

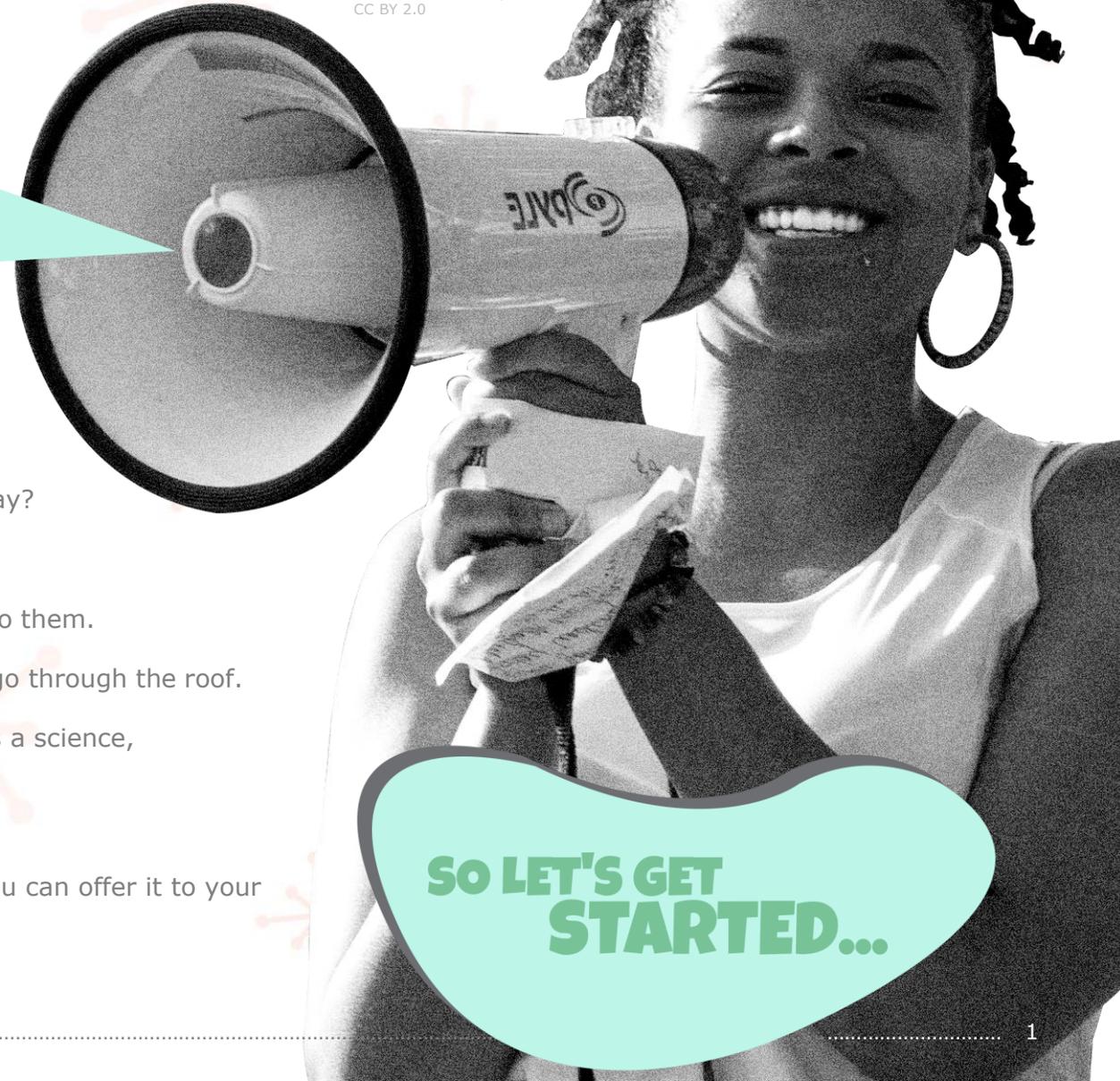
GOOD SERVICE NEVER SLEEPS!

How to offer 24/7 Customer Service
And Why It Matters



THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT!

Fibonacci Blue Speaker at Justice for Terrance protest
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That's the old adage when it comes to customer service – but how far does it really apply?

Is the customer right if they expect to talk to you after you've closed up for the day?

What about if it's half past 3 in the morning?

Increasingly, customers expect to receive customer service at a time convenient to them.

If you can offer this, your customer satisfaction ratings and retention ratings will go through the roof.

Business owners beware though – 24/7 customer service is as much an art as it is a science, get it wrong and your round the clock cover could see massive negative ROI.

But it's ok – we're here to help.

By the end of this guide you'll see why 24/7 customer service matters and how you can offer it to your customers.

SO LET'S GET STARTED...

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WHAT IS GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE?



Let's start off by thinking about what good customer service actually is.

Traditionally, good customer service meant having friendly and professional staff with great product knowledge who would go to every length to help the customer.

It meant living by "the customer is always right", and it meant making everyone who steps through the door into your business feel welcome and well looked after.

And, all of this is still true of good customer service today.

However;

This alone is no longer enough.

Today, there are two other factors that sit alongside customer service, and that is customer experience and customer journey.

Thanks to technological advances people want more than just great customer service, they want it in a way that is convenient to them.

Without providing a great customer experience it doesn't matter how good your customer service is, your customers simply won't be there to experience it at the times that it is available.

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO A 24/7 SERVICE?

So how does offering 24/7 customer service relate to customer service as a whole?

To put it simply, without offering 24/7 customer service you can never offer a truly satisfying customer experience.

Today, people are simply too busy to get customer service on your terms.

To provide the best customer experience, you need to provide maximum flexibility to support your customers when and where they choose.

WHY DO PEOPLE WANT A 24/7 SERVICE?

While it's clear that people want more flexible customer service options, in order to provide the best experience for them it's important to know exactly why they have that requirement.

The more in depth you can understand this decision, the better the journey you'll be able to create for your customers.

- **Are they at work all day and unable to contact you?**
- **Do they want an urgent resolution "right here right now"?**
- **Are they a London cabbie on the night shift who suddenly remembered it's his anniversary tomorrow and needs to know if you can deliver those flowers on time?**

Ok maybe that one's a bit specific but you get the idea.

The more you can understand your customer's reasons the better, and we've found the need for 24/7 customer service boils down to these 3 things.

Lifestyle

Lots of people work while your business is open. They need to contact you in the evening.

Technology

If you've got a website your business is open, so people want to talk to you.

A Global Audience

Just because you've got your pyjamas on doesn't mean the rest of the world has.

BUT WHERE'S THE PROOF?

But where's the proof you say?

After all we could just be making all of this up. Well here are the facts.

57%

of consumers expect the same response time at night and on weekends as during normal business hours

[Source](#)

40%

of people are still doing work after 10 p.m

[Source](#)

32%

of consumers expect a response within 30 minutes at night and on weekends

[Source](#)



IT FITS THEIR LIFESTYLE

One of the main reasons people want customer service 24/7 is lifestyle.

To put it simply, people simply have other things to do in the middle of the day than get on the phone or come into a store to manage a customer service enquiry.

Here are just 3 examples why:

- **Everyday, 21.18 million people in the UK work nine to five** [Source](#)
- **In 2016 there were 18.9 million families in the UK** [Source](#)
- **People spend up to 26 hours a week doing housework** [Source](#)

And that's just their job, childcare and housework!

Imagine then once you take into account all the other things people would like to do rather than chase up a customer service enquiry and it becomes obvious that taking time out to phone up customer service isn't a priority.

24/7 customer service means they don't have to prioritise that, and they can simply chase up their customer service enquiries at a time convenient to them when everything else is out the way.



THE ONLINE WORLD IS 24/7

Another reason behind the need for 24/7 customer service is technology.

Thanks to the internet, smartphones, and social media we live in a 24-hour culture.

If you live in a city and you have a smartphone connected to the internet there is nothing you can't get in 24 hours.

Because of this, if someone comes to your website and realises they can't get a response to their enquiry, or they can't find out why their order hasn't been delivered, the chances they'll think **"oh well that's fair – everyone needs some time off"** are slim.

Basically, people are used to getting what they want at a time convenient to them, and customer service is part of that.

30%
of people admit shopping
online between midnight and
4am

[Source](#)

The Peak time for
online shopping is
10pm

[Source](#)

IT'S A GLOBAL MARKET PLACE

Finally, there's the simple fact that just because it's the middle of the night for you it doesn't mean it is for everyone else.

If you're online and you've got a business that doesn't require you to meet your customers in person, there's no reason you shouldn't hawk your wares around the world.

The challenge is while New York is ready to get online and **buy buy buy** you're just slipping on your night cap.

If you've got an international market, you need a customer service plan that reflects that, and that your customers overseas can speak to at a time convenient to them ... **or at the very least when they're actually awake.**



SO WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

So why should you care?

After all you could run your customer service department from 9 to 5 and if your customers need to get in touch with you they should just make time to do it.

Well for starters *that's not very nice*, but here's the real reason why you should care.

Customer service is what makes and breaks businesses.

Thanks to the internet, it's harder to have a unique product than ever before.

You're in direct comparison with every other business around the world, so increasingly customers are less swayed by products and price points because there's always someone else offering the same thing or slightly better.

What customers do care about is customer service and customer experience.

86% of buyers will pay more for a good customer experience.

That's why 24/7 customer service matters.

"The customer experience is the next competitive battleground"

Jerry Gregoire



BETTER CUSTOMER RETENTION

Providing a better customer experience in the form of 24/7 customer service can help you get more of the holy grail in business – repeat customers.

- **Loyal customers are worth up to 10 times as much as their first purchase** [Source](#)
- **It is 6-7 times more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to keep a current one** [Source](#)
- **86% of consumers quit doing business with a company because of a bad customer experience** [Source](#)

If you can provide your customers with a fantastic customer experience at a time convenient to them, whether that's at 8pm after they've put the kids to bed, or at 6:30am before they go to work, you'll significantly increase the chance of them using you for their next purchase.

And, if you can offer this to them consistently you could have a customer for life on your hands.



MORE CUSTOMERS FROM MORE PLACES

As we've mentioned already a good reason for extending your hours of customer service is to engage with international markets – but just how important can international markets be to small businesses?

Very, it turns out.

Take for example [this case study](#) of the Quantum Beauty Company.

The Quantum Beauty company went from having 100% of its sales made in England in 2001 to now having over 50% of sales coming from foreign markets.

If you want to replicate this success in foreign markets then in (addition to making connections overseas) you need to have the infrastructure to respond to customer enquiries from those markets at whatever time they come in.



HOW YOU CAN OFFER CUSTOMER SERVICE **24/7**

The good news is that it's relatively easy to provide 24/7 customer service.

The challenge comes from making ROI while you're providing it.

After all it's easy enough to employ someone to come in overnight – but unless you can make enough money overnight to cover the costs it isn't a wise investment.

Balancing the different ways and methods that you use to provide out of hours customer service is key to providing great quality while still making a profit.

So where do you start?

START WITH A GAP ANALYSIS

If you want to provide 24/7 customer service, the place to start a gap analysis.

A gap analysis means looking at your business and finding out where the skills and infrastructure gaps are that you need to fill before you can effectively offer 24/7 customer service.

Start off with looking at what you do during normal office hours.

- **Do you normally answer enquiries by the phone or by email?**
- **Do you use social media for customer service?**
- **Do you have dedicated customer service people or do you manage it yourself?**

The second process is identifying which of these can be done out of hours.

For example:

- **Do you have on call staff who can take calls once the office has closed?**
- **Do you have a webmail so your staff can log in from home to manage emails?**
- **Would any of your staff be willing to do this if they were given the right incentives?**

Once you understand the processes in your business it's time to compare it to other businesses.

Typically, you'll look at your competitors, and at a company that you know is already providing great customer service 24/7.

When you're looking at your competitors focus on things they do differently to you.

- **Do they promise a reply to enquiries in a set time?**
- **Are they using different customer service channels to you?**

When it comes to the company who is already offering 24/7 service, focus on how they do it.

Look at the infrastructure they have in place and any software or services they are using to provide client care out of hours.

Once you have this information you can compare and contrast what you're currently doing in the day and what you can potentially do at night with what your competitors and other companies are already doing.

That way you'll know what skills and infrastructure you need to bring into the business to provide 24/7 customer service.

IDENTIFY COMMON QUERIES (AND CHOOSE THE RIGHT CHANNELS)

Next you need to work out what customer service channels are going to work best for your customers.

You can do this by looking at the type of people your customers are, and the type of enquires they make.

For example:

74 percent of people prefer the telephone for complex financial questions [Source](#)

However;

56 percent of respondents aged 18 to 34 prefer live chat to phone [Source](#)

What that means is if you're a company whose customers and clients are making big decisions or spending large amounts of money you need to have someone ready to answer the phone at all times.

If you're an online retailer targeting younger people with high fashion items they might be better served with live chat and customer service on social media.

Understand your audience and their needs so you don't waste money putting systems in place that they will never use.

So what options are there when it comes to providing customer service out of hours?



PICK UP THE PHONE

When it comes to providing customer service, the telephone is often still the best and most popular choice.

In fact, despite all the technological advances **the telephone still counts for 68% of all customer service interactions.** [Source](#)

The reason for this is most likely do to first contact resolution.

While emails may be more convenient than a phone call – as you can send customer services an email at any time – trying to resolve customer service queries via email normally results in a considerable amount of back and forth.

With the telephone this doesn't happen.

The customer service agent is right there, logged into the CRM system with all the information they need to solve the caller's enquiry first time.

But is it worth the investment in phone based customer service so you can provide first contact resolutions?

Improvements in first contact resolution alone typically improve customer retention by as much as 15-30 percent. [Source](#)

As we've already covered retaining customers is far more profitable than acquiring new ones, which makes using the telephone a worthwhile investment for your business.



THE PROBLEM WITH 24/7 CALL ANSWERING IN-HOUSE

So if you are going to offer 24/7 phone support for your customers, the question is how are you going to do it in house?

If your standard operating hours are 9 to 5 that means you need to employ people to cover the 16 hours in between, plus the weekends.

Even if you pay the out of hours staff you employ minimum wage at £7.50 an hour, that's £960 a week just to make sure there's always someone in the office to answer out of hours calls.

While that would be a nice option, it's unlikely you'll ever see a good ROI on that amount of spend.

While providing 24/7 customer support is important, it doesn't change the fact that you'll get significantly fewer out of hours enquiries than you do during the day, meaning employing people full time to manage them simply isn't cost effective.

Fortunately, there are many other options available when it comes to managing your phone lines out of hours.

OUTSOURCED CALL ANSWERING

Full disclosure time – we’re an outsourced telephone answering service supplier, so unsurprisingly we’re pretty big advocates of outsourcing your out of hours customer service calls.

But we’re not going to pitch you our business here – all this information applies as equally to our competitors as it does for us.

Basically, if you want **real people to answer your telephone calls** without making your staff go on call, outsourcing to a telephone answering service is the most cost effective way to do it.

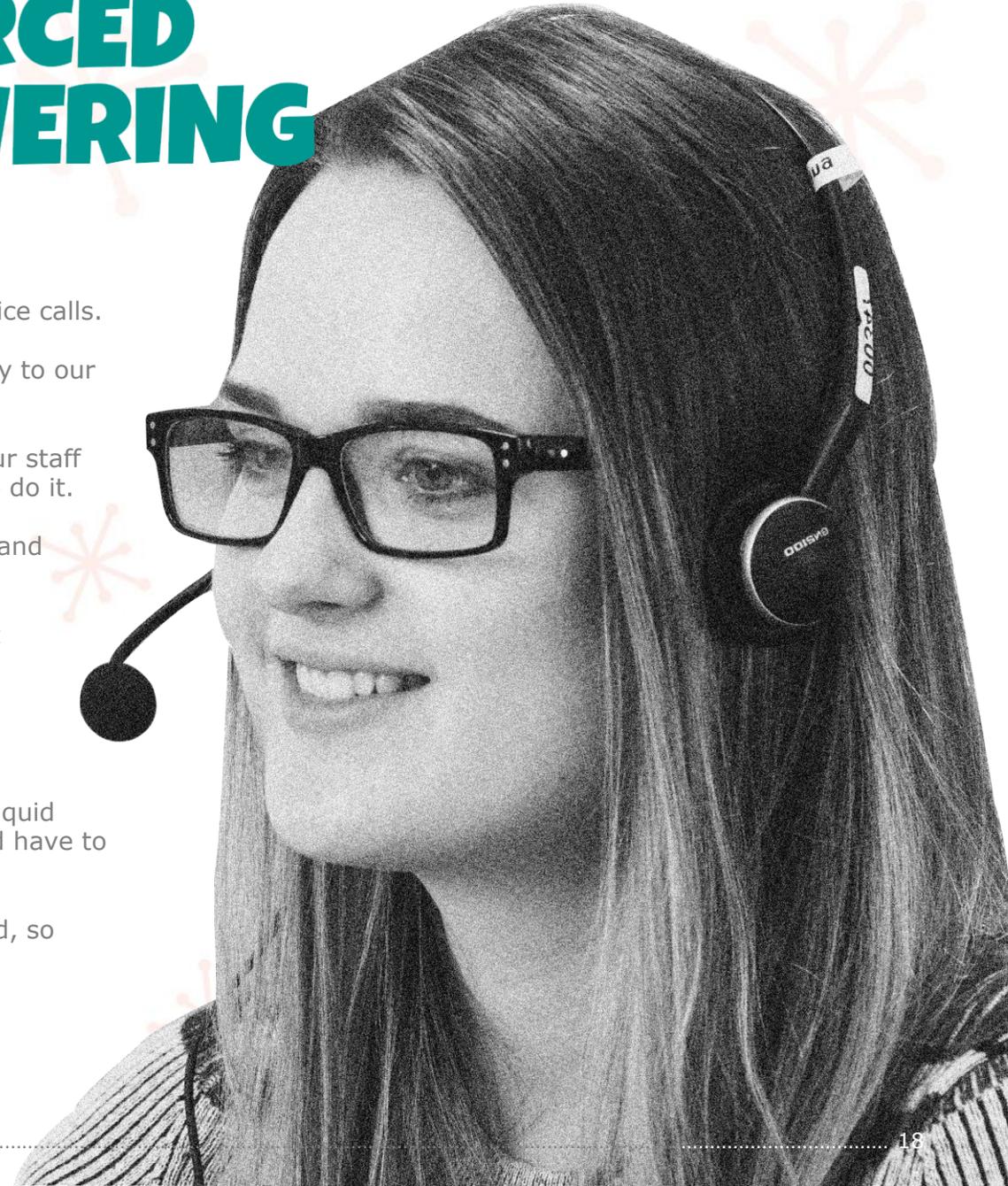
When you sign up with an answering service, you divert your out of hours calls to them, and they’ll be answered in a 24-hour contact centre.

The type of service you can get varies from company to company with some offering just message taking, and others offering complete customer service solutions.

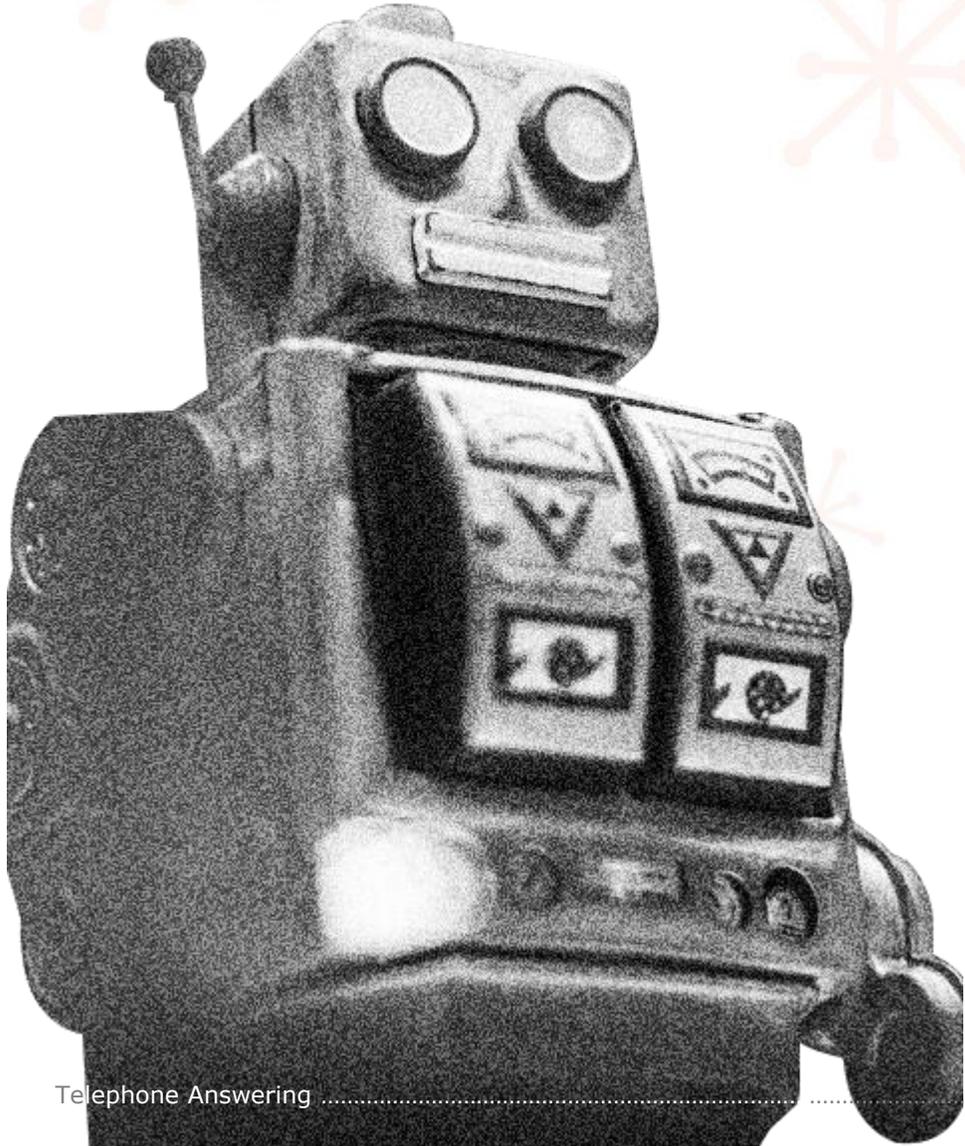
The reason it is so cost effective is that you **only pay for the time physically spent answering your calls**.

What that means is that if you only get a handful of calls a night, you’ll only spend a few quid having an answering service manage them, as opposed to the full 8 hours of wages you’d have to pay someone in house.

And the best part is an answering service will answer the call just as your own staff would, so your callers will never know you’ve outsourced the call.



TECH & IVR



Another option many businesses turn to is an IVR system.

This stands for Interactive Voice Response, which in layman's terms is one of those phone answering systems we've all experienced that tells you to "press one for customer service" or "say the name of the person you want to speak to after the beep".

The main problem with IVR systems is that people find them annoying. In fact [studies have shown](#) that only 3% of people like using IVR systems.

However just because people don't like them doesn't mean that they don't work. We've all been on enough phone calls to automated systems to know that 1000's of countries up and down the country use them on a daily basis.

If you feel you simply can't afford to use a call answering service that uses real people to take the calls, an IVR system is still a better option than just letting the calls go through to an answer phone.

And, if you're using on call staff to answer calls, an IVR system can be a great way to qualify and route the calls so your staff don't get woken up with basic questions that don't need an immediate response.

ON CALL STAFF

Using on call staff can be a great way to manage 24/7 customer service enquiries.

It bridges the gap between having staff on shift at all times, and an option like a call answering service where you only pay for the calls you use.

Having on call staff is also useful if you're in a highly technical industry like IT or the legal profession where the callers will need someone with a lot of knowledge to effectively manage their enquiry.

The problem with on call staff is that often it can be hard to find people who want to do it, and you'll typically have to pay staff to go on call even if they don't actually have to manage any enquiries - so it isn't always cost effective.

One of the best ways to use on call staff is to use them in conjunction with an outsourced call answering service.

The call answering service can manage the majority of the enquiries, and the ones that require the technical knowledge only your team can provide can be **transferred across after having been fully qualified by the answering service.**



EMAIL

Today email is ubiquitous in customer service, and you could argue that it is just as important as the telephone is.

When it comes to providing 24/7 customer service, email also has the advantage of giving you a bit more wiggle room when it comes to answering enquiries.

With the phone, if you promise your customers 24/7 cover, you need someone ready at all times to answer the phone.

If you promise 24/7 customer service via email, you can get away with a couple of hours gap between an email being sent and your company providing a response.

Because of this it is much easier for you to manage your email customer support yourself and with the use of on call staff.

The most important thing to have is a webmail system that allows your staff to easily log into their work email from wherever they are.

The challenge becomes making sure that the quality of service is maintained when multiple people from your business are managing the email account.

That is where a ticketing system comes in.

TICKETING SYSTEMS

With a ticketing system every new customer enquiry will be given a unique number or code.

From that point on, every contact made between the customer and the business regarding that enquiry will be logged on that ticketing system.

This is incredibly important to have as soon as you start managing email around the clock remotely, however all other interactions should be added to the ticketing system too including social media and phone enquiries.

The importance of the ticketing system is to ensure a good customer journey. It keeps all the information from the enquiry in the same place so that there's no need for the customer to be repeatedly explaining their issue every time they talk to a new agent.

One of the most popular ticketing systems at the minute is Zendesk, and they're particularly good when it comes to explaining how you can use their service.

If you think a ticketing system would be helpful for your business when it comes to managing your out of hours customer service then their website is a great place to start researching.



SOCIAL MEDIA

When it comes to customer service the most up and coming channel is social media.

If your business is designed to appeal to young people then social media should definitely be a part of your wider customer service strategy, and should be considered as part of your 24/7 plan.

Social Media customer service effectively works in two ways, either by people private messaging you regarding their query or by people posting their query directly on your wall for everyone one to see.

This is an interesting development in terms of 24/7 customer service as it basically makes having your social channels covered 24/7 essential.

After all, you wouldn't want someone posting angrily on your wall about a late delivery or a damaged item, and having it sit there all night – or worse all weekend – for all your potential customers to see.

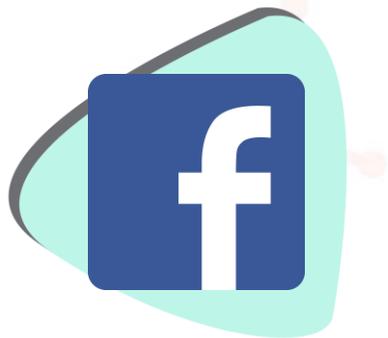
But which platforms should you use?



WHICH PLATFORMS TO CHOOSE?

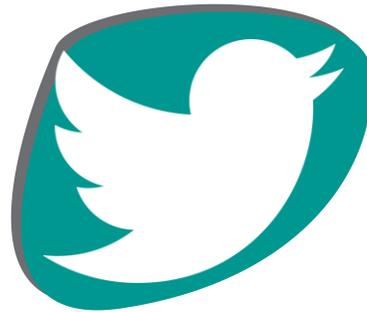
Which platforms you will use largely depends on which channels you're using for your marketing. After all, if you've got an account to promote yourself with, people can just as easily use that channel to make enquiries and even complaints, so you need to keep an eye on it at all times.

The channel that best fits your business depends on what you offer and what your target audience is like.



What was once the place to be for the young and trendy people of the internet is now far more important to people past the age of 30.

However, **Facebook** is almost as ubiquitous as google so regardless of what you're selling you should be on Facebook.



Twitter is a place lots of businesses, marketers, and influencers go to promote themselves, so if you're in B2B services it's a good place to be.

Twitter is also renowned for its trolling and general negative attitudes, so if you are on Twitter be extra alert, if someone's going to completely lose it about your business in a public forum, it's likely they'll do it on Twitter.



Until recently **Instagram** was the up and coming social network but since being bought by Facebook it has gone much more mainstream.

The visual nature of **Instagram** means it's great for retailers and anyone selling fashionable, desirable products.

Due to the nature of **Instagram** it's a bit harder for people to publicly bash you, but watch out for negative comments or people tagging you in pictures of damaged or faulty items they've received.



Snapchat is the new kid on the block and has stolen Instagram's crown as the social media platform of the trendy young things.

With most businesses still finding their feet on snapchat it's yet to be seen how customer service interactions will play out on there.

For now, treat it like you would all other social media. Be vigilant, professional, and try and provide a rapid response to enquiries as quickly as possible 24/7.

LIVE CHAT

Live Chat came on the scene at around the same time as social media customer service, and it is used much in the same way.

It is preferred by younger people and often generates enquiries of the quick and easy type rather than the complex questions that you'll get over the phone.

One of the interesting things about live chat customer service is that despite it not having been around for a long time it's already proven to improve sales on websites.

Studies have shown 62% of customers were (more) inclined to purchase products online if customer support is available via live chat.

But providing live chat 24/7 is a challenge. Much like the telephone you need someone there all the time to man it, meaning it isn't very cost effective to do in house.

Fortunately there are already many options for outsourcing live chat, with a number of organisations specialising in live chat services, and a number of telephone answering services having branched out to manage live chat enquiries as well.

One benefit live chat outsourcing has over outsourced call answering is that a skilled live chat operator can manage up to 4 live chats at a time, while of course you can only take one phone call at a time.

This means live chat outsourcing can handle more enquiries, more quickly, for potentially less money than a telephone answering service.

Often the best solution can be to outsource both live chat and call answering to the same provider as this provides a smooth customer journey between live chat and the telephone, and it keeps two of your customer service channels covered at all times.

HOW TO MANAGE ROI

At the start of this book we said that 24/7 customer service is a highly valuable service to provide, but it can very quickly and easily become a costly and inefficient process.

At points, we've discussed how to get maximum ROI out of individual channels, however across all channels there is one key point when it comes to getting the best ROI.

To get the best ROI out of your 24/7 customer service channels, you need to minimise paid down-time as much as possible.

Because fewer enquiries come in outside of traditional office hours (especially during the graveyard shift of 12 am to 7 am) as soon as you start paying someone on an hourly basis you're at risk of seeing negative ROI.

That's why outsourcing is so effective when it comes to managing enquiries out of hours – **you only pay for the time spent managing your enquiries.**

If you're a small business owner, you can likely manage email and social media enquiries yourself providing you can find time to log in every couple of hours. However, when it comes to the phone and live chat, outsourcing to a dedicated provider will get you the best service at the lowest price.



AND THAT'S IT!

So what have we learned?

1. In today's 24 hour culture people want to get customer enquiries answered at a time convenient to them
2. There are lots of customer service channels to choose from, and while you don't have to use them all, it's important to choose the right ones for your business
3. When you're trying to manage 24/7 customer service costs can quickly spin out of control. Outsourcing providers and the right technology can help you make good ROI.

Soon, 24/7 customer service won't even be a choice for businesses, **it will simply be the standard.**

Rather than waiting till you're forced to adopt a 24 hour customer service strategy, **start implementing one now** and you can **experience the boost to sales and customer retention** that providing a fantastic customer experience can bring to your business.



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ABOUT ALLDAYPA

At alldayPA we provide outsourced telephone answering services that support small businesses.

We believe in putting real people at the heart of business, which is why when you choose alldayPA your calls are always answered by a real person 24 hours a day.

Every call we take is answered right here in the UK, and we have a wide range of services available from basic message taking and virtual receptionist services, to diary management and outsourced customer service lines.

To find out more about what we do and how we can help you manage your enquiries 24/7 visit alldayPA.com

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