



Opportunities for Service Providers Offering an Omnichannel Customer Service / Support Platform as a Service to their Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Customers

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, the digital revolution has profoundly transformed the way businesses operate and interact with their prospects and customers. The advent of the Internet and the rapid advancements in technology have given rise to a new era of commerce and communication, leading to the birth of online user experience as a crucial component of modern business strategies.

Online user experience refers to the sum of all interactions that a prospect or a customer has with a brand or business through digital channels, such as websites, mobile apps, social media platforms, email and other online touchpoints. It encompasses every touchpoint along the customer journey, from initial awareness and engagement to the post-purchase phase and ongoing customer service. Pre-purchase engagement and post-purchase customer service are important components of this online user experience.

Companies that prioritise and invest in delivering exceptional online user experiences gain a competitive edge in the market. Conversely, those who neglect the importance of online interactions risk losing opportunities and customers while damaging their brand reputation.

This white paper explores what online user experience is, what has led to the interest in it and its impact on customer conversions and loyalty.

The contribution of online customer service / support in general and omnichannel customer service / support in particular to online user experience is then discussed.

After looking at the benefits that omnichannel customer service / support offers SMEs, the paper looks at the benefits for service providers who provide their customers with an omnichannel customer service platform.

It concludes by introducing Telviva Software International's Telviva Engage omnichannel customer service platform.

What is Online User Experience?

Online user experience refers to all the interactions a customer has with a business or brand across digital channels such as websites, social media platforms and mobile apps. It includes every touchpoint along the customer journey from awareness of the business or brand to engagement, purchase and post-purchase support.

What has led to this Interest in Online User Experience?

The shift towards an increasing interest in online user experience has been driven by several factors:

Rising Customer Expectations

- As technology continues to evolve, so do customer expectations. Today's consumers demand seamless, convenient, and personalised experiences across all channels, driving businesses to prioritise the online customer experience

Digital Transformation

- Businesses have increasingly embraced digital transformation to adapt to the changing market landscape and meet evolving consumer expectations. This shift involves integrating digital

E-Commerce and Online Shopping Boom

The Mobile Revolution and App-Based Experiences

Social Media

Data Analytics

Global Connectivity

Focus on User Experience (UX) Design

Omnichannel Customer Experience

Chatbots and AI-Powered Support

Impact of Online User Experience on Customer Conversions and Loyalty

technologies into all aspects of a company's operations, including marketing, sales, customer service, and more

- The rise of e-commerce has revolutionised retail, enabling customers to shop conveniently from the comfort of their homes or on the go. E-commerce platforms have become virtual storefronts where businesses showcase their products and services, making the online customer experience a critical driver of sales and revenue
- The widespread adoption of smartphones and mobile devices has given rise to the mobile-first approach. Customers now expect seamless experiences on their mobile devices, making mobile optimisation and responsive design essential for businesses.
- Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for businesses to engage with customers, build brand awareness, and provide customer support. Positive interactions on social media can significantly impact a brand's reputation and customer loyalty
- Advances in data collection and analytics have enabled businesses to gain deep insights into customer behaviour, preferences and pain points. This data-driven approach allows companies to personalise the customer experience and make informed decisions to enhance customer satisfaction
- The internet has transcended geographical boundaries, allowing businesses to reach customers worldwide. Online customer experience has become instrumental in attracting and retaining a diverse and global customer base
- With increased competition in the digital space, businesses recognised the importance of providing a seamless and enjoyable user experience. The focus shifted towards intuitive website navigation, attractive design, and efficient customer journeys to enhance customer satisfaction.
- With the proliferation of digital channels, customers started expecting consistent experiences across all touchpoints. The concept of omnichannel customer experience emerged, emphasising seamless integration and continuity of interactions between online and offline channels
- Advancements in artificial intelligence has led to the integration of chatbots and virtual assistants into customer service operations. These AI-powered solutions provided immediate responses to customer queries, improved response times, and enhanced overall support experiences.

Customer experience guides customer behaviour and this has a profound influence on conversion rates - the percentage of website visitors who complete a desired action, such as making a purchase, signing up for a newsletter, or filling out a contact form. This in turn has a profound financial impact on the organisation.

By focusing on creating a seamless, personalized, and trustworthy customer experience, in addition to increasing once-off sales, revenue and

conversion rates, businesses can increase customer loyalty, customer lifetime value (CLV) and overall business growth.

Improving the customer experience assists to achieve the above goals in the following ways:

Enhanced User Experience

- A well-designed and user-friendly website or app creates a positive user experience. Intuitive navigation, clear calls-to-action, and streamlined processes make it easier for customers to find what they're looking for and complete their desired actions, leading to higher conversion rates and repeat visits

Reduced Friction and Abandonment

- A positive customer experience reduces friction in the conversion process. When customers encounter fewer obstacles or frustrations during their journey, they are less likely to abandon their intended actions, resulting in higher conversion rates. Unfortunately, any difficulties experienced by users in engaging with an organisation or brand don't just lead to one-time abandonment of shopping carts or channel shift. They can also lead to a permanent lack of confidence in the brand as well as visitors to the organisation's Web or social media properties bad-mouthing the brand online.

Trust and Credibility

- A seamless and trustworthy customer experience builds confidence in the brand. Customers are more likely to convert and continue to use the brand's services when they feel secure about their transactions and trust the company to deliver on its promises

Social Proof and Reviews

- Positive customer reviews and testimonials act as social proof, building trust and influencing purchase decisions. Including reviews on product pages or checkout pages can encourage conversions and long-time loyalty

Personalisation

- Tailoring the customer experience based on individual preferences and behaviours can significantly impact conversion rates. Personalised product recommendations, targeted promotions, and relevant content resonate with customers and increase the likelihood of conversion

Mobile Optimisation

- With the increasing use of mobile devices for online interactions, optimising the customer experience for mobile users is crucial. A mobile-responsive design ensures that customers can easily navigate and convert on their smartphones and tablets, boosting mobile conversion rates

Speed and Performance

- Fast page load times and smooth website performance contribute to a positive customer experience. Slow-loading pages can lead to customer frustration and abandonment, negatively impacting conversion rates.

Seamless Checkout Process

- A smooth and efficient checkout process is essential for e-commerce websites. Reducing the number of steps, offering multiple payment options and ensuring security during checkout all contribute to higher conversion rates

Consistency Across Channels

- Providing a consistent customer experience across various channels, such as website, mobile app, and social media, helps customers feel familiar and comfortable, increasing their confidence in converting
- A positive post-purchase experience, including order confirmation, shipment tracking, and customer support, reinforces the positive

Post-Purchase Experience

customer experience and encourages repeat conversions thereby leading to a higher customer lifetime value.

As may be deduced from the above points, online user experience has a major impact on customer loyalty.

Customer loyalty is critical for businesses, particularly those that transact online. This is because customer acquisition costs in e-commerce are high and multiple purchases are required to make a customer profitable.

In addition, the longer their relationship with an online retailer, the more customers spent in a given period of time as a result of more frequent and larger purchases based on increased trust and cross-selling opportunities presented to them.

Repeat customers also refer more people. The value of these referrals can be significant.

Why is Online Customer Service / Support So Important?

Research undertaken by the Centre for Retail Research (<https://www.retailresearch.org/online-retail.html>) indicates that in 2022, online retail sales accounted for approximately 26.5% of total retail sales in the UK (10.6% in 2012), 15.4% in Europe (4.8% in 2012) and 18.8% in the US (9.7% in 2012). The figure for Europe varied from a high of 19.6% in Germany in 2022 (5.9% in 2012) to a low of 10.2% in Italy (1.5% in 2012).

After strong growth in 2020 and 2021 followed by negative growth during 2022, Forrester Research (<https://www.forrester.com/blogs/europe-5-retail-sales-trends-2023>) expects that the growth in online retail sales in five European economies (Germany, the UK, the France, Italy, and Spain) will rebound to pre-Covid 19 pandemic levels in 2024. Forrester further expects that online retail sales in these countries will increase from €372 billion in 2023 to €579 billion in 2028, a five-year compound annual growth rate of 9.2%.

Forrester expects that the UK will retain its lead in online retail penetration among the Europe-5 markets, with online retail sales expected to represent 32% of total retail sales by 2028. Germany will retain its second place at 22% of total retail sales by 2028.

Online retail sales is thus a substantial component of total retail sales. As the importance of online sales increases, so does the importance of the online user experience.

Customer service / support has a major impact on this user experience, shaping overall feelings and perceptions towards a brand, thus impacting customer loyalty and hence customer lifetime value.

Customer service is thus a strategic investment in a brand's success. By consistently delivering exceptional service experiences, one can build stronger customer relationships, loyalty, and ultimately, achieve long-term business growth.

Examples of how good customer service impacts customer experience, loyalty and purchases include:

- The boosting of customer satisfaction and loyalty
- When issues are resolved quickly and effectively, customers feel valued and respected, leading to higher satisfaction
- Friendly, empathetic, and knowledgeable support agents create a memorable and positive experience that builds trust and loyalty
- Anticipating customer needs and offering solutions can exceed expectations and leave a lasting positive impression
- Customers are more likely to recommend brands with a reputation for excellent customer service, driving organic growth and brand awareness
- Customers are willing to pay a premium for products or services backed by exceptional customer service
- Positive support interactions make customers less likely to switch to competitors, increasing customer retention and lifetime value while reducing churn
- Satisfied customers improve brand reputation by sharing their experiences online, influencing potential customers and building brand trust
- Excellent customer service can differentiate a brand from competitors, leading to a stronger competitive advantage and market position
- Investing in customer service fosters a customer-centric culture within the organization, benefiting all aspects of the business
- Customers are becoming impatient and expect that their problems be resolved online in real-time or near real-time. It appears that the speed at which a problem is handled has a bigger impact on the customer service experience than whether the outcome is that for which the customer hoped.

But apart from directly influencing customer loyalty and repeat purchases, positive customer service experiences are an important driver of brand advocacy.

Brand advocates are delighted customers who actively promote a brand through word of mouth across various channels.

Poor customer service can have the opposite effect, leading to:

- Long wait times, unhelpful solutions and rude interactions resulting in frustration and dissatisfaction which can damage customer relationships and brand image
- Dissatisfied customers who are more likely to vocalise their experiences through word-of-mouth, negative reviews and complaints, potentially influencing others to reconsider your brand
- Negative experiences leading to lost revenue and churn by driving customers away, impacting your bottom line and future growth.

The popularity of 'digitally-influenced sales' (online research / offline purchasing) is also resulting in the growth of converged online and offline

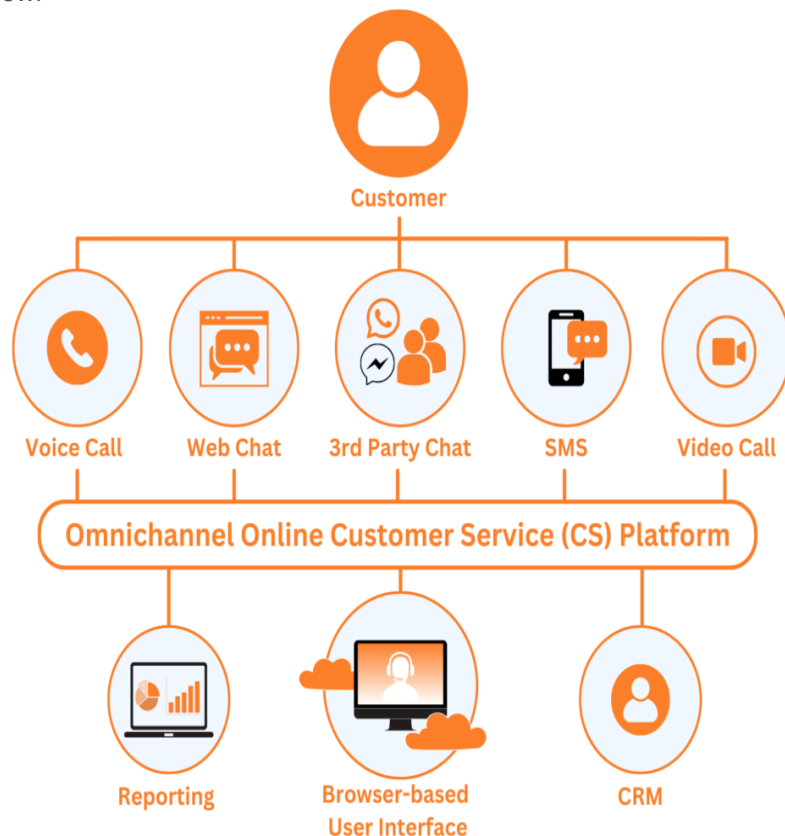
shopping. According to Forrester, digitally-influenced sales in the US currently account for 62% of total retail sales and will grow to 70% by 2027.

It's thus imperative that businesses provide visitors to their online properties with the best possible user experience, failing which they could lose not only substantial online sales but also offline sales to their competitors.

What is Omnichannel Customer Service / Support?

Omnichannel customer service / support is a customer service approach that provides a consistent, seamless, personalised and integrated customer experience across multiple communication channels, regardless of the channel the customer chooses to engage with a business. This approach aims to eliminate silos between different channels and create a unified customer experience that enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In an omnichannel customer service / support system, customers have the flexibility to switch between various communication channels, such as voice and video calls, web chat, third party chats such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp as well as SMS, while maintaining a continuous and coherent conversation with the brand. The key aspect of omnichannel support is that the customer's context and interaction history are seamlessly transferred across channels, ensuring that customers do not have to repeat information or face disruptions when switching channels. See diagram below.



Core features and principles of omnichannel customer service / support include:

Integration

- Omnichannel customer service / support integrates various communication channels into a unified platform or system. This integration allows customer service agents to access customer data and interaction history from any channel, providing a complete view of the customer's journey

Consistency

- Customers receive consistent service and information, regardless of the channel they use. The tone, messaging, and quality of support remain the same, creating a cohesive and recognisable brand experience

Personalisation

- Omnichannel customer service enables personalised interactions based on customer preferences and behaviour. Customer data is leveraged to offer tailored recommendations and resolutions, enhancing the overall customer experience

Seamless Transitions

- Customers can switch between channels during an ongoing conversation without starting over. Agents are aware of previous interactions, allowing for smooth transitions and a contextually relevant experience

Real-Time Communication

- Omnichannel support emphasises real-time communication options like live chat and phone support to offer immediate assistance and resolve issues promptly

Self-Service Options

- Customers can access self-service options, such as FAQs, knowledge bases, and online forums, to find answers to common queries independently

Customer-Centric Approach

- The primary focus of omnichannel customer service is to cater to customer preferences and needs while making customer interactions effortless and enjoyable.

Data Integration and Analysis

- Data collected from various channels is integrated and analysed to gain insights into customer behaviour and preferences. This data-driven approach helps improve customer support strategies

Cross-Channel Analytics

- Omnichannel customer service includes cross-channel analytics, which allows businesses to track customer interactions across channels and gain a holistic view of the customer journey.

Benefits of Omnichannel Customer Service / Support to SMEs

Providing an omnichannel customer service / support platform offers numerous benefits to businesses seeking to deliver exceptional customer experiences and build strong customer relationships. These include:

Increased Customer Accessibility

- Customers can reach out for assistance through their preferred method. Some customers prefer phone calls, while others may prefer live chat or social media. Offering various channels increases accessibility and accommodates diverse customer preferences, encouraging customers to express their concerns rather than keeping quiet.

Enhanced Customer Convenience

- Different customers have different schedules and preferences for communication. By offering multiple service channels, businesses

Seamless Customer Experience

enable customers to seek help when it's most convenient for them, leading to a more satisfying experience

Faster Issue Resolution

Improved Customer Satisfaction

Competitive Advantage

Valuable Customer Insights

Increased Customer Loyalty and Retention

Opportunity for Customer Engagement

Brand Visibility and Awareness

- A well-integrated omnichannel customer service platform provides a seamless customer experience. Customers can switch between channels during an ongoing conversation without losing context, resulting in a more efficient and coherent support process
- With multiple service channels, customers can choose the most appropriate channel for their particular issue. This can lead to faster issue resolution as customers receive specialised assistance through the most suitable medium
- Offering personalised interactions and service across multiple channels allows businesses to identify customer issues or concerns proactively, thus preventing potential escalations, meeting customer expectations and providing a positive impression of the business. Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, make repeat purchases, and recommend the brand to others
- Providing support across multiple channels can set a business apart from competitors that may offer limited support options. A customer-centric approach that values customer preferences contributes to a competitive advantage
- Each support channel provides unique data and insights into customer behaviour and preferences. Analysing this data can lead to valuable customer insights that inform marketing, product development, and customer experience improvement strategies
- Delivering consistent and excellent support experiences across various channels fosters customer loyalty. Loyal customers are more likely to stay with the brand, reducing customer churn and increasing customer retention rates and lifetime value
- Various support channels, such as social media and live chat, offer opportunities for proactive customer engagement. Engaging with customers on these platforms can strengthen relationships and create positive brand associations
- Being present on multiple channels increases a brand's visibility and awareness. It allows businesses to reach a broader audience and engage with customers across different digital touchpoints.

In summary, providing customer service across multiple channels is an essential aspect of a customer-centric approach. It enables businesses to cater to diverse customer preferences, deliver personalised assistance, and creates a positive and cohesive customer experience. By embracing an omnichannel service strategy, businesses can build stronger customer relationships, enhance satisfaction, and gain a competitive advantage in today's dynamic and competitive marketplace by delivering a superior and consistent customer experience across all touchpoints.

Customers value the convenience and personalized attention that omnichannel customer service offers, leading to increased loyalty and advocacy for the brand.

Benefits to Service Providers offering an Omnichannel Customer Service / Support Platform to SMEs

The market for service providers such as Telcos, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), System Integrators (Sis), Managed Service Providers (MSPs), Value Added Resellers (VARs) and Web hosts is experiencing increasing pressure on its margins given declining average revenue per user (ARPU) as many services have become commoditized (e.g. traditional PSTN voice).

Service providers are also pressurised by competitive forces to bundle or offer uncapped services (e.g. Internet access services). It is thus important for these service providers to increase the value of the services they provide in order to prevent their networks from becoming mere bitpipes transporting traffic as their subscribers access third party applications on an Over the Top (OTT) basis.

The omnichannel customer service / support platform as a service (OCS PaaS) model provides service providers with an opportunity to offer additional value added service offerings to their subscribers.

Apart from the increased revenue to be earned from these value add services, these services also increase service providers' stickiness or their ability to retain subscribers in times of increased subscriber churn as they ensure that they are continually meeting the needs and expectations of their clients.

How will our OCS PaaS Platform help you and your SME Clients?

Zwana ICT & Consulting is a channel partner for the scalable multi-tenant unified communications as a service (UCaaS) and communications platform as a service (CPaaS) offerings of leading South African unified communications provider Telviva Software International.

Telviva Engage is an omnichannel, inbound, real-time communications platform.

This many-to-many engagement tool facilitates communication between a business's customer-facing teams, such as sales or support staff, and third parties. It's been designed to enable these teams to operate more productively and, in doing so, to boost customer satisfaction.

Telviva Engage aggregates multiple engagement channels into a single interface. These could be Web chat, browser-based voice calls, WhatsApp channel integration, or any other third-party chat solution. Chatbots can be implemented to introduce automation, pre-set phrases can be used by business users, and the chat transcript can be saved and can be provided to the customer.

The platform offers users the option to seamlessly upgrade their current chat engagement to a browser-based voice engagement with the click of a button.

This functionality is available through a Web browser and mobile phone application, making it perfectly suited for hybrid or remote working.

Teams will be able to keep on top of customer conversations taking place on various communication platforms with ease, because they are all conveniently pulled into a single place.

Telviva Engage synchronises with CRM systems for added efficiency and productivity, thus maintaining data integrity with up-to-the-minute accuracy of customer information.

Telviva Software International offers Telviva Engage out of Amazon Web Services' (AWS) secure infrastructure in Ireland. Should you as a service provider wish, you may also host Telviva Engage in your own Cloud. Either way, you may white label the service to reflect your own branding and identity.

The Telviva Engage omnichannel customer support platform as a service makes it easy and affordable for you as a service provider to help your clients improve their real-time communications and collaboration with their prospects and clients, thus giving you and your clients a quick return on your respective financial investments.

Telviva Engage gives you the tools to retain your existing clients and generate new business by meeting the current and developing real-time communications needs of small and medium businesses instead of their using your infrastructure just to access the services of third party over the top (OTT) providers.

In Conclusion

Unified communications and collaboration services provide organisations with measurable financial benefits as well as less easily quantified 'soft' benefits which nevertheless improve the organisation's business processes.

As an ISP or a system integrator, you can meet the current and developing real-time communications requirements of your existing clients as well as grow your market share by offering these services to new clients.

This allows you to generate value added income from your networks instead of merely being a bitpipe over which your clients access the services of third party over the top (OTT) providers.

Zwana ICT & Consulting, through its relationship with Telviva Software International, makes it easy for service providers and their clients in turn to enjoy an affordable quick time to value omnichannel customer service / support platform.

If you like what you've read in this white paper and on our website and would like further information, including the opportunity for us to demo Telviva Engage to you, please contact us by clicking [here](#).

About Telviva Software International

Telviva Software International (<https://www.zwana.net/telviva1>) is the international arm of leading South African Unified Communications as a Service provider Telviva.

Having been involved with the first commercial ISP in the country, representing the largest ISP in Africa in the year 2000 having expanded its operations into 6 African Countries, the executive team of Telviva has extensive Internet experience and a profound understanding of how technology can solve real-world business challenges

Its executive team also features some of the pioneers of Internet Protocol PBX in South Africa As the country's market leader in multi-tenant cloud PBX communications, Telviva extended the solution to create its flagship product Telviva One, a cloud-based unified communications platform serving over 75 000 users at over 2 500 sites.

Telviva Engage is the result of the Telviva team's deep understanding of business processes garnered over twenty years of developing intelligent communications solutions that enhance the way people work.

About Zwana ICT & Consulting

Zwana ICT & Consulting (<https://www.zwana.net>) has more than 10 years of experience in the unified communications field.

This experience was obtained as a distributor for a US / European vendor of unified communications solutions. During this time we also launched a cloud based provider of unified communications, IP PBX, SIP trunking and WebRTC services.

We target:

- Tier 2 and tier 3 European telcos, ISPs, SIs, MSPs, VARs and Web hosts that wish to upsell value-added white label unified communications services to attract and retain clients
- Small and medium businesses that wish to improve their communications, collaboration and business processes and thereby their competitiveness

We take care to understand your goals, challenges, pain points and needs and will only recommend our offerings to you if we believe they will exceed your expectations. We are after all working in the SaaS environment and would like to have you as a client for many years to come.