Why DIY just won't cut it in customer experience

By Graham Ede, Yonder Digital Group

Studies show that more and more shoppers in the UK are choosing to buy DIY products online,[1] but the web provides much more than just a means of placing an order and customer interaction is not limited to the DIY retailer's website. Digital contact points span from customer's inboxes when they receive a promotional email for example, right through to their interactions with the brand over social media. In the retail sector 4 in 10 social media users have purchased an item online or in-store after sharing or favouriting it on Twitter, Facebook or Pinterest.[2] But of course, the overall customer journey is not limited to online as bricks and mortar locations where customers can browse, try out products and ask staff questions also play a key part in the mix.

Pinterest for example can play an important role for DIY brands as 61% of users follow DIY and crafts on this platform. This makes Pinterest an ideal tool to develop and nurture communities encouraging the sharing and 'pinning' of projects, mood-boards and design ideas. In 2014, 63% of people used Pinterest for DIY and Crafts, 34% Twitter and 29% Facebook highlighting the key role social media plays in fostering positive messages relating to DIY brands.[3] Evidence clearly shows that DIY brands really need to get involved in social media channel communities to help drive and direct the conversation towards their products and services.

Although the web provides DIY retailers with another important touch point to combine with in-store experience it does also carry the potential of making customer interactions much more public especially if these are carried out over social media. So on the one hand, brands have another opportunity to help out with customer queries, perhaps giving decisive information to drive a purchase, on the other there are many more interactions to monitor and any complaint is given a much more public airing than ever before. In a social world it is easy for an aggrieved customer to air their discontent with the world over Facebook or Twitter for example, but research shows that 55% of customer requests for service on social media are not acknowledged, never mind resolved.[4] Queries left to languish not only look bad to other users, but are clearly not being integrated in customer service.

The market regularly offers retailers new technology promising to automate customer interactions making the process speedy and efficient, but retailers must beware: customer satisfaction must be preserved even if the new solution promises to be much more cost effective. Some examples of these technologies are artificial intelligence chatbots, tools to manage social media interactions, online chat, marketing trigger mechanisms that send out communications based on customer behaviour and many more. Specifically, far too often online chat services are little more sophisticated than Artificial Intelligence FAQs resulting in consumers feeling they have wasted their precious time on a wild-goose chase.

Consumers however are complex individuals and their journey to purchase reflects that; the same person may have a range of contact preferences and even prefer companies to reach out over one channel such as email or post, but would rather initiate contact themselves over social media. They may prefer to shop online, but deal with complaints over the telephone. It's very rare that a

---

[1] Sagittarius.agency, *How do DIY customers buy online and offline?*
[2] Sagittarius.agency, *How do DIY customers buy online and offline?*
[3] Sagittarius.agency, *How do DIY customers buy online and offline?*
[4] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/vala-afshar/50-important-customer-exp_b_8295772.html

consumer only opts for one channel such as email and takes no account of other touch points and brands need to be aware of this to help them understand the customer better. In a recent survey, 87% of consumers demanded that brands provide a more cohesive experience.[5]

DIY retailers need to master multi-channel communications so that they can ensure that they offer the customer the right channel combination at critical points of the customer journey such as just prior to purchase or in the event of a complaint. 60% of consumers have in fact not completed an intended purchase based on a poor customer service experience and 97% of global consumers cite customer service as important in their brand choice and loyalty.[6]

One especially important touch point highlighted by customers is the live agent. In fact, a study by Accenture shows that 83% of consumers who switched providers say if companies had provided better live or in-person support, they may have retained their business.[7] While 72% of customers are going online to serve themselves, only 52% report that they are finding the information they're searching for and only 18% of consumers turn to online chat specifically as an alternative to telephone for fast resolution of customer service issues[8]. Anecdotal experience also suggests that within live chat there is a large divergence in service provided by a real agent as opposed to chatbots.

The DIY retail sector is especially at risk as 40% of consumers believe Home & DIY stores need to improve customer interaction ranking well behind grocery (36%) and electrical (35%) retailers. This disappointment has led 70% of UK shoppers to walk out of shops leaving behind goods worth more than £20 and 40% leaving shopping worth more than £30. 90% then reported purchasing from another outlet instead.[9] Given this disillusionment with in-store service, it's vital that the same mistakes are not made when providing remote assistance.

Given that Aberdeen Group Inc. claims that companies with the strongest omni-channel customer engagement strategies retain an average of 89% of their customers, as compared to 33% for companies with weak omni-channel strategies, DIY retailers cannot afford to ignore the importance of providing consistent service across a number of channels and offering human interaction when required.[10]

In conclusion, while technology and new media play an important role in providing the customer with more choice and should not be ignored, it's vital that businesses don't throw the baby out with the bathwater and eliminate human interaction especially at key stages of the customer journey. Rather, technology should help prepare human agents to best handle complaints or requests by providing them with a clear view of the customer's preferences and history with the company. This places agents in the best position to respond to queries rapidly and cost-effectively and perhaps even to grasp cross-selling and up-selling opportunities.

---

[5] https://www.visioncritical.com/customer-experience-statistics/

[6] http://uk.businessinsider.com/customer-service-experiences-are-more-important-than-ever-in-the-age-of-e-commerce-2016-3?r=US&IR=T

[7] https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/us-companies-losing-customers-as-consumers-demand-more-human-interaction-accenture-strategy-study-finds.htm

[8] http://www.northridgegroup.com/images/files/file/The%20Northridge%20Group,%20State%20of%20Customer%20Service%20Experience%202016.pdf; https://www.zendesk.com/blog/web-self-service/

[9] http://www.talkingretail.com/category-news/supermarket/36-rank-grocery-sector-worst-customer-service/

[10] Omni-channel Customer Care: Empowered Customers Demand a Seamless Experience, Aberdeen Group Inc.