2020 STATE OF CONVERSATIONAL MARKETING

Accelerating Revenue with Conversational Marketing to Deliver Exceptional Customer Experiences
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INTRODUCTION

The customer experience is continuously shifting. Amidst the waves of digital transformation and workforce innovation, both amplified by the coronavirus pandemic, B2B companies are faced with a future-defining decision: sink or swim. To sink is to continue like nothing in even the last 5 years has changed. Whereas to swim is to adapt, embrace digitization, and transform the way you approach the customer experience.

Buyer enablement, customer success, revenue acceleration – in the digital age, this all relies on so much more than random acts of marketing and unsolicited sales calls. And today’s frictionless digital experiences have completely redefined what your customers expect to experience as they progress throughout the increasingly complex stages of the customer journey.

“The B2B environment will be more complex with knowledgeable customers dictating the experience.”
Source: Walker

To lead the customer-first revolution, B2B organizations require a solution that enables a customer-first approach. Enter: Conversational Marketing.

In this research report, you’ll discover how today’s customer experience has evolved, how your customer expectations have grown, and how businesses like yours are accelerating revenue and achieving a customer-first approach with Conversational Marketing.
Methodology

To further understand the state of Conversational Marketing in B2B, Drift and Heinz Marketing conducted a survey in July 2020. The following data comes from 538 B2B professionals across multiple experience levels, company sizes, and industries.

Respondent Breakdown

Key Findings

Traditional digital B2B experiences are noisy, chaotic, and poor for the customer.

Today’s digital B2B landscape is increasingly noisy, chaotic, and highly irrelevant for today’s savvy digital customers. 53% of respondents feel frustrated by receiving too many irrelevant ads and emails from B2B companies; 36% feel they can't get answers to simple questions; and 35% say that services typically feel impersonal.
And these frustrations continue to grow. Since 2019, our data shows that:

- Frustrations with unresponsive brands on social or email grew **5.7x**.
- Frustrations with services feeling impersonal grew **2x**.
- Frustrations with having to deal with poor quality online forms grew **1.6x**.
- Frustrations with a lack of service outside of normal operating hours grew **1.4x**.
- The number of people who have not experienced any of these frustrations fell **by nearly half** in the past year.

For B2B businesses to succeed in this network of increasing complexity and chaos, sellers and marketers must do all that they can to remove friction from and add clarity to the customer experience. **Gartner** says it best:

> “With more information, options, and people involved in a buying process, buyers are paralyzed when trying to move forward.” And now, more than ever, “sales [and marketing] teams must affirm customers’ confidence in their decisions to drive account growth.”

**Immediacy isn’t just an advantage – it’s a necessity.**

33% of consumers would recommend a brand that provides a quick, yet **ineffective** response (**Nielsen–McKinsey via HBR**). As buyers grow ever-busier, the need for speed and immediacy across communication channels becomes paramount, demonstrating to your buyers that they’re not just another blip on the screen, but that they are truly valued and important.

When our survey asked about expectations in response times, the results helped further confirm these trends.

46% of respondents reported that they expect a response within 5 seconds or less when using a chatbot; 43% expect the same using online live chat; and 33% when using a phone or video call. In fact, this need for immediacy grew across the board averaging an increase of 25%. And expectations even rose 33% over the last year for inherently sluggish web forms.

Immediacy isn’t just an advantage – it’s a core necessity for buyers and customers to want to continue communicating and engaging with your business.
Expertise, resolution, and ease of use are top priorities for users of Conversational Marketing solutions.

For 49% of respondents, the most important factor in having a positive experience with a Conversational Marketing solution is getting quick, detailed, and expert answers to their questions. 36% also believe it’s important to get complaints and issues resolved quickly; and 29% say it’s important the solution is friendly, approachable, and easy to communicate with.

As we discovered above, the need for immediacy to deliver positive experiences is also seen here in both response times and issue resolution. And according to PWC, 60% of consumers said they'd stop doing business with a brand if the service they received was not friendly. Therefore, it’s crucial to offer quick, friendly, and knowledgeable responses as you converse with your buyers.

Inaccurate information and slow response times stop the customer journey in its tracks.

Poor experiences with Conversational Marketing solutions are not only bad for your buyers, but also disastrous for your business.

59% of respondents would stop using a Conversational Marketing solution if it provided inaccurate information or didn't answer their question adequately – a trend that grew by 45% since 2019. And 51% would stop engaging if the solution was too slow to respond, further echoing that growing need for immediacy.

It takes 12 positive customer experiences to make up for just a single negative experience. And with those kinds of odds, ensuring your Conversational Marketing capabilities are tried, tested, and refined is vital to your long-term success.

Conversational Marketing solutions play vital roles throughout the customer journey

While it’s no surprise that a majority of respondents (71%) use Conversational Marketing solutions to get questions answered and issues resolved, these solutions fulfill other roles too. 56% of respondents use them to access content and resources; 44% to book meetings; and 41% to make actual purchases.

In fact, between 2019 and 2020, using a Conversational Marketing solution to schedule a meeting, purchase an item, or add yourself to a mailing list more than doubled.
Employee engagement will make or break your customer experience

Lacking the right internal resources to effectively upkeep and manage your Conversational Marketing solution can leave negative impressions of your company on your customers. And when your employees — especially those who are customer-facing — are reluctant to engage with these solutions, they put the entire customer experience (and by association, the entire health of the pipeline) at risk.

Respondents report that their sales team typically lacks the willingness or enthusiasm to either engage in conversations (40%) or to follow-up with leads (39%) via their Conversational Marketing solution. And this lack of employee engagement can be dire for an organization.

According to Gartner, the business performance of organizations with high employee engagement outpaces their competitors with higher average revenue growth, net profit margin, and customer satisfaction.

The Implications of Our Research

In an age when buyers have greater access to resources, content, and data than they ever have before; when digitization of products and services is becoming a business imperative; and when the future of work is shifting to be entirely remote; B2B organizations must transform the way they capture interest, engage buyers, and convert demand to accommodate the new customer journey and the new customer experience that comes with it.
“Vendors are already experimenting with chatbots handling personalized offers and calls to action to customers, ‘but 2020 is the year in which this will reach scale,’ said Juniper Research lead analyst Nick Maynard.”
Source: CMO by Adobe

It’s easier than ever for B2B companies to launch multi-channel campaigns – mass emails, digital ads, paid media, purchased contacts – the list goes on. But at the same time, garnering the attention of qualified buyers and converting that interest into a loyal customer base has also never been more challenging. And today, what separates the leaders from the laggards isn’t the number of emails you send or the amount of digital ad space you purchase. **What separates the leaders from the laggards is the customer experience.**

And with the help of Conversational Marketing, B2B organizations are enabled to transform their own customer experience to start more meaningful conversations, engage more of the right buyers at-scale, affirm decision-making and priorities, and accelerate revenue with confidence through immediacy, accuracy, and empathy.

**“The Digital Imperative”**

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, we are in the middle of a colossal paradigm shift in the way we work, socialize, and engage the world. And now, as many organizations – B2C and B2B, big and small, new and old – transition the way they work to work-from-home, the online experience – for you and for your customers – matters more than it arguably ever has before.

We’re not only transitioning employees to work from home – we’re transitioning entire business processes to work remotely as well. And according to Gartner, the response to COVID-19 has only accelerated both the speed and scale of digital transformation, “escalating digital initiatives into digital imperatives.”

To accelerate revenue today, you must have the right digital infrastructure. Unfortunately, a lack of internal digital skills could jeopardize any plans of winning the digital transformation race. And this misalignment is only made more apparent as traditional online B2B experiences continue to fall short of users’ expectations, wants, and needs.
Traditional Digital B2B Experiences Are Noisy, Chaotic, and Poor for the Customer

Today’s digital B2B marketplace is noisy, chaotic, and highly irrelevant for today’s savvy digital consumers. And filled with intrusive ads, generic and jargon-heavy messages, poorly designed websites, and repetitive gates and hoops, today’s online B2B experiences feel (almost purposefully) designed for anyone but the buyer. And those gaps are only further widened by the polish and gleam of the innovative B2C experiences that have been created and fine-tuned with the rise of Netflix and Amazon.

When respondents were asked to think about the B2B products and services they use every day, as well as the frustrations they typically experience with those solutions, our data further illustrates these problem areas.

• 53% of respondents feel frustrated by receiving too many irrelevant ads and emails from B2B companies
• 36% feel they can’t get answers to simple questions
• 35% say that services feel impersonal

And frustrations with online experiences have continued to rapidly grow in the past year. In 2019, the three biggest frustrations identified were:

• Being unable to get answers to simple questions (34%)
• Dealing with websites that are difficult to navigate (30%)
• And finding basic details about a business (e.g. address, hours of operation, or phone number) (25%)
Thinking about the B2B products and services you use every day, which of these frustrations have you experienced in the last month?

In 2020, our data showed that frustrations around the inability to get answers to simple questions grew by 9% and frustrations around difficult to navigate websites grew by 8%. However, our data also showed massive growth in other areas. In the past year:

- 5.7x Increase in frustrations with brands being unresponsive on social/email
- 2x Increase in frustrations with services feeling impersonal
- 1.6x Increase in frustrations with poor quality online forms
- 1.4x Increase in frustrations with no service outside normal operating hours
- 1/2 Decrease in people who have not experienced any of these frustrations

The Future of the Customer Journey and the Customer Experience

Spurred by the response to the coronavirus pandemic, the B2B digital landscape is changing, and it’s changing fast. Simultaneously, the customer experience is transforming as well, impacting how companies not only generate, but accelerate revenue in our new normal.

As companies continue to lean into their contingency plans of remote work, to succeed long-term, they must transform their digital experiences to address the new customer journey.
Now more than ever, buyers are spending more time online, interacting digitally with businesses 24/7/365. And even after the pandemic subsides, 82% of company leaders still plan to allow employees to work remotely some of the time. If they haven’t done so already, this finding only validates the need for organizations to further invest in their digital, customer-first infrastructure, offering frictionless online experiences that truly resonate with their customers.

“Looking to the future, the B2B customer relationship will grow in complexity as customers continue to gain the upper hand and dictate the experience.”

Source: Walker

While B2B buyers are spending more of their time researching independently, less of their time actually meeting with potential suppliers (only 17% of their time, according to Gartner), and now have greater access to information than ever before, they are also incredibly overwhelmed with the sheer amount of information they have to sift through and prioritize.

“With more information, options, and people involved in a buying process, buyers are paralyzed when trying to move forward.” And now, more than ever, “sales [and marketing] teams must affirm customers’ confidence in their decisions to drive account growth.”

In the age of remote work, rapid digital transformation and information overload; business success and revenue acceleration rely not only on your understanding of the new customer journey, but on your ability to take action within it. Success today requires you to intimately know your customer, foster meaningful interactions, spark personable conversations, and deliver authentic, innovative experiences that build customer decision confidence in this increasingly complex web of the customer journey.

The imperative now falls on the shoulders of B2B organizations to unburden their buyers and affirm their decisions. It places the onus on B2B sellers and marketers to offer relevant, meaningful content when the buyer needs it — on their terms, through their channels — rather than when or how the company deems it appropriate. It’s about enhancing and empowering the journey of a customer through adaptive, intelligent, and personalized experiences.

And in 2020 and beyond, it’s these highly sophisticated customer experiences, created with the help of Conversational Marketing, that will truly separate the leaders from the laggards.
What is Conversational Marketing?
Conversational Marketing enables revenue acceleration through exceptional customer experiences. It is the fastest way to move your buyers through their customer journey. And with the power of real-time conversations and customer-centric data, you’re able to create meaningful interactions and authentic experiences for your buyers at every stage and when they need it. In turn, creating long-term, loyal customers for the business.

Instead of forcing people to navigate through clunky web pages, fill out repetitive lead capture forms, and wait days for a response, Conversational Marketing utilizes targeted messaging and intelligent chatbots to engage with people 24/7/365 whether you’re personally available or not. This means that you’re able to deliver content and experiences to your buyers at the moment they need it — even before they know they need it — making it easier for them to engage with your business, and easier for you to convert more of the right leads faster.

In the wake of COVID-19, communicating with your buyers and customers has never been more important. As your audience searches for answers, guidance, and leadership, Conversational Marketing solutions become a powerful way to help them navigate this time of crisis and uncertainty with confidence.

Communicating with Businesses Today
As more and more people are working remotely, and as face-to-face interactions fall away, B2B companies must double-down on their digital communications infrastructure if they expect to continue operating even just as well as they did pre-pandemic. As reported by Walker, “customers will determine the experience they want and will expect companies to enable that experience through various channels.” Meaning that if you’re unavailable on the customer’s terms, you’re missing out on a huge opportunity.
Email, Phone, and Online Live Chat Are the Most Preferred Means of Communication

In the last 6 months, when it came to how buyers most often communicated with B2B organizations, our data shows that email, phone, and online live chat were the most preferred means.

- 67% of respondents used email
- 51% also use phone and/or video calls
- 45% used online live chat

As a user, in the past 6 months, which of the following tools have you used most often to communicate with companies?

- Email: 66.7%
- Phone and/or Video Call: 50.6%
- Online Live Chat (Live Person): 45.2%
- Social Media: 36.6%
- Web Form: 27.7%
- Chatbots: 24.9%

EMAIL ISN’T DEAD, BUT IT DESERVES A TUNE-UP

The most notable dataset from this question is the high use of email. Because while many claim email to be a “dead channel,” our data showcases the opposite. In fact, email is the most popular form of communication used by respondents when communicating with B2B businesses.

However, while email is widely popular for buyers to communicate with businesses, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s the most effective channel for businesses to generate demand from buyers. But that shouldn’t diminish the value of email in the customer journey. In fact, it should be justification that email desperately deserves a tune-up.

For so long, B2B marketers have treated people’s inboxes like highway billboards. And eventually, what used to work so well lost its glimmer. Suddenly, you were faced with two sides: one calling for the death of email; the other clinging to what remained.
But what if all that changed? **What if you could bring the conversation back to email?** Because whether today’s top thought leaders like it or not, **B2B buyers are using email now more than ever to communicate with businesses.** The difference is that buyers are using email to start **conversations.** When for so long, businesses had been using email to **sell.**

**LIVE CHAT, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CHATBOTS HAVE GROWN INCREASINGLY POPULAR**

Our data shows that the use of email to communicate with businesses actually **grew** by 3%, alongside other communication methods. Online live chat grew by 35% and social media saw a 31% increase since 2019.

However, the most notable growth spurt came from chatbots, which saw a **massive 92% increase in use since 2019** – the largest increase observed.

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**Conversational Marketing Solutions Are Used by Buyers Throughout the Funnel**

So just how are today’s buyers using Conversational Marketing solutions? Let’s explore that next.

- A majority of respondents (71%) use Conversational Marketing and messaging solutions to get questions answered and issues resolved.
- 56% of respondents also use them to access content, resources, ideas, and inspiration
- 44% use them to book meetings
- And 41% use them to make purchases
“As a user, which of the following would you use a conversational marketing tool for?"

**THE USEFULNESS OF CONVERSATIONAL MARKETING SOLUTIONS IS GROWING**

And in the midst of COVID-19, the usefulness of digital Conversational Marketing solutions is growing. Between 2019 and 2020, using a Conversational Marketing solution to 1) schedule a meeting, 2) purchase an item, or 3) add yourself to a mailing list more than doubled.

"The thing I like most about Conversational Marketing solutions is that I can get my questions and concerns addressed immediately and determine whether I want to purchase a product or not."

- Anonymous Respondent
It’s Not Just about Communicating, It’s about Creating Positive Customer Experiences

Conversational Marketing solutions aren’t simply being used to communicate with a business for communication’s sake. They enable businesses to generate – and accelerate – more predictable revenue through thoughtfully-created experiences across the entire customer lifecycle. They’re the means of getting your buyers’ and customers’ wholly unique questions, concerns, and needs addressed, facilitating progression as they convert to become long-term, loyal customers.

Companies that actively improve their customer experience report an increase in their revenue (84%), increased customer loyalty (92%), and improved cost savings (79%), and according to Forrester, companies that lead in delivering these positive experiences can drive revenue nearly 6x faster than laggards.

Therefore, Conversational Marketing isn’t just a nice to have – it’s an essential component for generating revenue and creating long-term loyal customers. It enables you to meet buyers where they are – when they are – to address concerns, affirm decision making, and accelerate revenue by removing friction from the customer experience.
The Conversational Marketing Experience

In the age of the coronavirus pandemic, the customer-centric revolution has been accelerated. Brands like Netflix, Spotify, and Amazon are continuously raising expectations – redefining how customers interact with their brands online. And today, people want an experience that isn’t just frictionless, but enjoyable and personable.

The experiences created by B2C are now the same experiences expected from B2B. So when a customer visits your website, they expect the same frictionless, personal, and enjoyable experience they’d get from a brand like Nordstrom. **Unfortunately, these experiences are where B2B lags far behind.**

To keep up with skyrocketing expectations, you need to remove friction and give customers what they want at the exact moment they want it. Yet B2B businesses continue to serve up generic ads leading to unpersonalized landing pages. Buyers get lost in confusing websites and have to fill out lengthy forms just to get answers. They wait days, if not weeks, for replies, which often come back as stock emails. It’s a frustrating experience that does little to make the buyer feel valued or empowered to make a decision.

**Experiences with Conversational Marketing Solutions Are Mixed**

While many B2B organizations are trying to ride the customer-centric wave of Conversational Marketing, there’s still some work to be done. Because experiences are largely mixed:

- Only 44% of respondents say their experience with Conversational Marketing solutions has been positive.
- 28% say their typical experience has been okay.
- And the remaining 28% have had neutral to negative experiences with Conversational Marketing solutions.
As a user of conversational marketing tools, please describe your most typical experience with them.

- **Positive**: 43.7%
- **Neutral**: 15.2%
- **Okay**: 28.3%
- **Needs Improvement**: 10.6%
- **Negative**: 2.2%

**THE BAD**

“I find it very frustrating when these solutions give the illusion that someone is online, just to end up with a message like ‘We cannot answer this question right now. Leave us your email and we’ll get back to you.’”

“Many are too disruptive [with] pop-ups [being] too much in my face.”

“The people responding often do not have the training or knowledge to be helpful. They can only follow a script, but [lack the] real depth of knowledge to expand past that.”

Others fault Conversational Marketing solutions as being inaccurate, unhelpful, impersonal, and inauthentic.

**THE GOOD**

“Conversational [Marketing] solutions help in three ways: [they] expedite getting answers to my questions, [they] give me those answers regardless of time of day, [and they] allow me to engage by whichever channel I prefer.”

“Conversational [Marketing] solutions have been a prominent technology [that] enable us to know [more about] our customers in a very natural way.”

Other users with positive experiences praise these solutions for offering fast service, useful resources, instant responses, and relevant recommendations.
Inaccurate Information and Slow Response Times Stop the Customer Journey in Its Tracks

Poor experiences with Conversational Marketing solutions are not only bad for your buyers, but also disastrous for your business. Because when you let your customers down, it doesn’t just hit you once — it hits you over and over again, driving up customer acquisition cost and sinking customer lifetime value.

Conversational Marketing opens a lot of doors for your business, and it connects you with your customers in an instant. But it also adds an extra layer of complexity in the customer journey when things go awry. It takes 12 positive customer experiences to make up for just a single negative experience. And with those kinds of odds, ensuring your Conversational Marketing capabilities are tried, tested, and refined is vital to your long-term success.

What would stop people from engaging with you and your Conversational Marketing solution?

• 59% of respondents would stop engaging if it provided inaccurate information or didn't answer their question adequately
• 51% if it was too slow to respond

LEGACY METHODS ARE KILLING ENGAGEMENT

Only 22% of B2B buyers prefer to fill out a web form. And that’s even less than the number of people who’d rather interact with your reps directly. (Which, as Gartner found, is not something buyers so readily enjoy doing.)
This suggests that when your Conversational Marketing solution isn’t poised to handle the needs of your buyers – like if it delivers poor information or exhibits slow response times – your buyers’ likelihood to engage and convert plummets. And this leaves you with just a small minority of prospects who are then forced to talk to a representative (likely before they’re even close to making a decision) or fill out a clunky form – all to get the answers they’re looking for.

And the more friction there is, the more likely it is that your buyers disappear.

**PATIENCE FOR INACCURACIES IS THINNING**

People’s lack of patience for inaccurate or inadequate information is thinning. In 2019, 41% of respondents said that if a chatbot wasn’t helpful or if it provided inaccurate information then they would stop using it. And in 2020, we saw that number grow by 45%.

In fact, a lack of helpful information became an even bigger reason for respondents to stop using a Conversational Marketing solution than if it didn’t respond at all.

**Immediacy Isn’t Just an Advantage – It’s a Necessity**

Our data further confirms that immediacy isn’t just an advantage – it’s a core necessity for buyers and customers to continue communicating and engaging with your business.

When asked about expectations in response times, 46% of respondents reported they expect a response within 5 seconds or less when using a chatbot. 43% expect the same using online live chat. And 33% when using a phone or video call.

In fact, 14% of respondents even expect an immediate response when using a web form. And 10% when communicating by email.

As buyers grow busier and their decisions grow more complex, B2B organizations must do everything they can to lighten the load as quickly and painlessly as possible. In a study by Walker, it was discovered that “immediate gratification is not fast enough.” And that now and moving forward, “customers will expect companies to be more proactive, anticipating their current and future needs.” And part of that comes by being available to your buyers at the exact moment they need you.

**RESPONSES ARE EXPECTED TO COME QUICKER AND QUICKER**

Across the board, people’s expectations of getting immediate responses are growing across nearly every communication channel asked about.
The expectation of an immediate response through a chatbot increased by 10% since 2019. Immediacy of response via social media grew by 19%. And online live chat saw an increase by 21%.

Even more dramatically, email saw an increase in immediate response expectations by 45%. And the expectation of an immediate response via web forms grew by 33%. However, true immediacy with web forms is a virtual impossibility.

WEB FORMS SUFFER FROM AN INHERENTLY POOR EXPERIENCE

While it’s easy to generate immediate responses with chatbots and online live chat; and somewhat easy to do so by phone, social media, and email; web forms suffer from an inherently slow process that — even for the best of marketers — is difficult to accelerate or improve.
As soon as someone fills out a form on your website, their information gets logged in you CRM. The data has to then pass through a number of operational processes like lead scoring and lead routing, to then be sent off to — what’s most likely — a sales rep. That sales rep must then determine two things based on the form submission: 1) What the user is asking and 2) What kind of response is needed. Finally, an email gets sent back to the user. Hopefully this email has the answers they were looking for, but more likely it has a stock response and a request for a meeting.

“Many B2B companies still push prospects onto a contact form that looks like it was designed in 1999. This makes prospects wonder if the form submission is actually going to be seen by anyone… I'd suggest the entire marketing approach of many B2B companies lacks a focus on the customer.”

– Paul Entin, President of epr Marketing (via CMSWire)

And all of that can take hours or even days. And the user’s primary reason for filling out the form might not even be addressed. Talk about feeling unappreciated (which is also the number one reason customers switch brands.)

Unfortunately, that scenario is all too typical. And it’s a terrible experience for the buyer, one that’s completely devoid of interaction, personality, or commitment. In the end, the buyer is typically left with a bulleted list of meeting suggestions, unanswered questions, obvious frustration, and a wholly negative experience that’s unlikely to move the needle in a positive direction.
The Essentials of a Positive Experience

We’ve talked a lot about the typical experiences and expectations that come with Conversational Marketing solutions, messaging tools, and communication practices. But what about what makes these experiences worthwhile? What do buyers and customers value most in a Conversational Marketing solution? What do they prioritize? What do they deem to be most important?

Expertise, Resolution, and Ease of Use Are Top Priorities for Users

In 2019, respondents were asked about the benefits they expected to enjoy from using Conversational Marketing solutions like chatbots, and 24-hour service and instant responses were the top benefits expected.

However, in 2020, we positioned the question slightly differently. Instead of asking about what benefits users expected, we asked about what factors are most important to users to have a positive experience using a Conversational Marketing solution.

- For 49% of respondents, the most important factor in having a positive experience with a Conversational Marketing solution is getting quick, detailed, and expert answers to their questions.
- 36% of respondents say it is also important that their complaints and issues get resolved quickly.
- 29% say it’s important the solution is friendly, approachable, and easy to communicate with.
- And 27% of respondents feel it is important to have either 24-hour service or to be able to get an instant response.

As a user, which two of the following factors are most important to you in having a positive experience while using a conversational

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quick, detailed, and expert answers to my questions</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints/Issues resolved quickly</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness, approachability, and/or easy communication</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 hour service</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting an instant response</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving personalized results</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
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Delivering Positive Customer Experiences

As the digital transformation race continues to accelerate, it’s critical that the way your business communicates and engages with your buyers – and the way your buyers are able to communicate and engage with you – leans on a digitally-focused, customer-first approach.

Because in the golden age of digital experiences heralded by the likes of Netflix, Amazon, and Spotify, buyers have come to expect a certain level of quality and sophistication in their online experiences.

And for a business to truly excel in today’s chaotic, noisy, digital ecosystem, they must work to remove friction, foster authenticity, and promote personalization – all with the goal of delivering positive customer experiences that – yes, generates and accelerates revenue – but also delights, surprises, and engages buyers and customers alike.
The Business Case for Conversational Marketing

**Conversational Marketing enables revenue acceleration by creating exceptional customer experiences.** In a study conducted by Walker, the B2B companies that will find success in 2020 and beyond are recognizing the shift in customer expectations and experiences, realigning their resources to apply a customer-first approach, and focusing their metrics to include a holistic measurement of customer engagement.

Consider two different prospects.

The first is scrolling through her social media feed when a retargeting ad for your company pops up. She clicks it and goes to a page about a relevant product feature.

The second prospect, meanwhile, Googles a question related to your product category and stumbles on one of your blog posts, a helpful explainer article on the issue she’s having.

Clearly, these two people are different. They’re in completely different stages of the customer journey and therefore have different goals, behaviors, interests, and challenges. And yet, many sales and marketing funnels do little to separate them in order to personalize their experiences.

In fact, both of these prospects typically receive the same calls to action: Join our email list. Schedule a call. Book a demo.

Too often, as marketers and salespeople, we ignore what brings these visitors to our site in the first place. Since the dawn of digital marketing, we’ve given everyone who visits our websites the same message and the same experience—over and over and over again—no matter who they are, where they came from, or what they’re truly interested in.

**But with Conversational Marketing, we can do better.**
With Conversational Marketing, we can – and should – individually engage each buyer. According to Walker, “customers want to do business with companies that provide a consistent, informed, and superior experience across all channels of communication.” These are companies that account for each and every one of their individual, different preferences, histories, and reasons for being there. Now, we’re enabled to act like a Nordstrom personal shopper, rather than a cardboard sign at the front of a big-box store.

And when we’re able to deliver such great customer experiences, the rewards are huge.

**Conversational Marketing Solutions Play a Critical Business Role**

65% of survey respondents say Conversational Marketing solutions are valuable for their business’ growth and success.

13% of respondents without a Conversational Marketing solution want one.

The Effectiveness of These Solutions Is an Opportunity for Growth

However, while these solutions are highly valued in the businesses that utilize them, the way they are implemented presents an opportunity for improvement and growth.

We saw that only 43% of respondents with a Conversational Marketing solution believe they’re using it effectively. While 45% of respondents believe their implementation is being done somewhat effectively and 12% not effectively at all.
There’s a lot of opportunity to improve here. And while companies see the value in having a Conversational Marketing solution, implementation of that solution leaves a gap that must be addressed if businesses want to succeed in the new customer-centric, digital-first landscape.

Ready to optimize your use of Conversational Marketing? Drift’s Blueprint can help. Get the full guide here.

Conversational Marketing Solutions Accelerate Revenue Throughout the Customer Journey

Bridging the gaps in your customer experience with a Conversational Marketing solution can impact every stage of your customer lifecycle, offering each individual buyer a unique experience, catered to their needs and histories.

With the help of a Conversational Marketing solution, survey respondents have benefitted from:

- Learning more about their buyers and customers (57%)
- Generating a greater volume of high-quality leads (55%)
- Generating greater, more predictable engagement from leads and accounts (40%)
- Driving longer times on site and/or more pages per session (39%)
- Shortening or accelerating their sales cycle (38%)

Which of the following benefits have you experienced when it comes to implementing conversational marketing tools within your own business?

- Reduced customer churn
- Shortened/accelerate sales cycle
- Longer times on site and/or more pages per session
- Greater, more predictable engagement from leads and accounts
- Generated a greater volume of higher quality leads
- Learned more about our buyers and customers

57.1% 55.2% 39.5% 38.7% 37.5% 10.7%
A Company’s Website, Content Marketing Strategy, and Sales Enablement Initiatives See the Biggest Impacts

More specifically, B2B sellers and marketers identified their website (55%), content marketing strategy (44%), and sales enablement initiatives (37%) were most impacted by the benefits of Conversational Marketing.

And it makes sense: These are three of your most-highly customer-focused and customer-facing channels. And they are also three channels where your most meaningful customer experiences take place.

In what areas have you seen the most success from your conversational marketing tools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Success Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Marketing</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Enablement</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Ads, PPC, or Retargeting</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emails/ Nurture Programs</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Social Ads</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Marketing</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Marketing/ Post Sale Programs</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Initiatives (Pre and Post Event)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABM</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel/ Partner Programs</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conversational Marketing Enables the Delivery of Positive Customer Experiences

As our data shows, Conversational Marketing has the potential to significantly impact the way companies generate and accelerate revenue throughout the customer lifecycle. But from your website to content to marketing and sales campaigns, what drives this continued success?

Companies that have the greatest success in their Conversational Marketing initiatives owe their effectiveness to 5 defining factors:

- **Immediacy** by providing quick response times and answers (49%)
- **Integration** of campaigns and experiences across channels (29%)
- **Authenticity** by providing a more human experience (36%)
- **Accessibility** by enabling quick and easy access to content (33%)
- **Relevance** of messaging, content, and experiences (28%)

Providing these kinds of immersive, customer-centric experiences is made possible with Conversational Marketing solutions. And connecting companies with buyers in such significant ways enables greater engagement, frictionless interactions, faster close times, and longer-term loyalty and revenue.

Companies Are Seeing Satisfied Customers

The work companies are doing to deliver positive customer experiences with their Conversational Marketing solution is paying off. 63% of respondents believe their customers are satisfied when engaging with their Conversational Marketing solution.

Only 2% of respondents believe their customers are not satisfied.
Employee Engagement Will Make or Break Your Customer Experience

But a Conversational Marketing solution can’t function effectively if your internal teams are reluctant or unable to utilize it. Survey respondents who utilize these solutions in their sales and marketing funnels identify a few problems that need to be addressed before they’re able to fully reap the rewards of Conversational Marketing.

A lack of internal marketing resources to maintain messaging and keep experiences fresh is the primary area respondents struggle with (45%).

But a more troubling issue shows that sales typically lacks the willingness or enthusiasm to either engage in conversations (40%) or to follow-up with leads (39%) via Conversational Marketing solutions. And this lack of employee engagement can be dire for an organization.

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On a scale of 1-7, how satisfied do you feel your customers are when engaging with your conversational marketing solution? (Where 7 is very satisfied and 1 is not satisfied at all.)

- Satisfied (6-7): 62.7%
- 4-5: 35.4%
- Not Satisfied (1-3): 1.9%
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Lacking the right internal resources to effectively upkeep and manage your Conversational Marketing solution can leave damaging impressions of your company. And you run the risk of losing customers altogether if your digital experiences aren’t addressing the standards of your customers’ expectations.

To meaningfully accelerate revenue with Conversational Marketing, you must achieve cross-functional alignment from sales, marketing, and customer success.
The Do’s and Don’ts of a Conversational Marketing-enabled Customer Experience

To accelerate revenue by creating positive customer experiences, businesses will require an intuitive, intelligent Conversational Marketing solution to help their buyers easily find content, thoroughly and immediately address questions and needs, and confidently prioritize and affirm decisions.

As you continue to craft and refine your customer experience, think about these key Do’s and Don’ts.

**DO**

1. Be customer-centric.
2. Work to digitize your products, services, and customer experiences.
3. Enable immediate responses to your buyers.
4. Make it easy for buyers to engage with you on their terms no matter when, how, or where.
5. Ensure your customer service and help centers are knowledgeable, detailed, and approachable.
6. Make it easy, convenient, and frictionless for buyers to discover content and engage with your business.
7. Ensure that your channels, people, tech, and the internal processes connecting them are fully integrated and consistent.

**DON’T**

1. Be company-centric.
2. Deprioritize your company’s digital transformation.
3. Force your buyers to wait hours or days without a response.
4. Only give your buyers one or two ways to contact you.
5. Respond to your buyers with inaccurate or inadequate information that doesn’t solve their problem.
6. Force your buyers to fill out repetitive, clunky web forms every time they want to engage with you.
7. Force your buyers to explain the same information to multiple representatives.
Enhancing Your Customer Experience with Conversational Marketing

We’ve talked a lot about how Conversational Marketing is used to delight buyers, enhance experiences, and accelerate revenue across the customer lifecycle. We’ve discussed the challenges as well as the key considerations when implementing a Conversational Marketing solution into your funnel.

Now, we want to share some of our best practices to help you bring your customer experience to life with Conversational Marketing.

And for those looking for even more, be sure to check out our Conversational Marketing Blueprint.

Website Experiences

Your website is the digital storefront for your business. And in the age of the customer, investing the time and resources to create purposeful, relevant customer experiences online is critical to your success now and moving forward.

By automatically identifying your website visitors, you can greet each visitor with a personalized message and deliver an interaction dictated by their individual needs, histories, and context. So rather than a generic experience, they get something tailored just to them. And with every interaction, you gather more information, enabling every future experience to be that much more unique, relevant, and meaningful.

Content Marketing

Content is your company’s most powerful tool – don’t let it go to waste. Forcing your customers to navigate web page after web page all to find that one piece of content they were looking for is a terrible experience. And it’s one that typically results in the visitor abandoning their search altogether if they can’t easily find what they’re looking for.

Whether a website visitor is new or returning, Conversational Marketing enables you to not only direct them to the content they’re looking for, but to serve it up right then and there. No need for hunting or clunky form fills that add friction to the experience.

For even greater value, you can continue to customize the experience based on the content they’re reading, campaigns they’re a part of, or the individual’s contextual data you’ve already been able to gather. Doing so, you can guide buyers to specific pieces of content or nurture them to the next stage by further qualifying who they are and delivering relevant content over time. All with a simple, frictionless, and intentional experience.
Digital Ad Campaigns

When a buyer clicks on one of your digital ads, what does their experience look like? For many organizations, the answer is the same. The buyer clicks and they’re taken to a static landing page. There’s copy on the left-hand side and a web form on the right. Ideally, once the buyer decides it’s worth it to fill out the form, they do, and the download of the asset begins or their request is sent through. And then... nothing. The experience abruptly ends.

Now, if you ask us, that’s not a very worthwhile experience. Nor is it one that offers a lot of opportunity for further engagement and conversion. With a Conversational Marketing solution, you can build greater interactivity and foster stronger relationships when buyers land on your site.

Consider this alternative. A buyer clicks on your digital ad and they’re taken to a web page filled with useful resources that they can read and scroll through without ever having to fill out a form. Instead, while reading, a chatbot pops up in the corner of their screen and shares another offer related to what they’re looking at.

The buyer can then choose to accept it or tell the chatbot they’re interested in something else. And from there, the chatbot can continue to customize the experience, directing the buyer to blog posts, guides, web pages, or a sales rep. This enables you to build upon the buyer’s experience, rather than cut it short.

Email Campaigns

In the book The Boron Letters, Gary C. Halbert explains that people divide their mail into two piles: an A pile and a B pile. The B pile consists of shiny, colorful fliers and ads and anything that looks like it comes from a brand. The A pile, meanwhile, consists of personalized letters – which usually come in white envelopes, with handwritten names and addresses on the front. And while Halbert was writing about actual mail, you can apply the same principle to email.

As marketers, when we send highly designed HTML emails with impersonal, one-size-fits-all messages, we’re creating emails that are destined for people’s digital B pile.

In order to get in the A pile, we need to start sending emails that look and feel like they’re coming from a trusted friend or family member – not some faceless brand or corporation. That means stripping away all the fancy design elements and sending plain text email. And more importantly, it means writing compelling, personalized copy that engages leads and customers and keeps the conversation going.
By focusing on getting leads and customers not just to click, but to reply to your emails, you’re getting back to the channel’s roots. After all, email wasn’t built to be a one-way marketing broadcast tool, it was built for **two-way conversation**. We call this a Conversational CTA. By encouraging your email recipients to reply, you’re letting them know that there are actual humans (like you) working behind the scenes ready to respond with more information... even if the original email they’re receiving is automated. This leads to higher email engagement rates across the board, plus stronger relationships with your prospects and customers.

Conversational Email tools like Drift Email help you manage all of those email replies by sifting human replies out from the pile of autoresponder messages. These tools bring Conversational Marketing to the email channel, and also act like your best SDR by replying for you and introducing a human when the time is right. That way you can focus your time on creating conversational emails that get high engagement rates, and your sales team can focus their time on revenue generating activities with the best leads.

**Sales Enablement Initiatives**

Selling in a digital era may sound easy, but when buyers have near-limitless access to resources, reviews, and content, you’ve likely found that it’s anything but. And when it’s difficult for buyers to engage with your business, find content, or get their needs addressed in an easy, frictionless way, those challenges are amplified. And your good opportunities dry up fast.

With Conversational Marketing, you can make the most of your traffic by engaging previously anonymous visitors with personalized conversations based on who they are, how they’re behaving, and how they’ve engaged with marketing and sales in the past. And once a website visitor is engaged in conversation, you can add in the right sales rep or even automatically qualify them and book a sales meeting.

By serving up automated and personalized conversations and content for every web visitor, and by equipping your SDRs with in-depth insights about their buyers and their past interactions, you can supercharge your sales reps’ performance, ensuring you get more qualified buyers and meetings – and more pipeline.
Moving Forward

By meeting buyers where and when they are; by giving them unlimited, frictionless access to content and resources; by helping easily and empathetically address concerns and affirm decisions; Conversational Marketing solutions are poised to further enhance the customer experience across the entire customer lifecycle.

As B2B continues to evolve, and as organizations continue to navigate the new post-COVID normal, Conversational Marketing will continue to impact the customer experience, delivering new ways for companies and their buyers to engage, experience, and accelerate success.

About Drift

Drift is the Revenue Acceleration Platform that uses Conversational Marketing and Conversational Sales to help companies grow revenue and increase customer lifetime value, faster.

More than 50,000 businesses use Drift to align sales and marketing on a single platform to deliver a unified customer experience where people are free to have a conversation with a business at any time, on their terms. Learn more at drift.com.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a B2B marketing and sales acceleration firm that delivers measurable revenue results. Every strategy, tactic, and action has a specific, measured purpose. Instead of focusing on the activities, we focus on the outcomes. What really matters is sales pipeline, closing business, and accelerating revenue.

For more information, visit www.heinzmarketing.com.