

# ICXI -POST newsbriefing

Vol 3 – Issue 1 – June 2023

## Introduction From The President

As the Northern Hemisphere summer holiday and travel market gets back into full swing in the first full post covid season the management of the customer experience in those sectors where demand has very high seasonal fluctuations coupled with the potential of enhanced customer expectations represents a challenge to organisations who choose to operate in this and other seasonally influenced markets. What too for the supply or support chains of these organisations on whose support the quality of the customer experience is symbiotically intertwined.

Customers do expect more as reported by emarsys.com an SAP company  
*Many consumers have a single expectation of customer service during the holidays, and it can be summed up like this: frictionless perfection.*



## **Frictionless Perfection!**

Frictionless perfection may be an aim of those working in perpetual motion machines but what are the real key issues that an organisation operating in a highly seasonal market need to address to deliver an upper quartile customer experience?

The seasonal market, poses several unique challenges of which the more forecastable may include

1. **High demand fluctuations:** Seasonal markets experience significant variations in customer demand throughout the year. On one hand during peak seasons, customer service teams may be overwhelmed with a sudden influx of inquiries, orders, and complaints. On the other hand, during off-peak seasons, the workload may decrease substantially so bringing a challenge in balancing staffing levels and resources.
2. **Limited availability:** Some businesses in seasonal markets operate only during specific periods or events. This limited availability can make it difficult to provide continuous customer support throughout the year. Customers may face long response times or limited service options during the off-season, which can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction.
3. **Hiring, training and onboarding temporary staff members** can be time-consuming and costly. Ensuring that they are adequately prepared to handle customer inquiries, understand product or service details, and deliver a consistent customer experience is crucial but may pose challenges due to the short-term nature of their employment.
4. **Maintaining consistent quality:** In seasonal markets, businesses need to ramp up production or service delivery quickly to meet higher demand. so putting a strain on maintaining consistent quality standards and on keeping customer service representatives equipped with accurate and up-to-date information about products or services, as well as any changes or updates that occur during peak seasons.
5. **Customer expectations:** Seasonal markets often create a sense of urgency among customers who are looking for specific products or experiences within a limited timeframe. Meeting these heightened expectations can be challenging, especially when dealing with supply chain issues, inventory shortages, or unexpected disruptions. Failure to meet customer expectations can result in negative reviews, reduced customer loyalty, and potential long-term damage to the business's reputation.

1. Competing for talent: In seasonal markets, multiple businesses may operate during the same peak season, leading to increased competition for skilled customer service professionals. Hiring and retaining top talent becomes crucial for delivering exceptional customer service and may require offering attractive compensation packages, flexible work arrangements, or other incentives to attract and retain experienced staff members with the inherent knock on impact on costs, prices and margins.

To address these issues organisations operating in seasonal markets may consider developing a strategy which includes

Workforce planning,

Flexible staffing solutions,

Skill development programmes

Effective communication channels

Leveraging technology solutions such as

Automation,

Self-service options, and

AI-powered chatbots

To provide support to staff to help handle high volumes of inquiries efficiently and provide customers with timely support but not at the expense of damaging the customer experience.

So far the implied focus has been on the holiday and travel sectors but many organisations fall, to a greater or lesser degree, into the “seasonal” category (rather than simply having “busy periods”) so the issue encompasses a wider scope than may first be envisaged.

These may include

Multiple Sectors of Agriculture and Horticulture

Holiday Travel and Accommodation

Lawn , Garden and Pool Care

Snow Removal / Leaf Clearance/ Highway Maintenance

Schools and Universities

Ice Cream/Other Seasonal Food

Retail and Wholesale Packing and Distribution

Property Maintenance / House painting

Tax Accounting

## **The Retail Sector**

The advice given by Total Retail in their article by Ron Lutz

*How to Meet Customers' Elevated Expectations During the Holidays* may be equally helpful in many other sectors

*For most shoppers, the holiday season brings to mind long lines and early mornings hunting for great deals and the perfect gifts for friends and family. But for retailers, it presents an opportunity for growth within their physical environments, as the volume of both regular and first-time shoppers can increase market share during a holiday season that's projected to grow by 4.1 percent, according to the National Retail Federation.*

*With the heightened holiday shopping season comes equally heightened customer expectations. In the last decade, the growth of omnichannel has placed even greater pressure on brick-and-mortar retailers to create seamless experiences across their web and physical presences. Customers have grown to expect integration at a higher level during the holiday season.*

*So how can physical retailers meet the expected increases in shopper expectations and sales volume this holiday season? Ultimately, it comes down to how well retailers keep up with today's consumer. This includes understanding how they prefer to shop, what motivates them to buy, and what retail and marketing experiences have the most impact during the busy holiday season.*

*Here are three ways for your physical retail environment to exceed your customers' elevated holiday expectations.*

### **Embrace the Holiday**

*In a study on what motivates consumer shopping during the holidays, Bazaarvoice found that holiday experiences draw shoppers into the store because of how it made them feel. Bazaarvoice's study discovered that 42 percent of holiday shoppers said they brave the crowds and shop in-store because they enjoy the festive ambiance, and 32 percent feel that holiday activities (e.g., visiting Santa or a gingerbread village) are central to the in-store shopping experience.*

*Social media is another tactic that has proven to be a key marketing strategy for brick-and-mortar retailers. Consumers typically turn to recommendations from friends and family for inspiration on where to shop, while also looking to promotional advertising. The new trend among consumers is to look to social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to stay up-to-date on the latest deals and promotions. Using the holiday theme, retailers can connect with their customers by appealing to the sentiments of the holiday with digital content. It's important to remember that while customers return to the stores they know, they return more often and spend more at stores that emotionally engage them.*

## **Stock it Up**

*Once you develop and promote your in-store experience, be sure to deliver on your promise so shoppers can leave with purchases in-hand. Having available inventory may seem like table stakes when it comes to completing a sale, but it's never more important than during the rushed and "I need it now" holiday season. Too often, we see retailers advertise a seasonal special only to quickly sell out. Some shoppers may switch to in-stock options, but others will be disappointed and possibly angered that you can't deliver on the promised experience. You run the risk that these disengaged shoppers will buy the item from another retailer.*

*Remember that one of the key differentiators between the online and physical retail environment is the ability to interact with a product prior to purchase. Take advantage of this with engaging displays for promoted products. And if there are physical space constraints to maintaining adequate inventory levels, be sure to leverage off-site warehousing and online product delivery to quickly fulfill purchasing demands. A Salesforce study found that 74 percent of consumers are extremely likely to switch brands after having a difficult purchasing or checkout process. Thus, understanding your inventory demands during the holiday season will go a long way in satisfying shoppers.*



## **Turn to Technology**

*Customer-facing interactive display technology is one of the best ways to leverage innovation for that “one of a kind” customer experience. For example, some stores use smart screens to let shoppers virtually “try on” makeup shades, while others are using attention-grabbing droids or bots to roam around the store and interact with customers. With technology costs dropping and more options available, creating that unique sense of wonder may be easier than you think. Keep in mind that despite technology evolving and competition heating up, retailers must deliver experiences that are entertaining, valuable and relevant.*

*It's a fact that people shop at brick-and-mortar stores because they want a personal experience. Ensuring that you have the proper staff on hand to deliver that experience is a technology exercise as well. In taking the time to shore up internal technology processes, retailers can apply innovative solutions to handle operation both on and off the retail floor, ultimately allowing for more time to be spent focusing on coaching and empowering employees to deliver great service to each and every customer. It's important for retailers to remember that employee engagement paves the way for customer engagement. The experience for customers plays a huge role in their purchasing decisions for the holiday season.*

## **Prepping for Peak Season**

*Whether you're a retailer who works eight months of the year in preparation for the holiday season or one who maintains a constant flow of consumer traffic throughout the year, you have one opportunity to deliver an exceptional customer experience during the highly competitive holiday season. Business as usual could deliver disappointing results given today's savvy, time-starved, customer service-seeking shopper.*

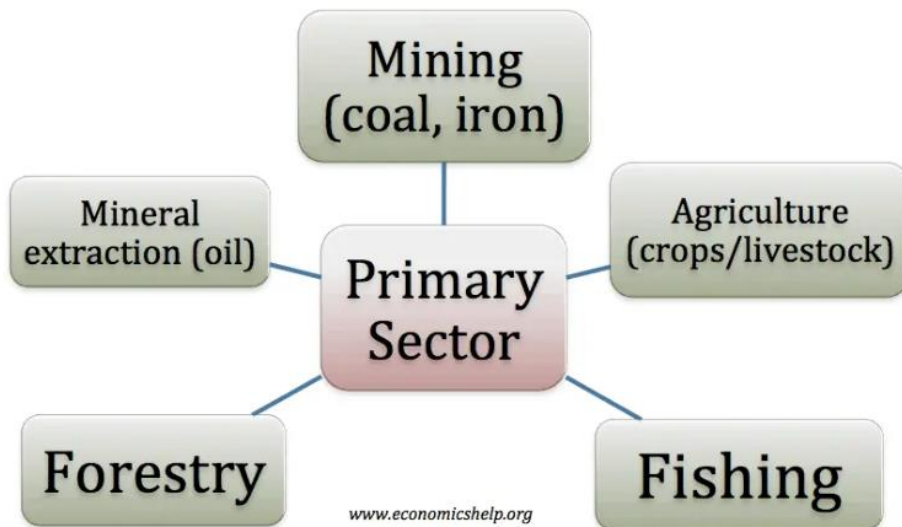
*So how do you win? Deliver a seamless experience for the customer with a personalized customer engagement experience through appropriate digital or immersive technology, have ample in-store and/or available inventory, and elevate your in-store customer service so that questions are addressed quickly and accurately. Remember, it's how you make them feel during the experience that lasts and begins the journey of a brand-loyal customer.*

[www.mytotalretail.com/article/how-to-meet-customers-expectations-during-the-holidays](http://www.mytotalretail.com/article/how-to-meet-customers-expectations-during-the-holidays)



## The Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector is one which rarely features in any customer experience review, as one of the primary global sectors. However it is, arguably, the sector to which every individual on the planet has a direct or indirect relationship. The issues more widely discussed appear to centre around the customer relationships between the producers and the wholesale/retail organisations but the agricultural sector which is a truly seasonal business and has to manage issues which are often beyond their control but which have the potential to affect all customers in the supply chain. The transparency of the core economic issues may often be clouded by the fact that many parts of the agricultural sector are supported by government subsidies but the key fact remains that unless the agricultural sector and its supply chain partners are able to address its seasonal issues then the customer experience in all parts of the supply chain will be negatively affected



Seasonal customer experience issues in the global agricultural sector can arise due to the unique challenges presented by different seasons throughout the year. These issues can impact both the supply and demand sides of the sector and all lead to reduced levels of customer satisfaction which in some parts of the world can lead on one hand to customer irritation at a supermarket to extreme malnutrition on the other.

Some key seasonal customer experience issues in the agricultural sector include

**Seasonal product availability:** Certain agricultural products are available only during specific seasons due to factors such as crop cycles, weather conditions, and harvest times. Customers may face challenges in finding their desired products during off-season periods, leading to limited options and potential dissatisfaction.

**Price fluctuations:** Seasonal variations in supply and demand can result in price fluctuations for agricultural products. Customers may experience higher prices during periods of low supply or increased demand, which can impact affordability and purchasing decisions.

## Quality variations:

Seasonal changes can affect the quality of agricultural products. For example, extreme weather conditions or pest outbreaks can lead to crop damage and reduced quality. Customers may encounter variations in taste, texture, or appearance, which can impact their satisfaction with the products.

**Inconsistent product freshness:** Freshness is a crucial factor for many agricultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, and perishable goods. Seasonal factors can influence product freshness, with challenges such as longer transportation times, storage issues, or delays in harvesting during adverse weather conditions. Customers may face difficulties in obtaining fresh produce, leading to a diminished experience.

**Demand surge during peak seasons:** Certain seasons, such as holidays or specific cultural festivals, witness a surge in demand for agricultural products. This increased demand can strain supply chains, leading to potential challenges in meeting customer expectations for timely delivery, product availability, and service levels.

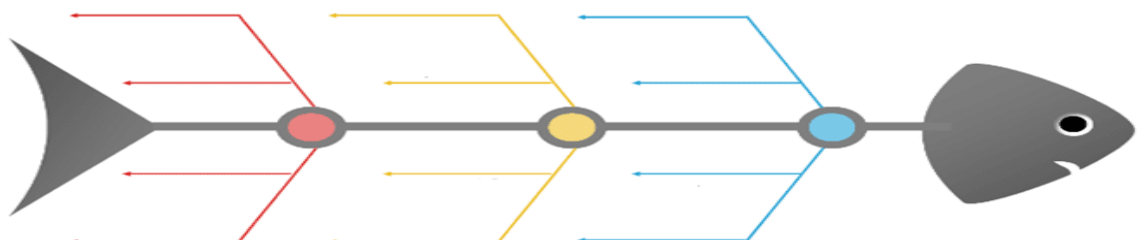
**Labour shortages:** Seasonal labour shortages can occur during peak agricultural periods, such as planting or harvesting seasons. Insufficient labour availability can impact farming operations, leading to delays in crop cultivation, harvesting, and processing. This, in turn, can affect product availability and customer satisfaction.

**Weather-related disruptions:** Weather conditions, including extreme events like hurricanes, floods, or droughts, can disrupt agricultural operations and impact customer experience. Crop failures, reduced yields, or damaged infrastructure can lead to supply disruptions, limited product availability, and potential price increases.

Addressing these seasonal customer experience issues requires

- Proactive planning,
- Effective supply chain management
- Collaboration among stakeholders.
- Potential government intervention

Farmers, distributors, retailers, and in some cases government need to work together to mitigate the impact of seasonal challenges through measures such as crop diversification, improved storage and preservation techniques, efficient transportation and logistics, labour law amendment and effective communication channels if customer expectations are to be met throughout a supply chain which could be represented and perhaps better understood as a fishbone diagram with every participant's customer journey being a bone along the spine.





## So What Can the Agri Sector do in the Areas it Can Control

Away from the global scene at the level of the individual farmer Sourav Sengupta of TaTa Consulting Service in his paper

### ***Reimagining Customer Experience in Agribusiness the Neural Way***

proposes that neural networks may have an important role to play

*What is the first thing you read on product labels before buying any packaged food item—the source of food, the price, or the nutritional information? Our guess is the nutritional information. According to the Charleston Orwig study on food labeling and consumer behavior, 71% of consumers expect nutritional information to be easy to find. Yet, only 7% of all manufacturers provide essential information on their labels. With price, nutritional facts, and ingredients becoming crucial in the product buying decision, agribusiness organizations must meet the end-user demands of providing comprehensive information on food ingredients and nutritional values for products in the expanding packaged foods segment.*

*Providing nutritional information on food packaging labels is a way for companies to communicate the authenticity of their products to their customers. Such information also apprises the end consumer of the source of the product. To offer this information, food companies are now familiarizing themselves with farming operations and are adopting technologies such as blockchain to enhance customer experience (CX). To illustrate, Dutch supermarket major Albert Heijn has deployed blockchain in its orange juice product to ensure it can be traced across the supply chain. According to FoodNavigator, a news publication for the food industry, consumers can scan QR codes on orange juice packs at Albert Heijn and see the entire journey the orange juice has taken from farm to supermarket.*

*With such visibility into the supply chain, agribusiness companies can negotiate lucrative deals for the farming community while also creating innovative food products with consumer product goods (CPG) companies, thus enabling CX transformation. In addition, as consumers expect products to be available through the year, on demand, agribusiness companies need to expand their supply network to improve sourcing, distribution, and enhance end-product variety. At the same time, to meet evolving consumer demands on health, safety, and traceability, these firms must also adhere to stringent regulatory requirements on packaging and labeling.*

### ***Building Resilience with a Neural CX Network***

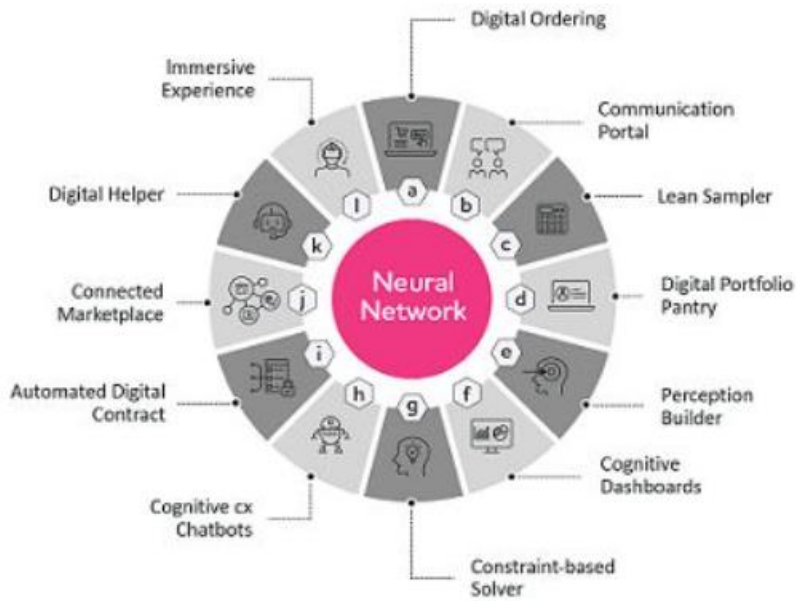
*Agribusinesses can better engage with their customers and create exponential business value by adopting neural traits into their operations and business processes. These traits are derived from the Neural Manufacturing™ framework, where the value chains, including those in agribusinesses, are connected, cognitive, and collaborative.*

*To enable neural traits, agribusinesses need to understand where customers want to engage with them, what needs must be fulfilled, and how they want to engage with a brand. By creating neural CX networks, organizations can build systems that provide sufficient early warnings to sense shifts in demand, address logistical challenges, and provide a personalized CX. By deriving actionable insights through improved market signals, an organization can handle any external shocks, drive customer retention and support, ensure greater customer responsiveness, and improve brand engagement. An example of how agribusinesses can create neural experience networks for their customers is through personalized experiences. A leading agri input company used augmented and virtual reality to build a digital portal for its customers. This boosted brand experience across the firm's branches in 58 countries and improved new brand launches by 66%. Content production increased by 90%, thereby improving customer engagement across product lines.*

*In another case, an agri-retailer saw its customer orders increase by 300% during the agricultural peak season thanks to its adoption of adaptive, intelligent, and cognitive operations. This change made the firm's business processes resilient and led to zero outages, leading to a 20% rise in branch revenue and improved customer satisfaction.*

### **Neural Networks for Innovative Customer Engagement**

*In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, rising market complexities, increasing external ecosystem factors, and inconsistencies in supply and demand make it difficult for the existing technology landscape to provide real-time actionable insights. Most organizations have invested heavily in enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM), and other IT systems. But they still struggle to be proactive in addressing customer engagement issues and mitigating risks. Bringing customer and market intelligence and cognition into sales and service processes and systems are crucial to having a proactive and predictive business process. Technology is the lynchpin in such cases where machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) can lend neural traits to marketing, sales, and the service business function. Neural networks can provide organizations with the right tools to predict potential problems and, in some cases, take preventive steps. A deep learning neural network can be effective in many areas using different predictive algorithms.*



## A Design Thinking Approach to Agribusinesses

*As agribusiness models become increasingly sensitive to changing consumer demand, industry players need to analyze the implications of systemic disruptions on operational activities and prepare accordingly. Design thinking can address end-user requirements by understanding what they need from a product or service. Design thinking elements also prioritize digital technologies to make CX processes truly scalable and immune from disruptions.*

<https://www.tcs.com/insights/blogs/ai-agriculture-agribusiness-customer-experience>

## What about Employees?

By definition In many seasonal sectors a demand is created for seasonal workers. Such people may apply for a wide variety of reasons ranging from personal choice through to economic necessity. In order to gain a position in the more desirable employment, particularly where there is a high customer service dimension to the role what are the key factors that an applicant demonstrate?



<https://depositphotos.com/vector-images/seasonal-work.html>

In Wikijob Katie Wilde writes

*Seasonal jobs may be temporary positions, but the employee will still be working at the heart of the company, often representing the business in a public-facing role and might have access to confidential information.*

*Therefore, it is still very important to prepare for an interview and paint yourself in the very best light. After all, you don't know how many other people are going for the same role.*

*There are several key qualities employers look for when recruiting seasonal workers. These can be communicated through your resume and at interview:*

**Reliability** – *Employers want to recruit just once for seasonal workers and hold onto them for the entire season, therefore it's important to demonstrate that you recognize how important it is to be reliable.*

**Enthusiasm** – *There will be a lot of seasonal workers who are purely doing it for the money and can't bring themselves to be enthusiastic about the role. Stand out by showing a genuine interest in the company and the work you will be doing.*

**Communication skills** – Seasonal jobs are often customer-facing, so speaking eloquently and showing how well you can communicate will give the employer confidence in your ability to represent the company publicly.

**Positive work ethic** – The fact you are applying for a seasonal position should demonstrate your positive work ethic, but to further convince a prospective employer of this, make sure you focus on the personal development and resume building benefits of a seasonal role, rather than talking about money.

**Flexibility** – There are often more hours on offer than the seasonal job advert states. The more flexible you can be, the better.

**Good team player** – Very few seasonal roles are lone worker positions. Usually, an employer recruits a team of seasonal workers, so it is important to give examples that prove you work well as part of a team.

**Good interpersonal skills** – Some seasonal roles require you to communicate with customers on a much more personal level than simply ringing goods through the cash register. During your interview, talk about the experience you have working closely with customers or clients.

[www.wikijob.co.uk/features/useful-resources/top-10-seasonal-jobs](http://www.wikijob.co.uk/features/useful-resources/top-10-seasonal-jobs)

## **The Risk To The Customer Experience From Seasonal Staff**

Organisations operating seasonal businesses need to take special care to ensure that short term seasonal staff are aware of the importance of their role in delivering an upper quartile customer experience. The difficulty of this task is compounded by the facts that

- It may be difficult to recruit seasonal staff in some areas
- They will not know the organisation's customer service policy/processes
- They may not understand/be aware of/care about the importance of service
- Their reasons for seeking such work may vary widely and thus their commitment
- They may not be easily engaged with organisational aims and values
- Their customer service skills may be poor
- They see no future with the organisation beyond the season
- Their prime motivation is the money not the role

It is therefore important for employers make an effort to ensure that seasonal workers understand not only the technical requirements of their employment but also the customer experience elements of their role. As many seasonal organisations also have long term customers failure to deliver quality service may lead not only to short term customer disappointment but to long term damage to customer loyalty.

## **So Is There a Strategic Service Quality Approach Applicable to All Seasonal Sectors?**

As stated earlier the seasonal sector is very diverse and covers multiple sectors from local markets through to global primary industries so to have a one size fits all solution is perhaps a little optimistic. However by Aamir Baloch writes in the Odonco Co Blog

### **Seasonal Customer Service Planning: Year-round Customer Service Improvement Strategies**

*Holidays and peak seasons, such as Christmas and New Year, are crucial for retail and ecommerce sales. They're a time to improve revenue and earn new customers with compelling offers and discounts. But all that also comes with increased customer service demands.*

*An effective customer service strategy is critical to engaging with seasonal sales and peak periods to maximum effect. You need to embrace agility and build a system that is able to:*

*Scale-up capacity on short notice*

*Provide access to the right channels and agents, at the right time*

*Train and onboard new agents without losing quality*

*Control and predict costs*

*Strengthen customer relationships*

*Drive business outcomes*

*Remember: customer service is a growth strategy. Customers judge brands based on customer service experiences, and are more likely to recommend a brand because of a positive experience.*

*The last thing you want is for your Christmas, Black Friday or Summer Sales event to negatively impact your reputation. Increased contact with your customer service teams can (if done right) create positive customer experiences that actually improves your ability to retain customers first contacted during seasonal sales.*

*Let's get started and walk through the key points of a successful, year-round customer service improvement strategy.*

## **Step 1: Preempting customer behaviour**

*Customer service is about serving customers — so that's where we are going to start. Peak seasonal periods (be that Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Christmas, January or Summer Sales) each come with a set of unique customer behaviour trends. Understanding these, and planning your customer service strategy accordingly, will help deliver the right outcome.*

### *1. High rates of return*

*Sales seasons lead to impulse buys, which leads to an increase in returns. The fact that more and more purchases are being made online only exacerbates the issue. Brick-and-mortar store return rates average between 8%-10%. For ecommerce, that jumps to 20%. Holiday ecommerce return rates regularly top 30%.*

*These volumes can easily get out of control, particularly during peak periods. January 2nd is a big day for customer returning items accumulated during the December sales period. You need to be prepared. Customers expect fast turnarounds, updates on progress, and seamless experiences.*

### *2. A deluge of reviews*

*More sales means more reviews. Up to 97 per cent of customers read brands' responses to reviews, and 45 per cent are more likely to visit businesses that respond to negative reviews. You need teams in place to respond to criticism and curate the right brand image online.*

### *3. Demand for upfront information*

*Peak seasons are competitive, and customers demand information to make decisions. Particularly online, that information has to be baked into product listings. Remember, customer service isn't just about responding to complaints. It's about creating positive customer experiences from start to finish. Just like you need to pay attention to your reviews, make sure that you have information-rich product listings. Create FAQ pages, post high-quality photos, and properly represent your products online. This will increase sales and decrease returns.*

### *4. Seasonal-specific interests*

*Each sales season and each industry has its own quirks. There are obvious correlations. For example, clothing (summer clothing particularly) sees a large boost during the summer. However, you also see a lot of home improvement projects and other DIY sales in the summer, along with purchases associated with "back-to-school".*

*Electronic goods, and other big-ticket items, fly off the shelves during Black Friday and Cyber Monday. And the whole run-up to Christmas sees people buying gifts — not just making purchases for themselves. While, in January, customers are often looking for good deals, or purchases to help with New Year's resolutions.*

*The point is simply to think about seasonality. Consider broad buying trends, look at how that aligns with your products, and use that as a basis for projecting how any given season is likely to impact your customer service capacity. That forethought will help you time the rest of the steps in this list.*

## *Step 2: Build flexibility*

*There are a number of things customers hate about contact customer service. 98% of customers find interactive voice response (IVR) systems infuriating. But having to wait too long might even top IVR on the pet-peeve list.*

*You might be surprised to find out that two-thirds of customers think that a hold time of over 2 minutes is unacceptable. 13% won't tolerate any hold time at all. You need to make sure that a spike in demand won't overload your automated and personalised support teams. Keeping customers waiting is just going to make them unhappy.*

*There are two critical components to keeping wait times to a minimum:*

### **Channels**

#### **1. Use multiple channels to create efficiency**

*Customer service can take many forms. As we have already addressed, FAQ pages, online support videos, training manuals, etc. all fall within the framework of customer service. So do automated chatbots. Making sure that these self-service options are honed and easily accessible can lessen the load on your customer service agents.*

*However, it's also important to consider the different ways actual agents communicate with customers. Most popularly, these include:*

*Phone support*

*Live chat*

*Email*

*Online support portals*

*Social media*

*Fundamentally, different queries are better suited to different channels. A quick question about return policies is far faster to respond to with templated text via live chat than to explain over the phone. By having options available, you not only create a better experience for customers — each one of which will have a preferred channel of communication — but also create a more efficient system overall.*

*Pro tip: You need to make sure that switching between channels is easy. For example, 71% of customers expect to be able to jump from a chatbot to phone conversation without having to repeat themselves. If you don't build information sharing into your system, you damage efficiency gains and create unhappy customers.*

### **Scalability**

#### **2. Create scalability and agility**

*Efficiency is great. But, ultimately, more customer service queries means more people are needed to answer them in time — be that on the phone, over live chat, or via email. Your ability to bring onboard new agents is critical to matching seasonal demand.*

*What many brands forget is that scalability isn't just about recruitment. There is a lot more to creating a team that can truly deliver on-demand access to seasonal resources.*

*Consider the following:*

*Recruitment: You need to predict seasonal customer service trends and set up recruitment drives beforehand. You also need some form of ongoing regular recruitment to simply fill gaps as they arise, and manage unexpected growth.*



*Onboarding: New agents means rapid training. You need a robust and streamlined training system able to bring new agents up to speed quickly, teaching them the specifics of your brand, product/service, messaging and style.*

*Management: Growth means being prepared to manage larger teams for a short period of time. That means processes that scale, management expertise, the ability to bring onboard new managers, and effectively manage seasonal teams.*

*Infrastructure: More people means more space. You need the desks, phones, computers, and more required to support your expanded seasonal team. During the current health crisis, you also need to think about social distancing. One “out-of-the-box” solution to consider is a greater embrace of WFH policies.*

*Downsizing: If you experience twice the volume during the Christmas period, it makes no cost sense to maintain those service levels all year round. You need a policy and process for letting people go after the season peak has subsided.*

*Taken together, these five components form the basis of a truly agile customer service team. With that said, it’s important to recognise that true on-demand flexibility cannot really be achieved in-house. Only by partnering with outsourced customer service specialists can you scale up and down access to resources to match rapid fluctuation in demand.*

*In-house vs outsourcing customer service is a valuable debate to have. Outsourcing does remove all of the complexity we’ve described to this point. And it’s important to remember that outsourcing can be undertaken with a quality-specific outcome in mind. But any business attempting to manage fluctuations in demand needs at least limited outsourcing access, which brings us to the next point...*

### ***New call-to-action***

#### ***3: Line-up emergency overflow capacity***

*If your goal is to deliver seamless customer service throughout peak seasons, you need a contingency option. There is no way to recruit agents fast enough to match any seasonal spike without massively over-investing in capacity. What you need is an outsourced partner that is able to step in and fill any gaps as they arise.*

*Selecting the right customer service partner is critical, so too is deciding what percentage of your customer service capacity to outsource. Most brands benefit from having a limited internal customer service team. But a benefit of being a brand subject to seasonal demand is your ability to engage with outsourced partners for limited periods of time, and double down on what works.*

#### ***Outsourcing partnerships***

*In all cases, consider the following characteristics as key things to look out for when outsourcing customer service capacity:*

*On-demand scalability: Not every customer service outsourcing agency actually promises on-demand scalability. If you can’t scale up and down your access to agents and channels at a moment’s notice, it kind of defeats the point.*

*Transparency: In any partnership, you want to look for support that is transparent. That means easy to understand pricing, SLAs, reporting and more. You want a partner that will keep you up to date on what they've done, and tell you where improvements can be made. A focus on quality: You don't want agents that aren't going to appropriately represent your brand. Look for partners that emphasise quality, have on-shore teams, provide training and have a track record of success.*

*Are willing to learn about you: Your business is unique, anyone delivering services on your behalf should recognise that. This comes back to the point about quality. However, fundamentally, you want a partner that emphasises customised training and support to make sure that their agents understand you, your brand, your messaging and your customers.*

#### **4: Control costs and watch metrics**

*Growth in revenue is almost always accompanied by a growth in expenses. The need to bring onboard more customer service representatives is just one example of that linked growth. As we have emphasised, creating positive customer service experiences can be a growth strategy in and of itself. However, you need to be careful that spikes in seasonal demand don't lead to spiralling cost.*

#### **Costs**

*Again, the right outsourced partner can help. Pricing transparency, on-demand scalability and simple reporting will allow you to stay on top of costs and predict month-to-month changes.*

*Building a scalable solution in-house is a little more challenging. You need to make sure that the administrative costs of managing your agile team do not outpace predictions. There are a lot more variables to manage. However, getting this all under control is critical to a successful seasonal strategy.*

#### **Building a solution that works**

*Quality customer service is essential to any business, and it's something that customers naturally expect you to provide. Outsourcing your customer service is the easiest way to get the flexibility you need. However, simply having access to outsourced customer service resources able to operate alongside your in-house team can go a long way to simplifying seasonal scalability. Realistically, some kind of outsourced capability is essential to real on-demand scalability.*

*From Black Friday and Cyber Monday all the way through to the Summer Holiday, you need to think about which seasonal sales are most critical to your brand, and plan accordingly. If you need help with seasonal customer service, be sure to get in touch, our agents are ready to help.*

[Seasonal Customer Service Planning | Customer Service Strategy Plan \(odondo.co\)](#)

## The Last Word

The key factor to remember about seasonal sectors is that when it's gone its gone and it may be another year before the opportunity arises to make up any deficit. This is particularly important when thinking about the quality of the experience delivered to customers. Given that many seasonal purchases are not routine and may often, for one reason or another, be a special purchase, it is likely that a bad customer journey will be recalled more readily than one of a more routine or regular nature and thereby will damage the potential for customer loyalty and the opportunity of repeat business from a satisfied customer.

An initial impression is that it is a relatively small sector of the global market but on further exploration seasonally impacted organisations are far more numerous and as such have the additional challenge to not only address their customer experience management needs for the same reasons as all other sectors but also develop special strategies to address the often unique needs of their customers

## Recommended Reading

[www.mytotalretail.com/article/how-to-meet-customers-expectations-during-the-holidays](http://www.mytotalretail.com/article/how-to-meet-customers-expectations-during-the-holidays)

<https://www.tcs.com/insights/blogs/ai-agriculture-agribusiness-customer-experience>

[www.wikijob.co.uk/features/useful-resources/top-10-seasonal-jobs](http://www.wikijob.co.uk/features/useful-resources/top-10-seasonal-jobs)

[Seasonal Customer Service Planning | Customer Service Strategy Plan \(odondo.co\)](#)