

Why customer service needs to be more empathic in the age of AI

In the ever-accelerating race to automate customer service interactions, companies risk overlooking a vital component: empathy. While adding AI promises efficiency and scalability, it may inadvertently widen the chasm between the support customers desire and what companies actually deliver.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Research conducted by customer service platform Dixa reveals a stark truth: 96% of customers consider empathy to be critical in their interactions with brands. However, a contrasting insight from contact center solution Genesys paints a different picture - only 3% of top-performing European agents prioritise "empathy" as one of their greatest strengths.

This fundamental disconnect underscores a pressing need for businesses to reevaluate their approach to customer service in the AI age. As companies strive to meet the demands of an increasingly digitised world, they must not overlook the human element that lies at the heart of every customer interaction: empathy.

Understanding empathy in customer service

Empathy lies at the heart of every meaningful customer interaction, serving as a vital bridge between service providers and consumers. Defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another,

empathy is a cornerstone of effective communication and relationship-building in customer service.

In the realm of customer support, *empathy statements* serve as powerful tools to convey genuine understanding and concern for the customer's emotions and experiences. These statements are carefully crafted phrases employed by customer service teams to express their acknowledgment and validation of the customer's feelings in any given situation.

Drawing from the multifaceted nature of empathy, it manifests in various forms:

1. **Affective Empathy:** This involves the ability to respond to someone else's emotions appropriately, showing sensitivity and understanding towards their feelings.
2. **Somatic Empathy:** Involving a physical resonance with another's experiences, somatic empathy enables individuals to physically feel what others are going through, fostering a deeper connection and rapport.
3. **Cognitive Empathy:** This form of empathy revolves around understanding another person's mental state, allowing individuals to grasp their thoughts, perspectives, and emotions with clarity and insight.

For customer service representatives or AI assistants, cultivating empathy is not merely a desirable trait but an essential skill set. As frontline ambassadors of a brand, they interact with a diverse range of customers on a daily basis, each with their unique concerns, frustrations, and needs. By harnessing the power of empathy, service agents can create a supportive and validating environment, where customers feel truly heard and understood.

Moreover, empathy plays a pivotal role in mitigating negative emotions such as anger or frustration. By demonstrating genuine empathy through their words and actions, customer service representatives can effectively defuse tense situations, fostering a sense of trust and goodwill between the brand and its customers.

However, it's important to recognise that while AI-driven chatbots and automation can enhance efficiency in customer service, they may not always be equipped to handle complex customer issues with the same level of empathy and understanding as human agents. Automating every customer interaction with an AI bot may streamline processes, but it risks sacrificing the human touch and emotional connection that customers often seek, particularly when facing challenging or emotionally charged situations. Therefore, striking a balance between AI automation and human interaction is essential to deliver empathetic and effective customer service in the AI age.

How to be more empathic with your customers

As AI shakes up support operations, the essence of genuine connection with customers remains paramount for businesses striving to deliver exceptional experiences.

A recent Emplifi study reveals a critical consumer sentiment: 75% prioritise "authentic" customer care experiences. This insight underscores the enduring human need for personalised, empathetic interactions, irrespective of the interface—whether human or AI-driven.

Here are five key principles and strategies to cultivate empathy and enhance customer interactions:

Personalisation through first names

The first one is easy! A simple yet powerful way to humanise customer interactions is by addressing customers by their first names. Research in psychology underscores the significance of hearing one's name, as it triggers a positive neurological response associated with feelings of recognition and validation. By incorporating customers' names into conversations, whether in person, over the phone, or through chatbots, businesses can establish a personalised connection from the outset, laying the foundation for a more empathetic interaction.

Mirroring for rapport building

Mirroring, a technique rooted in social psychology, involves subtly mimicking the verbal and non-verbal cues of another person to foster rapport and connection. By mirroring a customer's language, tone, and body language, customer service representatives can convey empathy and understanding, signaling to customers that they are truly being heard and valued. Whether it's echoing the customer's concerns or validating their emotions, mirroring helps establish a sense of mutual understanding and trust, facilitating more meaningful interactions.

Accountability and validation

In moments of customer dissatisfaction or conflict, taking accountability and validating the customer's feelings can be instrumental in defusing tension and restoring trust. Rather than deflecting blame or making excuses, acknowledging the customer's concerns and expressing genuine empathy can go a long way in de-escalating the situation. By using active language and demonstrating a sincere commitment to resolving the issue, businesses can reaffirm their dedication to customer satisfaction while preserving the customer's dignity and respect.

Leveraging similarity and relatability

Finding common ground with customers by sharing personal experiences or anecdotes can create a sense of camaraderie and understanding. By acknowledging shared struggles or challenges, customer service representatives can tap into the "Similar-To-Me" cognitive bias, wherein individuals feel more affinity towards those who share similar traits or experiences. This approach not only validates the customer's emotions but also humanises the interaction, fostering a sense of empathy and solidarity between the customer and the representative.

Establishing expertise and authority

Instilling confidence in customers requires demonstrating expertise and competence in addressing their concerns. By showcasing knowledge and proficiency in handling various issues, customer service representatives can inspire trust and reassurance, alleviating customer anxieties and uncertainties. Leveraging the "authority bias," wherein individuals defer to those perceived as credible and knowledgeable, businesses can position themselves as trusted advisors, guiding customers towards effective solutions with confidence and expertise.

Striking the balance: Human touch in the age of AI

As companies continue to explore and implement AI to enhance customer journeys, striking the delicate balance between human touch and technological efficiency becomes imperative. The quest for truly omnichannel customer service entails offering diverse options, such as [click-to-video](#), empowering customers to connect with a human representative when needed.

In conclusion, empathy remains the linchpin of outstanding customer

service, anchoring meaningful connections and fostering positive experiences. By embracing empathy as a guiding principle and integrating strategies that prioritise understanding and connection, businesses can cultivate a culture of empathy, nurturing enduring relationships with their customers. This commitment not only drives long-term loyalty but also ensures customer satisfaction in an increasingly AI digitised landscape.

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