

RETAIL

Digital customer services heighten live agent expectations

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Customers are expecting more service options. Image credit: Neiman Marcus

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

The need for advanced customer service solutions and highly trained agents is more important now than ever for luxury retailers, as consumers demand more.

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According to a new survey from CFI Group and Radial, customers are first looking for self-serve tools for various tasks such as checking order status, general product support, resolving issues before speaking with an agent and more. This means by the time they reach out to a service agent, customers' expectations and demands are much higher.

"Retail customer expectations for agent interaction are rising," said Sheri Petras, CEO of **CFI Group**. "They expect to be able to do more and more online without contacting customer service.

"So, if a customer does reach out to customer service, they are more eager to get the problem solved," she said. "By the time they reach out to customer service, they no longer want to self serve; they want to directly reach a professional live agent who has the tools, systems and talent to resolve things quickly.

"IVRs and other automated tools actually create a digital barrier to customer satisfaction at this point in the customer's journey."

The **survey** asked 500 shoppers on their expectations in customer service.

Customers serve themselves

The majority of consumers attempt to resolve their issues before contacting customer service, with 64 percent preferring to do so.

Sixty-nine percent who are interested in resolving their issues themselves first take to the company's Web site.



Customers are becoming more sophisticated with customer service. Image courtesy of InstantLuxe

When it comes to checking an order status online, 45 percent of those surveyed expect to be able to and 38 percent expect the ability to receive general product or service support online.

Because of all the tools for self-serving, by the time consumers reach an agent their expectations are much higher than in the past, with 67 percent of customers expecting personnel to have immediate access to their order history.

About 55 percent believe customer service employees should have the shopper's history of contact with the retailer.

While many believe that the growth of digital customer service tools are diminishing live agent's roles, the survey shows they are just as important today. Twenty percent of customers who have spoken with a live person are more satisfied.



Customers are more likely to recommend retailers with loyalty programs. Image courtesy of Neiman Marcus

In addition, 27 percent are more likely to recommend the retailer to a friend or family member.

Additional insight

Other research shows that click-and-collect services are more popular among female consumers with higher annual incomes, exhibiting the importance of luxury retailers including these services.

According to Order Dynamics' research, the "click and collect superconsumer" is 24 to 49 years old and has been well versed in omnichannel retail for the last two years. This consumer is also interested in the experience of shopping, needing to touch and feel the products she is purchasing ([see story](#)).

Millennials expect brands to be more value-conscious, though not necessarily in the way marketers have come to anticipate.

A report from Morning Consult finds that honesty, quality and customer service are among the most important brand traits for millennials to drive loyalty. While much has been made of the impact of brands' political values on younger shoppers, this survey shows some experts may have been overemphasizing the importance of these positions on millennials' decision making ([see story](#)).

Other findings from CFI and Radial's survey shows that loyalty members are 15 percent more satisfied.

"Of course, loyalty members are more satisfied," CFI Group's Ms. Petras said. "But what was surprising was that a loyalty member is generally less satisfied than other customers if that member is not recognized by the agent as a

loyalty member.

"So, if retailers offer, or want to offer, a loyalty program, they must be sure to have the tools and systems in place to recognize and acknowledge those members," she said.

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