

Customer. Customer. Customer. The mantra for 2022 success

 By [Wynand Smit](#)

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In a world defined by inconsistency and uncertainty, customer service remains a consistent certainty.



Wynand Smit, CEO of Inovo

The Salesforce State of the Connected Customer [report](#) asked 12,000 customers from around the world precisely what their expectations were, and South Africans replied with: customer service.

Now, this is not just delivering a parcel on time, or being polite on the phone, it's a blend of all the different elements that make up any customer engagement, from personalisation to experiences to convenience. As companies move into a 2022 fraught with economic- and pandemic-led complexity, success relies on connecting with customers in fresh and interesting ways, and on delivering consistent service at every touchpoint along the way.

Customer wallets are tighter. The market is volatile. And the future complex. This is why these are the trends leading the way when it comes to customer service and experience:

Trend 1: Convenience, please

Two megatrends dominated 2021 – the 'Great Resignation' and 'burnout'. People struggled with long hours, ongoing anxiety and incredible social and professional stress. The result was millions of people quitting their jobs and millions of companies left with empty openings that they couldn't fill.

People are fed up. Not just because of working conditions, but because they are exhausted and out of time. So, what they don't want, is to spend unnecessary time dealing with admin and poorly designed customer service platforms to resolve problems or pay their bills.

People want to manage their own lives without spending hours on hold. The Salesforce survey found that 90% of South Africans use online self-service, 81% use knowledge bases, and 72% use online chat and support services or dedicated mobile applications. They also want options when it comes to online shopping – buy online, fetch from the store; buy online and deliver on time – and access to goods and services.

Short answer: Make every customer experience and touchpoint as convenient as possible, and use any feedback to the contrary to refine systems until they are.

Trend 2: Personalised experiences

People want to be remembered. Sure, a giant retail outlet or convenience store has thousands of customers, but with the technology that's available on the market today, even a mega-store can address someone by name, offer them a personalised service route or connect with them on the phone.

When customers connect with companies, they want to know that their spend is valued and their input is important. If their experiences are smooth from touchpoint to till-point to end-point, and if the customer journey is free from potholes, then customers are more likely to remain engaged with the brand and trust it with their money.

As Gartner points out, customers want holistic experiences within interesting and integrated ecosystems, so tear down the siloed walls and build journeys.

Short answer: Build trust and connect with customers by personalising their experiences and building comprehensive ecosystems around each person.

Trend 3: Analyse, analyse, analyse

Yes, the data and analytics conversation is so common it's a bit like that uncle who tells the same stories at every family gathering. But as the technologies that enhance data collation and analysis become increasingly capable and inventive, so do the insights that they deliver.

If a company can tap into every customer communication channel and analyse how the conversations flow, then it can fundamentally change how it engages with customers across these channels. Using analytics across speech, email, and social media, companies can enhance their customer experiences by removing the obstacles or choke points that are impacting on customer service.

The added bonus here is that these insights can be used to assess where sales fall short, how to reduce customer admin,

and what platforms are best suited to servicing very specific business requirements.

In the financial services sector, for example, customer service has to meet rigorous regulatory mandates, and anyone buying a new policy or changing their data has to follow very specific steps. Often this results in longer call times and customer frustration.

But if chatbots and contact centres are combined, then the user could get their documents on WhatsApp while the agent talks them through the legalities on the phone. Or the customer has the option to start the process through self-service and then complete it in the bank or on the phone. Analytics can help fine-tune the process and ultimately help the organisation win at the very important first trend – convenience.

Short answer: Use technology to dig deep into the data and squeeze out the insights that can help refine process, product and customer engagement.

Trend 4: Empowerment

Customers want to be empowered. They want control over their lives and their admin. They don't want to be stuck at the office or at home staring at another email that says the same thing as the last email – unhelpful, time-wasting, frustration. The same applies to company employees who work on the customer front line. They want to be empowered to answer the customer's questions properly. They want access to tools that allow them to tap into the company knowledge centre and respond to questions intelligently.

Gartner predicts that around 60% of large organisations will extend their customer service technology and processes so they can pull disparate systems together to create a more holistic approach delivering the multi-experience strategy.

ABOUT WYNAND SMIT

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

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