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2018 Top Priorities for Customer Service and Support

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Three imperatives topped the list when 140 companies assessed their customer service performance across key activities. Here's how to get ahead on those priorities.

Under pressure from new competitors, one regional U.S. energy company championed an effortless customer service experience to differentiate itself. To transform its customer service approach, it changed the culture of service centers, hired different types of people and designed a more tailored service experience. The company saw notable improvement, with a 40% increase in customer compliments and a 21% decline in call volumes.

Assess how a function is performing across core objectives and support activities to gauge how mature that function is

Every company looking to advance its customer service and support function needs to focus on those improvements that will have the biggest impact on its own business and follow a strategic plan to drive results.

Benchmarking shows us the highest priorities for service and support leaders in 2018 are to:

1. Design a multichannel service experience
2. Evaluate the customer service experience
3. Manage customer information

These imperatives topped the list among 140 organizations that participated in the Ignition Diagnostic for Customer Service & Support offered by Gartner. The Diagnostic enables organizations to assess how a function is performing across core objectives and support activities to gauge how mature that function is in areas critical to the business.

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Design a multichannel service experience

Customer service leaders are chasing moving targets as customers demand new channels to resolve their problems. At the same time, customers expect opportunities to serve themselves autonomously. The addition of channels must be done carefully — the effects of a multichannel environment can cause disjointed, confusing and frustrating situations for customers. It also may push more complex service issues to front-line reps after previous customer failures to self-help.

At each touchpoint, take the customer's pulse on how easy or hard it is for them to do business

How to get ahead: Take a look at available channels and map them to the issues those [channels can best resolve](#). By better understanding which channels align to what customers are trying to accomplish with each task, you'll be able to better position them so that customers are guided to the most appropriate channel.

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Evaluate the customer service experience

Surveys are typically deployed to gather feedback from customers, but are these surveys gathering the right information? Measuring the customer service experience is even harder when taking into consideration the numerous channels leveraged. Service leaders understand that customer feedback is important but are challenged to get the right type of information at the right time to effectively evaluate how their function is performing.

Lack of continuity between touchpoints can be frustrating to customers

At each touchpoint, take the customer's pulse on [how easy or hard](#) it is for them to do business. Using voice-of-the-customer (VOC) data, identify root causes of the most effortful experiences across channels and issues to understand which service improvements will have the largest effect.

Manage customer information

Customers are likely to have multiple interactions with a company, but the entirety of the information collected from a customer is rarely within a service rep's reach. The lack of

continuity between touchpoints can be frustrating to customers who feel they have to start at square one in every interaction. Moreover, as certain organizations become skilled at providing highly tailored, informative interactions, customer expectations are changing.

How to get ahead: Ensure that front-line reps collect relevant customer information by taking notes about each interaction. Use your systems to push relevant customer information to reps, and encourage them to access these notes so they can provide low-effort service to customers.