

CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS FROM START TO FINISH

Why today's customer self-service
journey requires next-gen knowledge
management

TWO TRENDS INEXTRICABLY LINKED

Speed, convenience, and relevance top this list of demands, and all of it must be available in the self-service channels customers already use.

The recent groundswell around customer centricism and knowledge management (KM) is no coincidence. Today's customer journey is far more expansive and layered. Customers, conditioned by the vast availability of convenient digital experiences, have come to prefer digital channels. And their expectations are high.

Supporting these journeys means companies must reorchestrate them from the customer's perspective, striving to meet customer demands throughout. Speed, convenience, and relevance top this list of demands, and all of it must be available in the self-service channels customers already use. They want the right answer, at the right time, in the easiest, most digestible form possible.

In a word, customers want low-effort self-service experiences.

Consequently, companies and their service leadership have no choice but to consider comprehensive customer engagement strategies (digital transformation and self-service, for example) and supporting technologies (knowledge management, to name another) that meet these demands. They must also rethink the ways they structure and deliver information during the purchase, success, and support phases of the customer journey.

THE EXPANDED CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Today's customer journey is powered by constant digital connectivity, and it is broader than ever before. A brand journey might begin at the very start of pre-purchase activities and extend far beyond the purchase itself.

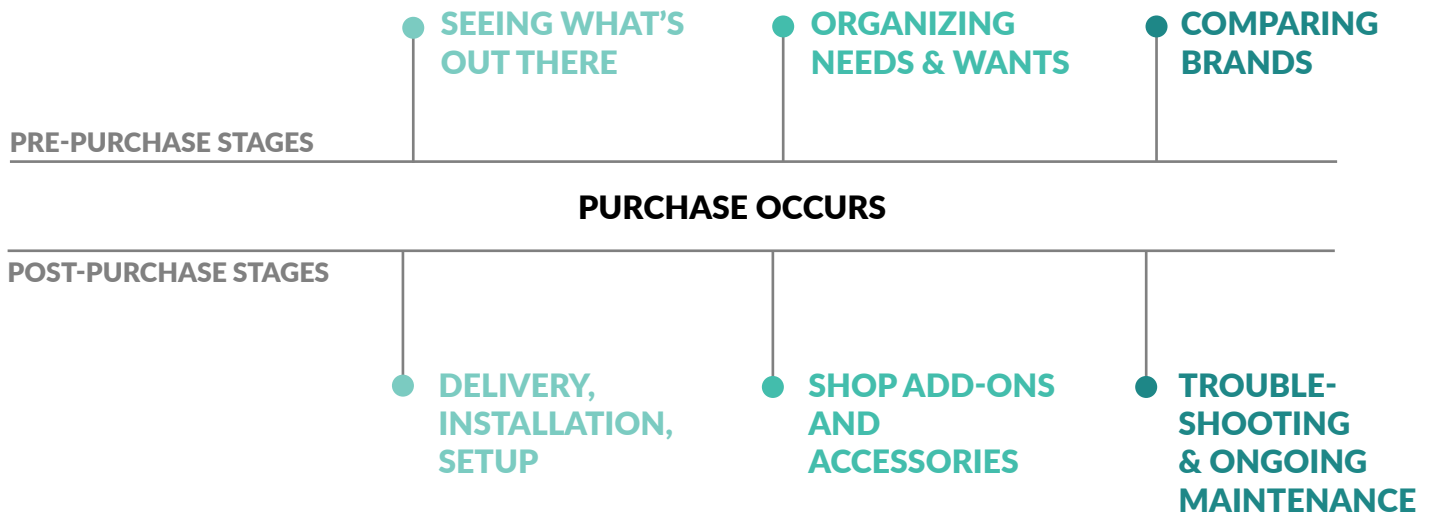
The touchpoints along this journey are more complex, too. As customers interact with brands and products, they seek information from various self-service channels that now have

well-defined, prioritized stages. Propelling customers through each stage are branded content experiences.

If they don't get what they need, customers are forced to (begrudgingly) move to a new company touchpoint, or even a new channel. The problem is, no one wants to end up talking to an agent, a preference service leadership must respond to. In such a competitive landscape, customers simply have too many options (including other brands!) to abide such high-effort experiences.

THE “NEED A NEW FRIDGE” PARADIGM

A common purchase and ownership journey illustrates this new self-service paradigm well. Usually, it starts with, “Honey, we need a new fridge.” Thus begins the journey to buying and owning something common to many households. Here’s how that journey might look:



THE PRE-PURCHASE STAGES

Seeing what's out there – This occurs very early in the consideration phase, and not necessarily in a structured or linear way. A customer might be looking for something else at

the store, then wander into the refrigerator section to see the options. They might ask friends for recommendations. Often, they reach for the closest connected device to perform a quick Google search.

Organizing needs and wants – This is where a prospect starts identifying desired product attributes based on needs, preferences, and market knowledge. This goes beyond deciding between crushed or cubed ice, extra crispers, or “smart” connectivity; it also includes post-sale ownership questions. How much time will installation take? How will the company answer my questions? The customer will look to the internet for answers, starting with Google before moving to manufacturer pages and social communities looking for further validation.

Comparing brands – A customer will also compare similar brand models based on criteria like price and features. They might also compare the brands themselves based on customer service, reputation, and any content experiences they’ve had up to this point. Some content traditionally intended for post-purchase activities will be relevant here, during the pre-sale process. Whether implicitly or explicitly, customers in this stage will be shortlisting finalists for the purchase decision after more digital searches for answers.

THE POST-PURCHASE STAGES

Delivery, installation, setup – Here, customers will check online for their order status, seek product information, onboarding materials, and documentation to learn the ins and outs of their new refrigerator, register warranties, and so on.

Shop add-ons and accessories – Over time, customers will need to replace things like water filters, bulbs, and fans. They might consider purchasing additional accessories from their favorite online retailer, or direct from the manufacturer’s website, that add value and functionality to their product.

Troubleshooting and ongoing maintenance – When issues do arise, such as malfunctioning motors or broken fans, customers will again hit the internet with their questions. This could be as simple as typing an error code or “how to fix” query into Google; or it could require an interaction with the contact center if that customer can’t find what they need. Increasingly, the strength of corresponding self-service content is the determining factor.

THE SELF-SERVICE SNIFF TEST

- Is it easy to find?**
- Is it relevant?**
- Does it make a call or email unnecessary?**

Common to every stage in this expanded journey is customer self-service. Gartner predicts that, by 2020, 85% of customers will choose self-service first.¹ And 84% of those customers prefer a straightforward solution to their problem, as opposed to a broad array of self-service channels.²

This is the high standard to which self-service experiences will now be held. Be it seeking information to inform a purchase, or searching for help, documentation, and additional info after the sale, customers will put every self-service experience to the self-service “sniff” test.

The test is comprised of three simple questions: Is it easy to find? Is it relevant? Does it make a call or email unnecessary?

If the answer to one or more of those questions is “no,” the customer will likely move on. The decision to abandon a brand happens quickly and can be the direct result of a poor self-service experience. As customers interact with a brand more regularly throughout the journey, the quality of those interactions will directly impact their brand perception.

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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IS THE FOUNDATION

Passing the sniff test means delivering consistent, relevant, and authoritative information throughout the entire journey—wherever and whenever customers go looking for it.

On its own, successfully guiding customers toward the purchase decision is no longer enough.

What's needed is a single source of truth that serves all channels and touchpoints across this journey—one capable of extending microcontent into a brand's digital experiences, support portals, and customer journeys.

This is what standalone knowledge management platforms do so well.

Knowledge management platforms provide a unified system and framework that centralizes an organization's existing knowledge. They allow organizations to take pages-long PDF documentation, as well as help content siloed in places like SharePoint, and break it down into web-based knowledge articles for more rapid storage, indexing, and retrieval.

Putting all this knowledge in one place allows companies to extend it to the channels that customers use for self-service. Google. Communities. Branded websites. Smartphone apps. By bringing this content out of silos and making it available directly for customer access, companies can also own more branded search terms, increase organic website traffic, and help facilitate repeat purchases and upsells. This, in turn, can lead to increased brand engagement that drives Net Promoter Score® and CSAT.

For an exploration of how organizational knowledge drives engagement, loyalty, and revenue, read our whitepaper:

ELEVATING CX WITH KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

[READ THE WHITEPAPER](#)

ENDNOTES

1. Gartner, "Four Best Practices for Implementing Extreme Customer Self-Service". Brian Manusama, Nadine LeBlanc. <https://www.gartner.com/doc/3894096/best-practices-implementing-extreme-customer>. November 2018.
2. Harvard Business Review, "Kick-ass Customer Service". Matthew Dixon, Lara Ponomareff, Scott Turner, Rick DeLisi. <https://hbr.org/2017/01/kick-ass-customer-service>. Jan-Feb 2017.



HEADQUARTERS

101 W Broadway, Ste 1500
San Diego, CA 92101
USA

WEB

mindtouch.com

SALES / SUPPORT

(619) 795-8459

ABOUT MINDTOUCH

MindTouch offers an enterprise-grade, AI-powered knowledge management platform that includes functionality for customer self-service, agent assistance and departmental knowledge for organizations of all sizes and industries. Focused on the customer experience, MindTouch is trusted by more than 340 companies worldwide to deliver knowledge when it's needed, where it's needed and how it's needed. The result is faster, more consistent and more personalized customer service, along with increased operational efficiencies. MindTouch was founded in 2005 and is headquartered in San Diego, California. www.mindtouch.com