



Quick Take: Amazon's Mayday Turns Customer Support Into Customer Experience

by [Tony Costa](#)

with [John Dalton](#), [Kate Leggett](#), and Corey Stearns

WHY READ THIS REPORT

Amazon.com's recently announced Mayday customer support feature is a major improvement on existing approaches, enabling customers to connect to live customer support professionals 24x7x365 — for free. As a result, for Amazon, customer support is now a key enabler of its customer experience. Customer experience (CX) pros hoping to innovate in customer support need to follow Amazon's lead and take an outside-in approach that deeply integrates support technologies into the customer experience and proactively anticipates customers' needs.

MAYDAY! MAYDAY! AMAZON DISRUPTS CUSTOMER SUPPORT

On September 24, 2013, Amazon announced the release of its new Kindle Fire HDX tablets along with a new customer support feature called Mayday. Available exclusively on the Kindle Fire HDX tablets, Amazon's Mayday button is a major improvement upon existing customer support approaches, enabling customers to connect to a live customer support professional 24x7x365 — for free.¹ Key features of Amazon's Mayday feature include:

- **Video chat with screen sharing.** When users press the Mayday button, the Kindle HDX initiates a video chat session with a Mayday customer support expert. Mayday agents can see exactly what is on customers' screen and can even use screen sharing to show consumers how to use a particular feature. Customers, however, remain in control. The connection is one way: Customers can see the agent, but she can't see them. Consumers can turn off screen sharing or mute the microphone so that they can enter passwords or have a local conversation without the expert listening in.
- **On-screen highlighting to assist customers.** To better guide customers (or "co-pilot" in Amazon's vernacular), Mayday experts can draw on the customer's screen — just like John Madden used to do during NFL games — to highlight content or functionality.² This is particularly helpful in highlighting desired content on Amazon store pages or specific interface controls as Mayday experts walk a customer through a sequence of steps.
- **The ability to remotely take control of the device.** Mayday experts can remotely take control of customers' device during the interaction to complete tasks for them or perform actions on their behalf. For example, they can remotely configure device settings or show customers how to set up photo sharing with a TV.

MAYDAY RAISES THE BAR ON CUSTOMER SUPPORT

For the majority of companies that still view customer support as a cost center that they need to make increasingly more efficient and inexpensive, Amazon's Mayday changes the rules.³ Customer support is now a key enabler of customer experiences. Mayday does this by:

- **Placing customer support in context.** Rather than force customers to navigate to a help page, search for information, and then navigate back and apply it, Mayday brings help directly to customers and delivers at their time of need. By cutting burdensome steps out of its customers' journey and walking customers through the solution without ever leaving their spot, Mayday transforms a support scenario into an effortless, perhaps even enjoyable, experience.⁴
- **Providing in-person support experience at scale — anywhere the customer is.** Support services such as Best Buy's Geek Squad and Apple's Genius Bar give millions of customers direct access to in-person technical support.⁵ Mayday uses technology to replicate the in-person experience without the need to have physical points of access or have customers travel to service locations.
- **Turning tech support cost centers into potential profit centers.** With the infrastructure in place for tech support, Amazon can easily leverage this capability for personal shoppers who help customers find just the right gift or for subject matter experts who help them identify what gear they need to buy as first-time mountain climbers.⁶ Companies such as Needle provide similar services using text chat, and Needle boasts a 20% increase in average order value.⁷

WHAT MAYDAY MEANS FOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROS

While Mayday isn't a cure-all for customer support woes, it stands as a great example of how one company took an outside-in approach to customer support and ended up elevating its customer experience. Customer experience professionals looking to innovate in customer support need to:

- **Catch up, fast.** Optimizing support searches, document organization, and content freshness are all worthy goals, but they are all incremental improvements that fail to solve the larger problem. To move the needle significantly on customer services, companies need to increase their emphasis on reinventing the support experience.⁸ After using Mayday, many customers are likely to view traditional text chat, interactive voice response, and doc-based support solutions as outdated and cumbersome.
- **Deepen the connection between customers and support staff.** While video chat is somewhat uncommon, phone support and text chat are not. Unfortunately, companies rarely integrate these services deeply into the customer experiences they are meant to support. To do so, companies need to give support staff the ability to see what is on customers' screen, interact with them in real time, and assist them directly.

- **Get proactive.** Competently managing problems after the fact is no longer enough; companies need to head off problems before they become issues.⁹ To do this, companies need to become more adept at creating proactive experiences — experiences that anticipate customers' needs and satisfy them before customers take action.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Source: Amazon.com (http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00BHJRYYS/ref=amb_link_385789442_2).
- ² While John Madden wasn't the first person to use a telestrator on TV, his use of the technology for his color commentary sessions during NFL games introduced the technology to millions of Americans. Source: Chris Oakes, "John Madden on Gridiron Tech," *Wired*, January 22, 1999 (<http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/1999/01/17422>).
- ³ Survey data from IMCI Technologies and Dimension Data suggest 50% to 70% of the companies they surveyed consider contact centers to be a cost center. For more on this topic, see the February 1, 2013, "[Navigate The Future Of Customer Service](#)" report.
- ⁴ Sixty-three percent of customers agree with the statement, "Valuing my time is the most important thing a company can do to provide me with good online customer service." See the March 11, 2013, "[Understand Communication Channel Needs To Craft Your Customer Service Strategy](#)" report.
- ⁵ According to The Loop, Apple's Genius Bars service 50,000 customers worldwide each day. Source: Jim Dalrymple, "Apple stores see 300 million visitors in FY 2012, 50,000 Genius Bar visits a day," *The Loop*, August 20, 2012 (<http://www.loopinsight.com/2012/08/20/apple-stores-see-300-million-visitors-in-2012-50000-genius-bar-visits-a-day/>).
- ⁶ Forrester analyst James McQuivey believes that the Kindle Fire HDX and services such as Mayday help Amazon build an unprecedented digital relationship with customers. Source: James McQuivey, "Kindle Fire HDX Builds An Unprecedented Digital Customer Relationship For Amazon," *Forrester Blogs*, September 25, 2013 (http://blogs.forrester.com/james_mcquivey/13-09-25-kindle_fire_hdx_builds_an_unprecedented_digital_customer_relationship_for_amazon).
- ⁷ Guided shopping firm Needle recruits loyal customers and turns them into brand advocates who help customers make online shopping decisions. This approach has proved surprisingly effective — Needle claims that average order values rise by more than 20% and that 25% of customers make a purchase within 24 hours of chatting with a Needler. Source: Needle (<http://www.needle.com/the-proof/>).
- ⁸ For more on how to innovate customer experience, see the June 27, 2013, "[Customer Experience Innovation Demystified](#)" report, and see the September 14, 2012, "[Humdrum Hardware: Why Google And Microsoft Are Goading Their Partners To Innovate](#)" report.
- ⁹ Proactivity is among the four P's of customer service: price, personalization, productivity, and proactivity. Source: Kate Leggett, "The Four P's Of Customer Service," *Forrester Blogs*, August 23, 2012 (http://blogs.forrester.com/kate_leggett/12-08-23-the_4_ps_of_customer_service).

¹⁰ Proactive experiences are a new type of customer experience that changes the way people relate to and engage with services in three specific ways: by closing the gap between problem and solution, integrating siloed information and services, and personalizing experiences based on context. See the November 20, 2013, "[Anticipate Your Customer's Next Move With Proactive Experiences](#)" report.