DEEPER INTO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Cutting Customer Service Costs While Improving Experience With Digital Adoption Platforms

userlane

The Compromise: Customer Experience or Cutting Costs?

Back in 2015, Gartner predicted that by 2017, two-thirds of all customer service interactions would no longer require the support of a human intermediary. And how true that prediction came to be. From chatbots to increasingly sophisticated automation technologies, customer self-service solutions are certainly here to stay. However, despite the benefits these new technologies offer, there are still businesses out there that are reluctant to adopt new customer support approaches. There are numerous reasons for this, including resistance to change and the cost of implementation. But interestingly enough, one of the more predominant objections is the fear of bad customer experience.

●●●

According to customer service expert Shep Hyken, "A self-service option may be able to improve your customer's experience of working with your company, but note that not all self-service options do." Adding to this, Hyken explains, "Self-service should be something that enhances the typical customer service experience. It should be about making it easier, faster, more efficient, and in some cases, even less expensive for the customer. A self-service solution doesn't mean you don't offer customer service. On the contrary, self-service is a way to enhance customer service."

The aim of this paper is to address this misconception that self-service results in a poor customer experience. Decision-makers mistakenly believe that they have to compromise on cost-saving and heavily invest in personal support if they want to improve customer satisfaction and the overall customer experience. In other words, they believe that they will provide their customers with a subpar experience if they use self-service solutions to save money. This, however, is only true if companies are purely driven to reduce overhead costs or if they focus more on customer acquisition than on customer support and retention[1]. As Hyken emphasizes, a self-service solution can enhance the customer experience—it just needs to be executed correctly. Thus, if companies have a carefully designed and well-planned, user-centric self-service approach, **they can cut costs and improve customer experience simultaneously** without the need to compromise on one or the other.

[1] According to Oracle's white paper on Redefining Customer Experience Through Self-Service, "too many companies are failing to execute self-service in a manner that actually serves customers and prospects … organizations primarily focus self-service on customer acquisition over customer support and retention."

For this paper, we address the use of self-service solutions in terms of **technical support** (i.e. users of an online platform that have encountered a problem or are stuck on a particular process). Our discussion is particularly relevant to larger companies with customer support teams that handle numerous requests in the form of a ticketing system.

In the following chapters, we discuss the relationship between support, cost, and experience and then move on to a comparison between three different self-service solutions. We conclude this paper by showing how companies can significantly cut customer service costs and enhance the customer experience at the same time.

Please note that throughout this paper, we use the more established term *self-service* and refrain from using service or success as a synonym for support[2]. Please also keep in mind that we use the term customers and users synonymously. Both terms include potential customers, which are commonly referred to as leads or prospects.

---
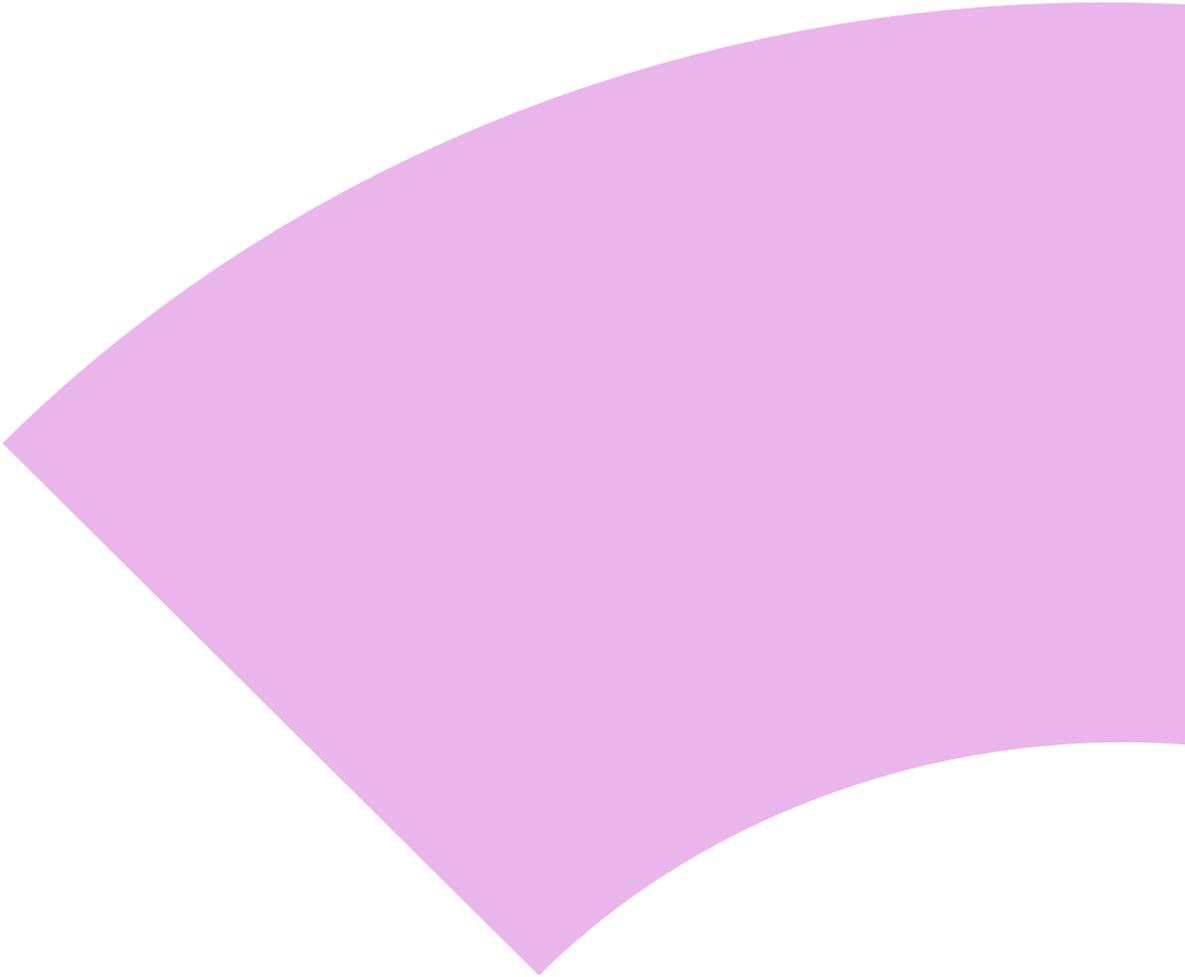
[2] If you'd like insightful definitions of these terms, you can refer to Hubspot's Customer Success vs. Customer Support vs. Customer Service: What's the Difference?

Chapter One

1 The Relationship Between Support, Cost, and Customer Experience

The Impact of Customer Support on the Bottom Line

It's a common belief that high customer satisfaction and a high level of personal support go hand-in-hand. If a business wants satisfied customers, they need to spend a good deal of money on providing them with one-on-one support. This is a traditional assumption, and it's easy to understand why it's made: Companies want highly satisfied customers because satisfaction leads to loyalty, and loyalty drives revenue. So, this means that cutting support costs while keeping satisfaction levels stable or even improving them has a direct impact on a company's profitability. The question is, though: **How can you cut support costs without compromising on the customer experience?**

Well, first things first. To understand the drivers of customer satisfaction in this context, we need to discuss and differentiate between the functional experience and emotional experience. In other words, when a customer is exposed to the support process, their overall satisfaction is determined by the functional and the emotional experience that they have.

To explain this differentiation further, we take a look at the concept of cost and benefit. When a customer is unable to perform a task seamlessly, this leads to two types of costs accumulating on the customer's side:

1. There is the physical cost, which relates to the time the customer has to spend on getting help to solve the problem.
2. Then comes the mental cost, which relates to the cognitive effort it takes to solve the problem (this can also include stress). In this case, the customer may feel as though they are not progressing quickly enough or don't have control over the problem-solving process. Conversely, the customer can also experience mental benefits, such as feelings of accomplishment, once a problem has been resolved.

Therefore, to summarize this section, the functional experience of a customer support process relates to the physical cost a customer accumulates, whereas the emotional experience is connected to mental cost and mental benefit. In the next section, we explore these two types of experiences in greater detail.

2 The Functional Experience Explained

For companies to optimize the functional experience of the customer support process, they must consider process efficiency. For example, the user has a problem and wants to resolve it autonomously using self-service options (such as via a chatbot or FAQ section). In the best-case scenario, the user manages to solve the problem efficiently without the need for personal support, which would be provided next in the problem solving process.

Problem Occurence > Self-Service > Personal Support

In practice, self-service options are often purposely designed to be more accessible to discourage the average user from immediately seeking personal support[3]. This approach isn't wrong as long as it is efficient and seen as somewhat equal to personal support. However, this can lead to poor customer experience when the user can't find the support hotline number (for example) after unsuccessfully resolving the issue via self-service options[4]. For this reason, companies must ensure that they provide users with a holistic support process that considers all three of the following:

- the handling of tickets,

- the problem-solving process prior to the ticket being lodged, and

- the actual root cause of the problem.

Although global consumers are increasingly coming to rely on, and even prefer[5], working with self-service solutions, personal support still plays a significant role[6]. A report from Salesforce shows that 84% of customers believe that "being treated like a person, not a number, is very important to winning their business," and although some self-service solutions, like chatbots, are becoming better at simulating human behavior, they still lack the emotion of human-to-human interactions and the ability to solve complex problems.

---

[3] Today's customers are becoming increasingly curious about how to solve their problems and control their own transactions and are thus gaining confidence in their ability to get things done by themselves. According to John Goodman, vice chairman of Customer Care Measurement and Consulting, 80% of customers prefer to visit a company's website before calling a service center.

[4] Poorly executed self-service will leave a customer feeling frustrated and exhausted. That's why when self-service is poorly executed, companies won't reap the benefits they offer. Gartner predicted in 2016 that at least 80% of organizations that failed to execute their self-service properly would incur even higher customer service costs.

[5] According to research by Matthew Dixon, Lara Ponomareff, Scott Turner, and Rick DeLisi (writing for Harvard Business Review), over 80% of customers across industries prefer to use self-service options before reaching out to a live representative.

[6] For more information, see an experiment on anxious customers preferring human customer service by Michelle A. Shell and Ryan W. Buell.

A common assumption, therefore, is: The more complex the problem, the stronger the desire for personal assistance. But this is where self-service solutions hold significant value: Most customer support agents will confirm that the majority of tickets lodged are related to redundant or common problems. Such problems can easily be solved with the self-service means available[7]. By fielding these redundant requests, the self-service solution helps the customer learn how to solve problems independently. At the same time, this gives customer support agents more time and resources to deal with more complex or urgent problems.

> **Though more and more customers are solving issues through self-service, the results show that customers still rely on effective agent support when they encounter problems too tricky to solve on their own. These days, agents are likely to connect with customers who have already attempted to resolve their issue through another channel, so an agent's ability to pick up exactly where the last interaction left off – and deliver a personalised and contextual interaction – is key to a positive experience.**

Microsoft

Another common mistake companies make regarding process efficiency is that they measure it with "hard" KPIs, such as ticket closure rate[8], and, as a result, ignore the experience that comes with it. In the end, it is the customer who ultimately decides whether the problem was adequately solved. For this reason, companies must keep in mind that the ultimate goal of the support process is not always about solving the problem: The end-goal should be about customer satisfaction. This is why it is essential to understand that it's not only about resolving the problem (or not) but always about how the customer perceives the problem-solving process in terms of their emotional experience.

---

[7] See Customer Self-Service: What It Is & How to Do It Right and Salesforce's How Customer Service Trends Are Changing for more information on this.

[8] See this help document on resolution rate for more information. Further, it is no longer sufficient for customer agents to close as many tickets as possible in a short time frame. Nowadays, it's about providing a personalized experience to customers and focusing less on hard KPIs.

3 The Emotional Experience Explained

As discussed above, the emotional experience of a support process is defined by the mental cost and mental benefits that arise from the interactions a customer has. The way personal interaction with a support agent is perceived can range from emotionally extremely pleasant to extremely unpleasant (for example when a customer feels they've been treated disrespectfully). When users aren't able to solve a particular problem themselves and need help, this can give rise to a moment of high sensitivity to social feedback. This explains why customers are more likely to accept process inefficiencies as long as they believe that they have been "well taken care of"[9].

Self-service solutions have a unique advantage in terms of providing a standardized experience that is independent of the capabilities of support agents. But, on the "downside," they lack the potential excitement and value of human interaction. Standard self-service solutions, such as Q&A sections, tend to be quite sterile, but different approaches, such as chatbots or avatars, are able to simulate the experience of an interpersonal conversation. This can partially make up for a lack of human touch (see chapter two for more information on this). This provides the feeling of personal interaction with the advantage of a fully controlled and standardized experience that can be optimized based on user data. Through content personalization, the interaction can feel less like a one-size-fits-all approach and speed up the problem-solving process. Therefore, while self-service is a standardized approach, the experience it provides can be humanized through the simulation of personal interaction and user segmentation.

Following on from this, it is important to understand that an integral part of the emotional experience is the sense of accomplishment a customer feels when the problem is solved. This relates to mental benefit, which is linked to feelings and sensations such as "getting things done," "being in control," and "feeling empowered to do more." Self-service solutions have a higher chance of providing such sensations to users because they enable independent problem solving. Customers nowadays have a desire for self-improvement and to learn new things, so by allowing them to problem-solve, companies are, as a result, adding to the customer experience.

---

4 Linking it All Together

To conclude this chapter, we've put together the following graphic to summarize the outlined causality between cost, support, and experience. As the graphic shows, any customer support approach comes with a certain cost and delivers a certain customer experience. Cost is directly linked to the bottom line, while customer experience has an indirect impact on the bottom line through its influence on customer satisfaction and, consequently, revenue.

It is clear, then, that self-service solutions can be extremely valuable, but only when well executed. Here are some of the advantages of self-service solutions based on our discussion above:

● They give immediate access to support and can solve problems (especially redundant ones) efficiently.

● The support process is standardized, continuously optimized, and independent of the capabilities of a support agent.

● The customer can experience heightened feelings of accomplishment as they can perform the task autonomously.

In the following and final section, we analyze and compare three different self-service solutions and their impact on customer experience, cost, and profit.

Chapter Two

Self-Service Solutions in Comparison

In the following chapter, we compare three self-service solutions: Knowledge bases, chatbots, and digital adoption platforms. We analyze each solution based on the functional and emotional experience they provide as well as their cost-saving potential. We also provide an overall rating of each solution based on experience (functional and emotional), its implementation and maintenance cost, and support cost savings. Please be aware that for each rating, it isn't possible to generalize any quantitative assumptions regarding support, cost, and experience. In other words, we cannot say that a chatbot will give you x% more satisfaction and x% fewer costs as every case is unique.

1 Knowledge Bases

Knowledge bases aren't usually technically-advanced, but they can provide a wealth of motivational, educational, and well-organized resources to help the customer. Knowledge bases typically include an FAQ section, how-to or process guides, introductory articles, troubleshooting instructions, videos, and glossaries. While a knowledge base can be more of a sterile environment, it is possible to make it engaging and enjoyable with good, diverse content in a variety of media formats.

Functional Experience

The materials stored within the knowledge base are designed to help a user find a solution to their problem quickly. But to do so, the user will need to search the knowledge base themselves. Knowledge bases are also available 24/7, and are, for the most part, reliable. Apart from a broken link now and again or some outdated content, well-executed and well-maintained knowledge bases will always be available to deliver contextual information at the moment the user needs it. Thus, knowledge bases can give users answers quickly and in a variety of formats. This can save time for both the user and the support agent as they won't have to deal with redundant tickets.

However, it is important to note that although knowledge bases can give information a user is looking for at their moment of need, there is a slight delay in this process. Even if the user knows what they are looking for, it will still take them time to find the relevant information. This is because the knowledge base contains a wealth of resources, and one search can return multiple results. Further, knowledge bases are, in general, designed for reactive support: The user is looking for information because they've already encountered a problem. In comparison, digital adoption platforms (which we discuss in detail below) proactively provide the user with just the right amount of relevant information in their exact moment of need.

Emotional Experience

One of the advantages of a knowledge base is that it supports different learning styles. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the emotional experience is linked to the mental benefit a customer derives from the support process. Thus, by catering to different learning styles, users are likely to feel more empowered and in control of their problem-solving process. Whether through video, text, or audio, a knowledge base can help users learn something new in a way that is best suited to them.

This can potentially give users an even greater sense of accomplishment once they've solved their problem because they are in control of the entire process. Users are essentially completely autonomous and in control of solving their problems.

Although knowledge bases can, in general, be seen as the least interactive support approach, they still provide a good opportunity for customer feedback. By allowing customers to provide their input on how useful or valuable a resource is, companies will be able to continually adapt the knowledge base to their future users' needs and focus on more helpful resources.

However, companies need to bear in mind that too much information can be overwhelming, and highly unstructured or disorganized knowledge bases will only damage the customer experience by placing too much cognitive stress on the user. Today's consumers don't have time to wade through long documents or struggle to find what they are looking for, so opting for a knowledge base can be risky if it is not managed and maintained properly[10].

Cost

Out of all the self-service solutions, a knowledge base is probably one of the most cost-effective ones in terms of implementation and maintenance. Knowledge management software can be relatively inexpensive, and they are designed to maximize how much staff and customers can learn with minimal investment.

However, it's important to keep in mind that the main cost will come in the form of the amount of time and effort it takes for employees to keep the base up-to-date (especially if the knowledge base contains videos and audio files). A good idea is to have a dedicated team of customer support agents and other stakeholders regularly updating the base as they are the ones who have first-hand knowledge of what customers are looking for or need.

In terms of savings on support costs, knowledge bases aren't as cost-effective as digital adoption platforms. This is because they can fail to provide the right information as quickly as possible (as they are disorganized and/or don't contain enough information), which will leave the customer frustrated and dissatisfied. Moreover, knowledge bases can only handle less complex queries. For this reason, support agents are still a necessity, which can lead to increased physical and mental costs on the customer side.

---

[10] In a 2018 survey on self-service issues experienced by customers in the US and worldwide, respondents were asked, "If while using self-service you did not find the response you were looking for, what was the key issue?" 16% of respondents (globally) said the issue was having too much information to sort through. 18% (globally) said the problem was disorganized information with no ability to search, and 43% stated there was not enough information available through the self-service option.

Rating

Here's our overall rating of knowledge bases based on our findings in terms of experience, implementation cost, and saving on support costs, with 1 star being poor to 3 stars being excellent. Please note that our rating is based on an average knowledge base with no "bells and whistles" content (i.e. high-quality videos and audio files, etc.). In this instance, such a knowledge base will provide a relatively poor experience but will be inexpensive to implement and maintain. The two-star cost-saving rating is based on the idea that it is better to at least have a knowledge base (albeit average) as opposed to having none at all.

|	
Functional Experience	⭐ ☆
Emotional Experience	⭐ ☆
Implementation & Maintenance Cost	⭐ ⭐
Support Cost Saving	⭐ ⭐

2 Chatbots

While the hype around chatbots may have died down in recent years, they are still one of the most popular and widely-used self-service solutions.

According to a definition by Gartner, a chatbot is a "narrowly focused conversational agent serving users, customers, or employees. It often uses, but is not limited to, text chat." With almost 90% of consumers preferring to reach out to businesses via instant messaging services such as Facebook Messenger, the chatbot has huge potential to significantly improve the customer experience.

> **"Chatbots don't always provide the right answer ... [but] I believe that in 2020 this will start to change with AI-powered bots, that can respond like a human, becoming increasingly common and affordable."**
>
> Arun Mani, Managing Director Europe at Freshworks Continental

Thus, while there is great potential for chatbots, businesses must keep in mind that consumers can easily be put off by them when they fail to provide the right answers.
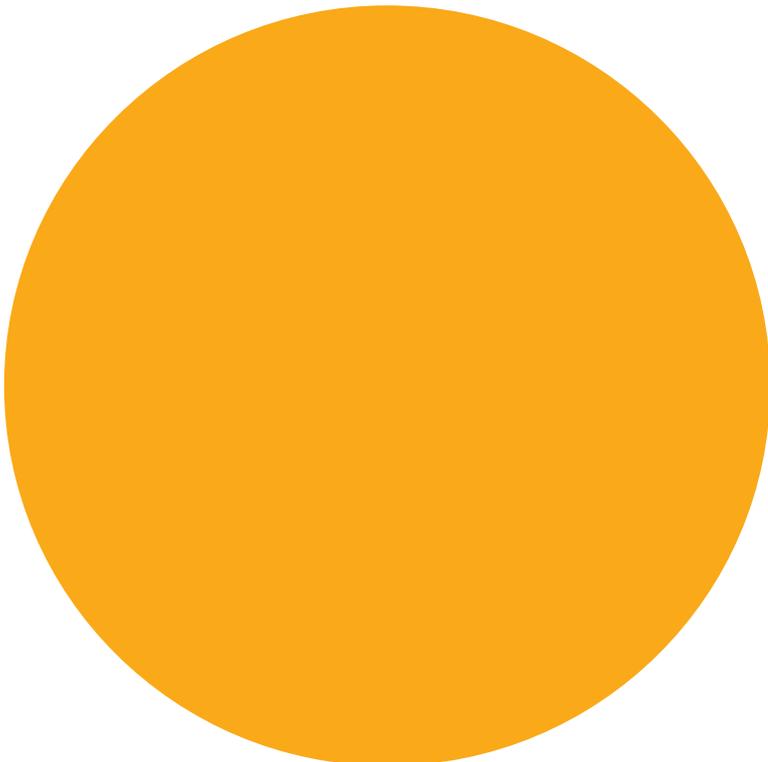
Functional Experience

Currently, chatbots are used for less complex tasks such as answering common questions, gathering relevant data and information, and guiding a visitor through a website. When it comes to technical support, chatbots are a valuable supplement because they free up time for agents to deal with more complex and pressing problems. Moreover, chatbots can gather relevant information beforehand, once again saving time by giving the agent all the information needed to deal with the problem efficiently.

One of the more prominent advantages of chatbots is that they are available 24/7, meaning customers have on-demand support and can receive answers to a variety of queries and problems. Not only does this give customers quick service but it also relieves the burden placed on customer support agents. For this reason, chatbots can improve the functional experience by answering a variety of queries, solving more common problems, and saving the customer time as they no longer have to search for answers or wait on support agents.

Despite this, chatbots, especially poorly executed or cheaper ones, can significantly hinder the customer experience. Research also shows that many customers still prefer human agents to chatbots for their customer service engagements[11]. This is because human agents can, in the words of Michael Mills, senior vice president for CGS' contact center division, "react and adapt to the complexity of [an individual's] problem and resolve the issue."

Further, chatbots are known to have several problems, including not understanding what the customer is asking, failing to perform simple actions, being unable to handle longer conversations or give adequate responses, and being offline. Mills suggests that when it comes to using chatbots, it is best to combine them with humans to create a blended approach that gives customers "the option of using the channel of their choice."

---

[11] For more information on this, see Chatbots Are Killing Customer Service. Here's Why.

Emotional Experience

One of the main criticisms against chatbots is the lack of the "human factor." As discussed previously, customers still want and need help from a knowledgeable, compassionate agent that is responsive to real human emotion. However, with the evolution of Natural Language Processing technology, the interaction between customers and chatbots is becoming increasingly more natural and personal[12].

Today's more intelligent chatbots use deep learning to analyze human speech, which is then used to form an appropriate and natural response to the user's situation. The more advanced chatbots are now able to ask and answer open and closed questions, interpret ambiguities, and detect emotional polarities of a subject, giving customers the feeling that they are having a one-on-one conversation with an agent.

For the emotional experience, chatbots can enhance it because they can help the customer solve a problem autonomously. This ability to solve a problem without extra support can give rise to all those positive sensations and mental benefits we mentioned previously.

When chatbots are implemented correctly and well-maintained, they can significantly improve the overall customer experience by (a) helping customers solve a problem quickly, (b) directing customers to an available support agent if necessary, and (c) giving customers a sense of control over and ability to solve problems on their own.

But, as Christopher Elliott writing for Forbes emphasizes, not all businesses employing chatbots to save money will be able to keep their customers happy. He bases this on his own experience dealing with chatbots as well as a study conducted by CGS, which found that optimal customer service requires the blend of a chatbot and human agents.

All-in-all, the use of chatbots can be a slippery slope: They will only enhance the customer experience if they are of good-quality. Businesses, therefore, need to be very careful in how they choose (or build) and implement a chatbot.

---

[12] Because NLP technology has surpassed the human baseline for understanding language, chatbots that use NLP will have a better understanding of what a customer is saying in comparison to the average human. See 5 Amazing Examples Of NLP In Practice.

Cost

According to Arun Mani, companies must fully invest in and support chatbot deployment for chatbots to perform optimally. If they fail to do so by underinvesting in a chatbot platform, mistakes will happen and customers will go elsewhere.

Implementing and maintaining quality chatbots can be expensive[13], but when well-executed, chatbots are an excellent means to save on support costs. According to Gartner research, organizations that implemented a Virtual Customer Assistant reported

- a significant reduction in the number of inquiries,

- increased customer satisfaction, and

- over 30% in savings per voice engagement.

Furthermore, a study released by Juniper Research estimates that by 2022, chatbots will help businesses save more than $8 billion per year.

However, to reiterate what has been said above, chatbots can be very bad for business if they're of low-quality, aren't well-maintained, or don't provide deeper analytics and engagement metrics that can be used to assess its efficacy[14]. Thus, businesses need to remember that chatbots aren't a silver bullet solution for customer self-service and businesses should always take a hybrid or blended approach:

"

When agents and chatbots help each other to deliver better service, it fosters increased customer trust and confidence in chatbots as well. It becomes a closed-loop "virtuous circle" of learning and trust.

Trips Reddy, IBM Watson blog

---

[13] Top-of-the-range chatbot software isn't cheap, and for businesses seeking to create their own chatbot, the amount of time and effort put into creating it can rack up the costs. While there are free or low-cost options out there, these are low-tier chatbots that are likely to do more harm than good to your customer experience.

[14] According to research by DigitasLBi Research, nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said they wouldn't use a company's chatbot again after having a bad experience with it.

Rating

Based on our findings, here's our overall rating. Please note that because there is a variation in the quality of chatbots, the rating is based on standard chatbot solutions currently on the market. Regarding the implementation and maintenance cost, our rating is based on the assumption that the chatbot solution is off-the-shelf (i.e. not internally built by the company), and implementation is therefore relatively fast and low cost. Maintenance is similar to digital adoption platforms as chatbots require ongoing maintenance and optimization.

|	
Functional Experience	⭐ ⭐
Emotional Experience	⭐ ⭐
Implementation & Maintenance Cost	⭐ ⭐
Support Cost Saving	⭐ ⭐

3 Digital Adoption Platforms

The last self-service solution we discuss is digital adoption platforms (DAPs) – a technology that is relatively new to the market. DAPs are excellent self-service solutions because they actually contain a Virtual Assistant and link to extra resources. They essentially provide an all-in-one self-service solution with different self-service capabilities. And unlike chatbots and knowledge bases, one of the most significant advantages of DAPs is that they provide proactive service[15]. For example, a user will only consult a chatbot or knowledge base when they already have a problem, whereas DAPs are designed to prevent users from getting stuck or encountering difficulties within an online application.

The core feature of a DAP is step-by-step interactive guides that lead users through any software application in real-time. This is beneficial in numerous ways, but in terms of self-service, interactive guidance is particularly helpful because:

① When navigating an online platform with interactive guides, users will experience very little to no friction in the digital process, meaning they are less likely to seek technical support.

② If a user becomes stuck and needs help, they can use the Virtual Assistant, which provides on-demand, contextual support whenever the user needs it.

③ Interactive guides can also be used to help the user find extra information (if needed) more quickly or to further explain a particular process.

All this serves to decrease the need for external support from agents, thus saving time, significantly reducing support costs, and greatly improving customer satisfaction.

---
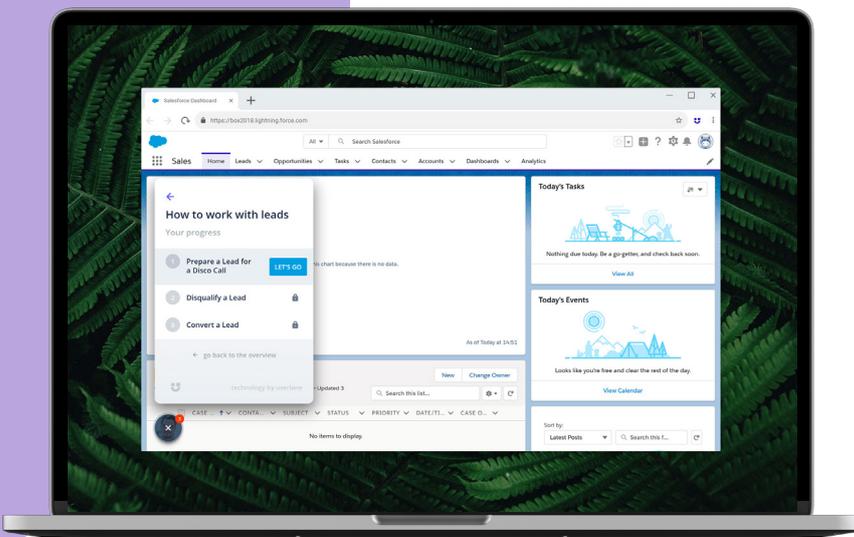
[15] According to Microsoft's 2017 State of Global Customer Service Report, 68% of customers have a more favorable view of brands that offer them proactive customer service notifications.

Functional Experience

Users are highly unlikely to accumulate any physical costs due to the interactive guides and Virtual Assistant providing just-in-time information and support. The interactive guides streamline the user experience completely, making navigating any online application a frictionless experience.

DAPs are highly valuable as users won't have to spend time figuring out how a digital process works or where to find the right information. Interactive guides show the user exactly what to do and when, leaving no room for error, frustration, and wasting time. And, as mentioned above, DAPs are designed to eliminate, or at least minimize, the need for external support materials—including help from agents—which saves both the user and agent time and decreases the overall physical cost on the user's side.

DAPs are also designed to handle very complex processes and applications. Chatbots and knowledge bases are still only capable of answering redundant or simpler queries. DAPs, on the other hand, can deal with high complexity. This further reduces the need for the user to reach out to a support agent.

Knowledge bases and chatbots can fail to provide just the right information at the user's exact moment of need, but this will never happen with interactive guides, which have been carefully designed to guide users through every digital process logically in small steps.

Emotional Experience

DAPs provide significant mental benefit. Designed with gamification techniques and the user in mind, DAPs will give users all the pleasant sensations we mentioned in Chapter 1, such as feeling empowered, being in control, and enjoying the autonomy to solve problems by themselves. DAPs also give rise to those all-important "aha! moments," which give users a continuous sense of accomplishment, empowerment, and the feeling of getting things done efficiently and effectively.

Importantly, the step-by-step interactive guides provide users with the right information at just the right moment, which eliminates the cognitive overload or stress placed on the user. Knowledge bases and chatbots can fail to provide just the right information at the user's exact moment of need, but this will never happen with interactive guides, which have been carefully designed to guide users through every digital process logically in small steps. Further, with DAPs, users can "stay in the venue," meaning that they don't need to stop what they are doing or navigate away from the page to find an answer.

Cost

DAPs tend to be initially more expensive when compared to alternative self-service solutions. However, most of them come with tailored and customized plans that are suited to individual use cases. Businesses, therefore, don't have to take all the add-ons or additional features from the beginning. While there are inexpensive versions of DAPs on the market, these (like lower-tier chatbots) fail to provide an enhanced customer experience and come with myriad problems and/or very basic features.

In terms of maintenance, interactive guides are easy (and enjoyable) to create and can be updated at any point with little effort. Further, if the respective application undergoes any updates or changes, the guides can automatically adjust to these changes. The only time a significant amount of effort is needed comes at the beginning when the interactive guides and tours need to be created.

So, while it may seem initially expensive to implement and pay for a DAP, the costs saved in the long run are significant because businesses will have satisfied (and therefore loyal) customers who encounter very few problems, which, in turn, reduces the burden placed on support agents.

Rating

The two stars given for implementation and maintenance costs arise from the cost of implementation and the initial effort it takes to create guides. This is why we give the same rating as knowledge bases. However, in comparison to knowledge bases that require a significant amount of maintenance effort, updating and maintaining guides in a DAP is much easier and less time-consuming.

Functional Experience	★ ★ ★
Emotional Experience	★ ★ ★
Implementation & Maintenance Cost	★ ★ ☆
Support Cost Saving	★ ★ ★
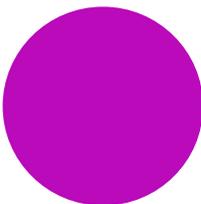
4 Overall Comparison

Here is our overall comparison of the three solutions. The customer experience is based on the emotional plus functional experience, and the ROI is rated in terms of implementation and maintenance costs and the overall savings in support costs (physical costs).

Self-Service Solution	Customer Experience	ROI
Knowledge Base	★	★★
Chatbot	★★	★★
DAPs	★★★	★★★

Furthermore, we can also compare these three solutions as follows:

Self Service Solution	Type of Support	Ability to Handle Complex Queries?	Need for Live Agents?
Knowledge Base	Standardized & reactive	No	Yes
Chatbot	Mainly standardized & reactive (although can be proactive)	No	Yes
DAPs	Personalized & proactive	Yes	Rarely

Successful Self-Service Is Omnichannel

> **Where companies once could differentiate themselves by product or efficiency, distinctiveness today increasingly lies in creating a seamless, omnichannel customer experience.**
>
> McKinsey&Company, Customer Experience Compendium

In a world where choice abounds, the digital customer essentially has all the power: They can easily choose to go elsewhere if they're subjected to poor customer experience. That's why companies need to change the way they deliver their product because simply having an exceptional product doesn't cut it anymore. As Shep Hyken discusses in an article for Forbes, customers demand high quality, quick service, and low price (although they can be flexible regarding price as long as they're receiving value). The only way to achieve this level of service is to offer omnichannel support[16]. This approach comprises a good combination of self-service solutions and, when necessary, personal support from an agent.

To summarize and conclude this paper, it is clear that self-service solutions can significantly enhance the customer experience (in terms of both the functional and emotional experience) if (and only if) they are well-executed and well-maintained. However, we must emphasize that as much as we have highlighted the benefits of self-service solutions – digital adoption platforms in particular – they should not be used as a substitute for personal support provided by an agent. In other words, they should function alongside customer service professionals to provide a holistic experience and smooth customer journey. As Hyken succinctly puts it, "The greatest technology in the world [cannot] replace the ultimate relationship-building tool between a customer and business, [namely] the human touch."

That being said, capitalizing on self-service technologies is a must for businesses to stay competitive and cater to the needs of the digital customer. Indeed, as Gartner research points out, self-service will become the norm, with organizations opting for self-service and automation-first approaches. So, whether it's chatbots, knowledge bases, or DAPs, it is essential that companies adopt not just one but multiple types of self-service solutions and channels to provide optimal customer experiences.

---

[16] 66% of global respondents for Microsoft's 2017 State of Global Customer Service Report said that they actively use three or more channels for customer service.

While there are, of course, more self-service solutions out there, we wanted to compare two of the most popular and/or widely-used self-service solutions to digital adoption platforms. DAPs are still making their way onto the market, and this is why we wanted to draw attention to their self-service capabilities. DAPs significantly reduce the number of support requests lodged by users by guiding them step-by-step through complex digital processes and offering contextual support that is available on-demand. By keeping support requests at a minimum and eliminating the need for external help documents, DAPs are an ideal and robust self-service solution for any business wanting to significantly enhance the customer experience while reducing support costs simultaneously.

With AI, the cloud, the Internet of Things, and so much more on offer, the future of self-service solutions is exciting. We are living in the age of "digital do-it-yourselfers." So, the more time and money you invest in executing high-quality self-service solutions, the greater the rewards you will ultimately reap. Results will come in terms of ROI as well as customer advocacy for your business. It is no longer necessary to compromise on cost for the sake of the customer experience because when done right, self-service solutions, DAPs in particular, can provide customers with a smooth, streamlined, and enjoyable experience.

In an era when companies see online support as a way to shield themselves from 'costly' interactions with their customers, it's time to consider an entirely different approach: building human-centric customer service through great people and clever technology. So, get to know your customers. Humanize them. Humanize yourself. It's worth it.

Kristin Smaby, "Being Human is Good Business"