How you can improve your brand's customer self-service

Introduction

Whether it's going to the company's help center, watching a video online, or checking out what other customers have to say on an online forum, most customers will attempt to solve their own customer service problems. In fact, Harvard Business Review found that 81% of consumers try to solve their problems on their own before reaching out to a customer service agent.

But are they able to? Not really. Gartner found that only 14% of customer service queries are resolved with self service. That's a big disconnect!

However, at this point, self-service options are no longer optional for brands. Microsoft's Global Customer Service Study found that 90% of consumers expect brands and organizations to offer an online portal for self-service. Having self-service options is the bare minimum. The question CX leaders should ask themselves is: how robust are my brand's self-service options?

The degree to which your customers can effectively self-serve depends on the resources your brand has dedicated to empowering customers with self service.

In this guide, we'll cover the benefits of self-service for customers and brands, actionable strategies you can use to improve customer self-service, and how to integrate self-service with human support - along with examples from brands with self-service resources you can strive to emulate.

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The benefits of customer self-service for customers

It's all about the customer, so let's start here. Customer self-service tools, such as knowledge bases, FAQs, and how-to videos are essential because they empower customers to resolve issues independently, without waiting for or relying on customer service agents.

Here are some of the more specific benefits:

⚡ Faster resolutions

One of the most compelling advantages of customer self-service is the speed at which issues can be resolved. Especially if the question or problem is common or straightforward, a customer can often solve their issue in less than a minute - even if they don't start on your website.

Microsoft's study found 75% of people have used a search engine to find answers before calling a brand's customer support. (This was especially prevalent for consumers between 18-34.) If a brand has effective self-service options like articles on a knowledge base or videos, search engines can pull those into their results. Sometimes, users don't even need to click to the website to get the information they need. For many queries, Google's new AI overviews are at the top of search results, pulling step by step instructions from results online.

Self-service spotlight

The help center articles from jewelry brand Ana Luisa get pulled directly into Google search results.
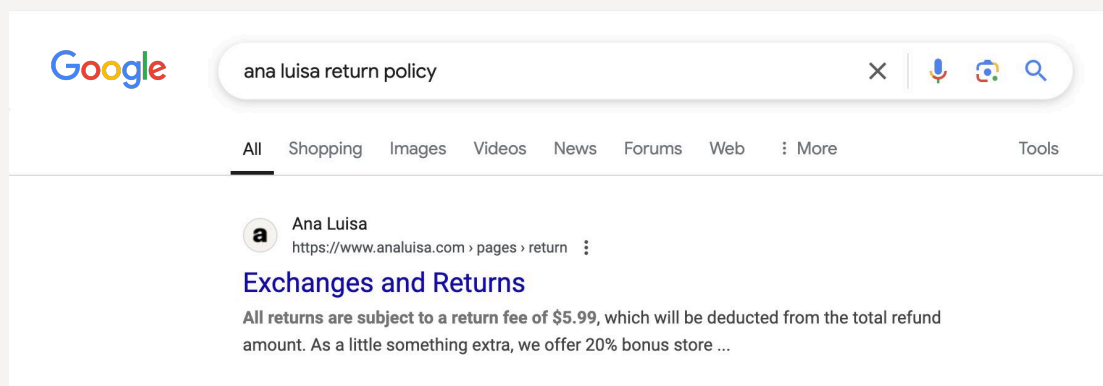
Google also will answer sophisticated questions in a featured snippet with step-by-step instructions, pulling from a variety of web sources. If your brand has help self-service resources, Google will pull from these. The trend of zero-click searches is increasing as Google and voice assistants provide direct answers to users without having to visit the webpages. You may not get that visibility if that's what's effectively addressing your customer service inquiries, but the key thing is that customers are still resolving their issues on their own.
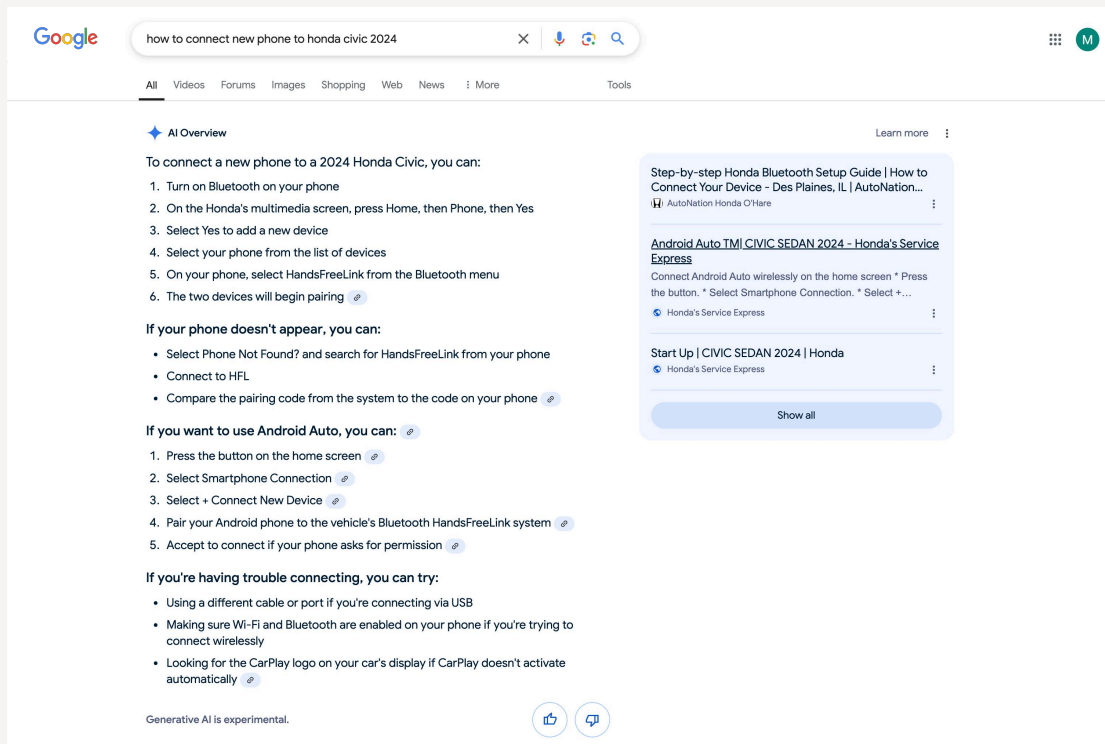
🕐 24/7 availability

The demand for round-the-clock customer service has grown over time, and self-service can make that possible for customers. Even if the customer does eventually need help from an agent, being able to troubleshoot part of the problem thanks to a self-service resource can speed up their resolution when your agents do become available.
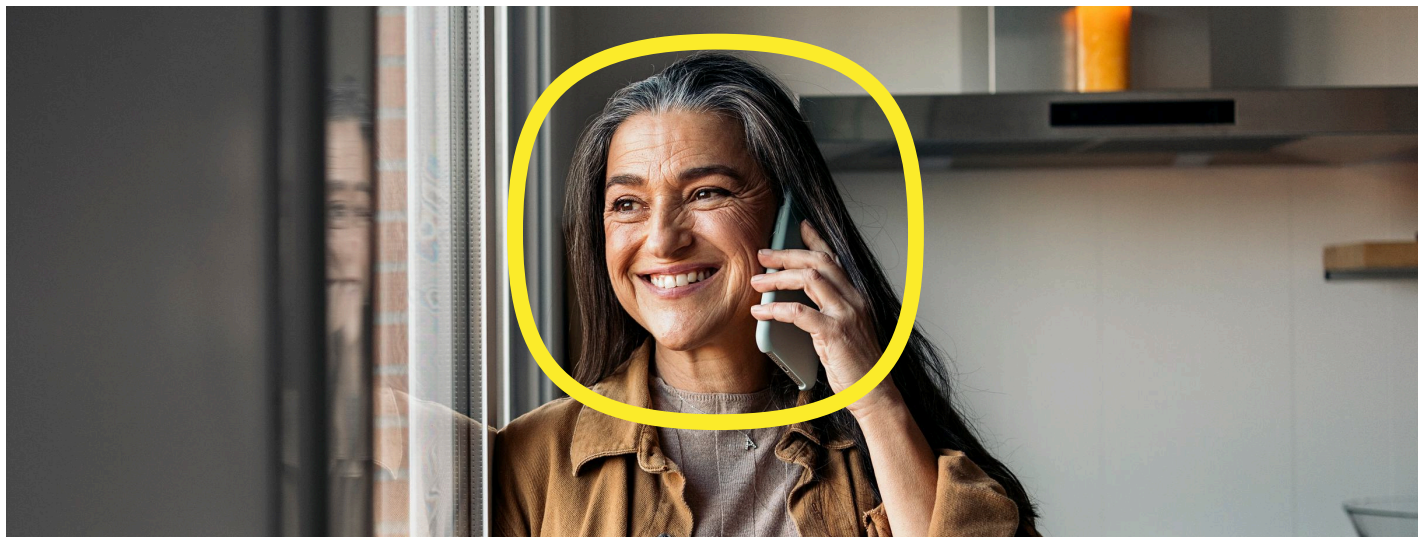
🙂 Increased customer satisfaction

As the data we referenced earlier shows, customers really want to self-serve; it's key to them having a good experience with your brand. Customer satisfaction is linked to how empowered customers feel when interacting with a company.

When customers can self-serve, they feel more satisfied with the company's products and services, knowing they can quickly and easily find solutions on their own. That can actually turn a potential problem into something that builds brand loyalty.

✓ Reduced frustration

Finally, self-service reduces customer frustration by streamlining the process to find an answer. When customers have access to an intuitive, easy-to-navigate knowledge base, they are less likely to experience the stress and irritation that often comes with needing to contact support for minor issues.

Gartner found that negative emotions, like frustration and anxiety, make a huge impact on whether a customer sticks it out with self-service or gives up and calls in to a live support agent. When companies reduce customers' negative emotions (via effective self-service channels) the customer is more likely to stay in those channels and solve their own problem.

When customers can self-serve, a customer service issue doesn't hold them back. They can get back on with their day and more importantly, back to smoothly using your product or service - no need to wait in a call queue or wait for an email back.

The benefits of customer self-service for your business

Implementing customer self-service tools does double duty: because it helps customers, businesses reaps the rewards. By enabling customers to handle issues independently, your company can improve its operational efficiency, save on costs, and enhance employee satisfaction.

These are some of the specific business reasons to invest in customer self-service:

Reduced financial resources

The potential cost savings with self-service is substantial: Forrester found that a self-service interaction can cost about $0.25 compared to between $6 - $12 for an interaction with a live agent - up to a 98% savings!

With more self service comes reduced tickets or conversations your team of support agents needs to address. The typical salary of a customer support representative in the United States ranges from about $35,000 - $44,000 a year or around $12-14 per hour if you use a BPO vendor to outsource the work offshore.

Self service resources can reduce operational costs by reducing additional headcount you'll need. Then, you can allocate resources to other strategic initiatives that can grow your business.

Increased lifetime revenue per customer

Happy customers renew, come back and buy again, and evangelize their experiences to others, providing a cost-efficient stream of business and brand awareness.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers found that consumers will spend between 7 - 16% more on a product from a brand that provides great customer service, and they're more likely to try additional products or services from said brands. McKinsey found that improving the customer experience can increase sales revenue between 2 - 7% and profitability by 1 - 2%.

Customers want to self-serve, and they reward brands that make that possible for them.

⚙ Increased customer service efficiency

When customers can resolve simpler matters on their own, that can improve your brand's overall customer support efficiency. You can speed up your average first response time as fewer support conversations come in. Self-service resources, when integrated with your customer support, can improve first contact resolution performance. The reduced volume also frees up your agents to tackle nuanced issues that require human intervention, providing support for customers who are having issues that go beyond self-service.

🎧 Scaling the reach of customer support

Self-service platforms facilitate one-to-many resources, meaning you can create one asset and it can help many people. As a result, they are an especially valuable tool in supporting your business as it scales. Writing an article or producing a how-to video or webinar can help thousands of customers for months or years to come and save hours of agent time.

This scalability is particularly valuable for growing businesses, or businesses with seasonal peaks. Self-service resources can accommodate increased demand without the need for proportional increases in staff. Human agents can leverage many of these self-service resources too; they can incorporate written instructions or links to tutorials in customer service templates. This can help them scale the support they can provide while delivering consistent service that aligns with your brand.

☺ Increase employee satisfaction

For customer service agents, handling the same simple or repetitive inquiries daily can become boring and unfulfilling. Harvard Business Review reports that the average call center turnover rate is 45%, which is around twice as high as other industries. Customer support agents can oscillate between monotony and managing emotionally driven customer inquiries back-to-back multiple times in a single shift.

By investing in self-service solutions, agents can focus on more complex, high-value customer interactions. This shift allows agents to become problem-solvers rather than information dispensers - a much more engaging and productive way to spend a workday. This can reduce employee turnover which can lower operational costs.

Like CSAT, ESAT is a measure of how satisfied employees are with their work, and this metric is important to understand employee morale. Measure your ESAT before and after investing in self-service resources to better understand the positive impacts on the business.

Key tactics to improve customer self-service solutions

With only 14% of customers able to effectively self-serve, there are some clear barriers that prevent customers from meeting their own needs. Understanding these can help provide some insight on what you can do to boost self-service rates. Microsoft's study found that for consumers who could not successfully self-serve, the top reasons were:

54%	**21%**	**14%**	**7%**	**5%**
Too little information	Disorganized information	No search capability	Outdated information	Too much information

Now we'll dig into specific strategies that address these barriers (and more).

(i) Include sufficient information

How do you know the right amount of information to include? Anyone writing the self-service resources is likely more familiar with your product or service than the typical customer. That can lead to materials having insufficient information to be useful to the reader or viewer. To address this, conduct user testing of the self-serve resources to ensure people can understand the instructions and solve their issues.

Your copy should be clear and concise. Use bullet points or step-by-step instructions to make the information digestible.

Be sure to include visuals like photos, diagrams, or screenshots in your resources. Label what the viewer should pay attention to.

Self-service spotlight

Scout Security has an installation guide for their security system on their knowledge base, complete with detailed diagrams to help consumers understand each step.
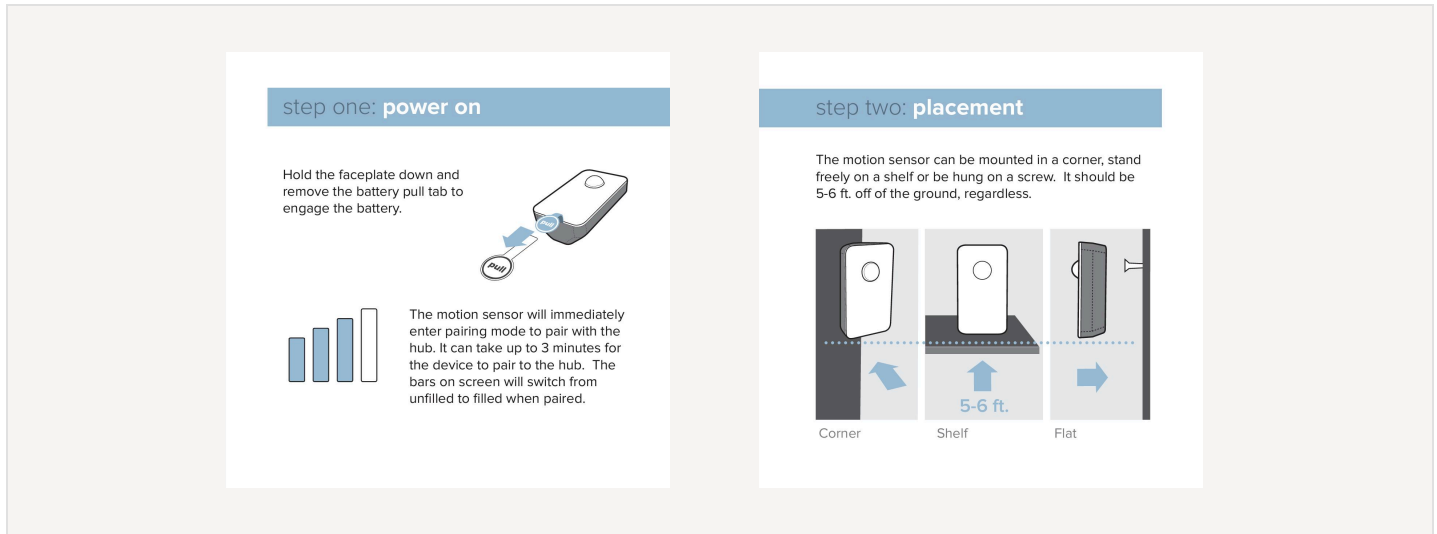
Gartner found that the most important things that predict a customer being able to resolve their issue with just self-service are clarity of the information, usefulness or reliability of the information, and messaging that indicates resolution. When you complete a new self-service resource, see if it fulfills those three points before you publish.

Plus, a small percentage of people found that some self-service resources had too much information. To avoid this, keep the asset streamlined. Keep examples to a minimum and prioritize the most common example.

To check up on your success in this area, use a knowledge base where users can report if the article was helpful. If the percentage of "no" ticks up, take another look at it.

## Structure and organize information so consumers can find it

Once your self-service resources exist, customers need to be able to find them.

Be intentional and map out your self-service content. One option is to organize your information hierarchy based on the types of products or services you offer. Group similar topics into well-defined categories, making it easy for users to find what they need. From there, create individual articles and videos that ladder up.

Use clear titles, tags, imagery, and consistent keywords that align with the brand's terminology so people can find what they need quickly. When you tag the inquiries and articles correctly, that helps connect searchers with the information they are looking for.

Self-service spotlight

Hopper has an easy-to-use knowledge base, covering a wide variety of scenarios with clear, concise information. You can search for your question or find it based on a clear category, like "Flights" or "Hotels".
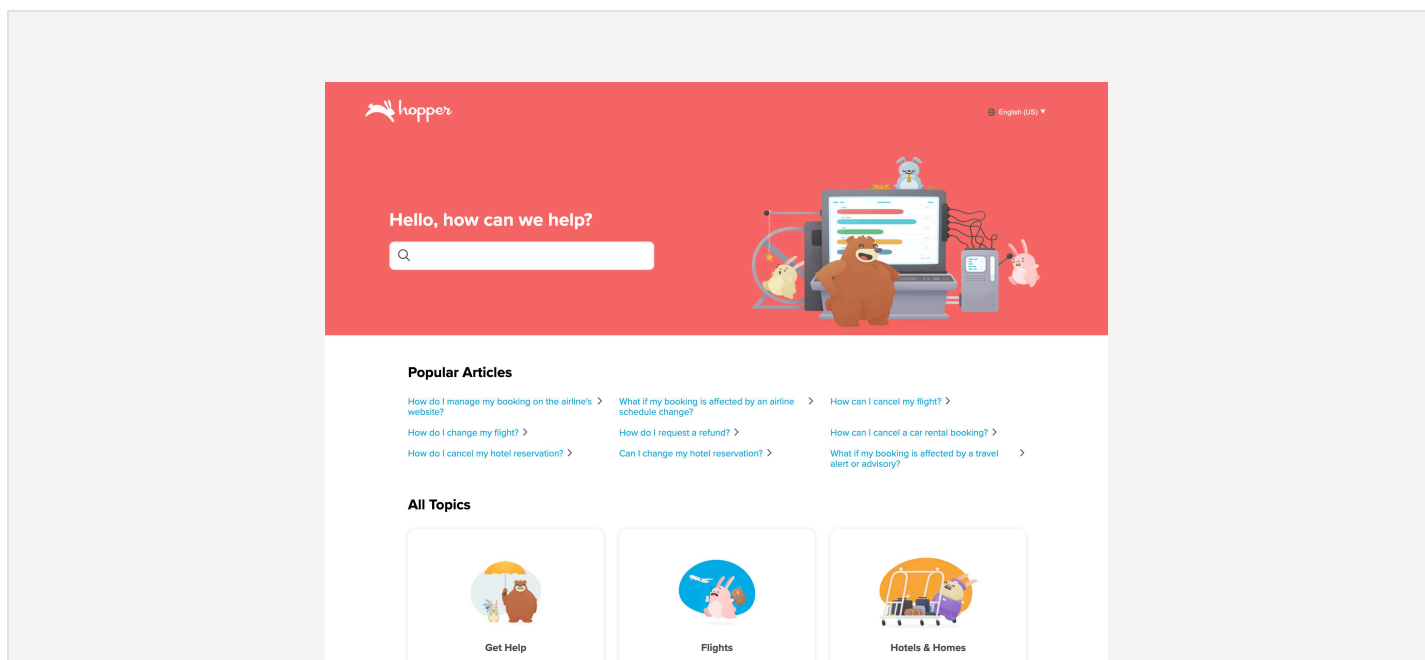
🔍 Make it searchable

Microsoft found that 79% of consumers who used a self-service portal successfully found the answer they were looking for. Make sure your brand's knowledge base is searchable and also index-able for search engines so customers can find it, no matter where they start their self-service journey. If you upload videos to YouTube, write a robust description to help the video be found in YouTube's search engine.

⭐ Keep it current

Keeping your self-service knowledge base up-to-date requires some organization. Here's a framework to help you:

- Audit existing self-serve resources periodically and update anything out of date.
- Build a process to update self-serve resources when you have new product or feature releases, policy changes, or design changes that could impact the customer experience.
- Continuously update and expand your knowledge base based on customer feedback and frequently asked questions.
- If an article or video is so obsolete it's no longer useful, archive it, so it doesn't clutter a user's search or cause confusion.

📹 Offer video resources

Many consumers <u>prefer video to written materials</u> when learning about a brand's product or services. Videos can be effective at providing a faster resolution for customer service issues. Branded videos can do double duty for your brand if you can repurpose them on video or social channels, gathering brand awareness all while assuring future customers that you have ample self-service materials should an issue arise.

Self-service spotlight

<u>Manscaped</u> has helpful, quick tutorials on their YouTube channel walking through how to use and take care of their specific products.
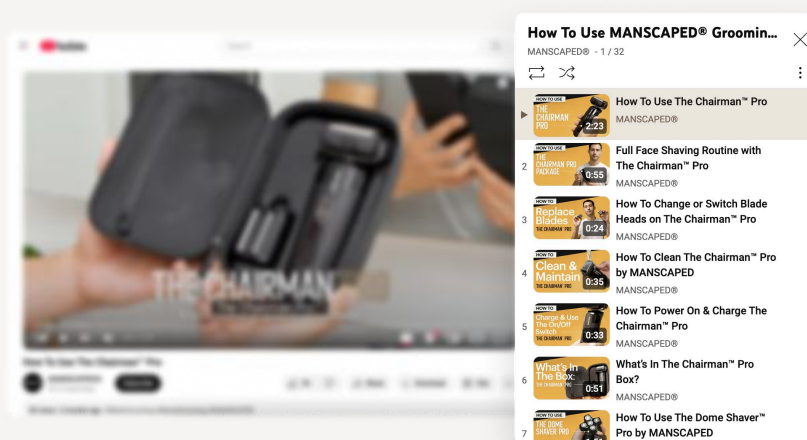
Video can be intimidating to produce or a big investment for brands, but if you can't pull off the highest production value yet, don't let that stop you. Even basic equipment, like smartphone cameras and microphones, has improved dramatically and can create serviceable videos. Consumers are looking for quick, authentic content - you don't need it to be highly polished!

You can also leverage influencers or user-generated content creators to tackle video FAQ production for you. Check out a UGC marketplace or a freelancer platform to find video hosts.

Webinars are another great option to offer a video-style walkthrough of a tool or process that your customers can follow. The best part? Webinars are efficient and pretty easy to produce. All you'll need is slides or a screenshare and some kind of video conferencing tool to record. You can even do audio-only as an even lower barrier to entry. An on-demand webinar can live on your help center afterward.

As a bonus, if you host a live webinar session and field questions from customers, you'll get helpful feedback about details customers don't understand or other topics you can take on.

Self-service spotlight

<u>Mixbook</u> has a helpful screenshare-style video on their help center that showcases how customers can use their tool.
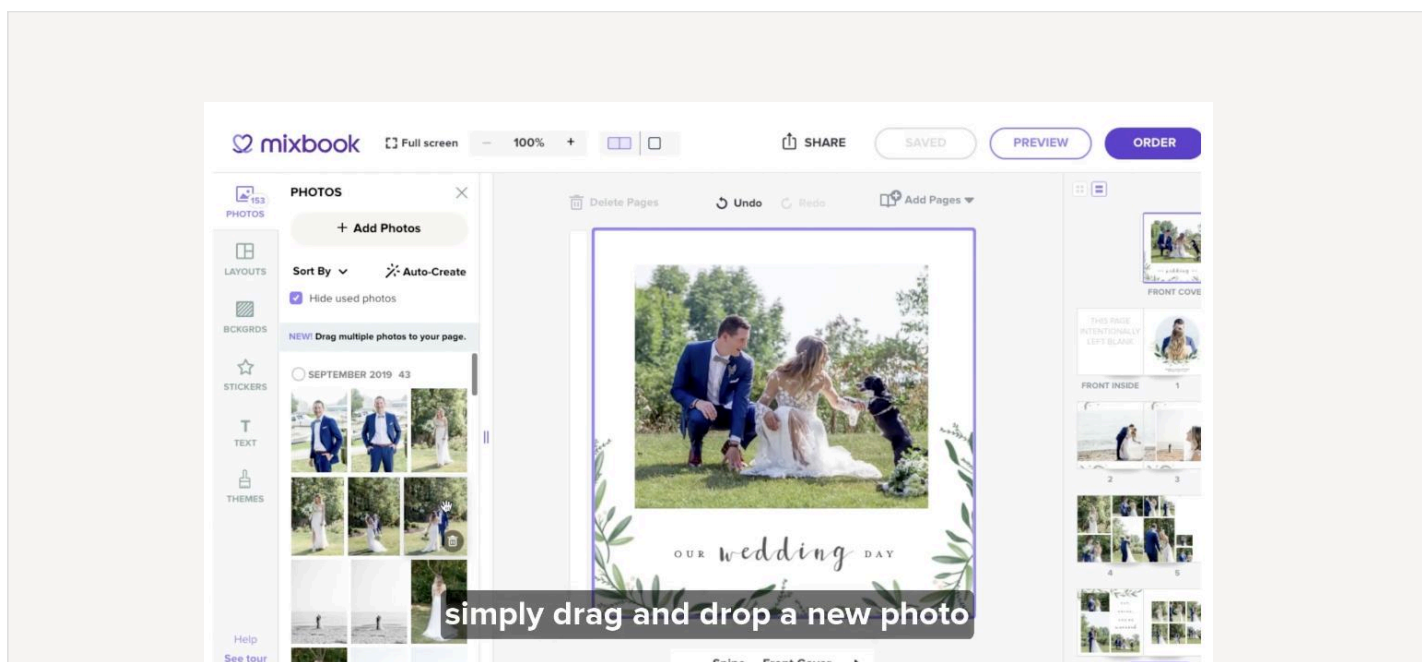
👥 Capture customer queries

The best way to know which topics to prioritize is to learn directly from your customers. When you understand what your customers need, you can build more and more effective FAQs, building an effective self-service content flywheel. Many knowledge base tool providers include the ability to see what customers are searching for on your knowledge base, and whether or not the content is successfully meeting needs and deflecting support tickets.

In Kustomer, you can find what your customers are searching for on your brand's help center within the Reporting section. First, within the Knowledge Base section, you'll find a subsection called Search Queries and Article Feedback. You can also go into the Deflection section to see what content the bot served up but was not searched for. These can help you gain an idea of how effective your self-service resources are, so you can refine and continually improve.

When your CX team has time freed up from answering routine questions thanks to self-service, they can turn their attention to creating assets like videos and webinars.

How to integrate self-service with human support

Whether they tried to self-serve first or not, customers will still need to talk to your company for help with their issue. Fortunately, self-service materials can bolster the capabilities of your support agents, getting more mileage out of your efforts. Here how:

Empower team members

Your self-service resources can make your human agents more effective. You can use much of the fresh or updated self-service material to bolster out your customer service communication email or chat templates with consistent information. This can free up agent time and keep your customer experience consistent across the team.

The next step is to be proactive with the self-service materials. When a customer completes a sale or reaches out with a problem, be proactive about likely future customer service touchpoints. Make sure your sales representatives, account managers and customer service agents are using the opportunity to point customers to self-service options like the help center or relevant videos. They can provide a higher level of personalized service.

Implement AI Agents

The next step is to use AI to automate some of the customer support workload. An AI chatbot can handle a large volume of initial inquiries to provide faster service and guide customers to the right answers, pulling from your knowledge base or FAQ section.

The next step is to use more advanced AI to provide contextualized responses based on customer inquiries. That could look like an <u>AI Agent</u> interfacing directly with the customer, or your team members using AI behind the scenes to make them more efficient.

Implementing generative AI to help your support team makes a big difference. <u>Deloitte</u> found the majority of CX leaders say their agent teams are overwhelmed by the systems and information they need to solve customer problems - but AI can help. For companies that don't use generative AI in the customer support process, that figure is 81% of agents that feel overwhelmed. But for companies that support their agents with generative AI, it's 53% of agents.

Using Kustomer's human-in-the-loop approach with AI Agents will facilitate faster support for your customers and support your team members at the same time.

Conclusion

Research reinforces how much customers really want to self-serve their own customer service issues. By enabling customers to resolve common issues independently, you can deliver the experience your customers want and free up time and resources for your business. Here are the key benefits:

For customers	For your business
Faster resolutions	Reduced operational resources
Reduced frustration	Increased lifetime revenue per customers
24/7 availability	Scaling your brand's reach

Here's your checklist with tactics to improve your brand's self-service:

- Include sufficient information in the resources
- Organize the knowledge base - use clear sections and tagging
- Keep the knowledge base up-to-date
- Use both written and video resources

Investing in developing your brand's self-service resources can provide an outsized return.

Looking to upgrade your customer service solution? Kustomer's modern, easy-to-deploy customer service CRM lets you focus on people, not problems. Our top-rated platform eliminates tickets, helping you grow with personalized, customer service experiences that meet the needs of each unique buyer - including self-service options. Kustomer allows brands to deflect more conversations, reduce average handle time, all while maintaining high CSAT scores.

See what Kustomer can do for you

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