The Essentials of Live Chat & Customer Service in eCommerce
This whitepaper is brought to you by Userlike – Live Chat Software Provider in collaboration with SEOshop.

The Userlike App in SEOshop allows web shop owners to easily install and set up live chat software into their websites to chat with their visitors.
Imagine a real street shop focused on attracting visitors with billboards, flyers, giveaway promotions, but with nobody inside to support the customers in the buying process. Unfortunately this is how many online stores look like. Large sums of money are spent on adwords, banners and more to attract people to the webshop, but the focus on converting visitors that entered the shop is far behind.

Providing a memorable customer service online is not a privilege limited to large companies. With the use of modern technology it is possible for small and medium sized businesses to offer a service of similar standard, or possibly higher, while keeping costs down.

This paper is about using these modern technologies to deliver a first-class service in your webshop. First we will briefly explain how service has grown in importance over the last decade, and especially for eCommerce. Then we discuss the basic channels of ‘eService’, to finish with a zoom-in on real time support with live chat. At the end of this paper you will know the best practices of service in online business and the optimal setup to reach the goals of your webshop.
Around a decade ago, the only ones that would find out about the quality of a company’s service delivered would be the one delivering and the one receiving the service, and perhaps a few friends and family members that the receiver would talk to (if the service was of an exceptionally high or low standard).

With the rise of social media, these ‘few friends and family members’ have grown to the entire list of Facebook friends and Twitter followers. People have turned into trigger happy sharers of experiences, with all the potential benefits and dangers for your business.

This is especially true for eCommerce, with the option of sharing just a few clicks away for the visitors of your shop. A quick Twitter search for the keywords #terribleservice and #greatservice makes the potential impact of service delivery very clear.

Another factor that makes service more essential for online business is the ease with which a visitor switches between product providers, an ease that is much higher than for real-life stores. If web visitors cannot find the product or an answer to their question easily, returning to the Google Search results is an easier option than reaching out via phone or email. This is why eCommerce requires other channels for customer interaction.

So service has become exponentially more important over the years, and especially in eCommerce. There are some other serious advantages of being able to offer a great service in your web shop:
1. **Showing off your brand personality**

There is no such good opportunity to let your visitors get to know you than through Customer Service. Customer interactions are the best opportunities to naturally communicate your values and your strengths.

Customer Service tools are a great way to engage your potential and current customers in a close relationship with your brand. Especially in eCommerce it is becoming harder for online shops to distinguish themselves from their competition, with beautiful shop themes available to all for low costs. A service process on the other hand is unique for every shop, because it is based on human interactions.

2. **Natural Feedback**

With a solid customer service strategy you are able to collect valuable feedback from your customers to improve your products, services or even processes. Listen smartly to your customers’ reviews, opinions and complaints and you will learn much more, with lower effort, about what you should start changing today.

3. **A More Memorable Website**

Places that offer human interactions are more memorable. Chatting with a real human being is more memorable than going through a FAQ form. It’s those places that treat us better, where we feel welcome, heard and appreciated that we will keep in our mind for later use. According to a study from eMarketer 62% of chatting users reported to be more likely to purchase from the site again.

Customer Service can be a competitive advantage, differentiating your services from your competitors’. According to a study by TELUS International, websites that offer live chat service are more easily memorised than those that do not, yet most top retail businesses are still not offering this contact option.
4. Increase Your Revenues

Additionally, it is worth to see Customer Service as another opportunity to upsell your products. In a Virgin Airlines case study that uses live chat to up sell customers, the numbers speak for themselves: Additional order value from users who use live chat function is around 15% higher than those who don’t.

According to Notebooksbilliger, the experience with Userlike live chat has enabled them to radically minimize shopping cart abandonment and thus increase their overall conversion rate. Additionally, it is worth to see Customer Service as another opportunity to upsell your products, show around better, personalised options to your target.

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Commonly known as Multichannel Customer Service, support can nowadays be offered over several channels, each with its specificities, pro's and con's. Even though you don't necessarily need to be present in every single one of them, it's important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the options available for your webshop.

1. **Phone Support**
   - Cost: High
   - Personal level: High
   - Anonymity: Low
   - Convenience: Low
   - Conversion power: Low

**Customer Perspective:**
The most traditional of contact methods is there to stay. Some people just want to hear a human voice. Without a doubt phone is the most personal of support channels, and adding a number to your contact page is advisable, also because it communicates trust. Next to that, the advantage of calling is that you know that you will get an answer right away.

However, for many visitors phone is the least preferred method of contact. Apart from being time-consuming, experiences with never ending waiting queues have damaged its reputation. If this is your only contact method you may be losing customers that have phone anxiety or for whom calling is too big of an effort. Finally, calling forces your visitor to make a 'media switch', away from your website to the phone. This means that the buying process is interrupted, with the danger of not being continued at all.

**Operational Perspective:**
From the operational side, phone support is the most troublesome channel. First of all, because 1 operator can only talk to 1 customer at a time, the costs of this channel are quite high. Furthermore, it is expensive to monitor and control the quality of service delivered over the phone. Customer satisfaction is hard to measure, people are generally not enthusiastic about after-talk reviews. Another point is that it is hard to match requests with the right operator skills. We all know this situation in which you have to explain to multiple people the same situation again, very frustrating. Finally, because of the strict capacity limitations, queueing of visitors will become necessary at peak times, which can lead to strong frustrations from your customers.
2. E-Mail Support

Cost: Low
Personal level: Medium
Anonymity: Medium
Convenience: Medium
Conversion power: Low

Customer Perspective:
The advantage for customers is that no direct personal contact is necessary, so phone-anxious customers will prefer this channel. On the other hand, some people don’t want to give out their email address. Other types of visitors think email support is not personal enough. A disadvantage is that when sending an email, you don’t know how long it will take until you receive your answer. Even if you have a fast response time, general email experiences can deter people from contacting you over this channel. Furthermore, email contact also forces your customer to pause the buying process.

Operational Perspective:
Email is quite convenient from the business side. The ability to organise by priority and labelling allows for easy matching of request with the qualities of operators (for example, Spanish emails can be forwarded to your Spanish operator). Also, email support can be easily integrated with information systems, allowing you to offer a more tailored service thanks to customer reference info. When the email concerns a frequently asked question, macros can help you out in providing a proper response in a short time. However, constructing a new email properly is rather time-consuming.
3. Social Media Support

Cost: Medium
Personal level: High
Anonymity: Low
Convenience: High
Conversion power: Low

Customer Perspective:
The most recent channel to reach out to your customers is social media: Facebook, Twitter, Linked’In, as well as specialised communities. From a customer perspective, the main advantage of social media support is convenience. People spend such large chunks of time on social media that reaching out to a company can be quite convenient. They won’t have to check their email from time to time to check for the answer, they will see the answer pop up while they are doing other things. A disadvantage of this channel is the same as that of email: you don’t know when you will receive your response. Furthermore, some people dislike the idea of sharing their social identity with a company, and social media support is not able to reach your elder public.

Operational Perspective:
From the business side, the main point of social media support is the potential marketing power behind it. Many people will be able to witness your support efforts, so it’s a nice natural way of gaining exposure. You can gather more social followers through it, and you have access to the social profiles of your customers (which can come in handy when it concerns high-value customers). The disadvantage is that people expect fast responses over social media, so you actually require a person to constantly monitor for interactions. Furthermore, matters can escalate negatively when customers are not satisfied with your service.
4. FAQs Common Support Resource

Cost: Low
Personal level: Low
Anonymity: High
Convenience: Low
Conversion power: Low

Customer Perspective:
The main advantages of FAQ for customers is that no personal contact is necessary and that it provides a quick overview of common issues, problems that the customer might not have even thought about yet. There are also big disadvantages though, such as the necessity to search through answers, which can be a frustrating experience. Next to that, FAQ is the least personal form of support, so not very memorable either.

Operational Perspective:
One often cited advantage of FAQ’s is that they can have a positive effect on your SEO, but that effect is in reality fairly limited. What is a strong advantage is the low costs associated with maintaining an FAQ page.
5. Live Chat Support

Cost: Medium
Personal level: High
Anonymity: High
Convenience: High
Conversion power: High

Customer Perspective:
For the customer live chat is the most convenient contact channel. As it is on the spot it does not require the visitor to stop the buying process. Whenever a question or issue pops up help is just a click away. Furthermore, it is as personal as the customer wants it to be. It is possible to have a fully anonymous chat, but customers can opt to provide their name and email as well. The fact that live chat support is on-the-spot makes it the only channel that is truly suitable for providing in site sales assistance. No media-switch or abortion of the buying process is required to receive help.

Operational Perspective:
Since 1 operator can answer multiple chats simultaneously, waiting queues are not an issue. The acceptable response time for chat is around 50% longer than with phone, and chat macros can be used to offer quick answers. Experienced chat operators can generally handle around 5 chats simultaneously. Even though live chat is instant and fast, the operator does have the option to look up information to better support the customer. Chats can be easily forwarded to other operators, who see the chat history so that the customer does not have to explain the issue again. As with email, live chat can be easily integrated with existing information systems, adding chat transcripts or offline messages to the reference info of your customers.

As is the case with phone and to a lesser extent social media support, live chat requires you to have a person available to handle the chat.
As pointed out, one of the biggest inconveniences of online stores compared to regular retail is the lack of real-time sales assistance, which drives customers to abort the buying process or exit the website. By adding live chat to your website you can expect the following benefits:

1. **Increase in Customer Satisfaction**
   
   In a study by Forrester Research, 44% of online shoppers indicated that the option to have questions answered with live chat during the purchasing process is one of the most important features a website can offer.

   Customer satisfaction goes up through (a) the feeling of personal attention, and (b) the speeding up of the buying process. In a case study with Servershop24, it was measured that the conversion rate was 3 to 5 times higher for visitors that used the chat than for visitors that did not.

2. **Increase in Loyalty**
   
   Loyalty measures the customer's probability of returning to your webshop. The higher the loyalty, the bigger is their value to your business.

   Live Chat Software can give you a hand when it comes to increasing customer loyalty. The on-site support tends to make your website appear more friendly and memorable, increasing the chances of a visitor returning.

   According to the same study from e-Marketer, 38% of customers who engaged in a buying experience after using live chat services reported that they made their purchase due to the chat session itself. Moreover, 62% of respondents say they are more likely to buy again from a website with live chat service.

   This was confirmed by the case study of Servershop24. While new visitors stayed on average 4 minutes on the site, and returning visitors 6 minutes, visitors that engaged in live chat contact stayed for an average of 17 minutes. Furthermore, visitors that used the chat were 25% more likely to return.
3. Lower Cost per Customer Served

Live chat does not cut down your total service costs, since the low-barrier style of the channel raises the amount of customer interactions. It does, however, lower the costs per customer served.

As we explained above, experienced operators are able to handle up to 5 chats simultaneously due to chat commands and the overall nature of live chat. This makes live chat a much more efficient channel that brings down cost per customer served, especially when chat support cannibalises on phone support. Adding a proactive chat to the contact page with your phone number can reduce the pressure on your hotline by 50%.

4. Increase Conversions

For most online shops this is the main motivation for implementing live chat. Of course this point is correlated with the other points of customer satisfaction and loyalty (happy and returning customers are obviously more likely to make a purchase than unhappy first timers), but also the point of shopping cart abandonment should be addressed. Shopping cart abandonment is a main issue in eCommerce, with an average of 67.91% abandonment being measured across various studies. Live chat support inside the checkout process can have a strong reduction on this metric, as it the perfect channel to take away the final doubts or issues that prevent visitors from finished the checkout. A proactive chat can be triggered if a visitor spends an unusual amount of time on a certain page, or if he/she has a high value inside the shopping cart.
As a rather innovative channel, we realised that many people are insecure about where to start with live chat. That’s why we would like to give you some points:

Define your Live Chat Goals

The first thing you need to do when implementing your live chat software is to define what your goals are. We explained above that there are several benefits to implementing live chat. However, each of these goals has its own optimal setup.

For example: If you are aiming at improving your customer satisfaction, you should enable features such as post-chat rating or features survey to track your customers’ opinion.
Set Up Your Operator Groups

According to your goals and website you should set your operator groups, dividing them either by function (IT, sales, support) or support language. Visitors can be able to choose the operator group they wish to talk to, or this can be pre-defined according to their geo-location or the page they are at the moment.

Set up your chat button for visibility

Your live chat button and widget are the entry gate for people to reach out. Make sure these elements are prominently visible on your pages, that they match your website design and that they are placed on the most appealing location.

If you don’t want the live chat button to be displayed on every single page, it is recommendable to include it at least in your contact page – which helps you reduce the amount of inbound calls – and product page – to support customers exactly at the moment they most need it. Our statistics show that the best location for you to place your live chat button is at the bottom right corner which, on average, generates 20% higher interactions than any other position.

Another consideration is the layout of your live chat button, which is customizable according to your own preferences. Pay attention to the color and positioning. Our statistics show that the best location for you to place your live chat button is at the bottom right corner which, on average, generates 20% higher interactions than any other position.
Chat Behaviour

Adapting chat behaviour to your preferences is another top-priority when setting up your live chat software. From the great number of things you can adapt we would like to highlight the most important options. The first is related to the way the chat starts, as basic setup is programmed to trigger conversations only when the web visitor clicks on the chat button. However, it’s also possible to trigger proactive chat invitations based on the number of time a visitor is on your webpage.

Next to that you have to decide what happens when none of your operators are online: will you show an offline contact form, an offline message, or make the chat button disappear completely? When your operator is not responding on an incoming chat message fast enough, you can let the chat be forwarded to another operator or have the contact form appear instead.
5. SETTING UP LIVE CHAT: WHERE TO START?

**Connect With Your Social Profiles**

We mentioned above the power of delivering support through social media. With Userlike live chat you can harness the power of social media support by linking your chat widget with your Facebook or Twitter account. After the chat the visitor is offered to share his experience over these social media, giving you a little viral boost.

**Integrate Live Chat With Your Other Systems**

We recommend you to link your chat software to the CRM and helpdesk tools you are currently using. Userlike software offers several integrations with different CRM systems, but you can also use our API to connect live chat software to any other system you are using.

Finally, it is advisable to connect Userlike to the tracking tool you are using (e.g. Google Analytics) to monitor all your live chat interactions as well as your current performance for different target goals.
Live chat is one of the least formal support channels. Even if your corporate communication style is distant and formal, don’t fall on the trap of typing lengthy complicated messages as by doing so you’ll miss the main advantages of this channel: speed, efficiency and informality. It is important to explicitly state the communication guidelines for supporting customers. As with the design and layout, your communication should match your company culture, your website and your target audience. Communication guidelines should be transferred to your chat operators, but it’s also important that they don’t lose their spontaneity with an overuse of pre-made templates.

Some live chat tips to integrate during your day-to-day interactions:

**Keep it conversational**
Chat with your customers as if you were speaking to them face-to-face, don’t overcomplicate neither feel afraid to use short sentences - actually cutting big messages in short parts is a great strategy to make sure your visitor follows your explanation.

**Break up long stories in small parts**
Hosting a live chat is not like writing down an e-mail, as any other conversation you can interrupt, add and reply real-time. Don’t write huge testimonials in the chat, keep it simple with short sentences and as straightforward as possible.

**Express you are listening**
Using interjections or other expressions such as “I see...” or “Ah, ok” shows that you are paying attention to what the other person is saying and you are interested in what the visitor is telling you. Once again this will add value to the chat and enhance the conversation.

**Answer to every customer within an acceptable timeframe**
Unless you are extremely busy answering different chats try to always make sure you answer promptly to any chat requests. If you need some time, ask the visitor for it.
Don’t be afraid to use emoticons
Those little happy, smiling or sad faces might do a lot for you when chatting. Not only are emoticons a great way to share your emotions with those listening but also a nice way to replace the necessary body language which helps on any conversation.

Laughing is part of the job
Similar to the use of emoticons, laughing is a natural response in regular conversations and thus a part of chatting. Show you understand a joke or any attempt from the visitor to create empathy by sending a “haha” or even better “haha :D”, just be natural.

Adopt a similar talking style as the person you’re speaking to
Find the appropriate tone of voice which relates to the person you are chatting to. It’s clearly different to speak to a millennial than to an octogenary and so on. Find the balance between keeping your company’s communication standards which match its culture and the visitor writing style.

Don’t fear mistakes
Making small type-o’s is part of life, you’re human and when speed is required, making short mistakes is totally acceptable. There are easy ways to show you recognize the error, however try to avoid constant type-o’s (such as what would happen if you are speaking in a language which you’re not fluent at) which customers will perceive negatively.

Don’t abuse of abbreviations
Ok, this is a chat but it’s not your Facebook buddies who you are talking to. Even though most of us is familiar with the typical LOL (laugh out loud) or np (no problem) always remember you are chatting with your website visitor and thus a potential customer, show some respect and treat them accordingly.

When anger comes to the table, keep it cool
It’s not easy to deal with angry customers and the fact that they are chatting and not yelling in your face
6. **TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING OVER THE CHAT**

doesn’t make it any easier. When angry customers come aboard, stay calm, show empathy for their problem and try to be handy and efficient in providing a solution. You should always be the one in control of the conversation, not the other way round.

**Always to be honest.**
If you don’t know a specific answer at a given time, ask visitor’s for their e-mail and get back to them as soon as possible with a solution.

**Foreigners and Foreign Languages**
Sometimes it happens that people start chats in different languages than those you master. In this case, don’t be shy to show you are not able to communicate perfectly and offer offline support or use any regular translation software to understand customer enquiries. However, never fall in the temptation of pretending to be able to fully understand and speak a different language, be honest about your capabilities otherwise you will be noticed and most likely customers will feel betrayed.
Userlike live chat software has developed several fully-functional integrations with other CRM systems, such as Zendesk, SugarCRM, Salesforce, and more. The advantages of working with integrated platforms are avoiding duplicate work and maintaining an overview of all your customer interactions. The best part is that you will never have to go through difficult procedures to keep everything updated.

**Advantages of integrating your live chat with your favourite CRM software:**

**Create leads**
In some of the conversations you engage in through your live chat interface you may bump with interesting customers and valuable leads for your business. The best you to track them and store their information for later use is by integrating your chats with your CRM software.

**Group customer information all in one place**
Never miss out some customer detail or their last purchase information just because you weren’t able to check all your interactions with the customer. With CRM integration with live chat you’ll see everything neat and organized all in one place.

**Lower Costs**
By reducing duplicate content, information and increasing the content quality within your team work platform you will be able to increase productivity and therefore narrow down your costs.
It is never too late to implement your customer service strategy, however to pick up with your competition you should start developing it today. You can use the following checklist as a guide:

- Set up the communication style you wish to communicate. Show it, promote and monitor whether your staff is using it.
- Provide appropriate incentives to excelling customer support agents for extra motivation boost.
- Provide adequate training opportunities to your staff. There are available out there many webinars and e-learning courses on customer service you can provide to your team.
- Motivate your staff with an empowering, autonomous yet self-developing culture.
- Implement the appropriate tools to relate with your website visitors and provide them a unique experience.
- Make sure your customers always stays in the centre of all your processes. It’s for them, with their feedback and thinking on their major interests and expectations you should build every single strategy.
RESOURCES

Userlike is live chat software that allows your users connect to your support operators in the moment of greatest need - when they browse your product pages and have a question.

Founded in 2011 in Cologne, Germany, Userlike aims to provide a service tool that is easy to use, easy to customise, and easy to scale. Over 10,000 SMEs and leading businesses worldwide trust us in delivering their service. Start with our 14 day trial today.