

Embrace self-service to improve customer experience

 By [Wynand Smit](#)

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Irrespective of industry sector, [81%](#) of customers want to take matters into their own hands and solve queries before reaching out to a contact centre agent. In fact, [67%](#) of people prefer self-service over speaking to a company representative. So, how can companies leverage this to differentiate themselves in the market?



Wynand Smit

At a basic level, organisations must first conduct an honest assessment of their existing self-service offerings and how effectively these are meeting customer expectations. The reality is that when it comes to self-service, most South African businesses do not even fulfil even the most basic customer demands. This is where analytics become crucial to understand the problems customers are experiencing and the journey they take to try and solve it themselves prior to phoning a contact centre.

So, not only must decision-makers focus on improving the self-service options currently available on their websites and mobile apps, but they must also be willing to adopt new channels such as WhatsApp and social media to engage with end-users in an environment where they are most comfortable in. For example, if a customer is sending a WhatsApp query, a business can immediately create significant intimacy by wishing them a happy birthday or introduce another personalised component based on the data they have on that individual.

Of course, the risk in embracing multiple channels is that companies might not have a fully-fledged self-service offering available on each platform. This could easily result in customer frustration, if not managed correctly. An example of this is a chatbot only being able to process statement requests via WhatsApp and not allowing for refunds that might be available on the website.



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Integration is vital

During tough economic times, delivering good customer service is critical to the success of any business. In the past, companies could get away with not fulfilling this mandate as moving to a competitor was difficult and most of the services available were similar. However, this will be the year where the competitive environment in South Africa will show its maturity.

People now have a wealth of options available to them from insurtechs and fintechs that are more agile in meeting their needs, are more cost-effective, and provide the level of self-service expected of a digital environment. For example, there are a plethora of hardware stores available in the market. Yet, a new entrant is differentiating itself by offering free DIY classes in-store to attract customers. A completely different mindset is therefore needed when it comes to service in this country.

But in addition to building differentiation, self-service is vital to improve security. While it is possible for malicious users to find different pieces of information on an individual and use that to gain access to their accounts via traditional channels, it is much more difficult to do so via a self-service channel.

Take online banking as an example. Not only does a user need to download and install an application, but their device must be linked to the service in addition to a username, password and OTP. All these elements contribute to a more secure (and authenticated) environment. While identification is great to deliver personalised service, authentication is essential to verify that the customer is who they say they are.



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Overcoming roadblocks

Self-service (at a basic level) is not that difficult to roll out. Most local businesses have already implemented it whether that is on their websites or through an application. However, when it comes to using newer technology that enables things such as chatbots and WhatsApp, decision-makers are still hesitant to implement them.

To this end, they are adopting a wait and see approach especially in terms of determining the use case capable of providing customers with the service they expect. With current channels not providing a sufficiently high level of self-service, it is hardly surprising that companies might want to focus on getting those areas right first.

Even so, changes are coming as South Africans start becoming more critical of the service they receive - and the ways and means available to solve it themselves.

ABOUT WYNAND SMIT

Wynand Smit is CEO at INOVO, a leading contact centre business solutions provider.

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