

Omnichannel Customer Service

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ABSTRACT

Omnichannel refers to a fully integrated approach that has the potential to create an interconnected experience—providing customers with seamless service, regardless of whether they are using email, social media, telephone, or even in-person channels. This allows customers to move freely between channels without experiencing interruptions or having to repeat context from previous interactions. Omnichannel customer service is a support strategy that creates connected and consistent experiences across all customer interactions, no matter the channel. It is a customer experience strategy that creates connected and consistent customer interactions across channels. It provides a modern, customizable, high-productivity app that allows agents to engage with customers across different channels. This paper introduces readers to omnichannel customer service and its various applications.

KEYWORDS: *customer service, customer service industry, omnichannel customer service, omnichannel customer support.*

INTRODUCTION

Long gone are the days when customers only had one or two options for interacting with a company. In today's customer-centric world, people expect support on their own terms. Today's customers move freely through digital and analog channels, using telephones, web chat, social media, etc. to make purchases, find solutions, initiate returns, and more. Omnichannel refers to a seamless, integrated approach to sales, support, and service across multiple channels, including online, in-store, and mobile. It ensures a cohesive and personalized experience for customers, regardless of how or where they interact with a brand [1].

Omnichannel customer service (also called omnichannel support or omnichannel customer support) is a strategic approach for delivering fully connected, seamless support across any channel a customer may use. It is a robust application that extends the power of Dynamics 365 Customer Service to enable organizations to instantly connect and engage with their customers via channels like live chat, voice, and SMS. It uses third-party cookies for authentication [2]. Businesses with robust

omnichannel customer service can maintain consistently great experiences for their customers regardless of the communication channel. Delivering excellent customer service is the core purpose of implementing an omnichannel strategy. This approach enables support agents to interact with staff warmly and resolve their issues quickly. Figure 1 shows a customer service team [3].

WHAT IS OMNICHANNEL CUSTOMER SERVICE?

The term "omnichannel" was coined to describe the new opportunity in which customers can interact with brands across multiple platforms without any friction or inconsistencies. The concept of omnichannel emerged gradually as technology began to reshape consumer behavior in the early years of the 21st century. The growth of digital channels and new communication technologies has enabled businesses to adopt an omnichannel approach to customer support. This way, they can manage interactions across multiple channels such as call centers, webchats, SMS, messaging, email, and social media. You can enable the different channels in your

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organization with omnichannel for customer service. Higher-performing service organizations offer a wider range of channels, including email, phone, text, live chat, and social media. For example, using phone as a customer-service channel is shown in Figure 2 [1]. Despite the rise of digital channels, phone support remains essential, especially for urgent or complex issues. The following asynchronized channels are also available in the conversation inbox: SMS, persistent chat, Facebook, LINE, WhatsApp, and Teams.

Omnichannel is sometimes confused with multichannel. The key difference between multichannel and omnichannel customer service is how connected the experience is across channels. Multichannel customer service offers support through different media — phone, text, online, or in-person — but each one typically operates in its own silo. Omnichannel customer service brings interactions from all channels into a unified contact center experience. While multichannel is about offering access, omnichannel is about offering continuity [4]. Unlike multichannel support, where each channel operates independently, omnichannel ensures that conversations flow smoothly across platforms without customers having to repeat themselves. Multichannel focuses on channels, while omnichannel focuses on the customer. Figure 3 compares multichannel and omnichannel communications [5].

Omnichannel customer service works by logging every customer interaction in a single, centralized database. A customer relationship management (CRM) software like Salesforce uses APIs to connect to each of the brand's channels, acting as a hub. In practical terms, it means a customer can switch from email to live chat to a phone call without ever having to repeat themselves. Today, companies have the tools they need to move a conversation to a channel that is better suited to the topic at hand. Omnichannel customer service is the method of offering unified and seamless customer support across multiple communication platforms. Whether customers reach out via email, social media, live chat, or phone, they receive consistent and high-quality service as if they were interacting on a single channel. True omnichannel customer support means giving businesses the ability to talk to the right customers, in the right place, without sacrificing context along the way. It is a strategic approach that ensures customer interactions are integrated across all touchpoints, providing a seamless and unified customer experience. Figure 4 shows a representation of omnichannel customer service [6].

APPLICATIONS OF OMNICHANNEL CUSTOMER SERVICE

Omnichannel customer service is assistance and advice for customers across a seamless and integrated network of devices and touchpoints. With omnichannel customer service, customers get a unified, frictionless experience, whether they contact you via phone, email, chat, or social media. Figure 5 displays industry-specific use cases of omnichannel customer service [7]. Common ways various industries can benefit from an omnichannel approach include the following [1,7,8]:

- *Omnichannel Ecommerce:* Omnichannel commerce represents the integration of all available shopping channels into one cohesive shopping experience. This approach allows customers to engage with a brand through multiple avenues (in-store, online via a website or mobile app, through social media, or over the phone) and enjoy a seamless transition between them. Although omnichannel is often described as a solution in retail and other forms of B2C commerce, it is just as capable of meeting the needs of B2B customers. The goal is to provide a unified and efficient purchasing process that meets the complex needs and buying cycles of business clients. Omnichannel commerce makes the purchasing process as convenient and efficient as possible for the customer, regardless of their preferred shopping method.
- *Omnichannel Marketing:* Omnichannel marketing extends the principle of a seamless customer experience to the realm of marketing. It involves using insights from various channels to deliver personalized and consistent marketing messages to customers, wherever they may be. It exists to build a relationship with the customer that feels both personal and relevant, enhancing engagement and encouraging loyalty. Unlike traditional marketing strategies that may treat each channel as a separate entity, omnichannel marketing recognizes the interconnectedness of all channels.
- *Omnichannel Strategy:* An effective omnichannel strategy begins with a deep understanding of customer preferences. It involves understanding the customer journey across all platforms and designing interactions that are consistent and personalized at each stage. To do this, organizations plan their approach strategically, first identifying relevant value drivers and then building a set of processes that allow them to prioritize business objectives and client needs. A customer support omnichannel strategy proposes

to create an accessible, convenient, and consistent cross-channel experience. Implementing an omnichannel strategy in customer support can lead to higher satisfaction rates, loyalty, and retention. Figure 6 depicts the features of an omnichannel strategy [3].

- *Omnichannel Customer Support:* Omnichannel support platforms let you aggregate customer data from multiple sources and display it in a centralized, interactive dashboard. This unified dashboard makes it easy for support agents to find insights that will help them resolve issues quickly. The first step in omnichannel support is mapping out your customer's journey, starting with where they first encounter your product, how they purchase it, and all the way through to post-purchase support. You need to choose a software with excellent omnichannel support features. Your chosen software determines how effectively you will implement the omnichannel strategy, so this decision requires careful thought.
- *Healthcare:* Healthcare providers can use omnichannel customer service to offer patients a more connected experience. Patients and providers need secure, efficient communication across multiple channels. Some contact centers have HIPAA-enabled virtual consultations, appointment scheduling, and follow-up reminders through video, chat, and SMS. AI-powered assistants can help patients check symptoms, find the right specialist, or manage billing inquiries, reducing administrative workload while improving the patient experience.
- *Education:* Schools and online learning platforms can offer students multi-channel support through chat, video, and email for smooth access to coursework and IT help. AI-powered chatbots handle common inquiries, like password resets or class schedules.
- *Financial Services:* Banks and financial institutions can improve customer satisfaction by integrating various service channels. Customers can manage their accounts online, receive support via phone or chat, and visit branches for in-person assistance, all with their information readily available to support agents. This seamless integration helps in providing timely and accurate support, enhancing the overall banking experience.
- *Telecommunications:* Telecom companies can offer better support by integrating customer interactions across multiple channels. Whether customers reach out via phone, email, or social

media, their service history is accessible, allowing for quicker issue resolution and improved satisfaction. An omnichannel customer solution approach enables telecom providers to deliver a consistent and efficient service, reducing customer frustration and enhancing the overall experience.

- *Government:* Omnichannel is not limited to the private sector; government institutions recognize the importance of omnichannel in citizen engagement and service delivery. An omnichannel approach in government services can lead to improved accessibility, increased satisfaction, and enhanced trust in public services.
- *Mobile Customer:* In the digital age, smartphones have become a non-negotiable part of daily life. Customers expect to be able to do everything from their mobile devices, whether it is shopping, booking appointments, or accessing customer service. Offering a mobile-friendly experience is no longer a bonus; it is a necessity. With an omnichannel approach, you can ensure that your customer service is as mobile as your customers are. This means easy-to-use mobile apps, mobile-optimized websites, and support channels that work seamlessly on any device. By catering to the mobile customer, you remove barriers to access, making it easier for customers to engage with your brand and make purchases. This can ultimately lead to an increase in mobile sales and overall business growth.

BENEFITS

The omnichannel approach gives businesses extra benefits for customer service. An omnichannel approach gives service teams connected data and systems that boost quality and efficiency. Successful omnichannel customer service is essential to buyer satisfaction and retention. Other benefits of omnichannel customer service include the following [1,4,9]:

- *Automation:* Automation does not replace human support but enhances it, allowing agents to focus on high-value interactions that require a personal touch. A telecom provider, for example, can automatically notify customers about upcoming billing due dates or network maintenance. AI-powered automation and self-service options lower costs by handling routine inquiries, freeing agents to focus on high-value interactions. Faster resolutions and reduced agent workload also contribute to cost savings and increased productivity.

- **Faster Responses:** A quick response time is like the cherry on top of a customer service sundae. Traditionally, post offices are notorious for their lengthy processes and long waiting times. You may have to wait in one line to buy stamps, another to send parcels, and a third to set up mail forwarding. With an omnichannel approach, imagine having one counter that can handle it all, with skilled representatives ready to assist with your every need. This is the essence of omnichannel customer service – a single, unified platform that enables faster and more efficient responses.
 - **Improved Customer Satisfaction:** Customer expectations have changed along with technological advancements. A good customer experience is at the core of high-quality customer service. It needs to be convenient and effortless. Ensuring customers can access their preferred channel and receive a consistent buying experience is at the heart of omnichannel customer support. Omnichannel customer service provides a consistent experience across channels and devices, allowing customers to get support without repeating themselves. Omnichannel service essentially removes the boundaries and barriers between channels—mobile, desktop, web, in-person, social media, and more, become a single, unified experience. Figure 7 displays how to calculate customer satisfaction (CSAT) [10].
 - **Higher Customer Loyalty:** Omnichannel customer experience creates speed, convenience, transparency, and trust. When customers can connect on their preferred channels and get fast, personalized assistance, it builds trust, satisfaction, and customer loyalty. Reps have the full picture to solve problems quickly, creating a sense of reliability and consistency that keeps customers coming back. As a result, customers are more likely to recommend your brand to others. When customers feel heard, understood, and valued across all platforms, they are more likely to stick around.
 - **Enhanced Efficiency:** Omnichannel customer support boosts service rep efficiency by giving them a complete view of customer interactions across channels, reducing time spent searching for information or switching between systems. This enhanced efficiency can significantly improve customer satisfaction, foster a positive brand image, and increase the likelihood of repeat business and higher sales.
 - **Increasing Revenue:** The advantages offered by implementing an omnichannel strategy typically lead to increased revenue. Omnichannel customer experience enables buyers to access potential purchases when they need them without going through traditional sales avenues. Removing the barriers to purchase and providing transparent and connected digital experiences increases revenue growth and customer satisfaction.
 - **Personalization:** Personalization is centered on creating personalized, consistent customer experiences that focus on building engagement across all available channels. Omnichannel personalization is about tailoring the customer experience to the individual's preferences, behaviors, and history with the brand across all channels. More retail and wholesale firms are investing in personalization technology such as machine learning to use insights on customer preferences. For example, machine learning can create unique web page layouts based on customer data such as location and purchase history. This type of customization is proven to yield increased revenue. Personalization can manifest in many forms, such as personalized product recommendations on a website, customized email marketing campaigns, or targeted offers through a mobile app.
 - **Consistency:** Consistency is the cornerstone of a strong omnichannel strategy, ensuring that customers receive the same level of service, messaging, and brand experience across all channels. Consistency helps in building trust and loyalty, as customers can rely on a predictable and reliable experience every time they engage with the brand.
 - **Convenience:** Convenience means making every interaction as effortless as possible for the customer. An optimal omnichannel experience is effortless, removing barriers and friction across the entire buying process. This includes providing options for how customers can make purchases, access information—online purchasing with in-store pick-up, 24/7 customer support across platforms, and streamlined returns processes may all play significant roles.
 - **Collaboration:** Omnichannel customer service fosters improved collaboration, particularly among support teams. All customer information is centralized and easily accessible, allowing any support agent to quickly pick up where their colleague left off. If needed, a support agent can promptly communicate with staff in a non-support department to rectify a customer's issue.
- Figure 8 shows the benefits of omnichannel customer service [10].

CHALLENGES

Omnichannel operations can create challenges when used by retailers with highly complex products, making every avenue more difficult, from sales to customer service. Complex products typically require well-trained and knowledgeable sales reps to assist customers. Traditional retail sales and customer service methods are also a challenge when converting to the digital processes of omnichannel operations. There are also organizational challenges related to inventory management and employee training, which also impact customer service. Lots of customers complain that companies should have up-to-date information on them, regardless of the channels they use. Other challenges of the omnichannel approach include the following [3,11]:

- *Integration:* Many businesses struggle with disconnected support platforms, leading to fragmented customer data and inefficiencies. Without proper integration, agents lack a unified view of customer interactions, forcing customers to repeat themselves across different channels. Seamless CRM, knowledge base, and support system integrations give agents full conversation history, allowing them to provide faster and more personalized support. With your support software set up, you should integrate it with other tools that power your business operations.
- *Continuous Monitoring:* An omnichannel strategy is a continuous process, not a one-time effort. It requires constantly analyzing your implementation and identifying areas for improvement. Always strive to improve on key support metrics, even if you are already at a good level. Track customer service metrics and key performance indicators like first call resolution and customer satisfaction score to understand what is working. Use this data to optimize your strategy over time and improve customer engagement.
- *Consistency:* Maintaining consistency across all channels is a challenge. Customers expect the same level of service whether they contact support via chat, phone, email, or social media. But inconsistent messaging and response quality can damage trust and frustrate customers.
- *Security:* Handling customer data across multiple channels introduces security risks and compliance challenges, especially in regulated industries like finance and healthcare. Businesses must protect sensitive information while providing seamless support.

- *Scalability:* Scalability is another critical factor to consider. You need a platform that can easily handle more requests as your business grows. Adding new accounts for support agents should be a straightforward process.
- *Training:* Training your support team is crucial. To create a successful omnichannel strategy, agents require comprehensive training on all channels and tools used to manage them. A lack of proper training can leave agents unprepared to handle diverse queries or to navigate complex integrated systems. A support team can only implement an effective omnichannel strategy if they have the required knowledge. Thus, you should provide adequate training to support agents, helping them understand the importance of an omnichannel strategy, how it makes their work more efficient, and the best practices to implement it. Your support agents should know how to navigate your support tool without hassle. Equip your staff with the right tools and skills to manage conversations across channels. Emphasize active listening, empathy, and the ability to quickly act on past customer interactions. Ensure that customer support teams are well-trained in using the integrated systems and understanding the omnichannel approach.

CONCLUSION

Omnichannel is a widely used term in the customer service industry. Customers interact with businesses through a wide range of channels, websites, mobile apps, social media, email, messaging platforms, and more. Omnichannel customer service brings all these touchpoints into one connected experience. It is a connected, integrated approach to customer support that integrates all communication channels — phone, email, chat, social media, and more — into a single, seamless experience. Customers expect to begin a conversation on one channel and continue it on another without the need to repeat themselves. Instead of serving each customer interaction separately, you can use an omnichannel strategy to remain consistent with each customer's conversation history and service quality.

Omnichannel customer service is not just a trend; it is the key to delivering seamless, efficient, and personalized support across every customer touchpoint. By integrating multiple channels, businesses can reduce friction, improve agent productivity, and enhance customer satisfaction. Omnichannel customer support provides integrated services, which improve satisfaction and strengthen brand loyalty and operational efficiency. By adopting an omnichannel approach, businesses can not only

meet but exceed expectations of different types of customer, leading to enhanced satisfaction and loyalty. Businesses that took an omnichannel approach have reaped the rewards by becoming high performers [12]. More information on the integration of omnichannel customer service is available from the books in [13-18].

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Figure 1 A customer service team [3].

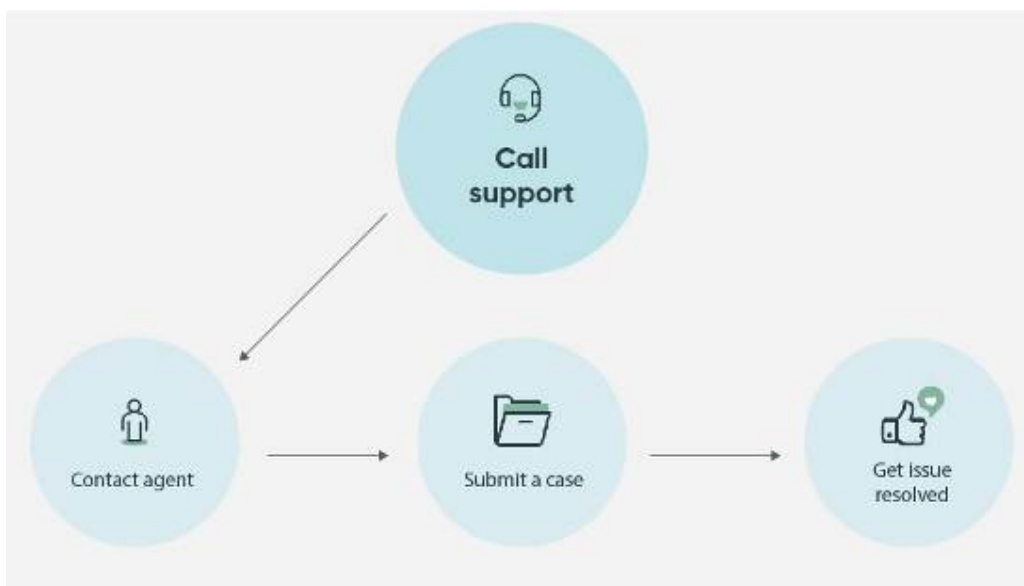


Figure 2 Using phone as a customer-service channel [1].



Figure 3 Comparing multichannel and omnichannel communications [5].

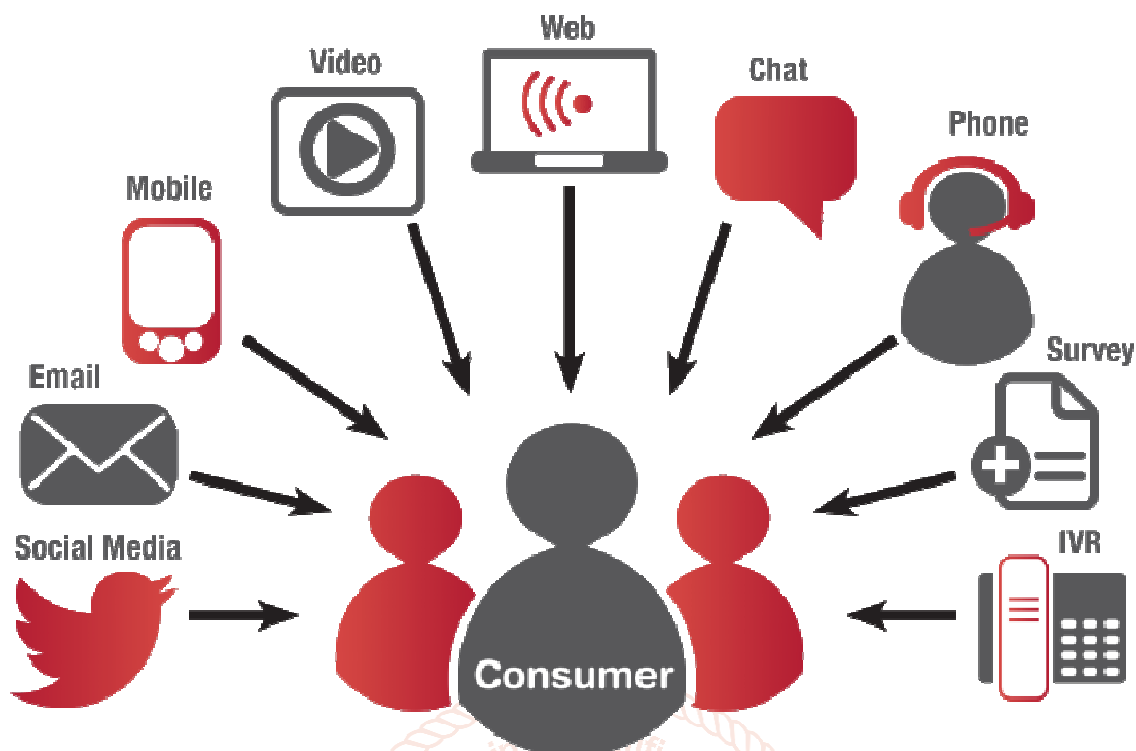


Figure 4 A representation of omnichannel customer service [6].



Figure 5 Industry-specific use cases of omnichannel customer service [7].

The features of an omnichannel strategy



Figure 6 The features of an omnichannel strategy [3].



Figure 7 How to calculate customer satisfaction (CSAT) [10].



Figure 8 The benefits of omnichannel customer service [10].