

How to successfully deliver multilingual customer support



Staffing a contact centre remains one of the biggest challenges for customer service operations, and that's particularly the case when you need to provide support beyond a contact centre's primary language. Brands risk alienating customers if they don't address multilingual support, especially with more and more people expecting real-time, native-language interactions to take place seamlessly, live and across digital channels.

In this CCMA Good Practice Guide, we highlight the importance of delivering multilingual customer support successfully, consider some of the key challenges currently faced by contact centre teams, and identify steps you can follow in your own operations.

Customers expect to be served in their own language

It may sound obvious, but one of the best ways to connect with and retain customers is to speak

their native language. People absolutely want to be served this way, indeed recent research

suggests that almost eight out of ten consumers would be happier buying products with information provided in their native language.

Anything contact centre leaders can do to streamline engagement for customers is clearly valuable, and research suggests that multilingual support in customer service can make a real difference for customers. When non-native speakers were asked how they would respond if brands offered multilingual customer care, 75% said they would become repeat customers – with some studies even indicating that people would be prepared to pay a higher

price if they could engage in their native or preferred language.

Given this clear enthusiasm, it's perhaps surprising that brands don't focus more on multilingual customer support. Around one in five contact centres still don't track the quality of their non-primary language interactions. Research also suggests that only around one in five organisations can support customers in any language over the phone – a proportion that falls significantly when extended to other service channels.

Acknowledging the challenges of multilingual customer service

How come so few organisations are able to deliver effective multilingual customer support? Overwhelmingly, the biggest concerns when providing support beyond a contact centre's primary language relate to the recruitment, training, and retention of bilingual advisors. Key complexities here include:

- Advisors with non-English native languages are in short supply in the UK, making recruitment difficult and expensive – particularly for seasonal hiring.

- While remote working can help to address the recruitment challenge, contact centre team leaders and remote advisors can find the cultural fit challenging.
- As businesses look to scale their business operations internationally, the demand for the tactical deployment of multilingual customer service increases.
- Contact centre team leaders have to be ready to support multilingual customer service with relevant training, coaching, and workforce management skills.
- And deliver this across both voice and digital channels, unlocking the potential NPS gains that can come from native language digital engagement

Hiring for language brings additional layers of complexity for contact centre teams. Additionally, if you're committed to providing customers with their language of choice, it can become harder to route them to the advisor that's best placed to answer their specific query as you grow. Given these complexities, many organisations in the UK that deal with non-English language speaking customers end up simply reading a statement that attempts to explain the language barrier, and then provide the service in English or avoid supporting certain languages altogether.

Options for providing multilingual customer service

Contact centre managers looking to resolve the challenges of optimising or scaling their multilingual customer service capabilities have a number of options available to them:

- **Run a fully-staffed multilingual support service** – either with your own multilingual advisors or by taking advantage of outsourced services. Hiring and retaining your own multilingual advisors might seem like an optimal approach for allowing brands to deliver best practice service in a customer's language of choice. However, the cost and difficulties associated with this approach can be significant. Finding and retaining multilingual advisors to support an organisation's existing business is challenging enough, but factor in issues such as growth and geographical expansion and it can introduce whole new levels of complexity.
- **Give your advisors access to freely-available online machine translation services** – providing advisors with access to popular machine translation services such as Google Translate, Amazon Translate, and Bing Microsoft

Translator can help to support multilingual customer service across digital channels. Accessing machine translation services can prove frustrating for advisors if they have to cut and paste between their desktop and browser systems, while submitting information externally can also lead to security and data privacy concerns. Popular online machine translation tools also tend to focus on words not meanings, making them less suitable for customer service deployment where context and comprehensibility are critical.

- **Deploy native language customer support across multiple digital channels** - with more customers engaging via chat, social, SMS and email channels, it's essential that multilingual support reflects the continued transition to digital. Designed to facilitate native language digital experiences, the latest multilingual-enabled unified agent desktop solutions can securely interpret digital conversations into some 100 different languages in real time. This provides a great way for brands to extend their customer service offering to new markets and languages.

Three steps to getting multilingual customer service right

1. **Language really matters to your customers.** Delivering native language support to customers can really make a difference, both through increased NPS scores as well as to your organisation's bottom line.
2. **Focus on hiring for the right skills.** With the right technology it's now possible to focus on hiring for the right skills and training for product knowledge. Gradually you can start to drop the language requirement, choosing to replace bilingual speakers with multilingual solutions when they leave the business.
3. **Remove barriers to international expansion.** Contact centre platforms that offer native language support can help you expand quickly into new markets. Reducing the complexity of multilingual engagement can have a direct, positive impact on your costs of doing business globally.

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