

RETAIL



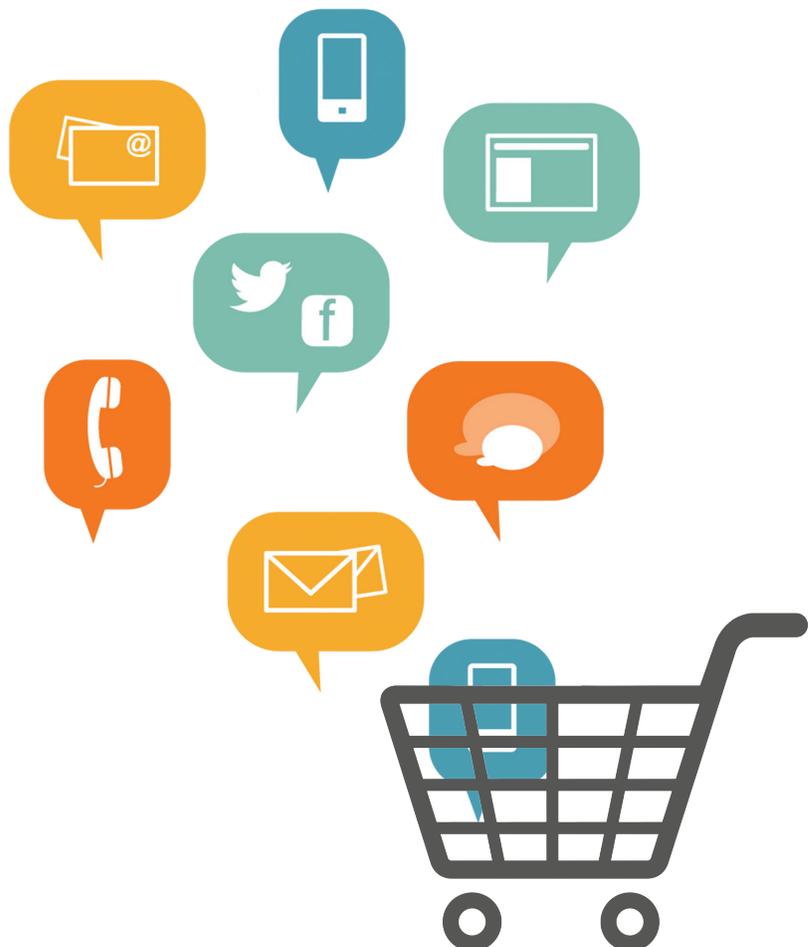
Eptica Multichannel Customer Experience Study



**500 U.S.
Retailers
Surveyed**

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1/ FOREWORD BY SHEP HYKEN

This is how it's supposed to work.

One night, I was on a flight from San Diego to St. Louis, with a stop and change of planes in Dallas. While in the air, we were informed that due to weather we would be circling the airport and landing late. To make us feel better, the captain informed us that most likely our connecting flights would all be late as well. His said, "Because of the weather, everything is backed up."

I decided to take advantage of the plane's WIFI system, and checked on my connecting flight to St. Louis. Sure enough, my flight was one of the only ones still operating on time; which meant I would miss the flight.



So, I jumped over to Twitter and tweeted a direct message to the airline. In less than 140 characters (although I later learned you can use more than 140 characters in a direct message), I gave them my frequent flier number and described the problem. Within a few minutes I received a message back that I was now protected on the next flight. Nice!

This is the way it should always work. If I choose to contact a company via email, Twitter, Facebook, or any other social channel, including the phone; I shouldn't have to wait to get my problem resolved.

If my "call is really important" to you, respect my time and don't make me wait. That also goes for email, Twitter, Facebook, or any other social channel through which I choose to communicate. I'm surprised how long companies make their customers wait on hold. Or how long it takes for them to respond to an email, Tweet, Facebook message, etc.

Within the pages of this report you will find some fascinating information. For me it proved that, for many retailers, customer service is just talk – or actually lack of it. Don't promise me great service and then take hours to respond to my requests, if you respond at all.

Case in point: In this report you'll discover the overall average response time when customers email a question or lodge a complaint with a retailer. For email the response is, are you ready for this, seven hours and 51 minutes! For Twitter and Facebook it's even longer!

If I wanted my question answered in seven hours, I would have waited seven hours to ask the question!

The best companies get it. They respect their customers and their time. They respond quickly – and with accurate information. Certain companies and certain sectors respond quicker and more accurately than others.

By reading this report you might find a potential gap in your customer service offering. Or, maybe you'll confirm that you are one of the better companies in your sector. Either way, you'll see the opportunity you have to add value to the customer service experience you offer your customers.

Shep Hyken, CSP, CPAE

Customer Experience Expert, New York Times and WSJ best selling author

Shep's latest book, "Amaze Every Customer Every Time" is now available, learn more at www.AmazeEveryCustomer.com

2/ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delivering superior customer experience is at the heart of business success, particularly in the highly competitive retail market. 70% of Americans say they are willing to spend more with companies that provide excellent customer service, according to American Express, while 91% of unhappy customers say they will shop elsewhere in future. The customer experience is important across every sector, but it is particularly crucial for smaller companies, such as online retailers, that are competing against bigger rivals.

Delivering a greater, personal customer experience can serve as a crucial differentiator, cementing loyalty and boosting sales as consumers recommend companies to their friends and social networks.

To find out how these mid-size and smaller players are faring, Eptica surveyed 500 U.S. retailers. Replicating consumer behavior, they were evaluated on their ability to answer routine customer service questions online, on social media, on chat and via email. At the same time, consumers were asked about how long they were willing to wait for answers to their questions across these different channels.

The findings point to a sector struggling to cope with the challenges of digital, multichannel sales. While some companies are delivering stellar results, others are poor – and few are consistently strong across every channel:

- Company websites deliver a strong performance, with the answers to an average of 65% of questions being found online. However, this means that over a third (35%) of queries aren't being answered on the web.
- Email provides the best channel for a response, with 73% of companies successfully answering a question. The average time to handle an email (7 hours 51 minutes), does not tally with customer expectations. 77% of consumers surveyed said they wouldn't wait for more than 6 hours for a response.
- Despite the talk of social customer service, companies are not performing well on Twitter or, to a lesser degree, Facebook. While the majority of companies advertise their Twitter handle, just 20% of questions tweeted to retailers were answered successfully. This was well behind the 54% of responses from Facebook. Both channels took an average of over 1 day to reply – far too long given that over 75% of consumers want a response within 2 hours on Twitter or 4 hours on Facebook.
- The fast growing chat channel seems to be starved of resources. While able to provide answers extremely quickly (4 minutes 28 seconds on average), only 35% of retailers were able to respond on chat, missing the opportunity to engage more closely with consumers.
- The research also measured consistency between channels, when it came to providing answers. While 14% of retailers delivered similar responses across 4 or more channels, 33% were completely inconsistent, pointing to a lack of a joined-up customer service.

If they are to succeed retailers need to benchmark performance and adapt best practice, not just from direct competitors, but from other sectors within the industry. Consequently this study includes comparisons between 15 different retail sectors and channels, as well as a best practice guide for C-level executives looking to measure and improve their performance.



3/ INTRODUCTION

As an industry, retail has been transformed by the internet and digital channels. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, \$83.9 billion was spent online in Q2 2015 alone – a growth of 14.1% Year on Year. It has opened up major new opportunities for retailers, allowing them to expand nationally without requiring heavy investment in physical stores. However, it has also dramatically increased competition, as every store faces a growing number of rivals, often offering the same or similar products to consumers across the United States.

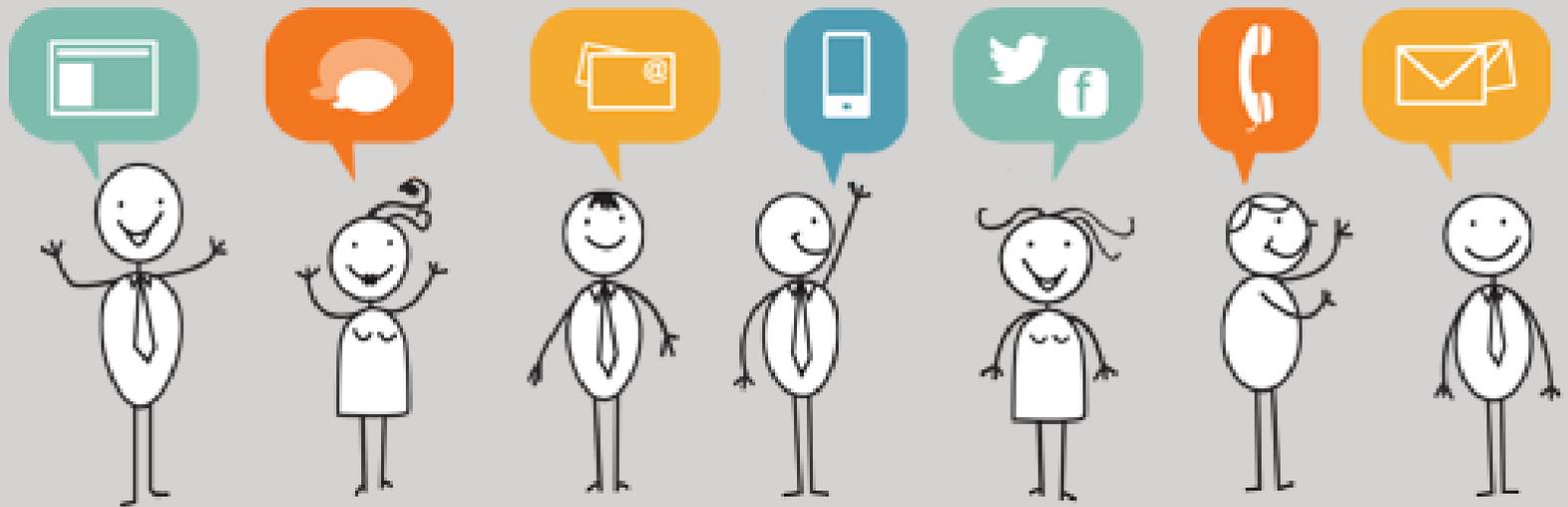
At the same time as choice has grown, customers have become more demanding. They are empowered by the greater range of products and suppliers they can now access, at the click of a mouse or the tap on the screen of a mobile device. Consequently they expect the highest levels of service from every retailer they deal with, large or small, if they are to retain their loyalty. They want to be able to deal with them on their channel of choice, quickly and seamlessly.

The rise of social media also provides them with a platform to deliver an unprecedented level of feedback on every company they deal with – an opportunity that they are embracing with both hands.

Research by American Express found that over 90% of U.S. consumers share their good and bad experiences.

In this competitive market, retailers consequently need to focus on the experience they offer their customers, across all channels, and to be continually improving the service they provide if they are to retain them.

Query volumes are increasing dramatically. For example, McKinsey found that the volume of Tweets targeted at brands and their Twitter service handles has grown 2.5x in the past two years. At the same time most people now use an average of six or seven channels to resolve customer service issues.



3/ INTRODUCTION

How are retailers faring? To find out Eptica researched the multichannel performance of U.S. retailers across the web, email, Facebook, Twitter and chat channels. The 2015 Eptica Retail Multichannel Customer Experience Study aimed to provide a real world view of the customer experience that actual consumers receive.

To supplement this analysis, we asked consumers about the level of experience they expected, specifically how long they were willing to wait for answers to their questions across different channels.

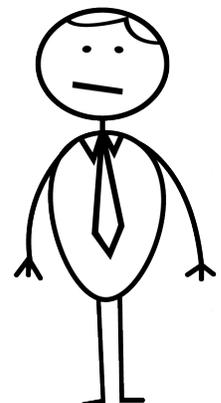
There has already been much analysis of the digital performance of the giants of the retail industry. Consequently the 2015 Eptica Retail Multichannel Customer Experience Study deliberately focused on smaller players in the retail space, covering the second 500 companies by turnover, as defined by Internet Retailer's Top500Guide.com. These independent stores are the bedrock of U.S. ecommerce, providing a combination of niche products and innovative ideas to consumers. In competitive markets they need to go the extra mile when it comes to customer service if they are to challenge the majors.

The study analyzed the responses of these 500 retailers, split into 15 sectors, when it came to the web, email, chat and social media channels. Researchers tried to find answers to ten sector-specific questions on each company's website, and asked a single question via each of the email, Twitter, Facebook and chat channels. These questions were deliberately pitched to be similar to those that consumers were asked, such as around next day delivery, returns policies and order tracking. As well as channel-by-channel performance, the research also measured consistency – were retailers giving the same answers on different channels or were they taking a silo-based approach to responses?

The key findings are detailed below, but show a mixed picture.

Email is the strongest channel for customer service, followed by the web, but companies are failing to embrace social customer service. Some companies and sectors score highly, others are trailing behind. The risk for these retailers is that as customer expectations continually rise, they will be overtaken by competitors, losing market share and potentially putting them out of business.

Most people now use an average of six or seven channels to resolve customer service issues...



4/ KEY FINDINGS

1 EMAIL PROVIDES BEST CHANNEL FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

For consumers that want a fast, accurate response to their question, the Study found that email is overwhelmingly the best channel. 99% of companies surveyed (494 out of 500) offered email to non-customers but there are still gaps in the process. Only 81% of companies responded to an email, meaning that 18% simply didn't answer – hardly the best way to deliver customer satisfaction. Nearly three quarters (73%) then actually answered the question successfully.

2 WEB CUSTOMER SERVICE – PATCHY PERFORMANCE

Getting answers from company websites seems to be a lottery. When asked ten basic questions online, some sectors and companies excelled, while others delivered distinctly average performance. For example, in the Mass Merchant category researchers successfully found answers to 80% of questions on company websites – yet in the Toys and Hobbies sector the average fell to just 50%. Six sectors scored 60%. Overall this meant that, on average, retailers answered 65% of questions asked online, putting the channel behind email.

3 SOCIAL MEDIA TRAILS EMAIL AND THE WEB

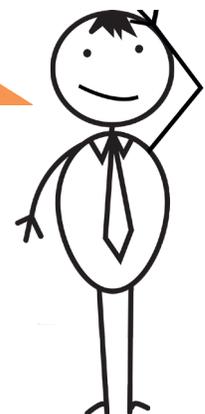
Much has been said about the growth in social customer service, using Facebook and Twitter to answer consumer questions and consequently improve the experience. However, the Study found that retailers surveyed were struggling to come to grips with social customer service, and were simply not delivering on their promises. While the vast majority had Twitter handles or Facebook accounts (87% and 92% respectively), many are not responding to tweets or messages posted on their pages. Twitter was particularly poor. Just 25% of retailers responded to a tweet sent directly to their official Twitter handle, and only 20% of all tweeted questions were answered successfully. That means that only 1 in 5 questions is being responded to accurately on Twitter.

Facebook proved a stronger channel, with companies replying to 64% of queries, and successfully answering 54% of them. Essentially, for consumers with a question, they are likely to get better, faster service on email, than social media.

4 CHAT

Chat is a growing channel, with more and more consumers wanting to use it for real-time conversations instead of picking up the telephone. It also benefits brands as it is cheaper than the phone, with agents able to handle multiple chats at the same time. The Study showed that the channel is still in its infancy – over half (51%) of companies claimed to offer chat, yet when actually being surveyed just 35% were able to provide an answer to the customer's query. The gap was due to companies switching off chat, long queues to access an agent or systems that simply crashed. This shows that greater resources need to be dedicated to the channel if its advantages are to be fully realized.

51% of companies offered chat but it only 35% had it operational...



4/ KEY FINDINGS

5 WHAT ARE THE BEST AND WORST SECTORS FOR RETAIL CUSTOMER SERVICE?

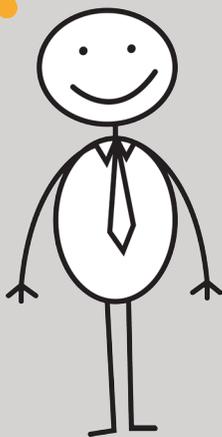
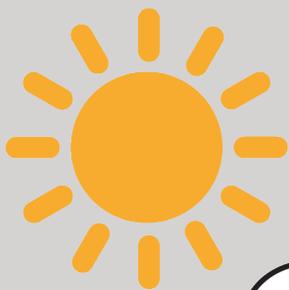
The Eptica Study surveyed 15 sectors:

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Apparel | Automotive Accessories | Books/Music/Video |
| Computers/Electronics | Flowers/Gifts | Food/Drug |
| Hardware/Home improvement | Health/Beauty | Housewares/Home Furnishings |
| Jewelry | Mass Merchant | Office Supplies |
| Specialty | Sporting Goods | Toys/Hobbies |

The numbers of retailers in each varied, from 108 in Apparel, down to 14 in Books/Music/Video. What is apparent is that different sectors seem to perform better on different channels, when it comes to delivering customer experience.

No sectors were top in more than one channel, although two (Automotive Accessories and Food/Drug) were ranked at the bottom in multiple channels. Health/Beauty led the way on Twitter, but was bottom on chat, reinforcing the idea of companies taking a channel by channel approach to service.

Best and Worst for Successful Responses



72%
Office Supplies



50%
Automotive Accessories

80%
Mass Merchant



50%
Toys/Hobbies

70%
Jewelry



46%
Food/Drug

41%
Health/Beauty

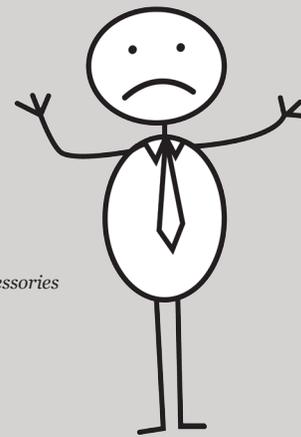


5%
Automotive Accessories

60%
Flowers/Gifts



14%
Food/Drug
Health/Beauty



4/ KEY FINDINGS

Bringing together responses on all five channels surveyed gives us a 'league table' that puts the Mass Merchant category at the top and Toys/Hobbies at the bottom. However, bear in mind that this flatters sectors that did well on the web (where ten questions were asked), compared to email, Twitter, Facebook and chat, where a single query was sent. Overall this equated to an average of 60% of all questions being answered within the Study.

| Overall ranking | Sector | % of all questions answered successfully |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1st | Mass Merchant | 68% |
| 2= | Books/Music/Video | 65% |
| 2= | Jewelry | 65% |
| 2= | Office Supplies | 65% |
| 5= | Health/Beauty | 63% |
| 5= | Specialty | 63% |
| 7 | Apparel | 61% |
| 8= | Flowers/Gifts | 59% |
| 8= | Hardware/Home improvement | 59% |
| 8= | Sporting Goods | 59% |
| 11= | Food/Drug | 56% |
| 11= | Housewares/Home Furnishings | 56% |
| 13 | Computers/Electronics | 55% |
| 14 | Automotive Accessories | 54% |
| 15 | Toys/Hobbies | 47% |

6 WHAT ARE THE FASTEST CHANNELS FOR GETTING A RESPONSE?

The two key factors for delivering customer service are accuracy and speed. After all, it isn't much use receiving a successful response to a question, such as around next day delivery a week or longer after it was sent. The moment has passed and the consumer is likely to have purchased elsewhere.



The fastest mainstream channel for answers was email, way ahead of Facebook and Twitter. While Facebook in particular was affected by outliers (3 companies took over 30 days to respond!), this backs up the finding that greater resources are being focused on email than social channels. At an average response time of 4 minutes 28 seconds chat was even faster than email for providing answers, but as only 51% of companies claimed to offer it (and many didn't have it working when surveyed), this hasn't been included in the speed league table.

4/ KEY FINDINGS

7 NOT MEETING CUSTOMER DEMANDS

As well as analyzing the real world performance of retailers, the Study researched consumer expectations when it came to speed of response. What this found was a significant disparity between what the majority of consumers demand, and what companies are actually providing:



EMAIL AVERAGE



77% consumers won't wait more than 6 hours for a response



FACEBOOK AVERAGE



85% expect an answer within 6 hours



TWITTER AVERAGE

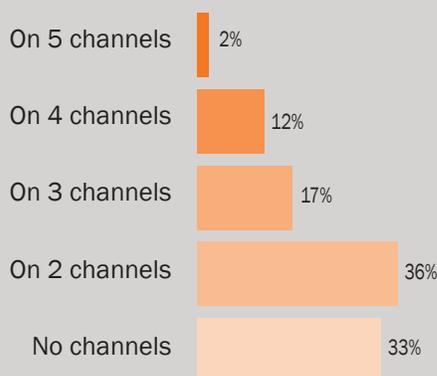


64% expect an answer within 60 minutes; 88% within 6 hours

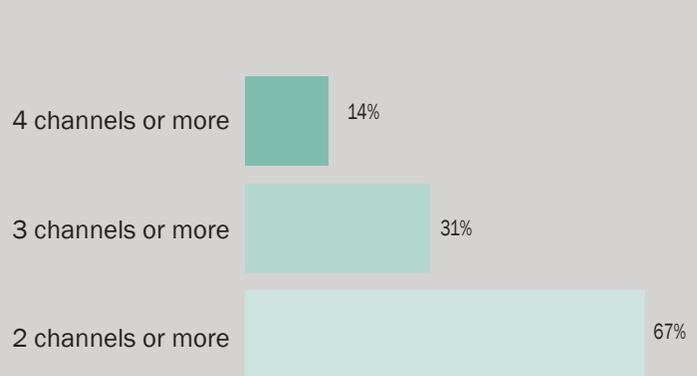
8 CONSISTENCY ACROSS CHANNELS

The Study also researched how consistent retailers were across multiple channels – were they giving the same answers on the web, social media email and chat? Overall, the Study found that companies were struggling to deliver consistent answers, even to the most basic of questions. Taking the five channels surveyed (web, email, Twitter, Facebook and chat), 11 companies (2% of the total) provided a consistent response across all of them. At the other end of the spectrum a third (33%) were not able to deliver any consistency, either because they only answered on a single channel or their responses did not match.

Consistency



Cumulative



5/ CUSTOMER SERVICE VIA THE WEB

With consumers increasingly shopping online, it is vital that retailers provide them with the information needed on their website, rather than forcing them to move to other channels to get an answer. Failure to provide an answer to their queries, such as around shipping or returns policies, is one of the major factors cited by consumers for abandoning their online shopping carts and moving to a rival. And they want this information quickly – over half (51%) of those consumers surveyed by Eptica would only spend a maximum of 5 minutes searching for the answer to their question.

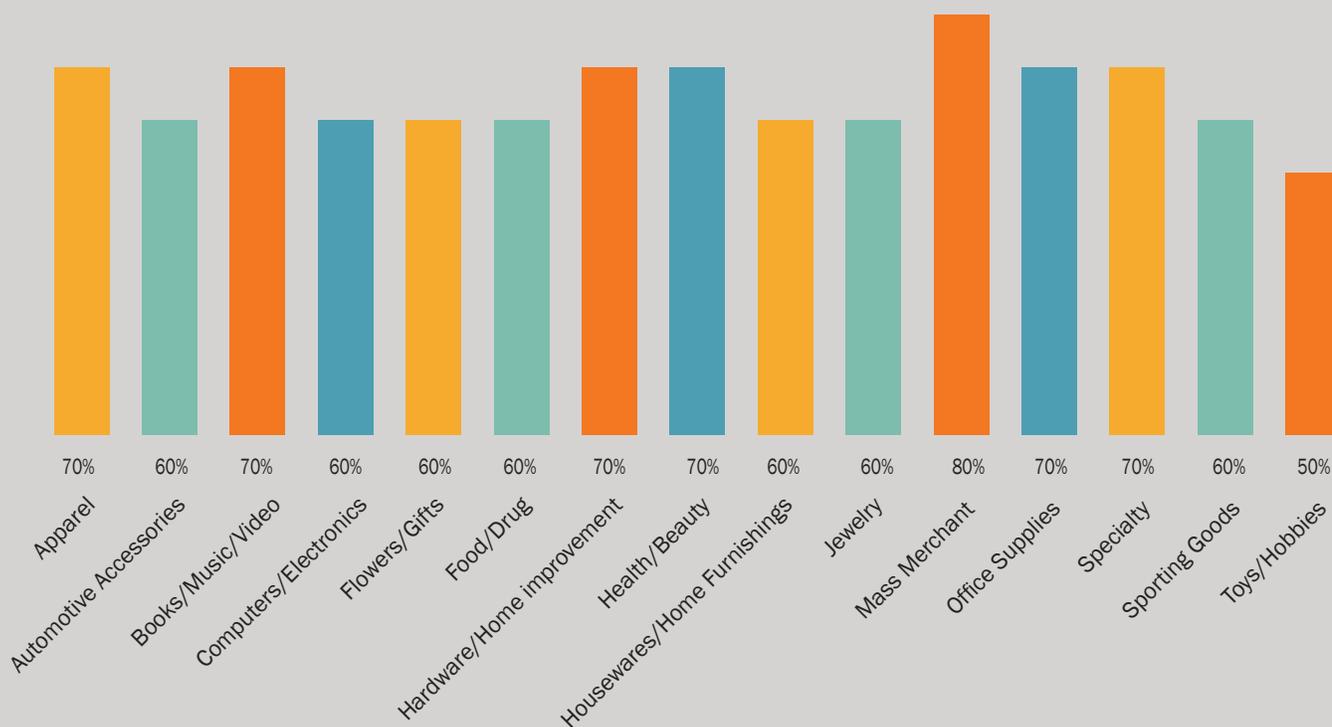


At the same time consumers don't want to wade through pages of information or use clunky keyword search functions to find the answer to their question. Self-service systems, that let customers ask questions in their own words and receive fast, accurate answers are therefore increasingly popular. Forrester reported that 76% of consumers now use self-service – even more than the 73% that use the telephone channel.

Delivering comprehensive, accurate web customer service is therefore a vital part of the overall experience. The Eptica study shows that more and more retailers understand this fact, with 34% companies able to answer 80% of questions asked online. At the other end of the spectrum 25% retailers scored 50% or below, pointing to growing gaps between the best and worst.

Overall, the study's findings uncovered an average answer rate of 65% of questions. The majority of sectors were clustered around 60-70%, with Mass Merchant (80%) and Toys/Hobbies (50%) bookending the Study.

Average web answer rate



6/ EMAIL AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Despite the rise of social media, email remains the workhorse of customer service, relied on by consumers who want the reassurance of receiving a personal, written answer to their question. By 2017 analyst firm Radicati Group predicts that 206.6 billion emails will be sent/received globally every day, up from 182.9 billion in 2013.



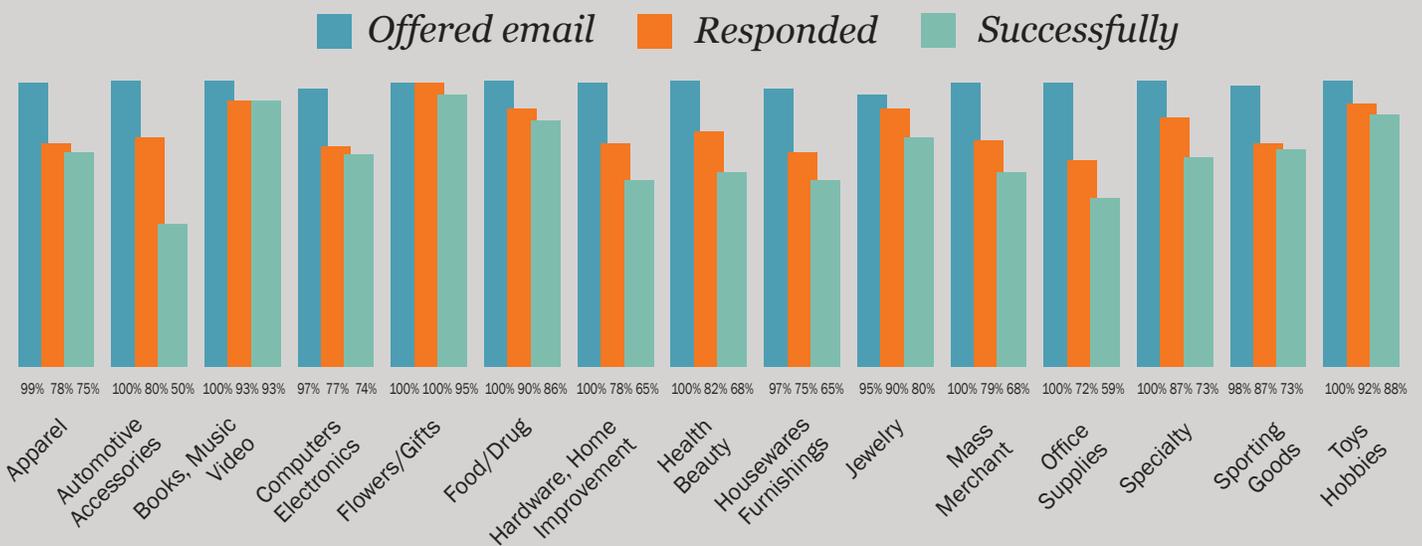
Growth is not just being driven by older consumers or traditional PC users. 69% of those born after 1990 (Generation Z)¹ want to communicate via email, while smartphones and tablets now make it even easier to fire off an email, wherever you may be. This makes it easier for consumers to ask questions or complain, in real-time, rather than having to wait until they return to their home or work PC.

Demonstrating its importance, U.S. retailers have obviously invested heavily in the email channel. 99% of companies offered email and, on average, 73% of questions asked via email are answered successfully. That means 365 companies delivered an accurate response. The average time to respond was 7 hours and 51 minutes – within one working day.

However, as on other channels the headline figures mask major differences between companies and sectors. For example, retailers within the Automotive Accessories sector could successfully answer only half (50%) of questions asked, despite all companies offering email, and 80% responding. Essentially this means 30% failed to provide an accurate answer to a basic question, despite going to the trouble of replying. By contrast, 95% of those within the Flowers/Gifts category successfully responded to the same consumer question.

Speed of response also varied wildly. Housewares/Home Furnishings took an average of 20 hours and 28 minutes to reply, compared to under an hour (52 minutes) by Automotive Accessories retailers. Still, as pointed out above, Automotive scored lowest for accuracy, showing the importance of balancing speed and thoroughness. Looking at individual companies, 71 (14%) responded within 10 minutes, with one answering within 48 seconds. Pushing the overall average up, 86 companies took over 6 hours to reply – one sporting goods retailer responded in over 9 days.

Analyzing consumer responses, the Study uncovered a major gap between customer expectations and reality. 58% of consumers expect an answer to their email within 2 hours, with 77% wanting a response within 6 hours. Only 64% of retailers met this looser 6 hour target, showing that many need to invest in speeding up their handling times.



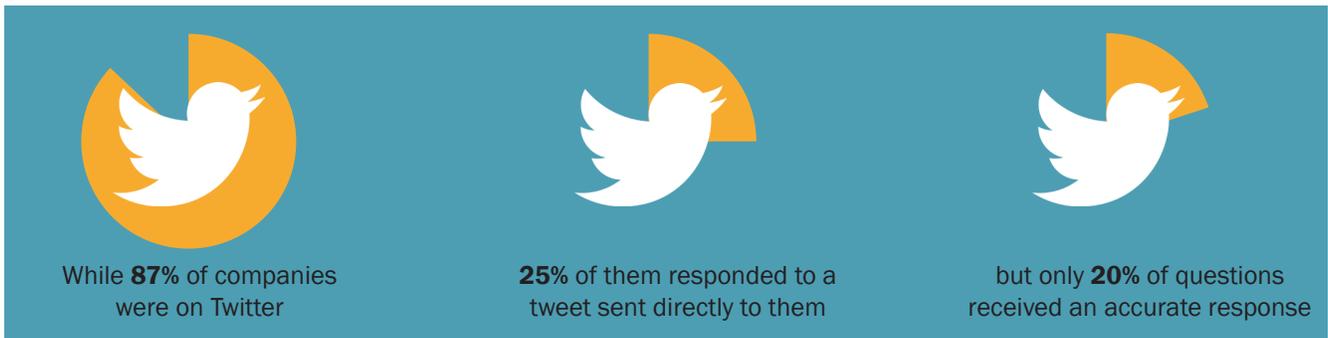
¹ Source: Forrester Omni-Channel Communications Technology Adoption Profile

7/ SOCIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

Over 1 million people view tweets about customer service every week, and two thirds of consumers who contact a company on social media do so for customer service. Failure to respond quickly and helpfully to issues raised on Twitter and Facebook can have a dramatic effect, with complaints being shared across the globe, escalating from a single person to delivering major damage to corporate reputation. At the same time, getting it right on provides correspondingly larger benefits. Consumers who have a positive experience on social media are three times more likely to recommend a brand, according to the Harvard Business Review, and will spend 20-40% more with that company.

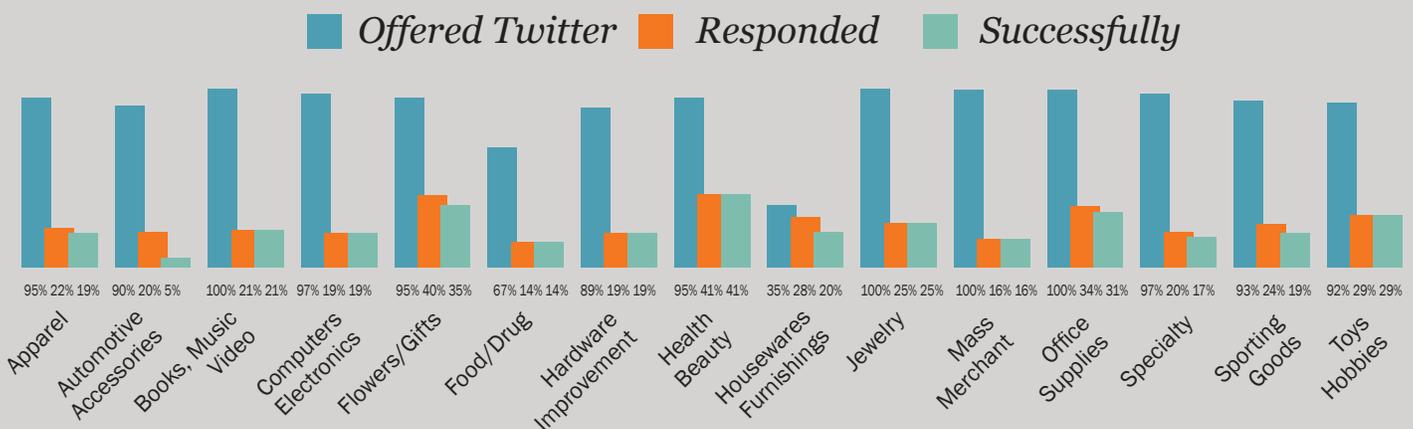
Twitter service – failing to fly?

Yet, the retailers surveyed seem to be failing to adapt to these new customer service channels, particularly Twitter. 87% advertised Twitter handles, but a woeful 25% actually answered a tweet sent directly to them. Just 20% provided a satisfactory answer. This enormous gap between advertising and reality can potentially be explained by the huge number of tweets sent every day to B2C companies (4.5 million according to Twitter’s own estimates), but risks tremendous damage to both brand and revenues. Not only will consumers not buy from you, they will use Twitter as a megaphone to share their complaints with other users.



No sector surveyed answered more than 50% of questions asked via Twitter, with Health/Beauty topping the charts with 41%. At the other end just one Automotive Accessories company (5% of the sector) was able to respond successfully, and this took nearly 6 hours. Books/Music/Video had the fastest average response time (58 minutes), but many retailers in the survey literally took days to respond. The Specialty category averaged 9 days 13 hours, 51 minutes, not helped by one company taking 51 days to respond! By contrast the fastest retailer took just 15 seconds to answer. Removing these two outliers, the overall average for Twitter reduced to 21 hours 7 minutes.

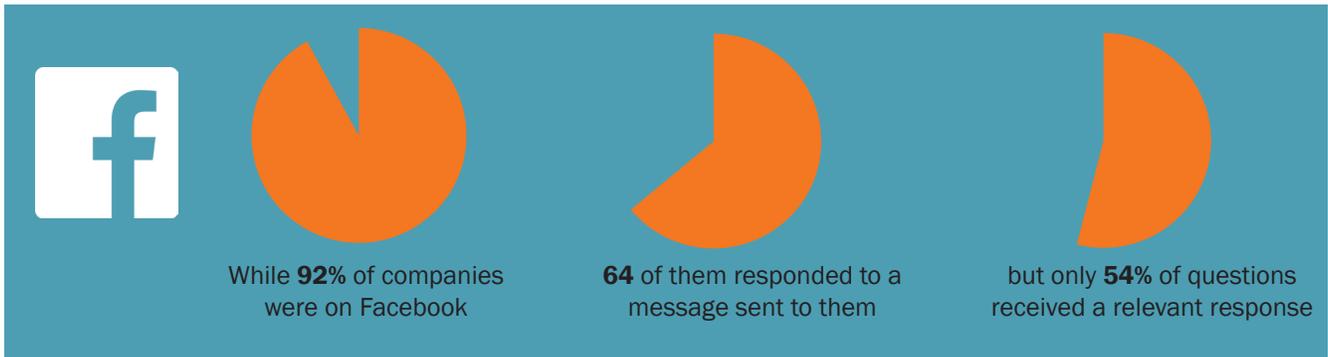
This is completely out of step with customer expectations. Not only was Twitter slower than email or Facebook, but it doesn’t match consumer requirements. The Study found that 23% of consumers expect a response to their tweet in 5 minutes and 51% demand an answer within half an hour. Only 7% companies met this second, more generous target.



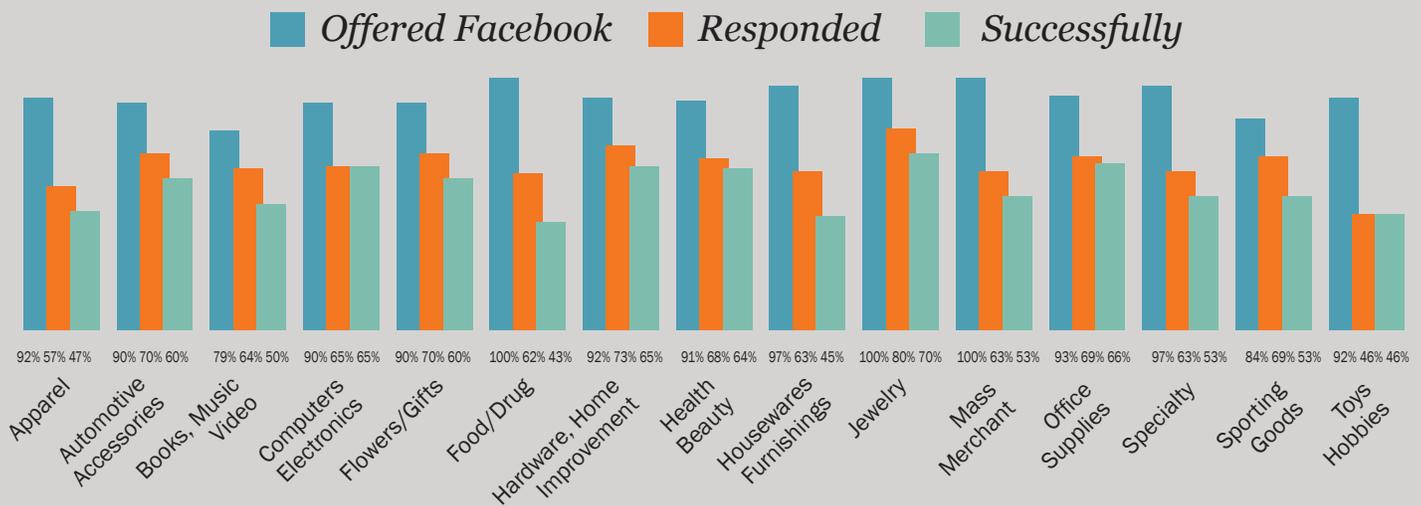
7/ SOCIAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

Do consumers Like Facebook customer service?

Retailers seem stronger on Facebook than Twitter when it comes to answering queries. More (92%) had a presence on the social network, and 64% responded to a message on their Facebook page. Unfortunately, accuracy is lacking – just over half (54%) successfully answered the question, below the rates for the web and email.



The Jewelry sector led the way on Facebook, answering an average of 70% of queries, ahead of Office Supplies (66%). Yet, at the same time only 25% of jewelers could answer the same question when asked on Twitter, showing a lack of integration between the two channels. Food/Drug companies only responded successfully to 43% of Facebook questions, with the sector also in the bottom three for Twitter, answering just 14%.



The overall average Facebook response time of 1 day 3 hours 47 minutes was well outside consumer expectations – 85% of consumers expect an answer within 6 hours. However, it was affected by a small number of outliers – four companies actually took over 20 days to reply to a simple Facebook message. At the other end of the scale, four companies answered in 1 minute exactly. Removing these extremes gives a more representative time of 17 hours 41 minutes.

8/ CHAT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE



While not a new channel, chat is rapidly increasing in importance. Nearly six in ten (58%) of consumers [polled by Forrester in 2014](#) had used chat, up from 43% in 2013. Chat's combination of ease of use, speed and the ability to have a personal conversation with an agent are all driving this growth. Those that have used chat are also happy with the experience – 73% were highly satisfied, while 67% said it was easy to use.

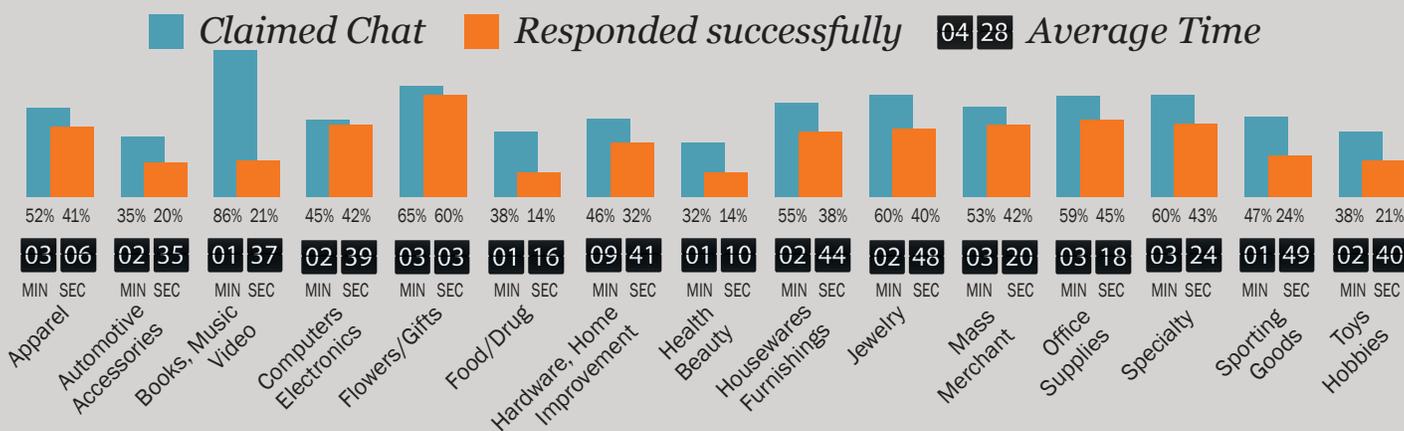
Chat also provides significant benefits to retailers. Not only does it increase consumer engagement as they get to talk to a human, but it also boosts productivity and sales. Unlike the telephone channel, a single agent can handle several chat conversations at once, without impacting quality. Additionally it provides the chance to cross-sell and up-sell within the context of the conversation. Proactive chat, which can be triggered by specific events or at certain points in the customer journey, gives even greater benefits as it reduces abandoned transactions.

On the technology side, chat is also very easy to put in place, with a wide variety of vendors providing chat systems that can be quickly set up and added to the retailer's website. However, in many ways the technical implementation of chat is the simple part of the project – what is more difficult is to integrate it with the rest of customer service and ensure it is a well-resourced, constantly available channel.

This appears to be where the retailers in the Study are facing issues. **While 51% of companies claimed to offer chat, only 35% actually provided answers on the channel.** In many cases there were long waits for chat sessions, or the technology crashed unexpectedly, pointing to insufficient agents being assigned to the channel. This not only brings down efficiency, but also annoys customers who want to use chat but are forced to pick up the phone or move to email.

Books/Music/Video was the most advanced sector in terms of offering chat, with 86% of companies claiming to have it available, but then failed to deliver in reality, with just 21% of its retailers providing an answer. In contrast, 65% of companies in the Flowers/Gifts category said they provided chat – and 60% then had agents available to respond to a question. Food/Drug and Health/Beauty were the lowest scoring for chat, answering just 14% of questions each.

Chat is also the fastest way of getting an answer – across the 175 companies that answered on the channel, the average response time was 4 minutes and 28 seconds. This masked significant differences in performance however. Health/Beauty retailers answered in an average of 1 minutes 10 seconds, while Hardware/Home Improvement companies took 9 minutes and 41 seconds to respond on average. Again, this was impacted by outliers – one Hardware company took 10 minutes and 16 seconds to reply, skewing the overall average, while just 14% of Health/Beauty retailers actually responded on chat. In contrast, one Apparel retailer successfully answered a routine question on chat in just 22 seconds. 4% of those companies that responded on chat answered the query in one minute or less.



9/ CONSISTENCY ACROSS CHANNELS

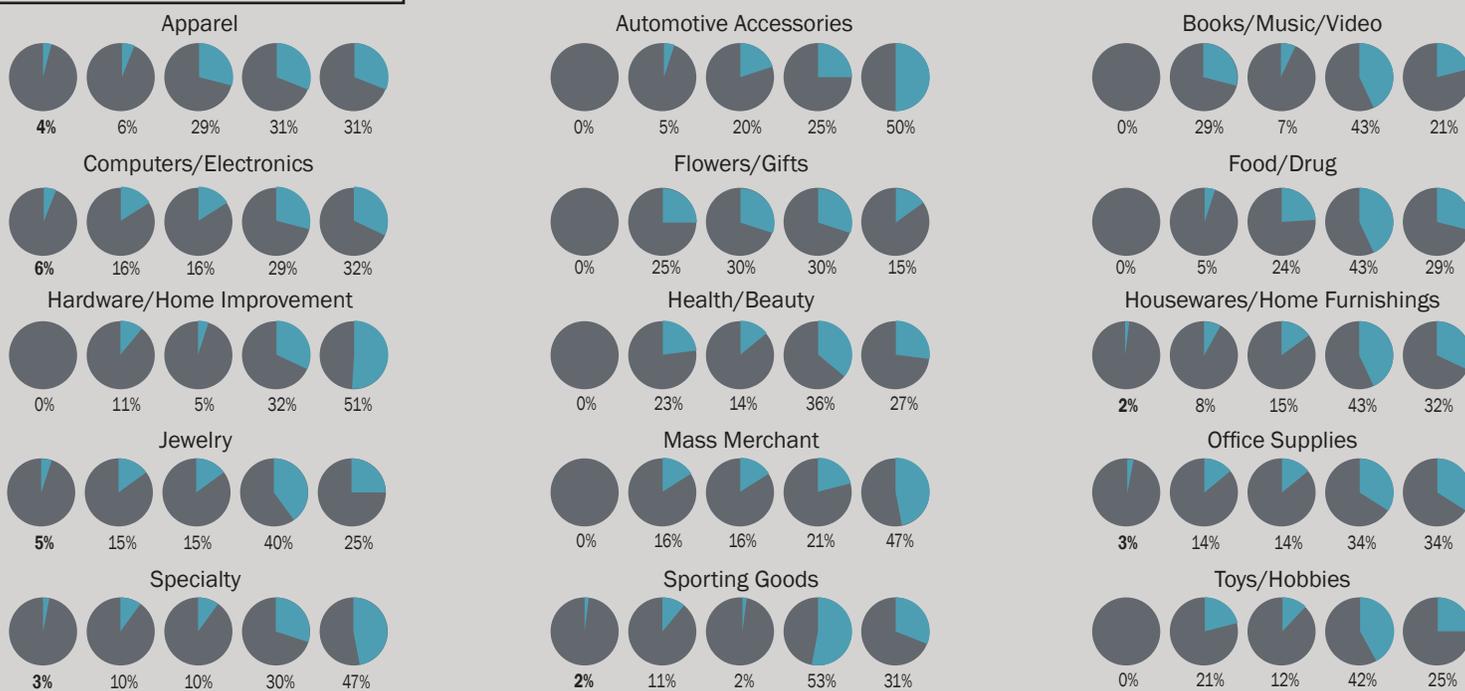
Delivering consistent, multichannel service is important for two reasons. Firstly, inconsistency frustrates consumers as they cannot be sure that they've received the 'right' answer to their query. Secondly, it adds to a retailer's costs. Consumers are likely to re-contact the company to check their answer, pushing up interaction volume, while running each channel separately, with its own knowledge base is inefficient and expensive. Additionally, giving an inconsistent answer might have a financial impact on the business – if agents answering on Twitter are not following company policy and offering free shipping, for example, it will hurt the bottom line.

On the positive side, U.S. retailers understand the importance of being multichannel, with 84% of those being surveyed offering customer service via email, Twitter, Facebook and chat, as well as their website. However issues arose when it came to actual delivery. Just over half (51%) provided answers across the four digital channels of Twitter, chat, Facebook and email. Essentially a large number of retailers are not delivering on their multichannel promises, meaning they are letting down customers, who expect a response that never arrives.

As discussed above, consistency is one of the hallmarks of successful customer service, yet the Study results point to retailers taking a channel-by-channel approach to answering queries. 2% of companies were able to hit the gold standard of providing a consistent response across every one of the web, chat, email, Facebook and Twitter channels, with a further 12% delivering on four channels. 4% of Apparel retailers answered on every channel, compared to scores of zero for eight other sectors.



Consistency across no. of channels



One third (33%) of retailers completely failed the consistency test, either because their answers didn't match, or because they were unable to provide answers on more than a single channel. There was significant variation between sectors – 50% of Automotive Accessories retailers had no consistent answers, compared to 15% of Flowers/Gifts vendors. This is likely to be caused by each channel being managed in isolation, by separate teams, without sharing information across the organization. In today's world, where consumers want to be able to move seamlessly between channels, this silo-based approach simply doesn't deliver the flexibility or service required.

10/ CONCLUSION AND TAKEAWAYS

The customer experience has never been so important to retailers, yet the Eptica Study found that on average, companies are struggling to meet the needs of their customers, both in terms of speed, variety of channels, and accuracy. Some sectors and companies are leading the way, but good practice is not universal and more can be done to improve performance.

By combining analysis of the research with its own experience, Eptica believes there are ten areas where companies need to focus on if they want to succeed:

1 MOVE TO A MULTICHANNEL APPROACH

Companies that scored highly on one channel failed to answer the very same question on others. This inconsistency shows that many retailers have not adopted a holistic approach to the customer experience, but are relying on multiple teams to handle individual parts of the puzzle. Bringing customer service together and sharing resources will improve the overall experience for consumers, but also reduce administration costs, helping the business itself.

2 MEET RISING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

At under 8 hours, the average time to answer an email seems like a strong result, particularly compared to the 1 day + to respond to Facebook or Twitter. Nevertheless, performance is not keeping pace with customer demands. Eptica's consumer research found that 77% of U.S. shoppers expect an answer on email within 6 hours – and 58% want a response within 2 hours. Nearly a quarter (22%) demand a reply within 15 minutes! Figures for Twitter and Facebook are even more demanding.

Companies need to therefore focus on continually bringing down response times, using technology to improve their operations and give faster, more accurate answers.

3 THE SOCIAL BLACK HOLE

Social media is the fastest-growing channel for customer service, due to its ease of use and widespread adoption. However, social media activities are often run by multiple departments (marketing, sales, customer service), each with different aims. Companies need to ensure that these teams work together to take a holistic approach if they are to avoid messages either being missed or answered inaccurately.

4 UNIFY KNOWLEDGE

The lack of consistency also points to potential failings in knowledge management. A single, centralized knowledge base is the foundation of good customer service, as the answers it contains can be made available across every channel. This helps agents and consumers get the information they need faster, while ensuring accuracy. A self-learning knowledgebase, that is easy to update with agent and customer feedback, will underpin the customer experience, bring down answer times and increase agent productivity.

10/ CONCLUSION AND TAKEAWAYS

5 EMBRACE CHAT

While it has been around for a while, chat is now coming of age with more and more consumers adopting it due to its personal feel and speed of response. It is more efficient for businesses than the telephone channel, as agents can take part in multiple chats at the same time. However, the research shows that retailers are not yet dedicating sufficient resources to the channel, with many not having it switched on at peak periods or forcing consumers to wait to access a chat agent. Given its benefits to both customers and businesses, greater investment in chat will deliver major improvements in the customer experience, providing retailers with a chance to cost-effectively improve service levels.

6 INVEST IN TECHNOLOGY

For retailers of all sizes the number of digital interactions is growing rapidly – and customers expect the same high standards of service whichever type of business they are dealing with. Trying to cope with customer service without specialized technology will no longer be an option, as it leads to inefficiency and frustrated customers. Look for a platform that can handle multiple channels, has a centralized knowledgebase, workflow that analyses incoming interactions and uses linguistics to understand tone and context to underpin your customer experience..

7 LEARN FROM YOUR PEERS

Online retail is one of the most competitive and dynamic markets in the world. Innovation is constant, and customer requirements are continually changing. Therefore retailers need to be researching what other businesses in the wider sector are doing, and adopting best practice to improve their own operations. They also need to learn internally – many retailers delivered dramatically different performance across individual channels, so must apply the lessons of success to every channel.

8 KEEP TESTING YOUR PERFORMANCE

Mystery shopper exercises, such as the 2015 Eptica Retail Multichannel Customer Experience Study don't require expensive consultants or significant investment. So test your own performance, and those of your rivals, by regularly replicating consumer behavior across every channel. It isn't too late to do this ahead of the 2015 holiday shopping season, in order to ensure that your systems are ready for the busiest time of the year.

9 THINK LIKE A CUSTOMER

Whatever channel(s) they use, consumers overwhelmingly want a simple, easy to navigate customer journey that makes it straightforward for them to find and buy the products they require. Therefore value their time by designing processes that reflect customer behavior, rather than forcing them to follow your rules or structures. This may well require closer integration between different channels and departments, but is necessary if you are to boost customer loyalty.

10 LEARN FROM YOUR CUSTOMERS

More and more customers want to provide their feedback and opinions. So analyze what they are saying, both directly and through the questions they ask during the journey. Use technology such as linguistics to analyze queries, including their context and their tone. This type of analysis delivers vital insight into what customers are looking for from your brand, which can be used to change how you operate and to ensure you are meeting customer needs.

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

APPAREL/ACCESSORIES

Overall score and ranking: 7th; 61% of all questions answered



70% of questions answered via the web



Highest 9/10 questions answered (1 retailer)



Lowest 2/10 questions answered (1 retailer)

19% successfully responded on Twitter



12 33
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (6th place)



Slowest Tweet:
3 days and 56 minutes



Fastest Tweet:
3 days and 56 minutes

75% successfully responded to email



05 32
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (6th place)



Slowest Email:
3 days, 4 hours, 1 minute



Fastest Email:
48 seconds

47% successfully responded on Facebook



02 01 32
DAYS HOURS MIN

Average Facebook response time (14th place)



Slowest response:
20 days



Fastest response:
3 days and 56 minutes

41% successfully responded on Chat



03 06
MIN SEC

Average chat response time (11th place)



Slowest Chat:
24 minutes and 39 seconds



Fastest Chat:
22 seconds

Companies Surveyed

39DollarGlasses.com, 6 Pack Fitness, 80sTees.com, Active Ride Shop, Adore Me, Andrew Christian, Ashley Stewart, Bag Borrow Or Steal, BareBones WorkWear, Betabrand, BlueCotton, Boot Barn, BootBay.com, BoutiquetoYou.com, Burlington Coat Factory, C.C.Filson Co, Calvin Klein, Captain Dave's, ChiefsSupply.com, Children's Wear Digest, Cookieskid.com, Coolibar, Country Club Prep, Dailylook, Draper's & Damon's, Dungarees.net, Express Design Group, Fashionphile, FlirtCatalog.com, Francesca's, Frederick's of Hollywood, FrenchToast.com, Gaffos.com, Galls, Genesco, Glove.ly, Gotham City Online, Hanes Brands, Heels.com, Hermes International, Hips and Curves, Historical Emporium, Hourglass Angel, Ibox Outdoor Clothing, Igigi, Inked Shop, Island Co, JGear, JunoActive by Junonia, KatydidCollection.com, Leather Up.com, Lifted Research Group, Lilly Pulitzer, LogoUp.com, Lolly Wolly Doodle, Long Tall Sally, Luggage Online, Luxury Divas Corp., Massey's Outfitters, Michael Stars, MMA Warehouse, Okabashi Brands, One Click Ventures, Peepers Reading Glasses, Phoenix Leather Goods, Planet Blue, Prep Sportswear, Queensboro.com, Quiksilver, R.G. Barry Corp, Ranger Up, Rock/Creek, Roots, ScotteVest, Shiekh Shoes, Shoes of Prey, ShoeZoo.com, ShopTV, Skye Associates, Slate Rock Safety, Sneakerhead.com, Sole Society, South Moon Under, Speedo USA, Steals.com, Stein Mart, StreetModa.com, StrongerRx Worldwide Corp, SunFrog Shirts, Swell, Tea Collection, The Red Dress Boutique, The Tie Bar, Topsy Elves, Silverhooks, Cuffcrazy, Crystal Case, True Religion Brand Jeans, Ulla Popken, US Trendy, Vince, Von Maur, WebUndies.com, WhatSheBuys, Working Person's enterprises, World Traveler, World Wrestling Entertainment, Yoogi's closet

AUTOMOTIVE PARTS/ACCESSORIES

Overall score and ranking: 14th; 54% of all questions answered



60% of questions answered via the web



Highest 9/10 questions answered (2 companies)



Lowest 1/10 questions answered (1 retailer)

5% successfully responded on Twitter



05 32
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (5th place)



Slowest Tweet:
22 hours and 54 minutes



Fastest Tweet:
6 minutes

50% successfully responded to email



00 51
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (1st place)



Slowest Email:
2 hours and 24 seconds



Fastest Email:
3 hours and 37 seconds

60% successfully responded on Facebook



19 05
HOURS MIN

Average Facebook response time (10th place)



Slowest response:
25 days, 23 hours, 35 min



Fastest response:
2 minutes

20% successfully responded on Chat



02 35
MIN SEC

Average chat response time (5th place)



Slowest Chat:
7 minutes and 21 seconds



Fastest Chat:
1 minute and 21 seconds

Companies Surveyed

4 Wheel Drive Hardware, Alligator Diesel Performance, AutoAccessoriesGarage, Autohaus AZ, Autoplicity.com, CheapCycleParts, Competition Accessories, Gearhead.com, JuicedHybrid.com, Lethal Performance, No Limit Motorsport, Pegasus Auto Racing Supplies, Performance Truck Product, Phastek Performance.com, RoughCountry.com, S4 Ventures, Shock Warehouse, Styles Logistics, The Eastwood Co., ZZPerformance

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

BOOKS/MUSIC/VIDEO

Overall score and ranking: 2nd; 65% of all questions answered

 70% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 9/10 questions answered (3 companies)  **Lowest score** 6/10 questions answered (3 companies)

21% successfully responded on Twitter



00 58
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (1st place)



Slowest Tweet:
1 hour and 59 minutes



Fastest Tweet:
25 minutes

93% successfully responded to email



05 33
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (4th place)



Slowest Email:
1 day, 4 hours, 50 minutes



Fastest Email:
6 minutes and 47 seconds

50% successfully responded on Facebook



03 23
HOURS MIN

Average Facebook response time (1st place)



Slowest response:
11 hours and 43 minutes



Fastest response:
4 minutes

21% successfully responded on Chat



01 37
MIN SEC

Average chat response time (3rd place)



Slowest Chat:
3 minutes & 23 seconds



Fastest Chat:
56 seconds

Companies Surveyed

Biblio, Books a Million, FYE.com, Harlequin Enterprises, Home Box Office, JustStrings.com, Lukie Games, Lulu Press, NorthShore Car Supply, Powell's Books, Shop PBS, Sourcebooks, The Taunton Press, Trinity Road

COMPUTERS/ELECTRONICS

Overall score and ranking: 13th; 55% of all questions answered

 60% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 10/10 questions answered (1 company)  **Lowest score** 4/10 questions answered (5 companies)

19% successfully responded on Twitter



06 51
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (6th place)



Slowest Tweet:
22 hours and 36 minutes



Fastest Tweet:
1 minute

74% successfully responded to email



07 50
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (10th place)



Slowest Email:
2 days, 20 hours, 24 min



Fastest Email:
1 minute and 34 seconds

65% successfully responded on Facebook



04 08
HOURS MIN

Average Facebook response time (2nd place)



Slowest response:
1 day, 3 hours and 40 min



Fastest response:
1 minute

42% successfully responded on Chat



02 39
MIN SEC

Average chat response time (6th place)



Slowest Chat:
7 minutes and 21 seconds



Fastest Chat:
1 minute and 16 seconds

Companies Surveyed

Abe's of Maine, Accessory Geeks, Batteries.com, Batteries Plus Bulbs, BatteryJunction.com, BrickHouse Security, Cable Organizer, CablesAndKits, Case-mate.com, Conn's, Creative Technology, Discount Electronics, Discount Two-Way Radio, FireFold, Headsets.com, HiDef Lifestyle, JayBird, Kingdom, Minisuit, Optimum Energy Product, OutdoorSpeakerDepot.com, Ritz & Wolf Camera & Image, RoyalDiscount.com, Sewell Direct, SF Planet, Shop4tech.com, Shopjimmy.com, Solid Signal.com, Super Warehouse, Wireless Emporium, Your Electronic Warehouse

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

FLOWERS/GIFTS

Overall score and ranking: 8th; 59% of all questions answered

 60% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 9/10 questions answered (1 company)  **Lowest score** 4/10 questions answered (4 companies)

35% successfully responded on Twitter 

19 58
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (9th place)
 **Slowest Tweet:**
3 days, 21 hours and 50 min
 **Fastest Tweet:**
14 minutes

95% successfully responded to email 

03 14
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (2nd place)
 **Slowest Email:**
17 hours and 12 minutes
 **Fastest Email:**
3 minutes and 54 seconds

60% successfully responded on Facebook 

01 08 11
DAY HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (11th place)
 **Slowest response:**
12 days, 21 hours and 43 min
 **Fastest response:**
1 minute

65% successfully responded on Chat 

03 03
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (3rd place)
 **Slowest Chat:**
9 minutes and 22 seconds
 **Fastest Chat:**
56 seconds

Companies Surveyed

American Meadows, Baudville, Beau-coup Favors, Beyond the Bloom, Big Dot of Happiness, Birthday Direct, Century Novelty Co., Church Hill Classics, CrownAwards.com, CTA, Diamond Candles, Emilie M. Accessories, Gourmet Gift Baskets, MagnetStreet, MoMA Store, PaperStyle.com, Halegrove.com, Spencer Gifts, The New York Times Store, Wine Country Gift Baskets

FOOD/DRUG

Overall score and ranking: 11th; 56% of all questions answered

 60% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 9/10 questions answered (2 companies)  **Lowest score** 3/10 questions answered (1 company)

14% successfully responded on Twitter 

05 14
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (4th place)
 **Slowest Tweet:**
8 hours
 **Fastest Tweet:**
1 hour, 1 min and 13 sec

86% successfully responded to email 

06 48
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (9th place)
 **Slowest Email:**
3 days, 2 hours and 46 min
 **Fastest Email:**
5 minutes and 30 seconds

43% successfully responded on Facebook 

18 46
HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (9th place)
 **Slowest response:**
4 days and 55 minutes
 **Fastest response:**
23 minutes

38% successfully responded on Chat 

01 16
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (2nd place)
 **Slowest Chat:**
4 minutes and 15 seconds
 **Fastest Chat:**
35 seconds

Companies Surveyed

CanadaDrugs.com, Candy.com, CandyWarehouse.com, Coffee.org, CoffeeForLess, Cookies by Design Ink, David's Cookies, Fairytale Brownies, iGourmet, Jelly Belly, Minimus, My Natural Market, Pharmacia Integrative, Plated, The HoneyBaked Ham Co, TheCandyLandStore.com, Tiger Fitness, Vinfolio, Wine Chateau, Zabar's, Zenobia

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

HARDWARE/HOME IMPROVEMENT

Overall score and ranking: 8th; 59% of all questions answered

 70% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 10/10 questions answered (1 company)  **Lowest score** 1/10 questions answered (1 company)

19% successfully responded on Twitter 

22 15
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (10th place)

 **Slowest Tweet:**
4 days, 6 hours & 20 min

 **Fastest Tweet:**
7 minutes

65% successfully responded to email 

05 57
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (7th place)

 **Slowest Email:**
2 days, 23 hours & 10 min

 **Fastest Email:**
1 minute and 51 seconds

65% successfully responded on Facebook 

18 03
HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (8th place)

 **Slowest response:**
8 days, 17 hours & 50 min

 **Fastest response:**
1 minute

21% successfully responded on Chat 

09 41
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (15th place)

 **Slowest Chat:**
9 minutes and 22 seconds

 **Fastest Chat:**
1 minute and 21 seconds

Companies Surveyed

1000bulbs.com, 1st Web Sales, A1 Pool Parts, Ace Hardware Corp, AirFilters Now, Appliance Zone, Backyard Pool Superstore, Bulbamerica.com, Bulbs.com, Cabinets.com, Cali Bamboo, Central Vacuum Stores, Cyberweld, Del City, Ecomfort Holdings, Floors To Your Home, Gump's, House of Antique Hardware, Jacks Small Engine & Generator Service, KitchenSource.com, Koffler Sales Co., Niche Market Concept, Overstockdeals, Patio Pacific, SolidSurface.com, Standard Tools and Equipment, Sustainable Supply, Sylvane, The RTA Store, Tonzof, Toolbarn.com, Toolfetch.com, Tools plus, Toolup.com, Travers Tool Co., VXB.com Ball Bearings, W.E. Aubuchon Co.

HEALTH/BEAUTY

Overall score and ranking: 5th; 63% of all questions answered

 70% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 9/10 questions answered (5 companies)  **Lowest score** 5/10 questions answered (3 companies)

41% successfully responded on Twitter 

02 00 27
DAYS HOURS MIN
Average email response time (13th place)

 **Slowest Tweet:**
9 days, 1 hour and 18 min

 **Fastest Tweet:**
2 minutes

68% successfully responded to email 

10 10
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (11th place)

 **Slowest Email:**
3 days, 7 hours and 37 min

 **Fastest Email:**
2 minutes and 57 seconds

64% successfully responded on Facebook 

15 05
HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (7th place)

 **Slowest response:**
4 days and 28 minutes

 **Fastest response:**
6 minutes

14% successfully responded on Chat 

01 10
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (1st place)

 **Slowest Chat:**
2 minutes and 59 seconds

 **Fastest Chat:**
2 minutes and 19 seconds

Companies Surveyed

800razors.com, BH Cosmetics, Bluemercury, Boston Green Goods, Burt's Bees, CosmeticMall.com, Diet Direct, E.L.F Cosmetics, EVitamins.com, FirstSTREET, FramesDirect.com, Healthy Directions, Herbspro.com, L'Occitane International, Lovelyskin.com, Natural Wellbeing, Nutricity, Ouidad Products, Scentiments, Skincarerx, Stockn'Go, WebEyeCare

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

HOUSEWARES/HOME FURNISHINGS

Overall score and ranking: 11th; 56% of all questions answered

 60% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 10/10 questions answered (1 company)  **Lowest score** 2/10 questions answered (1 company)

20% successfully responded on Twitter 

03 36
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (3rd place)

 **Slowest Tweet:**
1 day, 3 hours and 43 min

 **Fastest Tweet:**
1 minute

65% successfully responded to email 

20 28
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (15th place)

 **Slowest Email:**
8 days, 23 hours and 12 min

 **Fastest Email:**
3 minutes and 26 seconds

45% successfully responded on Facebook 

12 02
HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (4th place)

 **Slowest response:**
7 days, 4 hours and 20 min

 **Fastest response:**
4 minutes

38% successfully responded on Chat 

02 44
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (8th place)

 **Slowest Chat:**
10 minutes and 7 seconds

 **Fastest Chat:**
1 minutes and 7 seconds

Companies Surveyed

ACityDiscount.com, Bambeco.com, BedBathStore, BedroomFurnitureDiscount.com, Beyond Stores, Black Forest Decor, BlackKnight.com, BlendTec, Blinds Chalet, Capitol Lighting, ClickToShop, Cuisinart, Design Toscano, DesignByHumans.com, DesignWithaZ.com, DNA 11, Dorm Company Corp, Everything furniture, Everything Kitchens, Everything2go.com, FactoryEStores.com, Fifthroom.com, FoodServiceWarehouse.com, Goedekers.com, Golda's Kitchen, Harriet Carter Gifts, Humble Adobe, Inmod, JMX Brands, Kirkland's, Layla Grayce, LA-Z-Boy, Lifetime brands, Linentablecloth, Lovesac Furniture Co., MaxFurniture.com, Modern Line Furniture, Novica.com, ONEIDA, Online Commerce Group, OrangeOnions.com, OverstockArt.com, PatioShoppers.com, PaylessRugs.com, Pegasus Lighting, Polywood Furniture, PureModern, Renegade Furniture Group, RugStudio.com, RugsUSA, Seattle Coffee Gear, Stony Creek Brands, StrataShops, Sturbridge Yankee Workshop, Ten Thousand Villages, The Garden Gates, Tupperware Brands Corp, UGallery, VivaTerra.com, Wisteria

JEWELRY

Overall score and ranking: 2nd; 65% of all questions answered

 70% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 9/10 questions answered (4 companies)  **Lowest score** 3/10 questions answered (1 company)

25% successfully responded on Twitter 

01 05 13
DAY HOURS MIN
Average email response time (11th place)

 **Slowest Tweet:**
4 days, 23 hours & 20 min

 **Fastest Tweet:**
4 minutes

80% successfully responded to email 

10 10
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (9th place)

 **Slowest Email:**
4 days, 3 hours and 55 min

 **Fastest Email:**
3 minutes and 48 seconds

70% successfully responded on Facebook 

12 01
HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (3rd place)

 **Slowest response:**
4 days, 22 hours and 47 min

 **Fastest response:**
1 minute

40% successfully responded on Chat 

02 48
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (9th place)

 **Slowest Chat:**
7 minutes and 36 seconds

 **Fastest Chat:**
2 minutes and 41 seconds

Companies Surveyed

Adiamor, Allurez, Angara, Artbeads, Beckertime Fine Jewelers, Bob's Watches, Brian Gavin Diamonds, Charming Charlie, Claire's Stores, CuffLinks.com, Fusion Beads, Helzberg Diamonds, ItsHot.com, Jewelry Warehouse, Limoges Jewelry, Palm Beach Jewelry, Posh Mommy Jewelry, WhiteFlash, World Jewels, Ziamond

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

MASS MERCHANTS

Overall score and ranking: 1st; 68% of all questions answered

 80% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 10/10 questions answered (4 companies)  **Lowest score** 4/10 questions answered (1 company)

16% successfully responded on Twitter 

 **02 57**
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (2nd place)
 **Slowest Tweet:**
6 hours and 17 minutes
 **Fastest Tweet:**
40 minutes

68% successfully responded to email 

 **06 34**
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (8th place)
 **Slowest Email:**
1 day, 4 hours and 38 min
 **Fastest Email:**
2 minutes and 1 seconds

53% successfully responded on Facebook 

 **01 08 05**
DAY HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (12th place)
 **Slowest response:**
8 days, 3 hours and 2 min
 **Fastest response:**
24 minute

24% successfully responded on Chat 

 **03 20**
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (13th place)
 **Slowest Chat:**
7 minutes and 16 seconds
 **Fastest Chat:**
1 minute and 48 seconds

Companies Surveyed

3tailer, BabyEarth, Bourbon& Boots, BuyDBest, Clickstop, ClickStop, Commercial Bargains, DealYard.com, Dollar General Corp, Joyus, Modern Everyday, Newell Rubbermaid, Probus OneTouch, PulseTV.com, Shopko Stores, The University Co-op, UncommonGoods, VictoryStore.com, Web Commerce Partners

OFFICE SUPPLIES

Overall score and ranking: 2nd; 65% of all questions answered

 70% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 10/10 questions answered (2 companies)  **Lowest score** 3/10 questions answered (1 company)

31% successfully responded on Twitter 

 **01 10 31**
DAY HOURS MIN
Average email response time (12th place)
 **Slowest Tweet:**
5 days, 19 hours and 18 min
 **Fastest Tweet:**
8 minutes

59% successfully responded to email 

 **05 21**
HOURS MIN
Average email response time (3rd place)
 **Slowest Email:**
1 day, 5 hours and 18 min
 **Fastest Email:**
2 minutes and 10 seconds

66% successfully responded on Facebook 

 **03 00 48**
DAY HOURS MIN
Average Facebook response time (15th place)
 **Slowest response:**
43 days, 5 hours and 32 min
 **Fastest response:**
1 minute

45% successfully responded on Chat 

 **03 18**
MIN SEC
Average chat response time (12th place)
 **Slowest Chat:**
16 minutes and 6 seconds
 **Fastest Chat:**
1 minutes and 6 seconds

Companies Surveyed

Abacus 247, American Stationery Co., CardsDirect, Carrot Ink, CleanFreak.com, Crestline Specialities, Envelopes.com, Ergo In Demand, FindTape.com, Full Source, iBuyOfficesupply, InkSell.com, Invitation Consultants, Magnets.com, Paper Mart, Paper Source, Pens N More, Poppin.com, Positive Promotion, PrintGlobe, Recyclingbin.com, Restockit.com, Ryonet Corp, SeeJaneWork.com, Steelcase, The Betty Mills Co, US Markerboard, USimprints, Vetora

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

SPECIALTY

Overall score and ranking: 5th; 63% of all questions answered

 70% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 10/10 questions answered (1 company)  **Lowest score** 1/10 questions answered (1 company)

17% successfully responded on Twitter 

 **09** **13** **51**
DAY HOURS MIN

Average email response time (15th place)



Slowest Tweet:
51 days, 17 hours and 2 min



Fastest Tweet:
36 minutes

73% successfully responded to email 

 **10** **54**
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (13th place)



Slowest Email:
5 days, 1 hour and 35 min



Fastest Email:
2 minutes and 39 seconds

53% successfully responded on Facebook 

 **14** **32**
HOURS MIN

Average Facebook response time (6th place)



Slowest response:
4 days, 8 hours and 30 min



Fastest response:
10 minutes and 21 seconds

43% successfully responded on Chat 

 **03** **24**
MIN SEC

Average chat response time (14th place)



Slowest Chat:
15 minutes and 20 seconds



Fastest Chat:
1 minutes and 55 seconds

Companies Surveyed

Albee Baby, Bulkreefsupply.com, Calendar Holdings, Christmas Central, CPA.com, Crucial Vacuum, DogIDs.com, AmazingLights, Equipatron, ESpecial Needs, Fahrney's Pens, Global Sugar Art, Gotham Cigars, Gulf Coast Pet Supplies, Highland Products Group (ParkExpress), Home Brew Ohio, Jeffers, Medals of America, Muttropolis, PetEdge, Quality Home Systems, SmackTom.com, SmokingPipes.com, The Knot Shop, TicketPrinting.com, U.S. Patriot, UScutter, ValuePetSupplies.com, VetDepot, WebyShops

SPORTING GOODS

Overall score and ranking: 8th; 59% of all questions answered

 60% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 10/10 questions answered (3 companies)  **Lowest score** 4/10 questions answered (5 companies)

18% successfully responded on Twitter 

 **10** **58**
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (7th place)



Slowest Tweet:
4 days, 6 hours and 16 min



Fastest Tweet:
7 minutes

76% successfully responded to email 

 **12** **42**
HOURS MIN

Average email response time (14th place)



Slowest Email:
9 days, 2 hours and 19 min



Fastest Email:
1 minute and 39 seconds

53% successfully responded on Facebook 

 **01** **12** **58**
DAY HOURS MIN

Average Facebook response time (13th place)



Slowest response:
30 days, 14 hours and 16 min



Fastest response:
2 minutes

24% successfully responded on Chat 

 **01** **49**
MIN SEC

Average chat response time (4th place)



Slowest Chat:
5 minutes and 41 seconds



Fastest Chat:
51 seconds

Companies Surveyed

2nd Wind Exercise Equipment, 3balls.com, Academy Sports + Outdoors, Action Village, Airgun Depot, Airsplat.com, Al's Sporting Goods, ANS Extreme Performance, Baseball Rampage, Beretta USA Corp, Best Kiteboarding, BikesDirect.com, BikeSomeWhere.com, Billiards.com, BTO sports, Burton, Campmor, Campsaver.com, Champions On Display, City Sports, Dazadi, Eastern Mountain Sports, eSportsOnline, Farwest Sports, GearUp2Go.com, Golfballs.com, GolfClubs.com, Golfand Warehouse, Hockey Shot.com, Mack's Prairie Wings, Modell's Online, Northern Marine Electronic, OnlineSports.com, Ozone Billiards, Paragon Sporting Goods Co., Rawlings, SportBikeTrackGear.com, Skis.com, The Coleman Co., Total Hockey, Velotech, WaterOutfitters, Wholesale Marine, Worldwide Golf Enterprises, Zephyr Sports

11/ SECTOR COMPARISONS

TOYS/HOBBIES

Overall score and ranking: 15th; 47% of all questions answered

 50% of questions answered via the web  **Highest score** 7/10 questions answered (4 companies)  **Lowest score** 2/10 questions answered (2 companies)

29% successfully responded on Twitter 

 **03** | **19** | **34**
DAY HOURS MIN
Slowest Tweet:
18 days, 18 hours and 48 min

Average email response time
(14th place)

 **Fastest Tweet:**
12 minutes

88% successfully responded to email 

 **05** | **47**
HOURS MIN
Slowest Email:
1 day, 6 hours and 45 min

Average email response time
(5th place)

 **Fastest Email:**
5 minutes and 39 seconds

46% successfully responded on Facebook 

 **13** | **05**
HOURS MIN
Slowest response:
4 days, 1 hour and 2 min

Average Facebook response time
(5th place)

 **Fastest response:**
8 minutes

21% successfully responded on Chat 

 **02** | **40**
MIN SEC
Slowest Chat:
9 minutes and 31 seconds

Average chat response time
(7th place)

 **Fastest Chat:**
2 minutes and 26 seconds

Companies Surveyed

Auntie's Beads, Beadaholique, Blue Ridge Product Solutions, Build a Bear Workshop, Daniel Smith, Fat Brain Toys, Fire Mountains Gems, Hancock Fabrics, Hobby Express, HobbyTron.com, Jimmy Beans Wool, Kidrobot, KontrolFreek, Leap Frog Enterprises, Marbles: The Brain Store, Oompa.com, Orion Telescopes & Binoculars, Scientifics Direct, Trainz.com, Trollandtoad, US Toys, Vat19.com, Vertana Group, Yarn.com



12/ ABOUT EPTICA

Eptica is a leader in multichannel and multilingual customer interaction management software, covering the email, web, social media, web chat, SMS and agent channels. Available on premise or as a Software as a Service (SaaS) solution, the Eptica Customer Engagement suite enables organizations to improve engagement with customers, increase efficiency and drive sales by delivering fast, consistent and personalized responses to their queries, through their channel of choice.

The Eptica customer engagement platform is designed around a central knowledge base, powerful workflow and Eptica Linguistic Services™, advanced linguistic capabilities that enable organizations to quickly understand the tone, sentiment and context of digital interactions and automatically deliver personalized service.

Today, more than 400 organizations across all industries and in 15 countries rely on the power of Eptica's platform. They include L'Occitane en Provence, Laithwaites Wine (Direct Wines), EasyRoommate (Vivastreet), TUI, Debenhams, New Look, The White Company and AirAsia. Eptica's continuing innovation and strong performance has resulted in the company's inclusion in Gartner Magic Quadrants for the last five years.

For more information visit www.eptica.com, connect with us on LinkedIn, follow us on Twitter, or read our Customer Experience Blog.



APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

The 2015 Optica Retail Multichannel Customer Experience Study evaluated the customer service capabilities of 500 retailers companies in five ways – through the web, email, Twitter, Facebook and chat. The aim was to replicate the actual consumer experience to provide effective, meaningful results across each channel.

WEBSITE

1. Visit each website and look for answers for each of the ten (sector-specific) questions.
2. Record the answer – score 1 for a complete answer, 0 for not found or ½ for partial answer.
3. Spend at least 2 minutes searching per question.

EMAIL

1. Visit each website, search for email option
2. Email single question if possible, note down if no email option.
3. Record if receive auto-response email.
4. Record if auto-response provides a time frame within which the question will be answered.
5. Record the time taken to respond – was it within the promised timeframe?
6. Did the response answer the question - score 1 for a complete answer, 0 for not found or ½ for partial answer.

TWITTER

1. Visit each website or record if there is a link to the company presence on Twitter.
2. Go to Twitter and tweet the company directly with the single question.
3. Record the time taken to get a response.
4. Did the response answer the question - score 1 for a complete answer, 0 for not found or ½ for partial answer
5. Time the session from first tweet to end.
6. Compare the Twitter answer with those received via the web, chat, Facebook and email. Were they consistent? Score five if consistent across all five channels, four for four channels, three for three channels, two for two channels and zero if all answers are different.

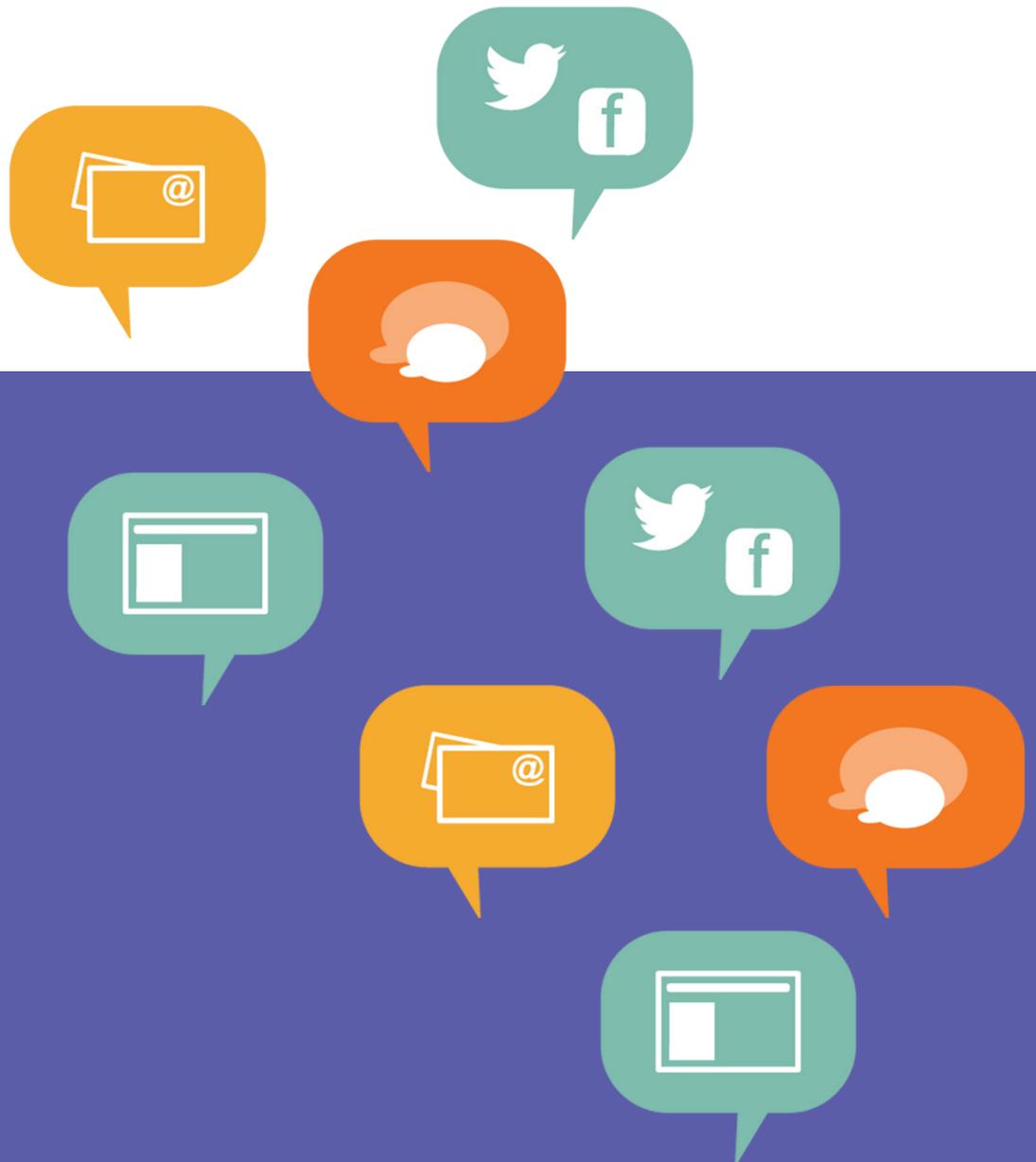
FACEBOOK

1. Visit each website or record if there is a link to the company Facebook page.
2. Go to Facebook and send the single question as a message.
3. Record the time taken to get a response.
4. Did the response answer the question - score 1 for a complete answer, 0 for not found or ½ for partial answer.
5. Time the session from first tweet to end.
6. Compare the Facebook answer with those received via the web, chat, Twitter and email. Were they consistent? Score five if consistent across all five channels, four for four channels, three for three channels, two for two channels and zero if all answers are different.

CHAT

1. Visit each website, search for chat option.
2. Note down if there is chat or not.
3. Start chat session and ask single question.
4. Time the session from initiation of conversation to end.
5. Record whether you were given the option to have the conversation emailed to you (if so, request this).
6. Did the response answer the question? Score 1 for a complete answer, 0 for no or ½ for partial answer
7. Compare the chat answer with those received via the web, Facebook, Twitter and email. Were they consistent? Score five if consistent across all five channels, four for four channels, three for three channels, two for two channels and zero if all answers are different.

The research across all five channels was carried out in Q3 2015. Consumer research on channel expectations, was conducted by Toluna with 1,000 U.S. consumers in October 2015.



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