

guest authors
Jenny Comiskey
Aradhana Goel
Simon King

Continuous Conversations

Using new media to build always-on relationships

The old 1-800 style of customer service is slowly being eroded. Companies are recognizing that every interaction matters and are therefore starting to open up new channels of communication to offer instant access, robust feedback loops, and rapid response.

Customer service is often driven reactively, relegated to a cost center and considered a negative touchpoint. Despised by customers and riddled with clichés, it's a broken system that reflects poorly on an

organization's underlying structure, culture, and brand values.

Today, real-time connectivity is changing the game. New communication tools are supporting open access, robust feedback, direct participation, and immediacy of information. We are seeing consistent evidence that one-way, linear flows of communication are shifting to continuous dialogue through multiple channels.

TAKE ACTION – *designing for Life's Changes*

1.

Don't invade, connect

Build continuity throughout the life of the relationship with your customers, without invading their space.

2.

Transform monologue to dialogue

Host a dialogue that gets both sides talking in order to create a continuous loop: listen, respond, act.

3.

Create redundancy

Design multiple points of entry. Allow access from all sides, in multiple channels, tailored for any number of situations.

4.

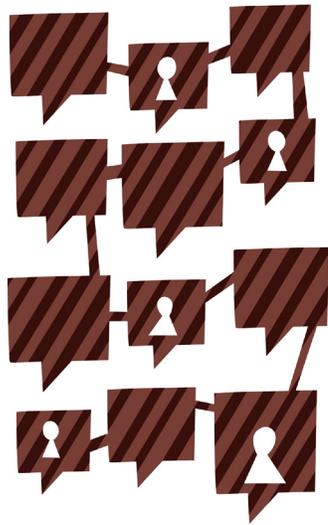
Outside in/ inside out

Open up access to what's going on behind the scenes. Make it human by making it authentic.

5.

Leverage existing platforms

Don't invent, integrate. Systems are already in place so that you can communicate via tools consumers already use.



Always-on customer service

People are vocal when things go wrong and new media tools amplify this, but the online shoe company Zappos has turned that to its advantage. Zappos maintains an Insights page, a Facebook account, and each employee has a Twitter account, which allows them to act as ambassadors for the company.

Jeanne's last job was at a traditional call center, where it was just one call after the next: "I felt like a robot, with no connection to the people I worked with or the person on the other end of the line." When she started at Zappos, the first thing she was asked to do was to set up a profile and Twitter account. "Once I even sent a woman flowers after she'd opened up to me about a family incident."

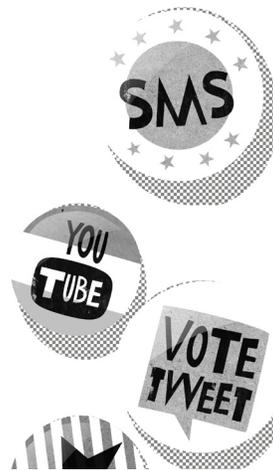
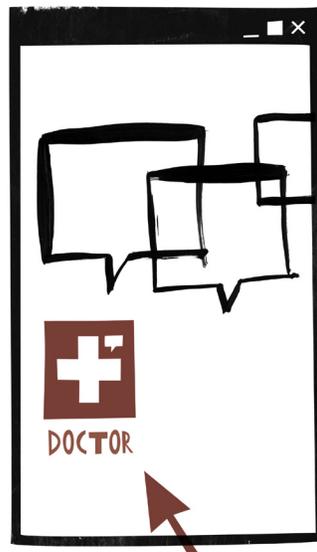
How might you build personal connections with your customers? How might you turn negative interactions into positive ones by responding to issues in real time?

Meaningful micro-moments

It's been hard for Jane, a 33-year-old New Yorker, to find a doctor she can trust. And it doesn't help when she has to wait two hours for a three-minute appointment: "If I'm sick, I'm sick, and I want to know what's wrong as soon as I can."

Since she signed up for the Hello Health service, she's able to communicate with her doctor rather than with the system. She can use IM, video chats, and Facebook-like profiles to ask about even the smallest things. Jane is a self-described hypochondriac and needs reassurance that, yes, it's just a cold. The fact that her doctor is always there for her, either in person or just a simple email away, means everything to her.

How can we transform the old system with new tools? How can we make getting a medical checkup as simple as getting a coffee at Starbucks?



The new public dialogue

During the 2008 US election, Jenna watched speeches on YouTube, got updates on her mobile phone, and subscribed to feeds. "Never before have I felt so involved," she said. "When it came time to watch the inauguration, I could see it with my Facebook status updates on CNN."

Citizens the world over have discovered the utility of mobile phones, YouTube, and Blogger to produce their own news coverage and influence world events. Dumisani Ndlela, a journalist in Zimbabwe, wrote about the use of SMS jokes to make sense of the election stalemate. Halfway across the world, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi regretted that his governing party ignored alternative media there: "It was a serious misjudgment. We made the biggest mistake in thinking that it was not important."

How might governments reach the public using the social networking tools? How can citizens and NGOs use them to make government more transparent, accountable, and responsive?

Simple tools for the little guys

Michael Coffey, chief executive of BlueCotton in Bowling Green, Kentucky, is using tools like Twitter to enhance customer service without significant infrastructure investment. The 25-employee, \$4 million company lets customers design their own shirts online. Two of Coffey's factory workers have recently used iPhones to send photo tweets of completed shirts right before shipping. "Customers have some anxiety when they purchase shirts online," Coffey says. "The tweets help alleviate those concerns and create real fans of the company."

Bridging services for direct access

Being stuck in a tree of menu options isn't what you need when things are going wrong. Often what people want is to simply talk to a person. GetHuman.com is a cheat sheet that tells frustrated consumers the right buttons to push on a telephone to reach a human in the customer service department at hundreds of companies. From full-service suites to message boards, many services are emerging to help consumers navigate complex systems that weren't built for customer satisfaction.



Portals for public action

Services that aggregate voices to support popular action are already widespread. Vote Report India is a collaborative election-monitoring platform that disseminates information and supports citizen action. Users contribute direct SMS, email, and web reports on violations of the Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct. The platform compiles these direct reports with news reports, blog posts, photos, videos, and tweets related to the elections. Citizens can monitor all relevant sources, in one place, on an interactive map.

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

Be a pattern spotter: Now that you've been exposed to a few different examples, don't be surprised if you start seeing *Life's Changes* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it's the next new pattern.

Guest authors: Jenny Comiskey, Aradhana Goel, Simon King.

Contact: Get in touch with us for all that is pattern related at patterns@ideo.com or visit us at <http://patterns.ideo.com>.