AM AMA Access:

B2B Marketing

A Business-to-Business Blueprint for Driving Sales

How B2B Marketers are Leveraging Live Chat to Increase Sales

By Nancy Pekala

B2B marketers are taking their cue from their B2C counterparts and using online tools to chat up their prospects, resulting in increased sales and customer satisfaction. Until fairly recently, the use of live chat has been relegated to B2C as a consumer-friendly technology. However, this rich media tool is now being frequently employed by B2B-oriented marketing and sales teams to support their customer acquisition activities.

Live chat is a great way for B2B ecommerce sites to increase customer satisfaction, improve conversion rates, reduce cart abandonment, and increase sales.

A Forrester Consulting study on the benefits of adopting an interactive chat strategy revealed the following key findings:

- 305% ROI from sales chat with a payback period of 6 months (when using paid chat services)
- 120% ROI from customer service chat with a payback period of 6 months (when using paid chat services)
- 59% call deflection rate

Rachel Rodenborg of Insite Software suggested there are three key reasons B2B marketers should consider incorporating Live Chat into their customer acquisition toolbox:

1. Live chat increases conversions by 20%. Live chat helps answer customer questions and remove buying objections and results in a more confident consumer.
2. Customers who chat are 3x more likely to buy. Live chat provides a method for more direct and personal interaction with customers, resulting in increase in likelihood that they will make the purchase.
3. **Live chat improves customer satisfaction levels.** Chat offers customers a more immediate and satisfying method to get their questions answered. As a result, customers walk away from the interaction feeling more satisfied and positive about your brand.

A recent AberdeenGroup study, "Live Chat Takes Center Stage in Best-in-Class Deployments of Sales and Marketing Rich Media Solutions," affirms that live chat is better at enabling a more compelling conversation between the enterprise and its prospects/customers, which ultimately yields stronger overall performance.

The study's author, [Peter Ostrow](#), Vice President and Research Group Director: Customer Management, Sales Effectiveness, notes that in order to maximize benefits from live chat, Best-in-Class companies are adhering to the following chat practices:

- **Security is essential**. Two-thirds of the Best-in-Class companies guarantee live chat participants' data will not be released, exposed or in any danger of distribution beyond the conversation at hand.
- **Subject matter expert support is provided**. Best-in-Class companies are nearly twice as likely as other companies to offer subject matter expert support in the live chat environment. Maintaining a pre-sales or selling discussion requires the eventual escalation of the interaction to a more detailed conversation of the prospect or customer's specific needs.
- **Enhance supported live chat with click-to-call or desktop/screen-sharing solutions.** Both of these options help to further engage a live chat conversant by adding voice communications or co-browsing modalities to the engagement. It further enhances the ability of an agent or sales rep using live chat to bring the discussion to more engaging levels, using a number of rich media tools. For example, screen-sharing and instant meeting starts create a seamless user experience, while the ability to manage various content assets enables an agent to pick and choose exactly what their conversant can see, based on the needs of each particular selling situation.
- **Integrating chat conversation into the CRM system is critical.** This capability can enable all customer-facing personnel to more effectively understand the nature of the accounts with whom they interact. Half of Best-in-Class companies integrate the actual live chat conversation content into the CRM to support this approach.

Data from the study also shows that live chat usage peaks both early in the prospecting process—after awareness building, at the time when website visitors identify themselves as individual prospects, and the sales team takes over the conversation—and then again once the customer relationship has been established.

Further, the study reveals that live chat can be used effectively throughout the customer cycle:

- Marketing: Awareness—29%
- Marketing: Conversion to create sales suspects---39%
- Sales: Early-stage direct engagement: 32%
- Sales: Mid-Stage Direct Engagement: 24%
- Sales: Closing the deal: 18%
- Post-sales customer support, education, engagement: 39%

The report also acknowledges the importance of supporting live chat with both text and non-textual assets that can be delivered either through the chat interface or via separate communications. Providing this flexibility will help ensure that every conversation counts. Doing so, however, requires that organizations create a centralized library of configurable assets that can quickly be tailored by the rep to meet the needs of individual prospects.

Live Chat Best Practices and Tips:

If your organization is looking to add live chat to its toolbox to help increase sales, increase customer satisfaction or build brand awareness, you'll want to consider these best practices and tips:

1. **Develop a rich, customized user experience**. Offer subject matter experts, escalate live chat sessions into click-to-call or screen-sharing, and introduce video or other rich media into the conversation.
2. **Integrate live chat conversation data into the CRM deployment**. In order to ensure that a full history of the account's interactions with the company is captured, make sure your live chat platform data is fully integrated with your CRM solution.
3. **Support the conversation with other customer acquisition tools**. Utilize user-generated social data, content management, and aggressive return-on-investment (ROI) initiatives to capture the value of live chat and all related marketing/selling/servicing investments.
4. **Resource your live chat platform appropriately**. Live chat is a dialogue so utilize pre-set responses properly. The response should fit the specific question asked. Ensure that the business developer responding to live chat inquiries is properly trained and can effectively respond to each prospect's post.
5. **Be mindful of the prospect's needs and interests.** Just like any other type of interaction with a prospect, make sure you utilize Live Chat to respond to the prospect's needs rather pushing your own agenda.
6. **Develop a process to respond to chatters' customer service or technical support inquiries.** Politely refer these chatters to the correct department to handle their inquiries quickly and efficiently so you may focus on chatters with needs for your products or services.
7. **Ensure live chat discussions support your brand.** Live chat is a great tool to build your brand. Make sure your brand is effectively reflected in live conversations, pre-set responses and the display of live chat within your website.

> ## Priorities for Live Chat Users
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> - Meeting participants can share their screens (co-present): **86%**
> - Meeting participants can share permission to remotely control their computer: **75%**
> - Instant meeting can be started "on the fly" without a reservation: **75%**
> - Ability to choose to share a single application or entire desktop**: 74%**
> - Ability to control what content is shown (or not shown) within a screen-sharing session: **68%**
> - All rich media content can be viewed during screen-sharing/co-browsing session, i.e., video, dynamic pages, uploaded assets: **68%**
> - All participants in screen-sharing or co-browsing interactions are guaranteed that their local data is secure and private: **68%**
> - Session recording capability: **68%**
>
> **Source: AberdeenGroupStudy,** Live Chat Takes Center Stage in Best-in-Class Deployments of Sales and Marketing Rich Media Solutions,

Nancy Pekala is the AMA's Senior Director of Online Content and Editor of *B2B Marketing*. Continue the conversation in the B2B Marketing Group of AMAConnect, the AMA's online community exclusively for marketing professionals. Follow us on Twitter @marketing_power.