

COLUMNS

3 skills that will dictate future customer service

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Artificial intelligence (AI) has shaken up customer service.

Powering mighty chatbots, self-service tickets and personalized automations via AI, one could think that the traditional idea of human support is fading away. But that idea could not be further from the truth.

In fact, the human element is just as important as ever even if its role may now be more refined.

According to Eptica Chat, **77 percent of consumers** want to chat with a human when they have less-straightforward requests.

So, while AI-powered solutions and human agents may cater to different needs, they come together in an integrated customer service experience.

However, as human support assumes a slightly different role, the demands change.

Over the past few decades, we have seen different support channels trending be it in-person meetings, phone, email or social media. And there is no wonder that some of the skills considered valuable before may not be relevant anymore.

The next decade will likely be defined by technology more than any previous era. And that begs a simple question: What skills will human agents need to deliver next-generation customer service?

Empathy

Empathy is hands down the single most important skill that **any agent needs**.

Customer service is an arena of emotions impatience, frustration, anxiety, you name it.

Showing an active effort to sympathize fosters positive exchanges and helps build trust. And what is more: A deep understanding of customer expectations prompts the development of a product that is more aligned with their needs

and pain points.

It is assumed that automation will recover **up to 40 percent** of human agents' work time, allowing them to be more attentive to individual queries.

Yet while empathy remains as important as ever, its practice is shifting.

How can empathy be practiced in an increasingly digital world?

Customer service is plagued with vain metrics, such as response time. The pressure to respond fast is even heightened by the fact that some social media platforms such as Facebook display the average response time on every brand page.

It is clear that agents should respond in a timely manner, but they should also know that the immediate response is not necessarily the best one.

Even in rapid and complex environments, for example, when trying to defuse an escalated situation in a social media post, it is important to put ourselves in the customer's shoes and maintain calmness and insight.

By validating their perspective and trying to genuinely understand their perspective, customer service becomes more approachable and effective.

Patience

Closely tied to empathy, patience is also an essential skill that every customer agent should possess.

Each person we come across is different and has different needs. Understanding this and approaching them with patience and respect is fundamental.

The pace of progress in recent decades has been unprecedented.

Ray Kurzweil, a prominent futurist, says that in this century, we will experience some **20,000 years of progress** at today's rate.

Everything around us is changing fast and keeping up may be difficult. Patience is more important than ever, especially when dealing with less tech-savvy customers.

It is said that **72 percent of consumers** would rather interact with a happy agent than finish an interaction sooner.

Impatient, disrespectful or impolite behavior just does not cut it.

All agents should remember that even in difficult scenarios, the frustration will likely be forgotten as soon as a solution is found.

Product knowledge

It goes without saying that every employee of your business should have a deep working knowledge of the product and be constantly on top of all the latest updates.

This way, agents can ensure faster troubleshooting, smarter product recommendations, clearer communication of product value and confident customer interactions.

To promote better product knowledge, all staff should undergo consistent training and be allowed hands-on-experience with the product.

This may be slightly challenging in the remote work context, which is why companies need to prioritize seamless information exchange.

SUPPORT SHOULD never be viewed as a temp job.

When hiring agents, companies need to show that support people are not second-class citizens in an organization.

After all, customer service is not something additional it should pervade each facet of every business.

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