



## 5 Customer Service Trends You Can't Ignore !

By Heather Clancy |

Every one of us can relate to a good or bad customer service experience. We can also relate to the fact that social media, mobility and other emerging technologies are completely rewriting the rules of engagement for customer service organizations.

I recently interviewed customer service expert, Zack Urlocker, chief operating officer of five-year-old help desk technology company [Zendesk](http://Zendesk.com), about some of the themes transforming customer services for businesses large and small. Urlocker's insight is shaped by Zendesk's position as the help desk service provider for both fast-growing upstart brands such as Yammer, Dropbox and AirBandB as well as more mainstream companies, such as Zappos and the Four Seasons Hotel.

Here are 5 themes on the minds of Urlocker – and of his company's 15,000 customers.

**1. There is no 9-to-5.** Even though there is definitely for companies to pay more attention to work-life balance issues, there is a growing intolerance for organizations that close down their support organizations in the evening or on the weekends. That makes it important for companies to closely integrate their various touch points, so that true emergencies can be escalated out to someone who is "on call."

**2. Good customer service = good brand marketing.** Today's successful companies view their customer service organizations as extensions of their marketing and sales teams, not as operational expenses. Urlocker notes that customers will vent very different – and publicly – about bad customer support experiences than they have in the past, which makes it imperative to act quickly. "Customers are unifying in a way that we have never seen before, because of social media," he said.

**3. Listen carefully.** If your company is spending oodles of money on customer surveys and research, it might want to consider diverting some of the investment into systems that can help collect customer feedback in real time. The more you listen, the more people notice. "Your most vocal critics can become your most vocal champions, if you listen to them," Urlocker said. (See No. 2, about marketing.)



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### 4. Allow customers to use the support mechanism that makes sense.

Tech-savvy consumers are growing impatient with systems that force people to interact with businesses in ways that don't make sense for their specific need. Why would you force someone to visit a Web site to check on their cable service, for example, when it is clear that they probably can't do so because, right, the cable service is out. Close integration of communication channels is increasingly important and customer service agents need to be trained and expert at using all of those channels. "The old way of drawing lines in the past isn't going to work for a lot of brands moving forward," Urlocker said.

### 5. Customer service isn't just relegated to customer service agents.

Collaboration technologies are making product experts available in ways that were unimaginable even just two years ago. A successful customer service organization will focus on enabling the right person to help solve the problem, not just the first person who happened to pick up the phone or read the email or notice the Twitter comment or question.

#### About Heather Clancy

*Heather Clancy is a contributing editor for SmartPlanet.*

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