

The Next Retail Shift

Five ways retail customers are changing
and how you can use customer service
to capitalize



Introduction

Mobile devices, ubiquitous connectivity, and social media have created empowered customers who are no longer loyal to a retail brand, but rather to an experience across channels.

Retailers know these customer experiences are critical to their ongoing success. But how do they create unique experiences when traditional differentiators—price, product, promotion, and place—are increasingly irrelevant? What's more, how do retailers—especially brick-and-mortar retailers—deliver these differentiated experiences without breaking the bank?

Forward-thinking retailers are now focusing on customer service as the way to improve the customer experience. They're leveraging many of the same technologies that are driving these changes (such as ubiquitous connectivity and social media) to deliver frictionless service—retail's Holy Grail.

To service today's hyper-connected customer, retailers are choosing solutions that can standardize customer experiences across channels, including social media; empower agents with contextual customer, product, and service information; and enable customers to help themselves via web-based self-service options. And they're requiring these solutions be cloud-based because of the agility and scalability it affords them.

Learn how retail customers are changing and how you can use cloud-based customer service solutions to capitalize on these very shifts.

Table of Contents

- 03** Purchase Path is No Longer Linear
- 04** Non-Stop Shopper
- 06** Self-Service is the New Normal
- 07** The Rise of Social Networks
- 08** Always-On-Demand Customers
- 09** Conclusion

Shift 1

Purchase Path is No Longer Linear

Think Beyond the Transaction

Today's consumers no longer make a straight line to purchase. Their purchase paths resemble infinite loops, crossing channels (online, in-store, in-app) and traveling through many points of influence (social media, online communities) along the way.

As a result, retailers are becoming less inclined to regard customer relationships as primarily transactional. Instead, the best companies view these relationships as a lifecycle they can cultivate through excellent customer experiences. So while purchase data will still be important, the trend now is to augment it with a customer's product history, social history, loyalty data, and so forth.

The implications for customer service are clear. First, customer interactions count more than ever before. Secondly, it's more important than ever to track how a customer interacts with a retailer over time, no matter what channel. Now every touch point counts—from an 800 number to a tweet or a “like” on the retailer's Facebook page.

To take their customer service to this new level, retailers are requiring cloud-based solutions that can provide a more modern 360° view of their customer. One that enables them to see customer interactions, as well as past purchases, e-commerce, etc., across channels in a single view. Anything less puts the customer experience, and the customer relationship, at risk.



A man with glasses and earbuds is looking at a tablet device. The image is partially obscured by a white overlay on the left side where the text is located.

Shift 2

Non-Stop Shopper

Make Customer Service Seamless

As digital convergence continues to erode boundaries between the physical and digital worlds, today's nonstop shoppers want to be able to start a conversation in one channel and continue it in another without having to restart the dialogue or repeat themselves. Whether they send a tweet, an email, or pick up the phone, your customer service department should be fully in-step with what previous conversations have taken place, and the action items that resulted.

Unfortunately, most retailers have yet to fully integrate their customer service function across channels. With little or no cross-channel visibility, customer interactions stay siloed. Or, as one well-known research firm put it: "Nothing says 'I don't care about you' more than forgetting a customer from one moment to the next."

To combat this issue, top retailers are choosing cloud-based customer service solutions that can be readily integrated with their existing business processes, systems, and information repositories. Such integration allows them to share accurate, current customer records, so customer experiences are consistent and seamless across channels.

Customer Spotlight:

Stanley Black & Decker

Service is a key priority for Stanley Black & Decker, and Salesforce helps it deliver a consistent and high quality experience. “Service Cloud helps us understand our customers’ business models and how they want to serve their own customers. And it helps us give them quick responses for the specific problems they need to solve,” says JoAnna Sohovich, Global President of the company’s IAR division.

[Watch the film >](#)

“Using Service Cloud is like having a help button embedded in all of our products.”

-JoAnna Sohovich, Global President, IAR

Shift 3

Self-Service is the New Normal

Help Customers Help Themselves

What may have started with self-serve gas stations has now become the norm. Fueled by our round-the-clock, tech-savvy lifestyle, the desire for self-service continues to grow. According to Gartner, revenue for the web self-service market is growing by an average of \$100m a year.

The best retailers understand how critical it is to provide their customers with self-service options. That's why they're insisting on cloud-based customer service solutions that enable them to provide their customers with a host of self-service options via mobile devices and through the creation of online customer communities.

Within a community, your customers can serve themselves on their terms. Such options literally let customers serve themselves on their terms, allowing them to get the contextual answers they need anytime, anywhere, while also letting them connect with the broader customer community so they can share their knowledge and learn from one another.

With a customer community your business can also learn what common questions and concerns your customers are facing, and improve your knowledge base to reflect these same questions. These same solutions also come with self-learning abilities to further ensure the underlying knowledge base improves with every customer interaction. Bottom line: customers are empowered and retailers enjoy lower service costs.



Shift 4

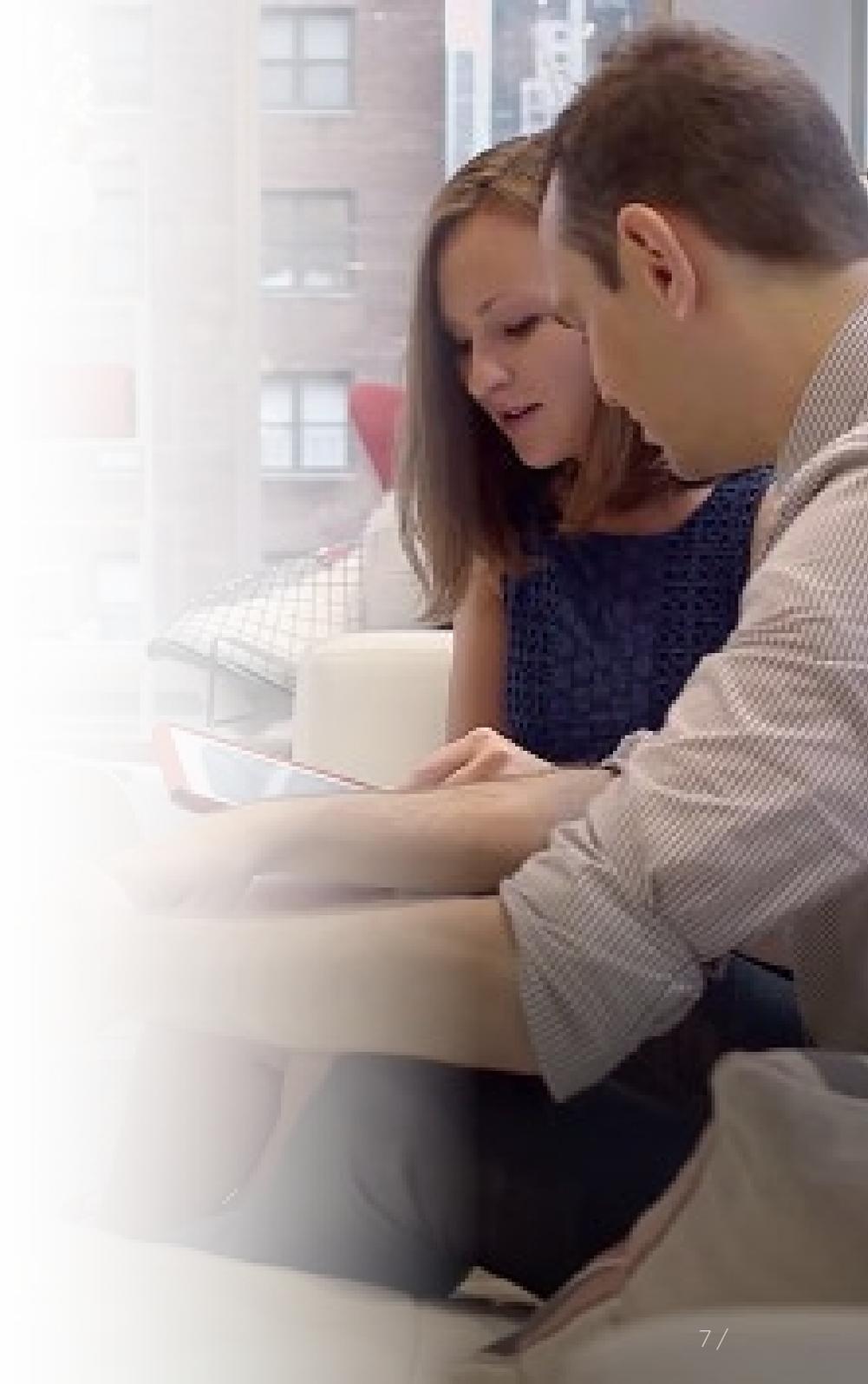
The Rise of Social Networks

Don't Beat Them—Join Them

Consumers are increasingly taking to Facebook and Twitter to share their opinions, read peer recommendations, provide feedback, collaborate, and more – and smart retailers are OK with this. In fact, they encourage it because they understand how social media is fast becoming the ultimate customer engagement tool, especially for millennials, who'll account for nearly 1/3 of total retail spending by 2020.

Likewise, as social media becomes a more commonplace two-way channel for retailers and their customers, the customer service benefits become clear, too. By directly responding to a customer's question, complaint, or inquiry on Facebook or Twitter, retailers not only resolve issues faster, but also provide proof to the world that they care about their customers.

It's little wonder retailers want a cloud-based customer service solution that gives them the ability to manage social interactions as a fully integrated part of their customer experience. This capability lets them extend their customer experience to the places where consumers are learning, sharing, and buying across the social web.



Shift 5

Always-On-Demand Customers

Empower Employees to Serve Customers in Real-Time

Customers expect efficient, effortless, and personalized service, or else. In a study of more than 7,000 U.S. consumers, a leading research company found 52 percent of respondents said that they would abandon a purchase if they couldn't get a quick answer to their question, and 71 percent said that valuing their time was the most important thing that a company could do to provide them with good customer service.

Retailers see these numbers, too. So they're making sure the cloud-based customer service solution they deploy comes with features that fully empower their service agents to solve cases with the fewest clicks – and that all support requests are handled in the same way, regardless if it's a tweet, Facebook comment, or a phone call.



Conclusion

Connected, informed, and empowered through mobile technologies and social media, today's consumers expect every retail experience to be effortless. To meet these expectations for frictionless service, forward-thinking retailers are increasingly focusing their efforts on improving their customer service through cloud technology.

By leveraging many of the same technologies driving these changes, in combination with robust cloud-based customer service solutions, retailers are able to provide personalized, smarter, faster customer service across online and in-store channels—the very type of service needed to capture the hearts and wallets of today's hyper-connected consumers.



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