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Messaging: The Future of Customer Service

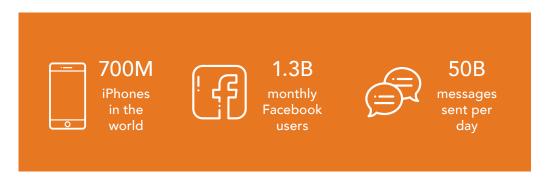Meet your customers where they are or risk losing them

With social media platforms coming in and out of fashion and the seemingly constant flux of customers' channels of preference, it can be hard for businesses to know how to keep up when it comes to providing service and support. In the age of hyper-adoption and hyper-abandonment, some companies are wondering if messaging is just another fad that will be here today and gone tomorrow. We have every reason to believe messaging is there to stay.

While marketers think about messaging as a channel, consumers who use it every day think of it as something they do. People use messaging to communicate with friends, family, colleagues—and now, businesses. In contrast to owned channels, which require consumers to download an app or log into an account, messaging offers the ultimate convenience because it's already on their phone or device and they're already using it. Plus, for companies there's no platform to build. You just need a solution that can integrate with messaging apps.

Messaging presents a unique, strategic customer service opportunity. If you haven't opened that door already, now is the right time to act: Companies that aren't shifting customer service and support towards messaging channels run the risk of losing customers.

Why Messaging Matters

700M iPhones in the world

1.3B monthly Facebook users

50B messages sent per day

Source: [24]7.ai/Forrester Webinar, "Messaging Apps: The Future of Customer Service or Passing Millennial Fad?"

Let's talk: Conversational Commerce

While messaging apps first gained popularity as a way to stay in touch with friends and family, in recent years consumers have started using them to seek support, service, and even products. And companies are catching on. Art Schoeller, Vice President and Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, explains, "It's like your business is a house and you're inviting people to come in. You have a lot of doors, which are your channels, but not all of them are open." There might be people lined up at your door and you don't even know it.

While it may seem logical that opening an additional channel for support should deflect contacts from your other channels, Schoeller points out that this is not always the case. It may be that you will reach a whole new segment. "How many people are lining up on Facebook Messenger or Apple Messages for Business, trying to get to your business? It's a missed opportunity if you don't open that door."

At [24]7.ai™, we think of messaging in terms of Conversational Commerce, a trend that's emerged in recent years as consumers suffering digital overload and advertising burnout turn to personal virtual assistants (think Siri, Alexa or Google) and messaging apps to escape the noise.

While most companies that have already implemented support via messaging are facilitating human-to human conversations, to make the most of this opportunity we recommend blending bots and agents. With the right platform even complex scenarios, such as booking travel or returning a purchase, can be automated in the app. And if the bot detects customer frustration, it can easily escalate them to an agent. Financial services and healthcare companies can use messaging for search and discovery type interactions and then route the customer to a secure channel (such as providing a link to online banking) to complete transactions requiring authentication. It's all about making things as easy as possible.

Conversational Commerce— A Big Opportunity

2B

messages are sent on Messenger between people and businesses each month. 20M businesses message with people every month.

Source: Digital Marketing Magazine

1.4B

people around the world send over 50 billion messages each day to communicate with one another.

Source: eMarketer

41%

of millennials say that they would be truly satisfied if they could use messaging or SMS to connect with companies and organizations where they do business.

Source: Facebook

"Conversational Commerce is when customers use messaging apps or voice technology to establish a relationship with a business and likely carry out value-based transactions."

[24]7.ai Conversation Commerce definition

The Power of Convenience

Digital transformation efforts have led many companies to shift large portions of their customer service and support to digital channels. Traditional chat, whether with a live agent or a chatbot, helps consumers self-serve more efficiently and can also reduce customer service costs. While messaging may seem like a variant of chat, it's important to draw a distinction between the two.

The first difference is where the conversation takes place. While chat usually occurs on owned channels like web and mobile, messaging is done through third-party platforms. The most popular messaging apps today are Facebook Messenger and Apple Messages for Business, with other platforms like Android's Messages and Twitter also owning market share within different segments and communities.

It's important to think about who is using these channels and what they need. The customers who download your app might be a different audience than those who prefer to use "borrowed" channels like Facebook Messenger.

The second, and perhaps more significant, difference is how the conversation takes place. With traditional chat, each transaction (or customer intent) begins and ends in a single interaction. Whether they're getting information, making a purchase, changing a reservation, etc. it all occurs within a single chat window. Once the inquiry or transaction is complete, the window—and the conversation—is closed. This also applies to voice calls and email queries.

With messaging, conversations can be started, paused, picked up, and paused again, over any period of time, without losing the thread or history. This is called "asynchronous" communication, and it's just like that messaging thread you have with, say, your mother that you can jump back into at any time. This gives the customer the ultimate convenience, and really empowers them—which in turn is good for your brand and business. Customers like buying from brands that make them feel valued.

Online adults in the United States use an average of 5.4 messaging platforms
Source: [24]7.ai/Forrester Webinar, "Messaging Apps: The Future of Customer Service or Passing Millennial Fad?"

Getting Started

As ever-rising customer expectations continue to outpace the ability of many companies to keep up, the focus remains on CX. Forrester cites the four key drivers of CX transformation as making it faster, cheaper, more personalized, and in your customers' channel of choice. Messaging executed with the right blend of virtual and human assistance enables companies to hit all four drivers at once.

Faster
Automation allows instant response to most messaging inquiries. If you have human agents on deck, automate an instant response to manage customer expectations (for example, "We'll get back to you within three minutes") and then make sure you meet them—this is table stakes.

Cost Effective
Mobile apps and messaging offer companies the biggest opportunity to reduce costs while improving CX. The platform already exists; businesses just need to integrate a solution to enable conversations.

Personalized
Messaging is as personal as it gets, because it's a one-on-one conversation in an app that the consumer is already using. Plus, with an AI-powered platform powering all your channels, you can address them individually. You can even drive sales by finding and presenting the best offers at the right moment within the conversation.

Channel of choice
While social media platforms come and go, messaging is here to stay. If you haven't already jumped on this train, now is the time—don't get left behind.

140B

people around the world send 50B messages each day

Source: eMarketer

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Messaging allows businesses to easily extend their reach to over a billion customers, wherever they are, in their favorite channel. It's all about delivering the best possible experience by enabling an easy, convenient way for customers to find and communicate with your brand. Companies can even enable proactive notifications through texting, such as an invitation to fill out a survey, which the customer can respond to whenever it's convenient.

Messaging really is the future of digital transformation, and it's something that you can implement now.

Let [24]7.ai help you attract and retain customers, and make it possible to create a personalized, predictive and effortless customer experience.

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About [24]7.ai

[24]7.ai is redefining how artificial intelligence, human insight, and deep vertical expertise can produce personalized, satisfying customer experiences across all channels. Our advanced conversational AI platform predicts consumer intent and creates frictionless interactions that help the world's largest and most recognizable brands to strengthen customer relationships and increase brand loyalty. With more than two decades of contact center operations expertise, [24]7.ai empowers companies to deliver natural, consistent conversations that increase customer satisfaction while lowering costs.

For more information, visit: www.247.ai