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Gethuman Customer Service Survey:
Online Service Expectations

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Introduction

A prospective customer has a question about a product they are considering buying from you and has decided to use one of your online forms to submit their inquiry. The inquiry is assigned to your best agent who has all-important information about the consumer at their fingertips and submits a response within the 1 business day you try to manage within. You never hear from the consumer again. What happened? It's quite possible that they got tired of waiting for your response and ended up finding the same or a similar product from another company that was faster in responding to their questions.

Maintaining customer service levels and customer satisfaction is a paramount task for each and every organization. Service experiences in online channels such as chat and email (includes online form submission) vary between companies and industries as do response times, but consumers generally set their expectations for the type of inquiry rather than the type of organization they are contacting.

General insights for consumer expectations for chat and email are hard to find, let alone how they vary by the age of the consumer or how often they use the Web. In an ongoing effort to keep organizations aware of customer expectations, and to ensure their software is capable of efficiently allowing consumer expectations to be met, Fuze Digital Solutions teamed with Gethuman.com to conduct a first-of-its-kind survey on what customers expect from online customer service.
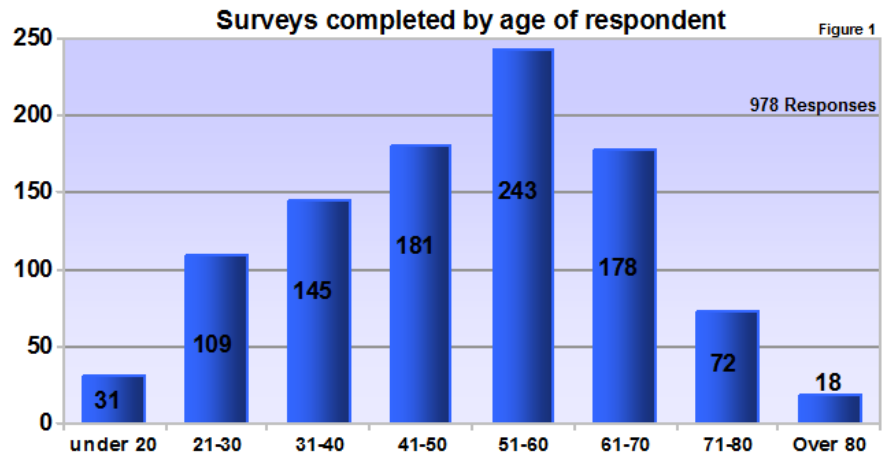
Gethuman.com is a resource that thousands of consumers use each day to help them understand what kind of experience they will receive from a company's customer service. In this survey we were able to get the opinions of these consumers while they were researching and requesting service from over 800 different companies. This was a significant event since it was the first time that the consumer advocacy site Gethuman.com had surveyed its very active and service-demanding community "Fuze understands that the final judge of their software is the consumer who uses it to get support. In this competitive and challenging economic climate, companies cannot afford to ignore the voice of the customer. Failure to meet or exceed customer expectations results in lost business and brand devaluation, which is far more costly than any expenditures required to keep customers happy and loyal to their brand," says Walt Tetschner, Consumer Advocate and Director of Gethuman.com.

The focus of the survey was to gauge how long consumers would wait for a response to a chat message or email request before picking up the phone, getting a negative perception of the responding organization, or taking their business elsewhere. The results of this survey, conducted in August 2008, are meant for organizations as a benchmark on service expectations during business hours and across a spectrum of customers who use the Internet to get service. Companies can use the information to help remain competitive, find ways to improve brand loyalty, and lower customer turnover. "Our software is only effective if it enables our customers to meet or exceed consumer expectations. These survey results clearly define what consumers expect and what companies must

deliver to provide online support that enhances rather than erodes brand loyalty," says Chuck Van Court, President and Founder of Fuze Digital Solutions.

How the Survey was Conducted

The survey was conducted online during August 2008 at www.Gethuman.com. There were 978 unique responses and any duplicates were filtered by email address and Internet protocol address. The target audience was website visitors coming to the Gethuman.com for access to a support channel. Email address was required and participants were offered a weekly prize drawing as an incentive to participate.

Surveys completed by age of respondent

Figure 1

978 Responses

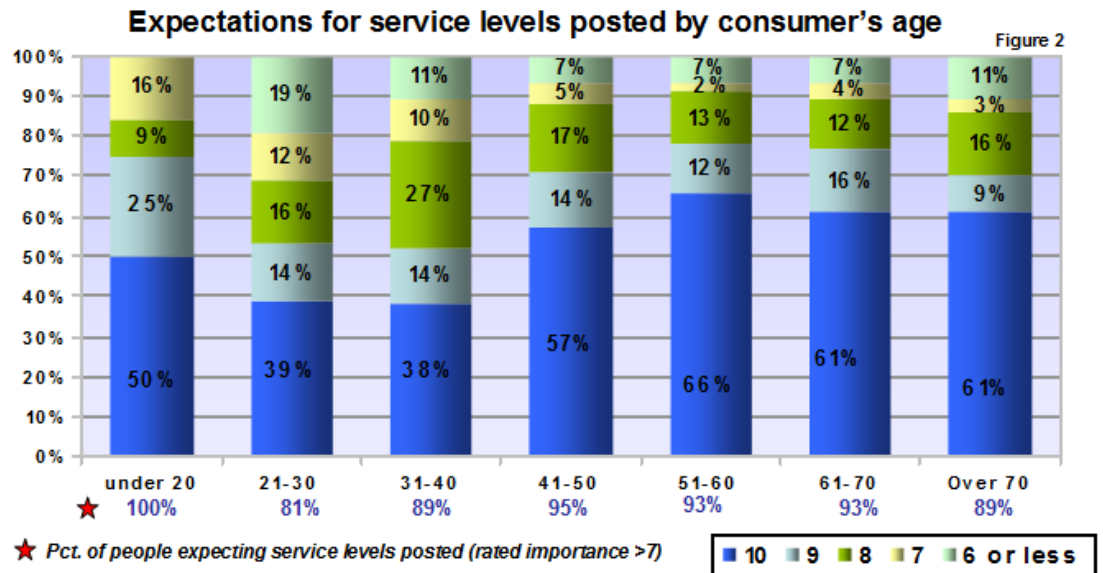| Age	Responses
under 20	31
21-30	109
31-40	145
41-50	181
51-60	243
61-70	178
71-80	72
Over 80	18

The Results and Trends

Clear Communication About Service Levels

If a customer walks into a physical store location to get a question answered, they can quickly tell how long it will take to get some kind of response. When a customer visits a web page to get support or is escalated from self-service they are behind a "virtual curtain" and can't sense, see or intuit how long it will take to get service.

Customers do know what they expect and will quickly turn to other support channels, or worse yet to other companies, if their expectations are not met. For example, would you expect a customer who has sent an email to your support department to also call your call center to ask the same question only 30 minutes later?

This is exactly what will likely happen if you do not post your expected turn-around for the inquiry to each channel on your website or if you post a service level that does not meet with consumer expectations. If instead you post service levels that fall within market expectations on your Web site, and you consistently demonstrate that you meet or exceed your service levels, people will gladly use these less expensive online channels that can provide 7x24 unassisted support.

So what do people expect? The vast majority of survey respondents want to know what the service level will be before contacting customer support. As figure 2 shows, the majority of people of all ages rated the desire to know what service level was beforehand as 9 or 10 and on average 90% of all respondents rated it at 7 or higher. Clearly and understandably people expect to understand how long they should expect to wait for a response before submitting their inquiry.

Expectations for service levels posted by consumer's age

Figure 2

	under 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	Over 70
10	50%	39%	38%	57%	66%	61%	61%
9	25%	14%	14%	14%	12%	16%	9%
8	9%	16%	27%	17%	13%	12%	16%
7	16%	12%	10%	5%	2%	4%	3%
6 or less		19%	11%	7%	7%	7%	11%
★ Pct. of people expecting service levels posted (rated importance >7)	100%	81%	89%	95%	93%	93%	89%

★ *Pct. of people expecting service levels posted (rated importance >7)*

■ 10 ■ 9 ■ 8 ■ 7 ■ 6 or less

Support related inquiries (post-sales inquiries)

There is a big difference between a customer who has just had a computer crash in the middle of an important report and a customer who wants to know what the shuffle option will do on an iPod. Customers will usually gravitate to the channel they think is most appropriate for their situation at hand.

Support incidents vary by severity and most customers who use the phone for support are looking for immediate resolution. Email is a convenient way for customers to multi-task, privately request help during their workday or to collect information that might be hard to document on the phone. But, customers who have chosen to email are looking for quick turn-around as well. What keeps a customer from going to the more expensive channel? One possible solution is by answering emails within 4 hours.

Business hours willing to wait for support-related inquiry

Figure 3

60% expect responses within 4 business hours

16%	20%	13%	11%	18%	10%	12%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ <1 hr. ■ 1 to 2 hrs. ■ 2-3 hrs. ■ 3-4 hrs. ■ 4-8 hrs. ■ 8-12 hrs. ■ over 12 hrs.

As shown in figure 3, over **60% of all respondents indicated that they expect to have an email response to a support incident within 4 business hours and only 22% will accept more than 1 business day**.

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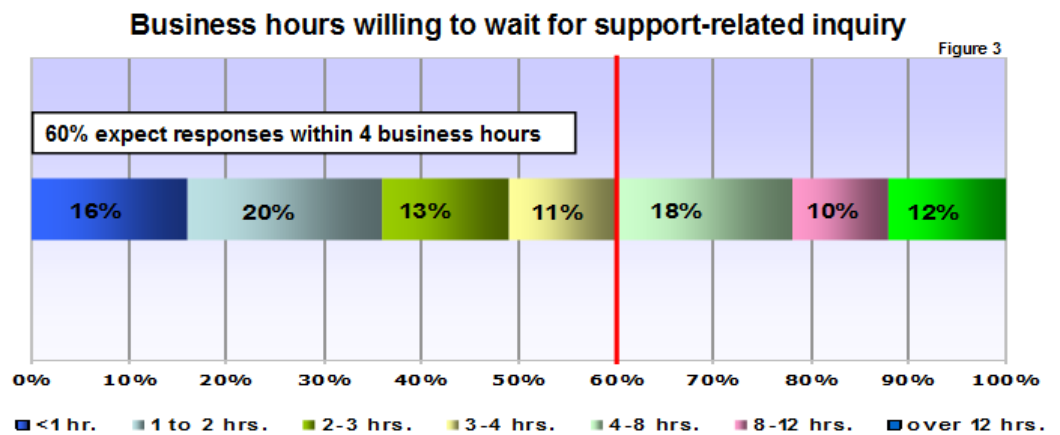
Clearly consumers have pretty high expectations when getting support, but let's take a look at how expectations vary by the age of the person initiating the inquiry or how often they use the Web each week.

As you can see based on the responses broken down by age in Figure 4, consumers of all ages pretty much expect the same level of service. In fact, some of the more senior folks have the most demanding expectations of all. Perhaps they have just lost their patience or want to get to the early seating for the 4 o'clock buffet, but whatever it is, it's pretty clear that the majority of people of all ages have similar expectations for a response to support inquiries within 4 business hours.

Service level expectations by age of consumer getting support. Figure 4
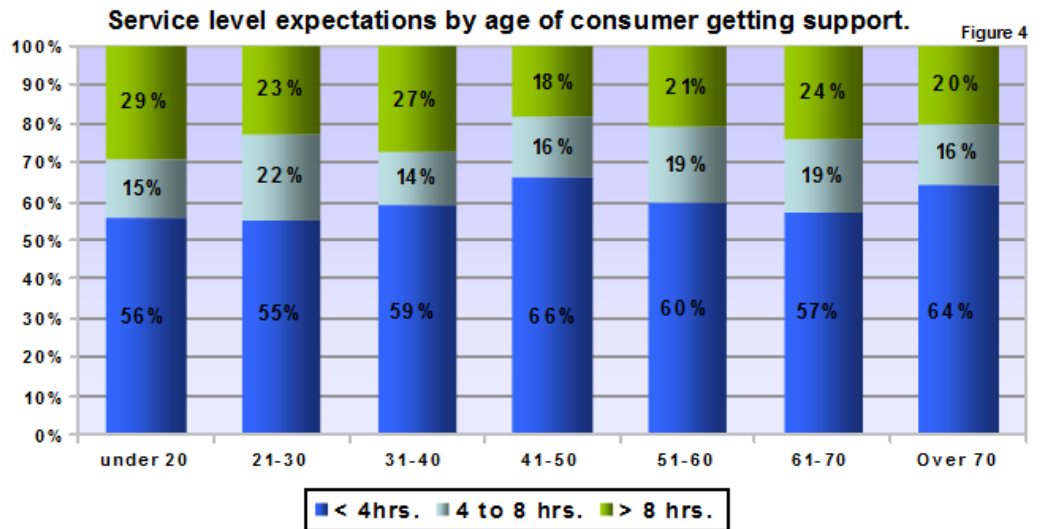
Looking at expectations based on the number of times a consumer uses the Web indicates that **expectations remain pretty consistent regardless of Web usage**. In fact, if anything, there is somewhat of an inverted relationship such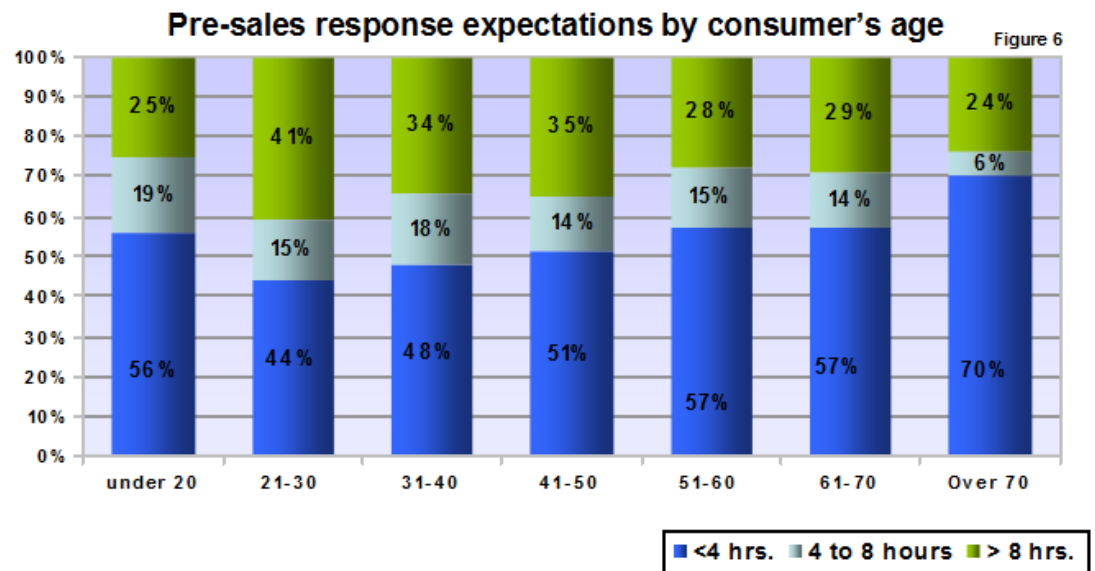 that the less a person uses the Web, the higher their expectations. Could this be the result of seasoned pros on the Web having their expectations tempered some based on actual experiences in getting support? Even so, their expectations for getting a response to a support-related inquiry remain quite high.

Service level expectations by web usage of consumer getting support Figure 5

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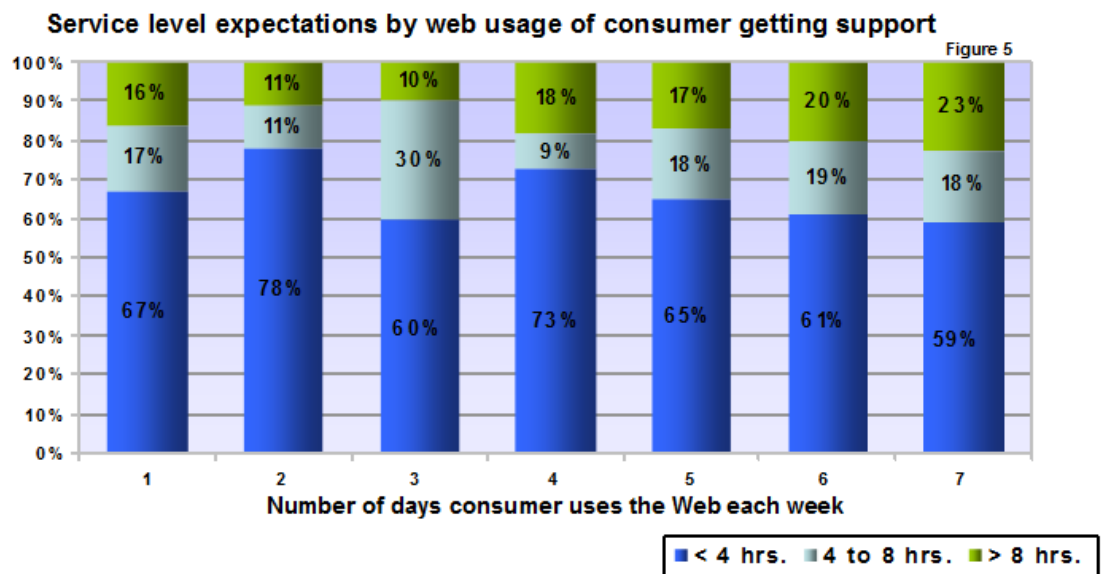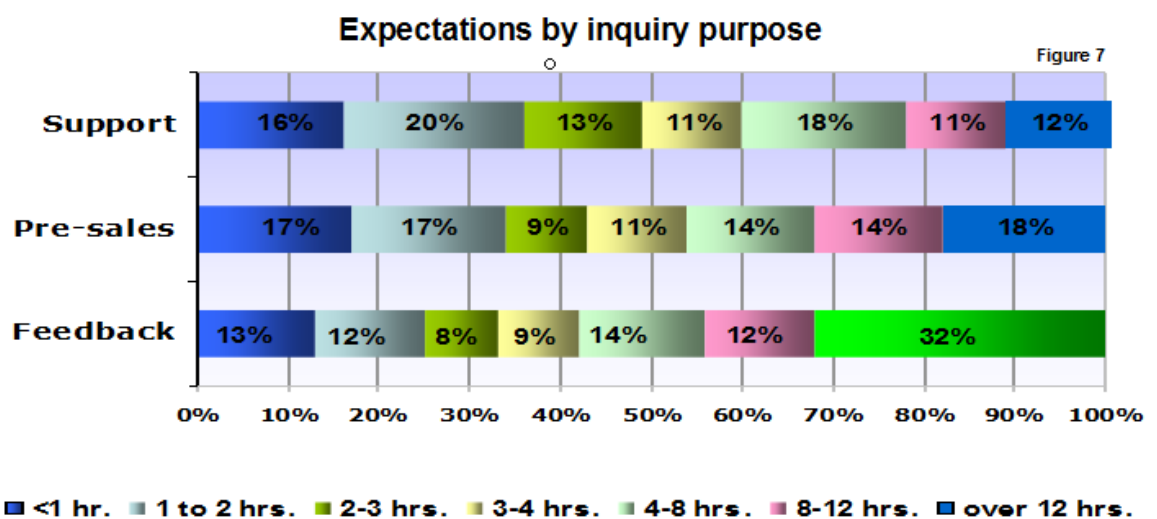
Pre-Sales inquiries

A customer who asks a casual question about a product feature, price or availability may be ready to make a purchase or may be just doing their homework. Choosing the email channel for a sales related question may be the only interaction that the customer wants to have, until they decide to actually purchase. How a company handles their pre-sales inquiries can have a significant impact on whether the customer ends up buying from the organization.

Figure 6 breaks down how expectations vary for pre-sales inquiries by the age of the consumer making the inquiry. Interestingly enough, **expectations tend to increase as the consumer gets older, but around 4 business hours continues to be expected**.

Pre-sales response expectations by consumer's age

Figure 6

Age	<4 hrs.	4 to 8 hours	> 8 hrs.
under 20	56%	19%	25%
21-30	44%	15%	41%
31-40	48%	18%	34%
41-50	51%	14%	35%
51-60	57%	15%	28%
61-70	57%	14%	29%
Over 70	70%	6%	24%

Summary of Responses

Consumers that take the time to provide feedback expect to get more than a general "thank you" response. Figure 7 shows consumer expectations for getting responses to feedback provided as well as providing expectations for pre-sales and support-related inquiries. As you can see, **consumer expectations are greatest for support-related inquiries, pre-sales comes in next and responses to feedback have the lowest expectations**. However, more than 50% of consumers do expect to get a personalized response to their feedback within 1 business day.

Expectations by inquiry purpose

Figure 7

	<1 hr.	1 to 2 hrs.	2-3 hrs.	3-4 hrs.	4-8 hrs.	8-12 hrs.	over 12 hrs.
Support	16%	20%	13%	11%	18%	11%	12%
Pre-sales	17%	17%	9%	11%	14%	14%	18%
Feedback	13%	12%	8%	9%	14%	12%	32%

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Chat

The great thing about chat is that it allows a customer to express their inquiry directly to a human and get a reply that may include text, media, and web pages. In some cases, immediate attention to a question can be the only thing that stands in the way of a sale or completion of an application.

Chat is also the preferred channel for some consumers since it provides a unique method to interact that cannot be replicated using any other channel. Like email, chat also provides consumers a more private way to get support than is achievable on the phone in a busy office setting. For some people, chat is always the preferred method of communication with support staff since removal of the human voice makes it less personal and threatening. For the younger age groups, texting is by far the preferred method of communication. As such, chat provides an important support channel beyond what even click-to-call can provide and must be effectively provided to compete in the marketplace. But merely providing chat is not enough; you have to meet consumer expectations.

Figure 8 shows how long consumers of different age groups expect to wait for a response to each chat message. **Although expectations do vary some by the age of the consumer, on average 40% of consumers expect to get a response within 30 seconds and 70% within 1 minute. Beyond that, you will clearly not be meeting consumer expectations**. It is also worth pointing out that the under-20 crowd has the highest expectations, with 33% expecting a response within 10 seconds. Don't plan on expectations lessening any time soon.

Chat response expectations by consumer's age — Figure 8
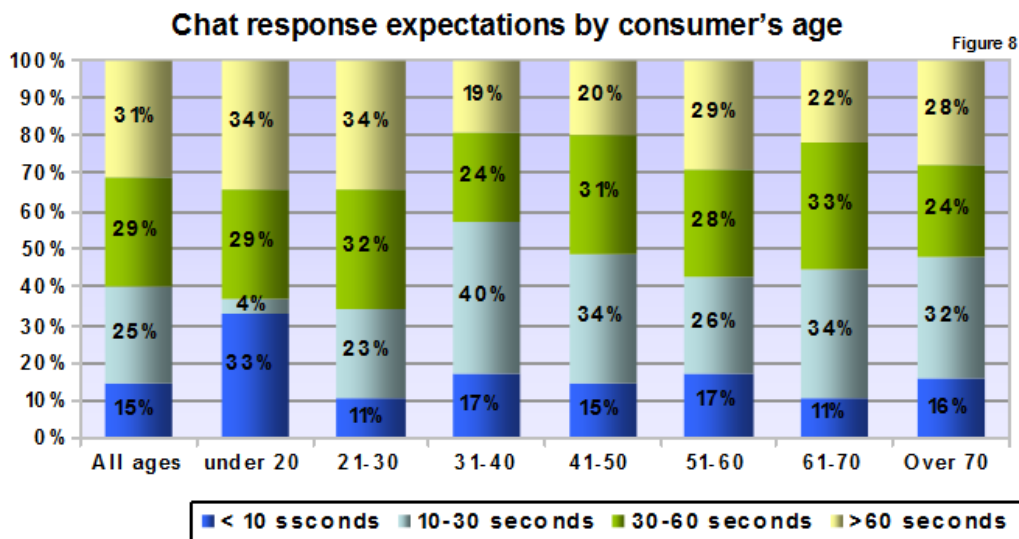
Exceptions and Comments

In the survey we also asked consumers if and when they would be willing to cut a company some slack on their service expectations. Here are just a few examples of the comments:

- If company is experiencing a widespread outage, natural disasters, etc.
- If I say "this is just some feedback I noticed" or something similar, I don't expect a response.

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- I don't expect issues to be resolved immediately when I call outside normal business hours.
- During a particularly busy time for the company, I would expect a longer wait time.
- Support issues can wait if it is not blocking. Sales issues can wait if I am contacting multiple companies (versus wanting to get a quote NOW).
- There's no reason for anything less than excellent and prompt customer service if a company values its customers.

Conclusion

The world economies are in shambles and virtually all analysts are forecasting a deep recession in the U.S. and abroad. Beyond competing on product and price, companies must differentiate themselves with their service and support. When executed successfully, consistent and outstanding customer care can create the most loyal customers and sometimes even turn them into your best sales force. But to be successful, merely offering the support channels consumers demand is not enough; they must be managed within the service metrics consumers actually *expect* rather than what companies *think* is good enough. These survey results help define where the bar is.

Beyond meeting consumer expectations by providing the flexibility allowed by alternative support channels, a well executed online support channel can bring many benefits, such as reduced operational costs, by diverting consumers from the more expensive and limited phone and in-person support. Another benefit of making it worth your consumers' time to use your online channel is the rich consumer insights that are available for digital capture and leveraging to provide more personalized service and for use in narrowly targeted campaigns.

Failure to provide an online channel that meets consumer expectations results in greater costs, lost opportunity, and quite possibly lost customers.

The survey responses include many subtleties to be extracted and analyzed for how they should be used to architect and deliver online customer care. Remember also that the service expectations provided by consumers in the survey define when the consumer would become dissatisfied and not what would make them happy, so organizations need to really work at exceeding these expectations.

As a baseline for minimum service levels, organizations should manage within the following to successfully meet the current expectations of most consumers:

- Post your service levels online that are within consumer expectations and consistently manage to them.
- Respond to online inquiries via email and forms within 4 business hours and never take more than one business day to respond. You may have slightly more time for responses to pre-sales inquiries and feedback.

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- Respond to chat messages within 30 seconds, 1 minute at the very latest. If dealing with a younger consumer base, you probably need to be prepared to deal with an expectation of providing a response within 10 seconds.

Clearly these expectations can only be consistently and affordably achieved by using technology that streamlines operations and allows proactive management within service-level expectations.

Fuze Digital Solutions and Gethuman.com hope you found this information informative and valuable to architecting your customer care operations.   We look forward to hearing from you and establishing a dialog about what kinds of metrics you would like to see included in our next survey. Please feel free to contact Fuze Digital Solutions at 1-866-631-0188 or by visiting www.FuzeDS.com or www.Gethuman.com.

About Gethuman

The Gethuman™ movement was created from the voices of millions of consumers who want to be treated with dignity when they contact an enterprise for customer support. The goal of Gethuman.com is to convince enterprises that providing high quality customer service and having satisfied customers cost much less than providing low quality customer service and having unsatisfied customers. Gethuman.com contains a database of over 800 companies in over 30 industries where consumers can directly access customer service channels and rate their customer service experiences in real-time.

About Fuze

Fuze Digital Solutions, LLC is an employee-owned company that provides an enterprise-grade and modular customer care software suite that is EASY to use and administer and includes a knowledge base that is first to leverage community insights while protecting brand integrity. The Fuze Suite^{TM} enables companies to build and sustain customer loyalty by facilitating education, communication, and collaboration with customers during the support process while providing outstanding and consistent care across all support channels including website, chat, email, in-person and phone. Fuze customers include Fujitsu, Sutherland Group, CareerBuilder.com, SonicWall, Oregon Health & Sciences University, NOAA, Midway Games, Turbine, 17-AAA clubs and over 50 financial institutions including Lockheed Federal Credit Union. Suffering less than 4 hours of unscheduled down-time in over 6 years of business, Fuze understand that their technology supports mission critical operations and has set the bar for system availabiity in the industry. The Fuze Suite can be run hosted on Fuze Services or licensed on yours. For more information, call (425) 649-1246 or visit online at www.fuzeds.com.