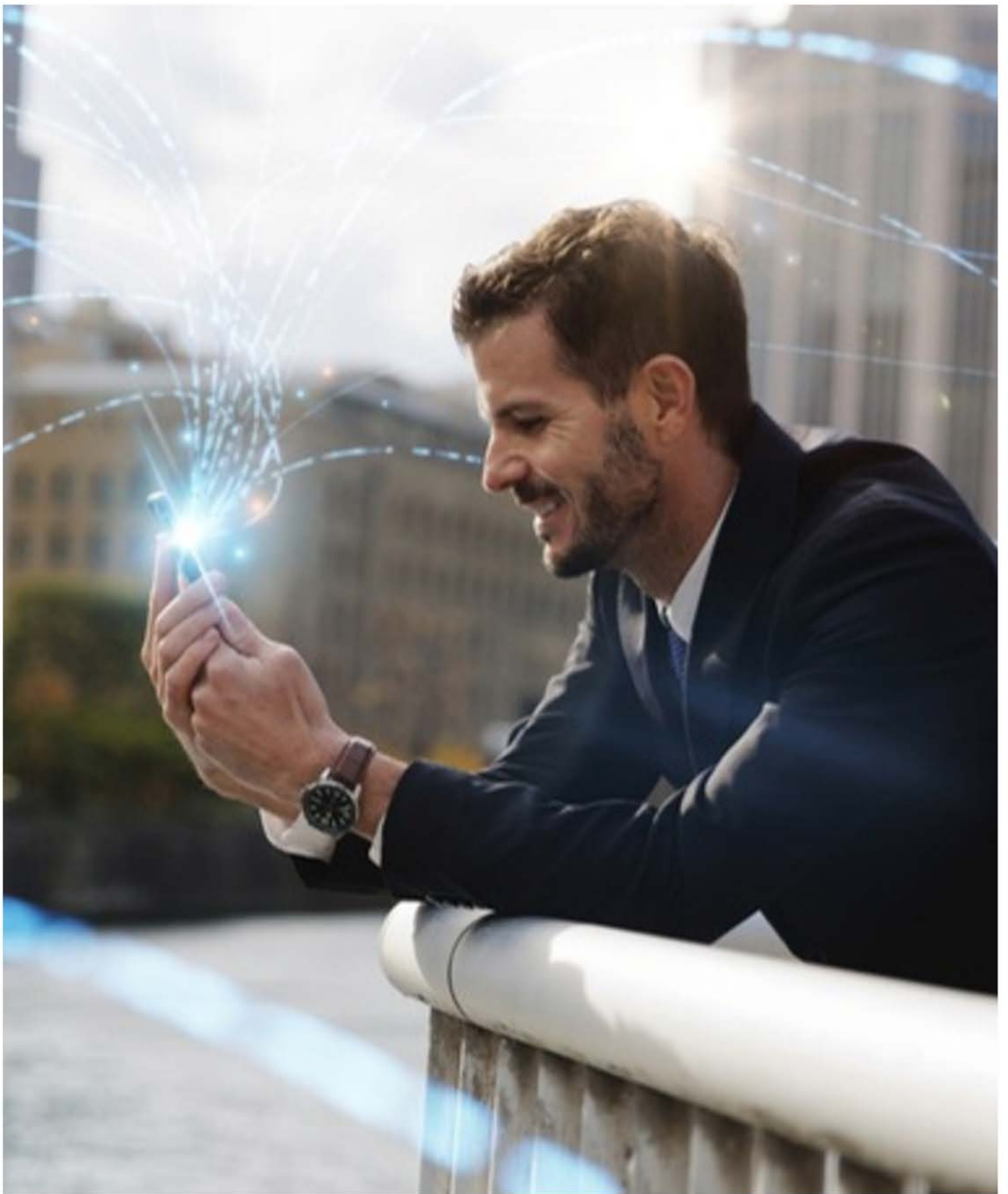


White paper

Omnichannel Customer Engagement



Business



**Omnichannel
Customer
Engagement**



Business



Omnichannel Customer Engagement

In a world where customers are increasingly demanding and technology evolves at breakneck speed, keeping track of customer satisfaction can be quite a challenge. Traditional contact methods such as phone and email are simply no longer enough. Nowadays customers want fast and seamless communication through a variety of channels, from social media to chatbots and mobile apps. This white paper highlights the power of omnichannel customer engagement and illustrates how businesses can implement this strategy to offer a superior customer experience. Discover how an omnichannel approach not only boosts customer satisfaction but also improves efficiency and customer loyalty. Learn why integrating various communication channels is essential in the modern business world and how this can create a competitive advantage.

“*Nowadays customers expect fast and seamless communication through a variety of channels.*”

1
Single-channel
vs. multichannel
vs. omnichannel

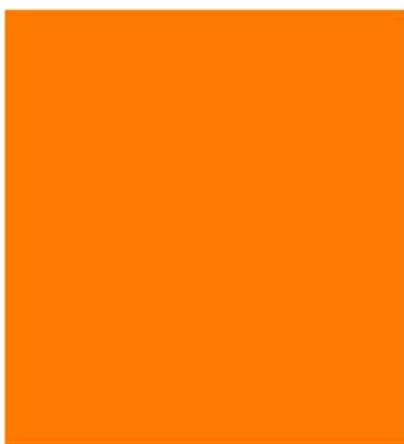


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1. Single-channel vs. multichannel vs. omnichannel

Single-channel, multichannel and omnichannel are different approaches to customer interaction, each with their own specific impact on customer experience.

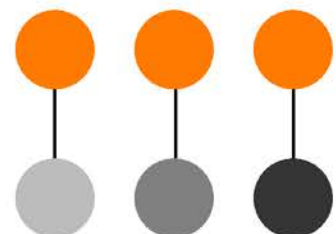
What is single-channel?

A business that implements a single-channel strategy only uses one communication channel, such as telephone, email or physical mail, to communicate with customers and provide services. This approach is seldom used nowadays because businesses realise customers need more variety in how they can contact a company.



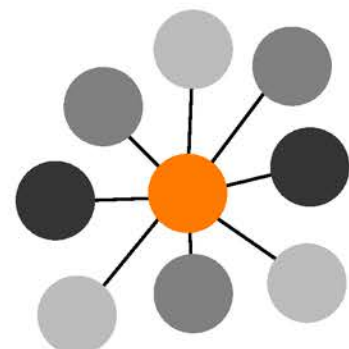
What is multichannel?

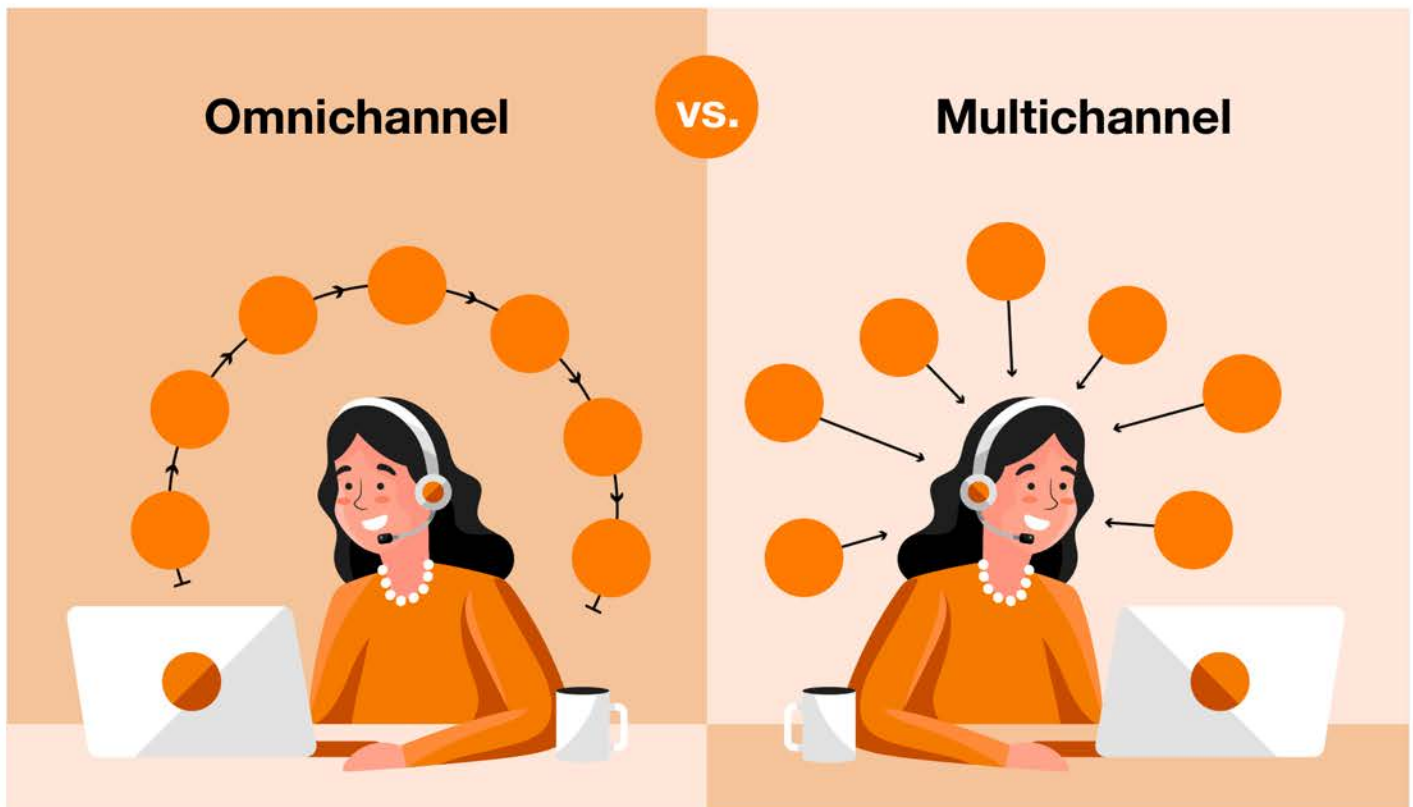
Businesses that implement a multichannel approach offer multiple communication channels, such as telephone, email, social media and live chat. Although this gives customers more options, these channels often operate independently from each other. Customers may have to repeat their story when switching communication channels, which may result in frustration and an inconsistent customer experience.



What is omnichannel?

An omnichannel approach goes beyond multichannel by offering a fully integrated and seamless customer experience across all communication channels, such as telephone, email, social media... In an omnichannel strategy all channels are interconnected so that customer information and interaction history are shared in real time. This ensures a consistent customer experience regardless of the channel they use to contact the company.





Advantages of omnichannel compared to multichannel:

- Consistency: customers benefit from a uniform experience across all channels, heightening customer satisfaction.
- Efficiency: integrated systems reduce the need for customers to repeat themselves, thereby shortening the handling time of inquiries.
- Personalisation: companies can better analyse and use customer data to provide personalised services and launch special offers.
- Higher customer loyalty: offering a seamless and enjoyable customer experience helps businesses boost customer loyalty and retention.

Omnichannel strategies are becoming increasingly popular because they help businesses to be more competitive and operate in a more customer-oriented way in an increasingly digitalised world.

1 Jarman, P. (2019, 11 January). *Delivering an Excellent Omni-channel Experience*. CX Today. Consulted on 4 July 2024, source <https://www.cxtoday.com/contact-centre/delivering-an-excellent-omni-channel-experience/>

2. Why is an omnichannel strategy indispensable?

Over the past fifteen years, consumer shopping behaviour has changed drastically. Fifteen years ago, consumers used an average of two contact points to purchase a product and just 7% regularly called on more than four contact points. Today consumers use an average of almost six contact points, with almost 50% using more than four contact points on a regular basis¹. This increase in the number of contact points underlines why it is essential for businesses to implement an omni-channel strategy in order to deliver a consistent and seamless customer experience.

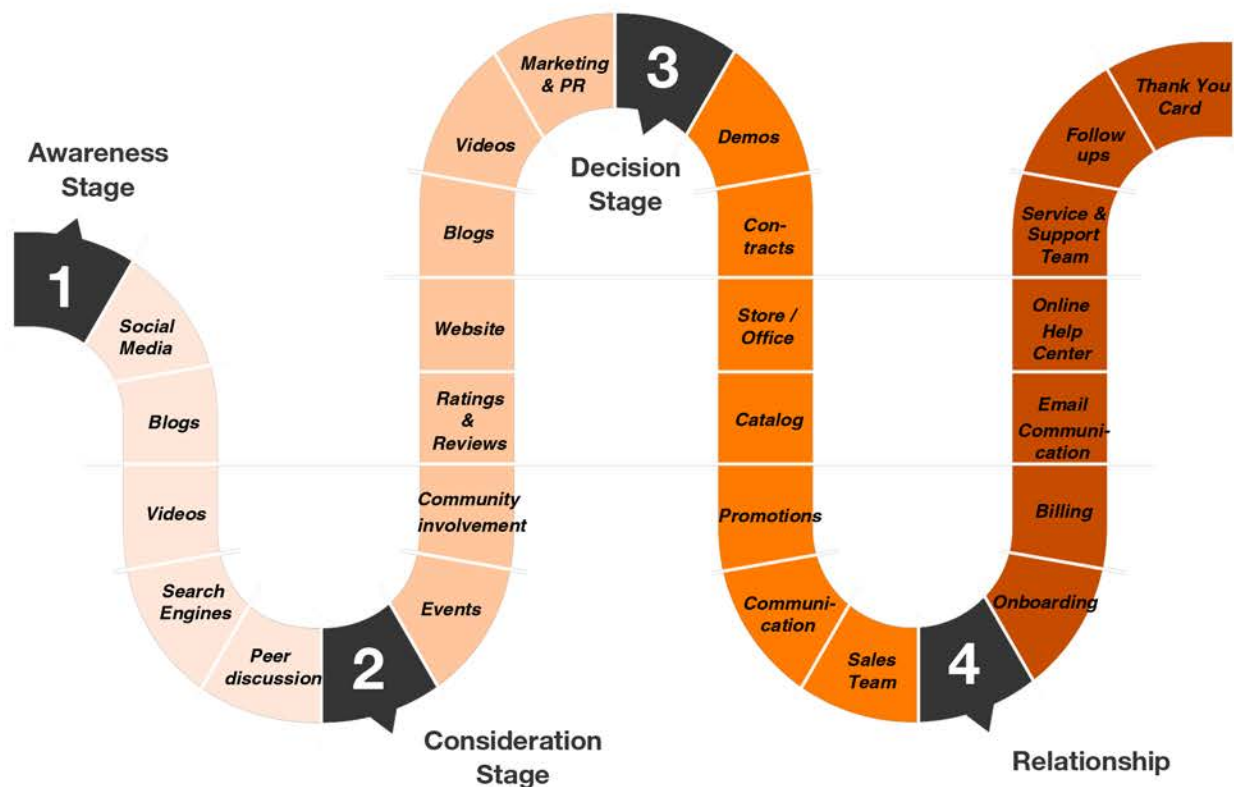
“*Today consumers use an average of almost six contact points.*”

For instance, during the pandemic, the number of online orders collected by customers in a physical shop soared by 208%². This shows how important it has become to seamlessly integrate both online and offline channels in order to meet customer expectations. Offering an excellent customer experience across all available channels is no longer just a friendly gesture, it has become essential to remain successful and stay ahead of the competition.

Growing number of contact points

The number of interactions in the consumer purchase journey has exploded compared to just a few years ago. For example, in 2014 Google determined that the average customer journey comprised nine interactions with a business. Today customers have a choice of 20 to 500 contact points, depending on what is being offered. This illustrates how complex the customer journey has become and how important it is to coordinate all these contact points to ensure a seamless experience.

² Thomas, L., (2020, 27 april). Curbside pickup at retail stores surges 208% during coronavirus pandemic. CNBC. Geraadpleegd op 4 juli 2024, van <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/27/coronavirus-curbside-pickup-at-retail-stores-surges-208percent.html>



Customer expectations

A Google survey showed that 59% of shoppers research a potential purchase online to make sure they are making the right choice³. In addition, 50% of shoppers expect to be able to make online purchases and collect them at the shop⁴. These figures underline the importance of an integrated approach where both online and offline channels work seamlessly together.

“Companies that fail to implement an omnichannel strategy risk losing customers to competitors that can meet these expectations.”

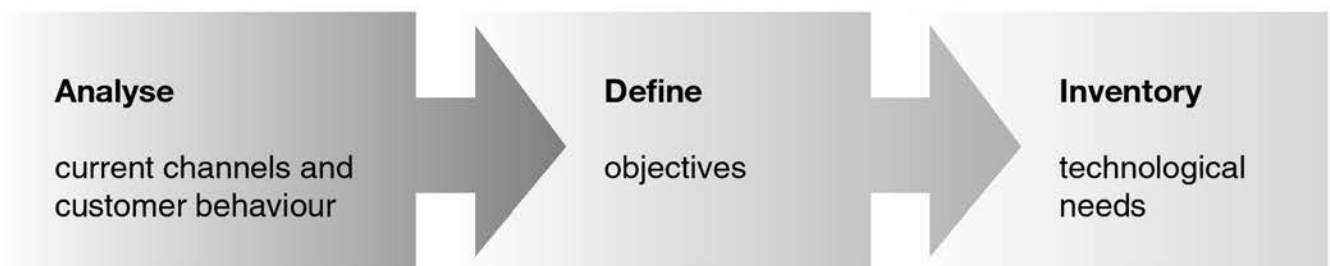
Contemporary consumers expect a seamless, integrated experience across multiple channels. Companies that fail to implement an omnichannel strategy risk losing customers to competitors that can meet these expectations. By investing in an omnichannel strategy, businesses can not only improve customer satisfaction but also strengthen their competitive position and secure long-term success.

³ Lellouche Tordjman, K., Poddar, B. & Philippon, A., (2023, 21 February). Touch points and the Revolution in Omnichannel. Consulted on 4 July 2024, source <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2023/touchpoints-and-omni-channel-revolution#:~:text=Touchpoints%20Have%20Reached%20a%20Tipping,500%2C%20depending%20on%20the%20offering.>

⁴ Forrester, (2014, January). Customer Desires vs. Retailer Capabilities: Minding the Omnichannel Commerce Gap

3. How to develop an omnichannel strategy?

Implementing an omnichannel strategy starts with a detailed evaluation of the current customer interaction channels and the technologies a company implements. First of all, it is essential to analyse the current channels and customer behaviour. This consists of identifying which channels customers are currently using and how they interact with them. Use customer data to gain insight into customer preferences and behaviour. It is also useful to collect customer feedback in order to identify areas for improvement. Subsequently companies must define their objectives, such as increasing customer satisfaction, improving customer service efficiency, or reinforcing customer loyalty. Inventorying technological needs is also crucial. Assess which technologies are required to integrate the current systems and offer a seamless customer experience.



The channels

An omnichannel strategy can comprise a wide range of communication channels. Traditional channels such as telephone and email remain essential for direct and personal communication. In addition, digital channels such as social media, chatbots and live chat are becoming ever more important. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are used for customer service and marketing whereas chatbots and live chat provide real-time support on web-sites and mobile apps. Text messages and messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Messenger are also effective for fast and easy communication.



Choosing the right channels

If you're going to choose the right channels you need to know your target audience. Determine which channels customers appreciate and use most often. Younger generations often prefer messaging apps and social media whereas older generations are more likely to contact you via telephone or email. Companies must also assess their current capabilities and consider which channels are already being used efficiently and which new channels can easily be integrated without major disruptions. It is also important to set priorities. Start with those channels that will have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and business results and gradually expand to other channels.

Seamless transition

To ensure a seamless transition it is essential to properly integrate all customer interaction channels and back end systems in order to offer a uniform and consistent experience. This means all staff involved must have real-time access to customer data and interaction history. It is also crucial to teach staff to use the new systems and channels efficiently. This is not restricted to technical training but also includes customer-centric communication and problem solving. Use advanced analytics to monitor and analyse customer interactions. This helps to identify problem areas and implement improvements.



4. The impact of omnichannel customer engagement

Impact on customers

The implementation of an omnichannel customer engagement strategy has a profound effect on customer experience. In the past customers had two contact points at most, such as telephone and/or email. However, as discussed earlier, consumers nowadays expect a seamless experience across multiple channels including social media, chatbots and physical stores. This change is a direct consequence of the rapid growth of digital technologies and evolving customer expectations. For customers, one of the chief advantages of omnichannel customer engagement is a consistent customer experience. If all channels are interconnected, customers don't have to repeat their story every time they switch contact points. This alleviates frustration and makes for a smoother and more efficient service. Customers appreciate when companies cater to their needs in this fashion, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, omnichannel customer engagement offers personalised interactions. By using customer data and analytics, businesses can produce targeted and relevant communication and offers. This not only heightens satisfaction but it can also stimulate sales by offering customers products or services that really suit them. Another aspect is speed and availability. Omnichannel customer engagement gives customers 24/7 access to support through varied channels, such as chatbots and social media. As a result, questions and issues are solved quickly, contributing to a better overall customer experience.

Impact on staff

Stress and burnout are common challenges for customer service agents. Research shows that 32% of consumers admit to having shouted at an agent at some point, whereas 24% indicate to have verbally abused an agent ⁵.

Moreover, 87% of call centre staff experience 'high' to 'very high' stress levels at work, and 77% say the same about the level of stress in their personal life. These high stress levels may have serious consequences for staff health and well-being. More than half of call centre agents feel emotionally drained, suffer from sleep issues and burnouts and take medication against stress or anxiety as a direct result of their work⁶. To mitigate the impact of stress and burnout, well-being initiatives can be integrated into an omnichannel strategy. For instance, by implementing AI, businesses can monitor how much negative feedback agents receive and adjust their duties accordingly.

5 Elliot, C., (2023, 18 March). Thank You For Not Calling! Agents Are On The Verge Of Burnout, Study Finds. Forbes. Consulted on 4 July 2024, source <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christopherelliott/2023/03/18/thank-you-for-not-calling-agents-are-on-the-verge-of-burnout-study-finds/>

This helps to distribute the workload and prevent burnout. Businesses can also set up programmes to support the emotional and physical well-being of their staff, such as coaching, stress management and well-being programmes. Apart from improving staff well-being, an omnichannel strategy also delivers considerable gains in efficiency. Integrated systems offer fast access to the full customer history and context so that agents are better prepared to help customers.

This reduces the time required to resolve issues and boosts overall productivity. Moreover, the automation of routine tasks through AI and chatbots enables contact centre agents to focus on more complex and satisfying tasks. This not only enhances the level of service but also contributes to the job satisfaction of contact centre agents. By reducing routine tasks, contact centre agents can hone their skills and create more added value. Another key aspect is training and development. Although the implementation of an omnichannel strategy initially requires training, this also contributes to the development of new skills among staff. This makes them more flexible and better equipped to respond to new technologies and changing customer needs.



6 Doellgast, V. & O'Brady, S. (2020, June). *Making call center jobs better: The relationship between management practices and worker stress*

5. The challenges of omnichannel customer engagement

The transition to an omnichannel customer engagement strategy offers myriad advantages for businesses and customers but also comes with its own set of challenges. Here are a few of the chief obstacles businesses can encounter when implementing an omnichannel approach.

Technology integration

One of the main challenges when implementing an omnichannel strategy is the integration of different technologies and systems. Businesses must ensure that all their customer interaction channels, such as telephone, email, social media and chatbots, seamlessly work together and share data. This often requires considerable investments in new technology and the adaptation of existing systems. The complexity of this integration can be discouraging, especially for companies using outdated or incompatible systems.

Data management and analysis

Another challenge is the efficient management and analysis of the large volumes of customer data collected through different channels. Businesses must make sure that this data is integrated correctly and used to provide personalised and consistent customer experiences. This requires advanced data analysis tools and strategies, as well as the right skills and knowledge within the company to use these tools with maximum efficiency. On top of this, businesses must comply with strict privacy and data protection legislation, such as the GDPR, which adds additional complexity to the data management process.

Consistent customer experience

Guaranteeing a consistent customer experience across all channels is a crucial but challenging task. Businesses have to ensure that customers receive the same information and level of service regardless of the channel they are using. This requires well-defined processes and policies, as well as staff training and support to enable them to offer consistent service.



Adaptation of processes

The implementation of an omnichannel strategy often requires significant changes in terms of operational processes and business culture. Staff must be trained in the use of new systems and technologies and must adapt to new ways of working. This can cause resistance and stress, especially if staff are not properly supported during the transition. Businesses need to invest in comprehensive training and change management programmes so that staff feel supported and competent in their new roles.



6.Future trends

Cloud-based contact centres

An important trend is the transition to cloud-based contact centres. These systems offer flexibility and scalability, making it easy for businesses to scale their customer service capacity up or down, depending on demand. The adoption of cloud-based solutions will grow considerably in the coming years, fuelled by the need for resilience and the possibility of working remotely, which proved crucial during the pandemic.

AI and automation

AI and automation are playing an increasingly significant role in omnichannel customer engagement. AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants are improving efficiency by taking over routine tasks and helping customers directly with frequently asked questions. In addition, AI can carry out sentiment analysis, allowing businesses to better respond to customer needs and emotions. Gartner claims that by 2025, around 80% of customer interactions will be handled by AI-driven technologies, without human intervention⁷.

Personalisation through data analysis

Advanced data analysis enables companies to acquire profound insights into customer behaviour and preferences. By leveraging this data, businesses can offer personalised experiences that better suit the needs of individual customers. The trend towards more personalised marketing and service will continue to gain momentum as consumers increasingly expect companies to be aware of their preferences and history, and cater to it.

⁷ Gartner, (2023, 30 August). Gartner Reveals Three Technologies That Will Transform Customer Service and Support By 2028



Integration of new channels

The integration of new and emerging channels will continue to enrich the omnichannel strategies. Platforms like TikTok and other social media networks are becoming more and more central to customer interactions, especially with younger generations. Companies must remain flexible and be prepared to embrace new channels in order to stay relevant to their customers.



Well-being and workforce management

More attention will be paid to employee well-being thanks to the application of AI in workforce management. AI can help monitor and manage work pressure and can even actively contribute to the prevention of burnouts by optimising tasks and work schedules. This not only results in a better work experience for agents but also in a higher level of customer service.

Proactive customer involvement

Instead of waiting for customers to contact them, companies will increasingly rely on proactive customer involvement. This means that companies themselves initiate customer communication, for instance by proactively contacting them to schedule appointments or keep customers informed of relevant information. This approach can boost customer satisfaction and strengthen loyalty.



Use of customer data for marketing purposes

The data collected via omnichannel platforms will not only be used for customer service but also for targeted marketing campaigns. Companies can analyse this data to identify trends and patterns so they can fine-tune their marketing strategies and conduct more effective campaigns.

7. Omnichannel customer engagement: the future of customer interaction

In a world with constantly evolving customer expectations, an omnichannel customer engagement strategy is the key to providing an exceptional customer experience. The seamless integration of various communication channels enables businesses to not only meet but even surpass these expectations. The benefits of an omnichannel approach are obvious: consistency in customer interactions, improved efficiency through integrated systems, profound personalisation and enhanced customer loyalty.

All these elements contribute to a sustainable competitive position and business success in an increasingly digitalised environment. Although the challenges such as technology integration, data management and ensuring consistent customer experience are not to be underestimated, the continuous development of AI and automation create fresh opportunities to surmount these obstacles. In order to develop a successful omnichannel strategy, businesses must invest in advanced technologies and keep focusing on staff development. The future of customer interaction will also be determined by trends such as cloud-based contact centres, AI-driven automation and the integration of new communication channels. By proactively responding to these developments and continually innovating, companies can not just meet but even anticipate customer expectations. In short, for companies aspiring growth, competitive advantage and stronger customer relationships, implementing an omnichannel customer engagement strategy is no longer optional but essential. By investing in this approach, customers can not only meet current customer needs but also anticipate future trends and challenges in the world of customer interaction.



Ready to optimise your omnichannel strategy?

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