

Using Web Self-Service to Accelerate Online Sales

By Dee Roche, Head of Marketing, Transversal

Web self-service done well deserves to be positioned as a complementary sales channel. As well as helping organizations to increase online sales, it can be used as a platform for promoting in-store products and offers; for ensuring that store and contact center staff are equipped with consistent and knowledgeable answers to customers' questions; and for providing insight into what products and services customers want.

Today's consumers are multi-channel shoppers, using both the Internet and "Main Street" together to make even a single purchase. For example, when we make decisions about more complex purchases, such as electronics goods, we tend to rely more heavily on a mix of sales channels. Many of us will visit websites for product information and reviews, then go in to stores to check out the sound of the MP3 speakers, or picture quality of the TV we want to buy. Often, we decide what product to purchase in store before going home to buy it online for the best price.

The quality of information provided by websites and sales staff can heavily influence our purchase and is one of the reasons why Web self-service is becoming an increasingly important part of the multi-channel shopping experience. Ultimately, the Web, Main Street and the contact center are dependent on each other to maintain successful engagement with customers. An unfulfilled customer expectation at any of these places will adversely affect a company's brand and potentially sales.

Adding New Revenue Streams

It really is possible to create Web self-service knowledgebase solutions that produce an impressive online customer service experience and add new revenue streams. What better way to sell online, than by using customer service interactions as a mechanism for promoting products and services based on what customers ask about. This is a classic strategy: using highly targeted, permission-based marketing. Your customers are asking you questions, thereby giving you permission to provide them with information—it's up to you to maximize the potential of these opportunities and follow

through in a way that satisfies your customers' requirements and increases the chances of them making a purchase.

The strategy of using Web self-service as a platform for selling products, alongside providing service, led Transversal to a major technology development in the online service market.

Working with Barclays Bank, we developed an ad-serving module which integrates with Barclays' existing Web self-service solution in order to serve graphic and classified-style advertising alongside answers to customers' questions. The ads change automatically depending on their relevance to questions asked or to products and services that Barclays is promoting, thus increasing cross-promotion and growing online sales of Barclays' products. For example, questions about foreign currency accounts return ads and offers on travel insurance, using debit cards abroad and foreign mortgages.

Management of advertising is carried out within the Web self-service solution, which stores ads ready to be served up

automatically when customers ask a related question. Content management tools built into the product enable advertisement start and expiration dates to be set for new product launches or particular campaigns.

The experience led to four major insights:

1. High response rates: Using Web self-service to provide the right information in response to the questions customers ask, along with automated, tailored, product advertising, is producing exceptionally high levels of engagement and conversion. While response rates for online advertising are typically less than one percent, 12% of all customers who ask a question through Barclays' Web self-service solution are responding to a product promotion—which has already contributed millions of dollars of additional sales.

2. Customer adoption increases 75%: Incorporating the ad-serving module within Barclays' Web self-service solution also led to an immediate increase in customer usage, which continues to rise month over month. Overall, adoption of Web self-service by Barclays' customers increased by 75% in 2006. The system successfully handled nearly a million online customer service sessions and answered more than two million customer service and sales questions.

3. Customer insight: Web self-service can provide incredible insight into what your customers want. Every question asked through your solution is providing real-time information about customer requirements in the process of making a buying decision, for example, "can I collect my order in store?" If a question is asked in sufficient numbers, it's providing serious clues about customer demand for a product or service and could

The Solution: Barclays Ask A Question

BARCLAYS Ask a question related to:

Reverse questions in Personal Banking

Get your question in the first place or submit a custom letter to better questions.

Please note that we cannot answer specific queries about your account here.

All of Personal Banking

- Shop & Buy
- Buy for your banking
- Transfer & Credit
- Loans & Credit
- Travel & Finance
- Business Banking
- Services
- Accounts & Statements
- Research
- Money & Investments
- Travel & International

Don't find the answer? Contact us

Suggested entries in 'All Areas'

The following entries may answer your query. If not please search again. A number of questions about your account cannot be answered here.

- Do you offer European mortgages?
- Can I borrow money to buy property abroad?
- Can I borrow money to buy property abroad?
- Travel Insurance: How do you know if you're covered?
- See our latest mortgage interest rates

Debit cards abroad

Read our guide to using your debit card abroad. You can use your Current or Debit card when you go shopping.

Barclays.co.uk/offer

See our family calculator to find out how much you should lend you to buy your dream home.

Car Insurance is looking

Find out what you can save on your car insurance and what you should do to get the best deal.

Travel of money for a better deal?

Targeted advertising is displayed based on customers' questions and the knowledgebase section being browsed.

Barclays' Ask a Question accommodates all search preferences, allowing customers to browse knowledgebase links, search by keyword or ask complete, natural language questions.

make a difference to your bottom line if you respond to this feedback. It was through Web self-service that Barclays Bank discovered that their personal banking customers' requirements for international payment transactions were much greater than previously realized.

4. Increasing sales through other channels: If your Web self-service data motivates you to introduce an "in-store collection service," think about the other items customers might purchase when they pick up their order? Your Web self-service solution is the ideal platform for providing incentives such as in-store discount e-vouchers that can be promoted alongside answers to questions about delivery.

Getting Web Self-Service Right

Too many online service solutions fall down when customers need to ask more specific or complex questions, thus leading to customer frustration and higher service costs as customers resort to other channels for answers. This was further highlighted in our research into consumer attitudes toward website search: 82% of consumers said current search methods were unacceptable and 66% would go to competitors if they couldn't find what they were looking for.

Intelligent NLP is essential: Whether customers choose to find information by browsing, searching by keyword or asking

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more complex questions, a Web self-service solution needs to be driven by a highly intelligent natural language search engine to successfully interpret customer requirements—able to know that a customer "wanting to buy a house in France" is looking for a "European mortgage." A natural language processing (NLP) search engine should be able to understand highly complex questions, and also produce more intelligent results from customers' keyword searches. For example, a customer entering the keywords "foreign currency" is normally presented with every knowledgebase entry containing "foreign," "currency" and/or "foreign currency," regardless of whether the results are appropriate and without understanding what the customer is looking for.

Barclays' web self-service uses advanced search algorithms to take into account other

Holiday Extras Increases Online Sales by 9%

Transversal's customer, Holiday Extras, the UK market leader for airport parking and hotel reservations, deployed Web self-service to increase customer satisfaction and cut contact center demand during its busiest season. Within four months, calls to the contact center dropped by 9%. Only 8% of customers using the website needed to email for information, further reducing workload for staff. What they didn't expect was a simultaneous increase in sales by 9%. Speaking for Holiday Extras, Jackie King, contact center manager, states, "The implementation of Web self-service has been an eye-opener for us; we have seen our sales on the Web go up. We have also noticed a rise in out-of-hours sales."

factors in order to understand customer requirements more closely. For example, because the customer is browsing the online banking section of the website at the time of performing the "foreign currency" search, they are probably more likely to want to know about "foreign currency bank accounts," so this information is served.

However, suppose the customer happened to be in online banking but was actually thinking about organizing currency for a holiday? The ad-serving feature of Barclays' Web self-service solves this by presenting an advertisement for commission-free currency—in effect, covering all bases.

to-date as customers ask new questions. Ensuring the back-end interface of your application allows staff to add new content and announcements, without needing HTML skills and without having to refer to your vendor. A multi-language solution should ensure that new content added in one language is automatically alerted for update across all language modules.

Share your Web self-service knowledgebase: A consistent, centralized Web self-service knowledgebase of customer service and product information can be deployed across help desks and contact centers for improved customer service quality and efficiency, and be integrated with other customer service technologies such as chat, email and voice.

The Bottom Line

Do you need Web self-service? Yes. Customers visiting your website expect to be provided with the information they need quickly and intuitively. Web self-service is also a platform for increasing sales by promoting products and services based on what your customers ask for. And finally, think of Web self-service as a "customer insight" engine, providing invaluable information about what customers want, which can be fed back into the business and be used to enhance your offering. In the words of Andy Barker, head of customer service, Sony Playstation, "It helps us read the minds of our customers." ■

Context-sensitive applications improve customer experience: Ensure your Web self-service solution is driven by a dynamic, self-organizing knowledgebase that automatically prioritizes entries according to how frequently they are viewed. A context-sensitive application will improve customer experience by presenting the most popular question-and-answer content, based on where they are on the website—so if I'm in "mortgages" when I select Help, Ask a Question or Contact Us, I'm automatically presented with the most often viewed part of the mortgage knowledgebase. In this way, many customers find the answers they need without even performing a search.

Ensure it's easy to keep knowledge up-to-date: A knowledgebase is as good as its content, so it's important to keep it up-

Transversal's multi-channel eService solutions enable organizations to achieve high-impact wins on improved service, reduced costs and increased sales. Transversal's flagship Web self-service solution uses the online customer service interaction to deliver targeted offers and advertising based on what customers ask about—a customer service strategy which is proven to produce high response rates and sales, while simultaneously improving customer service quality and efficiency.

For additional information, please visit www.transversal.com.