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Conversational Commerce

A guideline to improving
B2B customer experience
using conversational
commerce



An Infosys Consulting Perspective
By Ronald Ramsey & David Sauls

Consulting@Infosys.com | InfosysConsultingInsights.com

Introduction

In recent years, we are seeing a trend where a new breed of B2B buyers has emerged, forcing companies to rethink how they do business and communicate with them.

Your prospects and customers want to find solutions to their business problems as quickly as saying “Hey Siri” - and get your attention when they need help with their services or product as quickly as if on iMessage. The key to success with your customers is simple: presence. These buyers expect the same level of convenience and access in their business activities that they enjoy in their personal tasks.

This paper will explore “Conversational Commerce” and how enabling this capability through live chat can fill a critical part of your customer experience strategy.

Conversational Commerce

The push for Conversational Commerce

In recent years, we are seeing a new breed of B2B buyers emerging, forcing companies to rethink how they do business and communicate with them. These buyers expect the same level of convenience and access in their business tasks online that they have in their personal tasks.

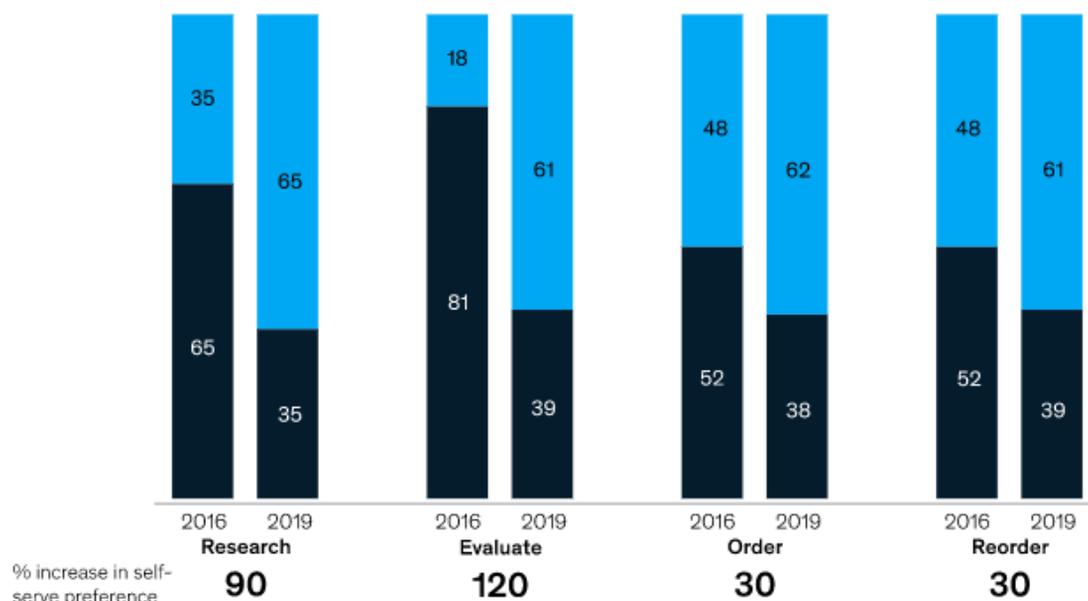
A recent [report by Forrester](#) states that more than 30% of B2B technology buyers already make their initial purchases through a digital channel; however, with the complexity of some products, pure "digital" selling is a challenge. Another [report by Forrester](#) states that "84% of millennials would prefer conducting the discovery phase of the sales cycle themselves versus speaking with a sales rep."

Even as B2B buyers accelerate the shift to self-service, they require high-quality interactions with sellers during their discovery phase, and assistance in configuration, purchase, and aftercare. The complexity of telecom services makes getting the correct information at the right time to the customer critical to ensuring a positive experience across the various channels and the lifecycle of the relationship.

Self-service matters for B2B

Increase in preference for self-service channels
% replies by interaction

Self-serve Directed



Source: OSI Results of McKinsey's 2nd biannual, global B2B customer buying research: US & Europe, 2016 and 2018/19 – note results for % increase have been rounded

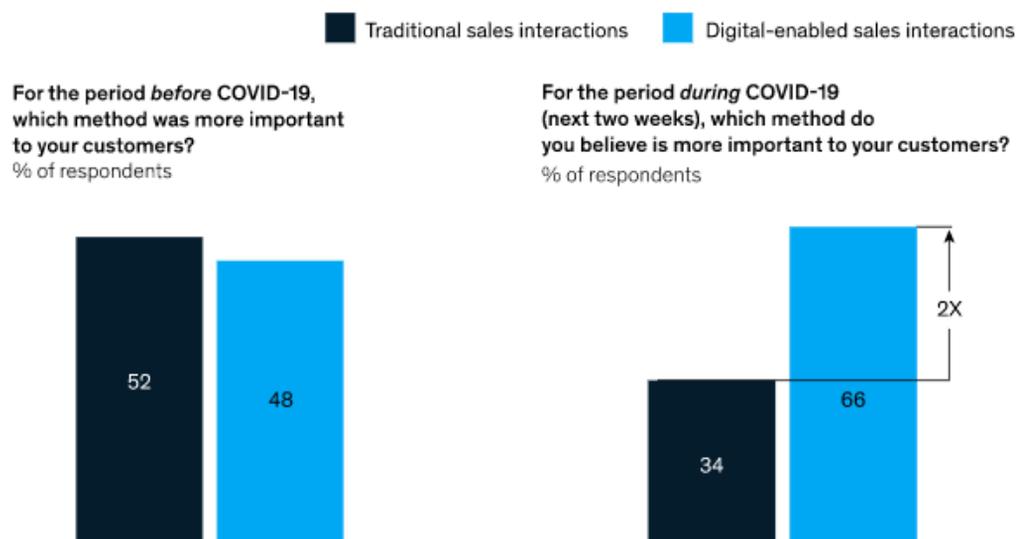
Covid19: Accelerating digital

The use of digital channels in B2B had been growing slowly over the past few year. However, the COVID-19 crisis has accelerated this, resulting in digital commerce and operations in B2B being commonplace.

A recent survey of leading companies shows that customers now see digital commerce as almost twice as important as the traditional sales model in the pre-COVID era.

Through the crisis over 70% of organizations enabled multi-disciplinary teams to support the sales and its operations performed almost entirely remote. The process of "making sales digital" has required companies to rethink the customer lifecycle and the sales process to provide the best value to their customers while leveraging the existing sales organization to support the various digital channels most effectively.

Digital interactions are twice as important.



Source: McKinsey B2B Decision Maker Pulse Survey, April 7, 2020 (n = 3,619)

Where does Conversational Commerce make an Impact?

While we have been most comfortable with the use of live chat in the context of customer services, the use of digital conversations across the entire customer lifecycle has become the expectation.



For example, a study from Forester found that over 40% of customers expect some form of live conversation capability on your corporate website, a channel that significantly influences prospects as they are investigating products and solution options before purchase.

In addition, data from an Aberdeen research study found that live chat usage peaks early in the prospecting process, at the point after a visitor has identified themselves as a prospect and then again after the customer relationship is established. This aligns with our hypothesis that digital conversation capabilities are expected and aligned to enable more interactive relationships with your customer. The challenge is to ensure that this channel (with all channels) represents your brand well and provides value, not frustration, to your customers.

Live messaging needs to move up in the customer journey. Typically relegated to product support after the sale, increasing customer expectations and using the digital channel for discovery and sales - and providing this type of communication with prospects and repeat customers - becomes critical. In addition, research shows a higher propensity of a prospect to convert to a customer when engaged over live messaging.

An Aberdeen Group study revealed the effectiveness of live chat across the customer lifecycle shown below. In addition, the strategic positioning of live messaging intercepts on pages for near-real-time response further increases its value.

What make Conversational Commerce effective?

For this discussion, we will define conversations to include a combination of both synchronous chat, typically considered live chat, and asynchronous chat, more comparable to a message which is followed by a reply. However, this may occur outside of a single session, much like an iMessage or SMS interaction. Email does not have the immediate response times possible through a live chat; hence it is an asynchronous conversation. A truly synchronous chat with sufficiently short response times allows for fluid digital conversations improving customer satisfaction. It is critical to monitor response time, content and tone when using bots, autoresponders, and the like with skilled chat operators to make it a seamless conversation.

We believe there are five PACTS you need to make and deliver for your customers to deploy good conversational commerce:



1. Be Personal

A massive opportunity exists to leverage conversational commerce further to enhance the relationship with your prospects and customers. The ability to leverage context from the relationship, past browsing experience, and other vital attributes related to the relationship between the companies creates more meaningful and contextual interactions which drive value. Conversational commerce as an enabler for your personalization strategy will allow you to respond to situations more effectively and generate proactive opportunities to engage with your customers (and to a limited effect prospect), and add value when interacting with you.

2. Be Accessible

Buyers prefer to self-serve, but the nuances and complexities of B2B products and services often get in the way. In delivering a consistently high-quality buying experience and provide the correct information when required, live chat is very effective when strategically aligned with critical points in the customer lifecycle. For instance, during the purchase cycle, customers are making final selections of capabilities or a delay on the "purchase" completion screen.

Accessibility enhancements include being able to transition from live chat to an actual live voice conversation over an integrated voice or video channel. Or screen sharing or remote control of the customer's computer to co-work the problem enhance the effectiveness of conversational commerce.

3. Be Consistent

As with every channel across your commerce capability, Conversational commerce must represent your brand. In live chat, visitors are looking for immediate responses and expect that the channel will clarify information on your website or resolve issues with purchased products or services. If bots are introduced as the first line in your conversational commerce strategy, it is critical to ensure bots understand the request and provide the best answers that your top agents would provide. Enabling a standard chat capability across your ecosystem optimizes this situation and ensures consistency across the channels. Providing conflicting information will significantly decrease the value of Conversational Commerce, reduce customer trust, and add additional costs to address the brand impact and lost sales.

4. Be Timely

Live conversations, by their very nature, are intended to provide information and support to prospects and customers at critical points in the customer lifecycle, whether pre- or post-purchase. Although meant to be near-real-time, timeliness is contextual to the complexity of the request. Customers understand that an immediate response may not be possible in every situation; however, providing updates on the answer is essential.

The magnitude of chat requests that could be presented can effectively be managed by leveraging AI-enabled bot capabilities that leverage the knowledge of your top agents to address a large volume of the requests while seamlessly engaging your staff to address more complex issues that require a human touch. More on the effective use of bots below.

5. Be Seamless

While a primary use of conversational commerce is to engage with prospects and customers already on your website, an opportunity exists to leverage the capability across each channel (voice/IVR, mobile app, social.) Companies can use intelligent intercepts to transition people to the live chat common infrastructure enabled your ecosystem's primary "digital conversation" capability. Additionally, creating a comprehensive experience by producing selected intercepts at critical times in the customer journey, such as during order creation, when customers access systems, and there are known issues with existing services, etc. can be intercepted to improve the prospect/customer's experience and enable consistency across the channels as well as the broader customer relationship.

Introducing bot enabled conversations



An effective conversational commerce strategy should include using AI-enabled virtual assistants (bots) to enhance and optimize your live chat support capabilities. With the advent of AI-enablement and the improvements in Natural Language Processing (NLP), the opportunity to address a broader slice of the chat inquires, especially for product information or service status, significantly improves your ability to reply to enquires promptly while minimizing the impact on your support organization.



The bot capability should use the same knowledge sources and interface with the data from commerce and support systems, so the information provided from the bots is consistent with the responses provided by live agents. This requires the knowledge sources that drive the bots to be integrated with the sources used across the other channels. Several approaches to the deployment of bots are used to ensure value to customers. For example, a leading APAC telecom started by enabling bots to answer questions based on their FAQs. Transfer to agents was an option for issues that the bots could not answer. Subsequent integration with larger data repositories enhanced the level of responses the bot could provide.

There are two steps to prevent customers from requesting a live agent right away. First, we must recognize when the customer questions cannot be answered and transition the conversation to a live agent. Second, a seamless transition of the conversation from the bot to the live agent, with the full context of the conversation, is critical to ensure customers see value in the entire conversation and not request agent intervention early on because they know they will have to repeat all the information to the live agent.



Resourcing your Conversational Commerce

The primary purpose of conversational commerce is to support your prospects and customers when they need support.

“Most organizations are reducing the costs of 24x7 conversational commerce with a combination of both humans and bots. They rely on bots to provide the first line of response to handle the requests, enable seamless transitions to a live agent team, or set expectations for live agent call-backs.”

Therefore, it is essential to establish an operating model to provide that support when your customers need it, even 24 hours a day. Your policies will determine how you support your customers, which will drive the size of the agent team, the days and times of coverage needed, and required skills, among others. Most organizations are reducing the costs of 24x7 conversational commerce with a combination of both humans and bots. They rely on bots to provide the first line of response to handle the requests, enable seamless transitions to a live agent team, or set expectations for live agent call-backs.

Resourcing approaches for conversational commerce support have varied across industry segments and capability areas (marketing/sales vs. support). An initial approach to team design is based on leveraging an existing support organization with agents focused on providing live chat support. This model tends to work well during deployments and rollouts; however, specialty teams with specific skills best aligned to online interactions tend to be formed over time.

We have found that live agents can also be readily outsourced to 24x7 global operations as the need for voice language skills is reduced. And re-use of materials for training AI bots can be used to support onboarding and training of global resources. Additionally, some clients have hybrid operations. A combination of in-sourced/employee resources and outsourced/ contract agents are seamlessly leveraged to cover the 24-hour day, leveraging the underlying technology platform to support the transition of “conversations” across the support teams.

Infosys Consulting Case Studies

Infosys Consulting has various examples of providing live chat (and voice) support across the customer lifecycle (marketing, sales, and support) for large multinationals on their B2B business segment.



Global Customer Sales and Support Operations for a US-based Semiconductor manufacturer

Infosys provides a combination of technical sales, ordering, and post-sales support to facilitate the client's global operations. The operations are staffed out of India locations and provide 24x7 assistance. The process combines voice and live chat services, supporting nine languages across two global delivery centers, and driving a 90%+ CSAT. In addition, the team is involved in the establishment of automation initiatives to optimize functional operations.



Sales, Technical, and Customer Support operations for a UK-based Wholesale Telecom provider

Infosys provides technical and customer support to the client's wholesale customers for the customer's telecom services through a combination of voice and chat channels. Independent operational teams offer services across the two channels and have been instrumental in driving RPA automation programs to reduce the cost of operations through effectively placed processes. Successfully improved NPS from -19 to +43 while delivering 30% productivity improvement.

Conclusion

A higher percentage of interactions between companies, prospects, and customers are moving to the online channel, enabling conversational commerce to become table stakes for your industry. A broad number of operations models are readily possible in conversational commerce, but how can you choose the right path?

We recommend that your organization have a Conversational Commerce strategy to guide you on whether you plan to expand existing live chat in your support organization or start from scratch. Creating a Conversational Commerce strategy begins with a complete perspective of your customer's journey, operations, interaction touchpoints, customer sentiments, and support expectations. When completed, it aligns and sets expectations on how the organization will engage with the customer and defines the five PACTS you aspire to provide across your customer's journey with you.

MEET THE EXPERTS



RONALD RAMSEY

Associate Partner, Communications, Media, and Entertainment Practice

Ronald_Ramsey@infosys.com



DAVID SAULS

Associate Partner, Enterprise Digital Practice

David_Sauls01@infosys.com

Infosys[®] | CONSULTING

consulting@Infosys.com
InfosysConsultingInsights.com

LinkedIn: /company/infosysconsulting
Twitter: @infosysconsltng

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For more information, contact consulting@infosys.com

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