be integrated with conversational AI and backend systems that use AI to understand to personalize interactions, which improves satisfaction and loyalty.

- **Increase service automation**—Using advanced conversational AI platforms businesses can build BOTs to automate tasks that would have otherwise required human interaction. Automation of simple queries can reach 80-90% while automation of complex transactional queries can achieve up to 30% automation today.

Businesses that have implemented business messaging in contact centers are seeing significant improvement in key metrics:

- customer effort scores reduced by 10 percentage points or more

- employee satisfaction by increased 25 percent

- first contact resolution was up by up to 88 percent

- NPS lifted by more than 50 percent

During COVID-19, customer adoption of business messaging increased by 45 percent in just three months on our platform. Businesses that implemented asynchronous message processing in their contact centers were able to absorb 38 percent additional digital contacts with 33 percent fewer agents. Had messaging not been available as a channel, volume would have dropped by 30 percent impacting CX and revenue.

As business slowly gets back to normal, CxOs have to grapple with how to handle service continuity in periods of business disruptions. Asynchronous messaging provides an avenue to keep your business open at all times. So how can businesses get started?

1. **Decide which messaging channels you want to support** – The most popular channels are Apple Business Chat, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Although Google's Business Messages is new, we expect it will be widely embraced as they integrate it with organic search. Alternatively, if you have a native app (such as an insurance, banking or telco app) consider embedding messaging into the native app. Look for a platform that supports:

    a) channel-specific native functionality (e.g. List Picker for ABC, Quick Replies for Facebook, Chips on Google) while providing you the ability to build once and using across other channels when you are ready to turn them on

    b) message routing based on Intent type, last interacted agent, timestamp and status

2. **Supporting asynchronous messaging requires the agents receiving the messages to be able to manage workloads and sequencing.** Choose a platform that provides an agent console that is truly asynchronous messaging ready:

    a) an agent console displaying multiple trays and visual cues of status, timers and countdowns, systematic summarization of conversation thread to improve agent understanding, customer verification across conversation turns and over time.

    b) work from home models that allow agents to collaborate securely

3. **Consider which of your customer conversations could be automated using BOTs.** Simple transactional queries such as account balance, delivery times, etc. could be automated using BOTs. To automate transactional messages queries, conversational AI design is critical; the platform you choose must understand natural language and should be able to follow the natural flow of conversation and be able to use AI to understand and process a customer's intent.

4. **100% automation is not possible as yet, so ensure the platform supports both automated (chatbot) and live agent interactions.** There is nothing more frustrating for a customer than to have to pick up the phone because the chatbot can't escalate. More sophisticated platforms allow for hand-offs between BOTs and agents and vice versa to improve experience.

5. Finally ensure that appropriate analytics is provided by the platform to understand the funnel from message receipt to automation to agent escalation and closure.

In summary, messaging is an important way to improve customer service through a channel that customers already love. Done right it is a game changer for your customers and your bottom line.

About the Author

Rohan Ganeson is Chief Operating Officer for [24]7.ai, responsible for overseeing core business functions related to the company's tech business, from their creation to their success in the market. He brings a wide range of skills across multiple functions, with a proven track record for driving transformation and growth in international businesses. He holds an MBA from the Melbourne School of Business, Advanced Management from Wharton Business School, and a BSc (honors) from the University of Western Australia.

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About [24]7.ai

[24]7.ai is redefining how artificial intelligence and human insight are combined to produce satisfying customer experiences. Our conversational AI platform predicts consumer intent to create frictionless interactions, across every channel, that strengthen relationships and increase brand loyalty, at the lowest cost per resolved conversation.

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