Chatbots May Ease Consumers' Customer Service Concerns

ARTICLE

Krista Garcia

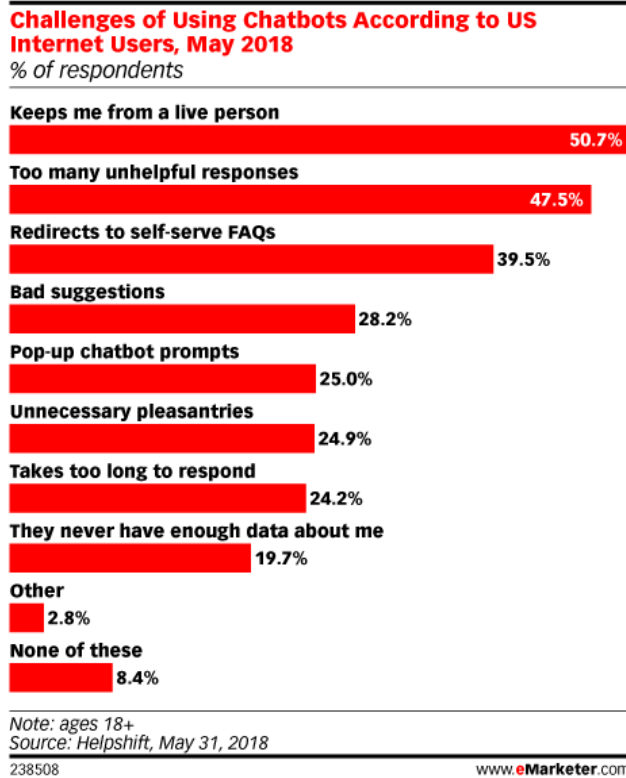**A**ccording to a May 2018 survey of US internet users by Helpshift, retail didn't rank among the top three industries for worst customer service. Instead, that "honor" went to the telecom, airline and insurance sectors. Still, retail came in fourth, cited by 17.7% of respondents.

Overall, close to three-fourths of respondents think contacting customer service is a frustrating experience. The leading reason why was long waits and hold times (60.2%). Nearly as many (58.6%) dreaded being transferred and having to re-explain a problem over and over, while 49.9% feared having to navigate a seemingly endless automated menu.

When asked about current and future tech, 62.0% said they liked email and messenger chatbots that collect information and get the right support agent, and 75.9% said chat-based messaging would be a preferred means to contact customer service if they knew they would get an immediate response. Granted, Helpshift is a messaging-based platform invested in texting for customer service.

Still, not everyone was enamored by chatbots. According to the study, 50.7% of respondents said dealing with chatbots prevents them from

connecting with a human, while 47.5% said they lead to too many unhelpful responses. Nearly 40% said they redirect to self-serve FAQs.

Challenges of Using Chatbots According to US Internet Users, May 2018
% of respondents

Challenge	%
Keeps me from a live person	50.7%
Too many unhelpful responses	47.5%
Redirects to self-serve FAQs	39.5%
Bad suggestions	28.2%
Pop-up chatbot prompts	25.0%
Unnecessary pleasantries	24.9%
Takes too long to respond	24.2%
They never have enough data about me	19.7%
Other	2.8%
None of these	8.4%

Note: ages 18+
Source: Helpshift, May 31, 2018
238508   www.**e**Marketer.com

In a Q4 2017 survey of US chatbot users by eGain and Chatbots.org, 74% of respondents deemed them "effective" or "somewhat effective" for customer service. (Only 12% said they were "very effective.") The biggest challenge, cited by 59% of respondents, was being transferred to a human agent and having to repeat everything they just told the chatbot.

This has been a theme in many studies. According to 38% of US internet users surveyed by Conversocial, the most important aspect of a good digital customer service experience is getting an issue resolved in a single interaction. And 17% cited having an issue resolved in a single channel rather than being shuttled to a traditional channel.

Customer service channel preferences vary with age, though. According to "The eMarketer Ecommerce Insights Report," conducted by Bizrate Insights in May 2018, live chat (not necessarily through a

chatbot) had a similar preference rate as a phone call (30.1% vs. 29.5%) among US internet users. Respondents ages 30 to 39 had a very strong preference for live chat (45.9%), and everyone under 50 liked chat more than phones. So it's a fair assumption that future usage of chatting for customer service will only increase.

Preferred Method for Interacting with a Brand/Website's Customer Support Team Among US Female Internet Users*, by Age, May 2018

% of respondents

	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
Email	27.7%	22.6%	31.8%	36.8%	30.8%	31.1%
Live chat	36.9%	45.9%	37.1%	25.6%	24.8%	30.1%
Phone	23.1%	24.1%	21.8%	27.3%	35.6%	29.5%
Website inquiry	9.2%	5.3%	6.5%	7.0%	6.4%	6.6%
Social media	3.1%	1.5%	1.2%	1.7%	0.6%	1.2%
Other	0.0%	0.8%	1.8%	1.7%	1.8%	1.5%

Note: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding; *at least 65% of respondents were female and at least 50% were ages 50+
Source: "The eMarketer Ecommerce Insights Report" conducted in May 2018 by Bizrate Insights, May 9, 2018

237852 www.**eMarketer**.com

Now the bad news: When NewVoiceMedia asked US internet users to name the most effective channel for getting a customer service problem resolved, the most popular response (31.7%) was "there is no most effective channel."