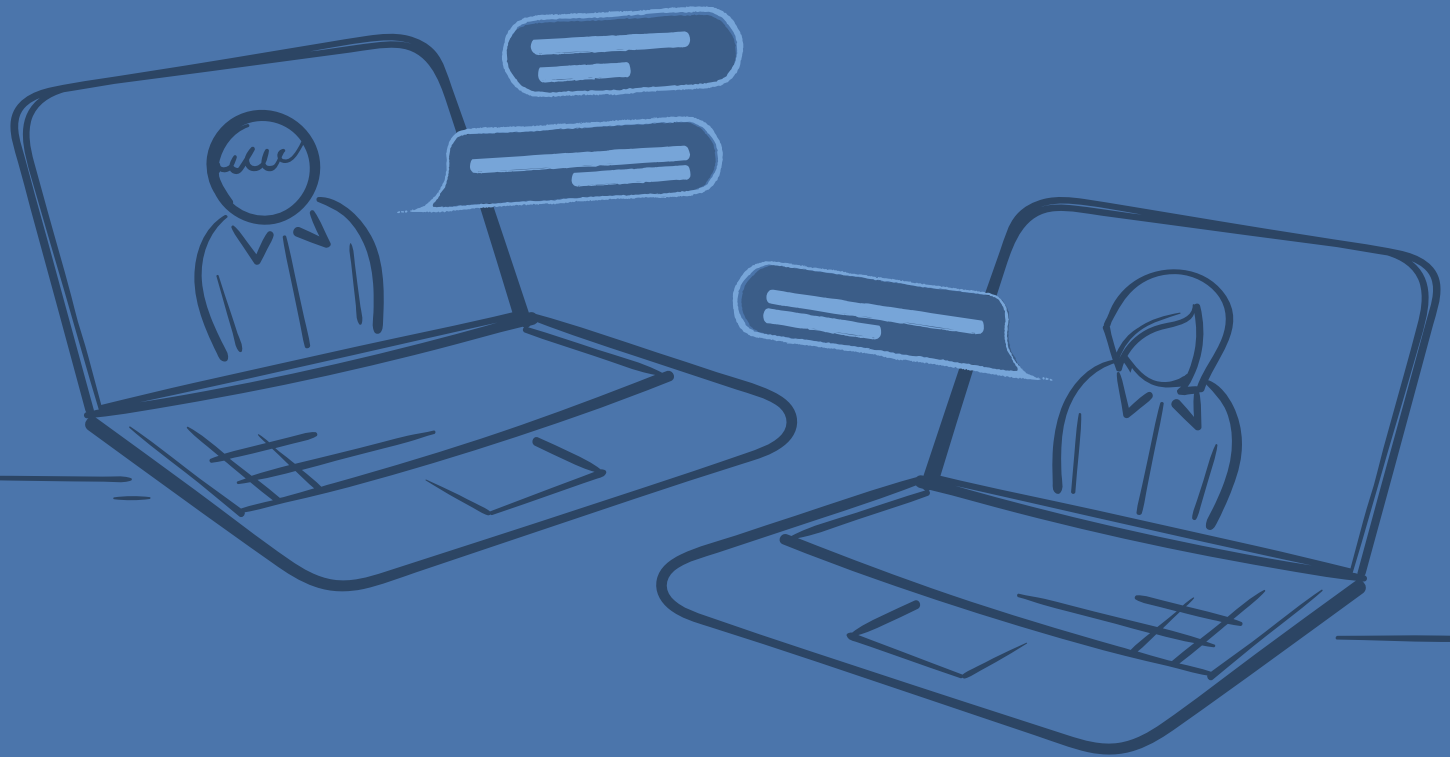


How to enhance customer experiences and increase revenue with proactive chat



Introduction

Today's always-on, connected consumers with new, higher levels of expectation are changing the nature of how products are sold, delivered, and supported.

Organizations that embrace the on-going challenge of meeting these heightened demands are successfully differentiating themselves in their respective marketplaces. In addition to providing a superior service experience, they are significantly increasing online sales by adopting real-time customer engagement tools. These tools create a buying experience that surpasses anything that could be delivered in a brick-and-mortar environment.

This white paper will explore how proactive chat and chat integration with CRM enable organizations to decrease shopping cart abandonment and use predictive behaviors to intercept buyers at critical points in the sales process.

Proactive chat

Proactive chat occurs when a website visitor is invited to engage in a chat conversation either manually, by an agent, or automatically, using a rules-engine trigger, rather than waiting for the visitor to click on a chat button themselves. Although the form of the invitation can vary, invitations are generally delivered via a pop-up window appearing while a visitor is on a particular web page that says, for example, "Any Questions? I'm Available to Chat!" With proactive chat, organizations can trigger a chat invitation when something does or does not occur.

For example, a chat invitation can be triggered when a user spends an inordinate amount of time on a page with complex information about a product. This is a great time to proactively offer to answer questions for the website visitor just like you would if you saw a perplexed customer walking around a retail store. A proactive chat message such as, "If you have questions about the options or any of the features of this product, I'm here to help. Would you like to chat?" can be used to extend the customer service experience.

Another opportunity is when a consumer already has a product in their shopping cart and they leave a page featuring product add-on options for their product without adding any of these options to their shopping cart. A proactive chat can be launched with a message like, "Do you need help picking accessories for your order?" This turns an up-sell opportunity into an offer for hands-on customer service, which can be perceived as extremely helpful to buyers who have questions. When used intelligently, proactive chat can be viewed as an extremely valuable service during the shopping experience rather than an annoying pop-up offer to sell something.

Consider a couple of impressive statistics:

- 44% of online consumers say that having questions answered by a live person while in the middle of an online purchase is one of the most important features a website can offer.
- Proactive chatters are six times more likely to buy than an average website visitor.

Here Are 9 Proactive Chat Best Practices to Guide Your Way

1. Trigger a chat session at the right time and place

It's important to experiment to find the right time and the right place to trigger a chat invitation. Evaluate your website analytics and identify pages that have a high bounce rate or where desired steps are not being taken. Underperforming web pages can be candidates for re-design as well as an opportunity to introduce proactive chat. Triggering a proactive chat session may be effective based on:

- ☒ The total time spent on the website
- ☒ The time spent on a particular web page
- ☒ The total number of page views
- ☒ Previous site visits
- ☒ The complexity of page content
- ☒ Position in the buying process

Also, look for opportunities to trigger a proactive chat session that can directly increase revenues; for example, when the consumer is on high-value product pages, when there are a number of valuable or complex items already in a shopping cart or the consumer is on a page that offers opportunities for your organization to cross-sell or up-sell.

Individuals that spend more, tend to be more receptive to a proactive chat invite. Most importantly, do not use chat as a way to improve poorly designed web pages or online selling processes. Proactive chat should enhance the customer's experience with your organization, not be a cover-up for bad website design.

2. Don't over invite

One invite is often enough. Although the average percentage of website visitors who accept proactive chat invitations is between 8.2% to 22%. Keep in mind the consumer just might not be ready to ask questions or want to communicate using a chat session.

In a recent survey, online consumers noted that receiving multiple invitations to chat on a single visit was one of the primary reasons that they left a website. Be sure to do your own testing and make sure the timing between invitations makes sense as the results can vary greatly depending on your industry and

the intended reasons for using live chat. There may be use cases for sending multiple live chat invites, but it requires knowing your visitors and having a goal in mind for the proactive chat. If you're inviting multiple times, do so with careful consideration of your audience.

3. Customize the chat invitations

Always customize your chat invitations so that they are specific to the consumer's experience. For example, if a proactive chat is triggered when a user is on a complex product page for more than a minute, then your chat invitation might say: "Do you have any questions about this product or its technical specifications?" Or, if you know that the consumer came to your website from a link where you're offering a specific promotion, your invite might say: "If you have any questions about our promotional offer I'm here to help".

4. Make it easy to accept or decline a chat invite

One of the things consumers love about chat is the feeling of control; that the experience is on their terms. Make it easy for the consumer to accept or decline the invitation. No one wants to feel obligated to chat. A simple call to action such as "Yes, I have questions" or "No thanks, I don't have questions at this time" leaves a positive impression and also leaves the door open for visitors to hit the chat button if they change their mind later

5. Properly align your chat objectives and measurement

Proactive chat is at the convergence of multiple functional areas such as call center operations, e-commerce, IT, sales, website design and marketing. As a result, implementing a successful proactive chat program can be complex because you must align your chat objectives across many diverse areas that each have their own agendas, goals and success metrics. Depending on who is driving the proactive chat initiative, goals for proactive chat could include reducing shopping cart abandonment rates, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty, or increasing call center efficiency. As a February 2011 International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) survey noted, less than 30% of contact center professionals surveyed rated their centers as successful at achieving a balance between call center efficiency and customer experience. There is a lot of room for improvement in striking this balance.

6. Engage online consumers with targeted offers

Make offers (e.g., special discounts or free shipping) with proactive chat invites to engage visitors who have never chatted before. When people who had not chatted in the past were surveyed, they noted that they would be open to a proactive chat session if there was a special offer associated with it². The key is to align your special offer with the reason you started a chat in the first place. For example, if the customer added a product to his shopping cart and hasn't checked out 5 minutes later, offer a chat that says something like, "If you have any questions about your order, I'm here to help. In the meantime, here's a 10% discount code." This kind of proactive chat encourages the user to complete his purchase and makes him feel like he just received a free bonus. It also decreases shopping cart abandonment and increases sales from customers that may not have purchased otherwise.

7. Minimize the interruption in the shopping experience

When a proactive chat invitation pops up, it should get the consumer's attention but allow them to continue their business. An invitation that requires several action steps before they can proceed is not recommended. It makes sense to request simple information from the user but adding the complexity and frustration of a multi-step form before the customer can get to an agent can be a recipe for complaints.

8. Train your agents in all the needed skills

It's important to ensure your chat agents have the skills they need to align with the objectives you want to achieve with proactive chat. If you want to use proactive chat to decrease shopping cart abandonment and you have customer service agents manning chat, it may require another level of product knowledge to answer product questions. Further, since most agents are not trained sales professionals, it's important to focus on finding people with the right mix of engagement and communication skills and to train them to effectively handle sales opportunities. Management needs to empower the agents so that they can offer solutions and make choices in how best to handle a situation so that they are able to exceed customer expectations and provide the customer with a superior experience.

While we don't recommend bogging down your proactive chat process with bulky forms, it does make sense to take advantage of the opportunity to use a brief pre-chat questionnaire to determine what the online consumer needs assistance with. This will allow you to automatically route specific chats to the most qualified agent or group to increase internal efficiencies while also increasing overall customer satisfaction.

9. Test, test, test... And get feedback

Continue to test and refine your proactive chat policies and automated triggers to achieve the best results. There is no place more important for testing than proactive invitations. Don't forget to ask how you did to your own customers. Using post chat surveys is an excellent way to gather the information you need to track the effectiveness of chat. Keeping the survey questions simple, short, and easy to answer will increase the likelihood that people will complete them.

Some common survey questions are:

- ☒ How likely are you to recommend our company?
- ☒ Please rate your satisfaction with this chat experience.
- ☒ Did you find the chat agent to be knowledgeable?
- ☒ Did you find the chat agent to be professional?
- ☒ Would you use chat again?

Keep it simple. Pick one of these questions and ask it consistently so you can create a database of knowledge around your customer's responses over time.

Other key proactive chat features

Proactive chat can offer an impressive set of benefits, but with two additional features, a pre-chat questionnaire and integration with other company data systems such as ERP and CRM, the likelihood of maximizing these benefits can be significantly enhanced.

The pre-chat surveys

Automatically triggering a proactive chat invite can provide the opportunity for a company to engage an otherwise unengaged online consumer. But a live chat session that's integrated into CRM and/ or ERP systems can provide the agent with actionable intelligence that can lead to a much more personalized session with the consumer and significantly improve their overall experience with the interaction.

Integration with other company systems begins with the capturing of specific information from the online consumer via a pre-chat questionnaire.

When an online consumer accepts a proactive chat invite, the agent has access to basic information about the consumer such as their IP address, browser, referring site, the web page they are on, the path that they took thus far on the website and the total time on the website. Although this information can certainly be helpful, more personalized and valuable information about the consumer and or the issue they are having may be available in other company databases. This information can be automatically accessed and delivered to the agent's dashboard if the accepted chat invite starts with a pre-chat questionnaire.

A pre-chat questionnaire can be as brief as asking for an email address, a phone number or other unique identifier that is stored in your databases combined with an identification of the problem or issue that the customer is having. Basically, the goal of the questionnaire is to capture unique information about the consumer and the nature of their problem so that proper data can be accessed before the agent begins the chat session. In fact, if your company agents are trained in various topics and disciplines, (for example agents trained in particular product lines or in selling techniques) identifying the nature of the issue in a pre-chat questionnaire could automatically route the chat session to the specific agent or agent group that would be best at handling the particular chat.

Integrations

Information delivered to the agent's dashboard from other company systems could include a variety of data about the consumer or their problem including, past purchases, last purchase date, suggested solutions to their problem, net promoter score (loyalty measurement) and virtually any other useful previously captured data about the consumer or their problem. But integration can be a two-way street. Information captured during a chat session can also be automatically pushed back to company email systems, knowledge bases, customer service ticketing systems, shopping carts and more. Doing so can trigger additional actions that need to be taken, assist the consumer with the consummation of their purchase, update other company systems with the conversation or data captured during the chat session. All of which could enhance the customer's experience and loyalty with your company.

Proactive Chat Benefits

More and more contact centers, particularly those at e-commerce websites, are being considered revenue centers with chat being used to reduce shopping cart abandonment as well as up-sell and cross-sell products. As noted by Forrester Research in the report "Selecting the Best Chat Strategy," online chat is evolving "from reactive, service-oriented solutions to proactive, sales-oriented solutions," which results in conversion rates that are 20% higher and a 10% increase in average order value.

A Marketing Sherpa case study found a 20% decline in cart abandonment with chat and Jupiter Research recently noted that companies using chat will also experience a 30% lift in the average value of their orders.

In a 2008 study of interactive chat by Forrester Research it was noted that proactive chat investments earned an impressive 105% ROI.

Some Proactive Chat Successes

- After a three-month trial period for proactive chat, a leading data-mining company experienced an 11% increase in average order value.
- A national wedding retailer chain reported a shopping cart conversion rate increase of 30-50% while order value increased by 10-20%.
- A New Zealand-based telephone service provider has seen a 21% average sales conversion rate increase using proactive chat compared to a 3.5% conversion rate for the phone channel.
- A major airline has begun to utilize live proactive chat in cases where it felt it would drive incremental revenue and increase average order values. Here are some of their early results:
 - Improved conversion rates: Customers who chats convert at nearly 3.5 times the rate of those who do not.
 - Increase in average order value: Customers who chat have an average order value of more than 15% over those who self-serve.
 - Reduced support costs: Cost per chat is cheaper than both phone and email, saving on labor costs.
 - Improved customer experience: Customers' needs are met in real time, raising Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) scores to over 80%.
 - Better resource planning: Chat has reduced email volume and backlog, allowing customer inquiries to be dealt with at first contact.

Summary

Using proactive chat as a marketing and customer communications channel isn't significantly different from using other channels. It all boils down to how you implement and optimize the channel. You want to combine knowledge of your visitors' behaviors with creating tailored messages that speak directly to them. The more targeted that you make your message, and the better your trained agents are, the better your results will be. It's becoming more and more difficult for companies to distinguish their brands by price or product features; providing exceptional customer experiences that significantly surpass customers' expectations has become the true competitive differentiator. Effectively implementing a proactive chat solution is an excellent way for companies to accomplish this and as a direct result, set themselves apart from the pack.

Want an assessment of how your company could benefit from proactive chat?

Velaro employs a success management program that includes an in-depth analysis of your current website to find chat opportunities that will drive your business goals.

Chat with us at velaro.com