HOW TO WIN SALES AND IMPROVE CX WITH ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION

PRESENTED BY: yelp for brands

In the early days of commerce, customer interactions primarily happened face-to-face. Over time, new technologies disrupted that norm. The telephone introduced the ability to have conversations with customers and prospects in real time over long distances. Then the internet really shook things up—bringing email onto the scene, followed by social media and online chat options. And now with smartphones being a staple accessory, texting has become an increasingly normal part of everyday life.

Still, none of these new communication technologies fully replaced older options. Instead, people want the ability to choose. For businesses, managing multiple lines of communication can be challenging, especially if you have multiple locations, each with its own staff. But when you meet customers where they are and interact with them in the ways they prefer, you can not only earn more sales, but also improve the overall customer experience (CX). And one of the most impactful ways to do that is by embracing asynchronous communication.

WHAT IS ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION?

Asynchronous communication refers to any type of communication that allows people the flexibility to respond in their own time. Email, text messaging and social media are popular forms of asynchronous communication. When you send someone a message via these channels, you don't necessarily expect an answer within seconds. The recipient can review and respond to your message when it works for them.

By contrast, phone calls, video conferencing and in-person meetings are examples of synchronous communication, where all parties must be present and can respond to each other in the moment. There will always be a need for synchronous communication options—don't rush to ditch these channels. Consumers have different preferences for different needs, and businesses should aim to offer both synchronous and asynchronous

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CHAPTER 1

THE CONSUMER CASE FOR ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION

Asynchronous communication isn't exactly new. People have been sending letters back and forth by post for many years—an early, low-tech form of the trend. But asynchronous communication has been growing in popularity in recent years, to the point that it's become a common customer expectation.

WHY CONSUMERS PREFER ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION

According to a Salesforce report, 80% of customers say the experience a company provides is as important as its products and services.[1] And customers want asynchronous communication options: In late 2022, Genesys found that email had overtaken voice as the most popular CX channel for the first time in their three years of doing the survey.[2]

For consumers, asynchronous communication is valuable for a few main reasons:

It's convenient

Asynchronous communication makes contact more convenient for consumers because it allows them to interact with businesses on their own schedule. For example, someone who works long hours or in a different time zone might have trouble finding time to contact a company when it's open. But if they're able to reach out whenever it works best for them, say by email or text, it can give you the advantage over your competitors.

It's efficient and effective

Synchronous communication depends on both people being available at the same time. That can mean dealing with a lot of back-and-forth scheduling work—or worse, hours spent on hold waiting for a representative to become available. That kind of inefficiency doesn't fit with modern life and even harder for consumers to tolerate when they know a better way exists. In Salesforce's report,[3] 81% of customers said they expect faster service as technology advances. One of the most practical ways to deliver that is making asynchronous channels an option.

[1] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.
[2] Genesys, The State of Customer Experience, 2023.
[3] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.

It fits with modern lifestyles—especially for young consumers

In that same survey,[4] 61% of consumers said they expect companies to adapt to their changing needs and preferences. Meeting people where they are in 2024 means being accessible to them online, especially on their mobile devices. On average, people now spend over four hours a day on their phones, according to Statista data.[5]

And while people of all ages have embraced a shift toward digital forms of communication, the trend is more pronounced in younger generations.
The Salesforce report[6] provides a generational breakdown of how many customers say they prefer to engage digitally with businesses:

- 38% of boomers
- 54% of gen X
- 65% of millennials
- 61% of gen Z

These generations have a lot of buying power. Considering their preferences is a smart business decision.

[4] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.
[5] Statista, Time spent with nonvoice activities on mobile phones every day in the United States from 2019 to 2024, 2024.
[6] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.

Consumers like choice

While personal preferences may vary across generations, people simply want communication options. The same Salesforce survey finds that 74% of respondents believe they should be able to do anything online that they can do in person or on the phone, and 71% said they prefer using different communication channels depending on context.[7] Offering asynchronous channels like email and messaging is a clear expectation, but not at the expense of losing traditional synchronous channels, like the phone. Consumers want the opportunity to choose.

[7] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.

CHAPTER 2

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION

Adopting asynchronous channels isn't just about what customers want (although that part is clearly important), it's good for your business too. There are many benefits to asynchronous messaging that can help you stay competitive.

It's less time and labor intensive

Synchronous communication comes with the expectation of immediate availability. When a customer calls or shows up in person, someone has to be ready and available to help them—at least if you want them to have a good experience. Having staff on the clock for long hours is expensive for the business and hard on employees. With asynchronous channels, customers can instead contact you whenever it works for them, with the expectation that staff will get back to them within business hours.

Asynchronous messaging also gives employees more space to craft the best answer before responding. If an issue requires research to answer effectively, staff aren't put on the spot trying to reply instantaneously. They can take the time needed to find the right information for the customer's issue.

It's easier to scale

When an employee meets with a customer in person or on the phone, the interaction requires *all* their attention. When managing asynchronous chats and emails though, employees can work on multiple inquiries at once. Because asynchronous channels allow for more flexibility and efficiency, your team can accomplish more with fewer people in fewer hours. That makes it easier to grow the business, without having to bring on as many new employees.

It improves accessibility

Offering a variety of communication channels is a smart way to make your brand more inclusive for customers with various disabilities. For consumers with cognitive disabilities, asynchronous communication provides them more time to process the information in your messages and respond when they're ready. For someone with hearing impairments, online chat and email are practical channels. And providing plenty of virtual communication options makes it easier for anyone with mobility issues to choose your business without having to show up in person.

It can produce valuable data

Many platforms for asynchronous channels like social media, email and messaging offer analytics to help you identify meaningful trends in your customer communication. Social media tools can not only provide alerts for tracking brand mentions, but also perform automated sentiment analysis to help you get a sense of how consumers feel about your company.

Sales and customer relationship management tools can help you track the common issues and questions that come up in your emails, form fills and message logs. Those insights can lead to more strategic business decisions. For example, tracking which services customers most often request at each of your business locations can guide your advertising efforts regionally. If a heating and air conditioning (HVAC) company gets a lot of requests for dryer vent cleaning in a particular market, they could build an advertising campaign there around an introductory offer for the service.

As an added benefit, asynchronous channels make it easy for customers to provide information you need to follow up, such as their contact information and specific questions or details about the service they're interested in. You don't risk losing that data just because of bad timing. Plus, asynchronous channels are good for capturing information accurately. If employees see a customer's name, product information and the details of their issue all in writing, there's less room for error than when hearing those things spoken.

It can increase customer satisfaction

Generating leads is nice, but delivering a CX that earns customer loyalty is even better. In a survey from Interactions,[8] 77% of consumers cited long hold times as a frustrating customer experience—making it the top answer provided. Including asynchronous communication channels as an option helps you avoid putting customers in that position. 90% of consumers in a SurveyMonkey study[9] said customer service and support are very important for the brands they like. Giving consumers easy ways to reach you can help you earn their goodwill.

[8] Interactions, CX and the Consumer, 2023.
[9] SurveyMonkey, The state of CX, 2023.

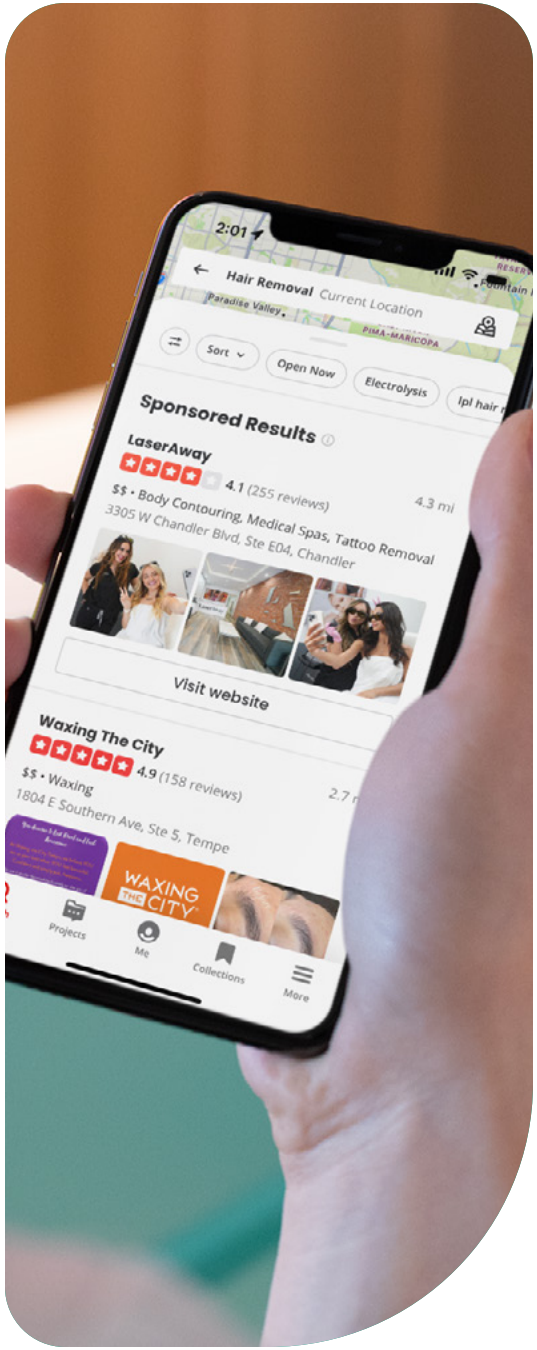
It can improve lead generation

When busy consumers need a new product or service, they often have to fit their research into the rare hours they have free. If they can't get the information they need about your business on their time—which may be at night, on the weekend, or at a time of day when your staff is slammed and the hold times are long—they may move on to a company they find more accessible. If you don't want to lose those leads, aim to offer flexible communication options that make it easy for customers to reach out at any time.

Yelp solution spotlight

"Yelp is working with us on an API so we can directly connect Yelp and our existing chat platform within our proprietary lead management system. We're excited... to be able to directly communicate with those individuals that want to chat instead of call through a platform that helps us manage [leads] in real-time."

Thomas Ballantyne, Bulwark Exterminating



CHAPTER 3

PUTTING ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION INTO ACTION

Asynchronous communication encompasses a number of different channels. You'll want to carefully consider which ones make the most sense for your business and how to effectively manage them.

TYPES OF ASYNCHRONOUS CHANNELS TO CONSIDER

Some asynchronous channels are probably already familiar, while others may be new to you. Some of the most valuable channels to consider using are:

Email

Consumers expect email to be an option to communicate with companies. In Salesforce's survey,[10] 93% of consumers listed it as a channel they use to engage with businesses. Make email addresses easy to find, and ensure the inboxes for all public-facing addresses are monitored so consumers get quick replies.

Social media

Having a presence on popular social media platforms is not only important for brand awareness and customer engagement—it also gives customers another way to get in touch with you directly. 64% of consumers in the same Salesforce survey[10] mentioned contacting businesses on social media.

Plus, when you respond publicly to a customer on social, you not only please that customer, but you also demonstrate your customer service to your followers.

Online forms

An online form is a convenient way for customers to contact you in a format that makes it easy to capture the information you need from them. Make sure your online forms send information to the right employees to get responses out promptly.

SMS or mobile app

Considering all the time consumers spend on their smartphones, investing in mobile channels simply makes sense. In the Salesforce survey,[10] 76% of people mentioned using mobile apps to communicate with businesses, and another 66% listed text/SMS.

[10,11,12] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.

Chat

72% of Salesforce respondents[13] also mentioned using chat. And while chat isn't always asynchronous—live chat requires a representative to be present and responding in real time—asynchronous chat can be used as an alternative, or in addition to offering live chat. You can program the chat tool to provide automated answers to simple questions and route more complex issues to a human. During the hours human representatives aren't available to monitor the chat, you can provide a message letting consumers know when to expect an answer.

Yelp's Request a Quote

When consumers have a particular need and are researching businesses on Yelp, the Request a Quote feature is one of the fastest, easiest ways for them to get in touch with a business. Request a Quote is an asynchronous communication option where customers can request a quote, a consultation, pricing and availability details, or ask other questions via messaging. It captures all relevant details about the customer and the request and can be used with Yelp's Leads API to integrate into your existing workflow.

[13] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.

IMPLEMENTING ASYNCHRONOUS OPTIONS FOR LEAD GENERATION

Asynchronous communication is a valuable option to offer throughout the customer journey, but it can be especially important for top-of-the-funnel (TOFU) interactions. A customer in the research or consideration stage doesn't always want to jump straight to a conversation with a salesperson. They want the option to gather information in a way that's convenient for them. By being offered easy asynchronous options at this stage, like Yelp's Request a Quote, they're more likely to take that first step to learn more about your business.

How Yelp's Request a Quote feature works

Imagine a stressed-out, overworked parent dealing with a leaky sink. They need to find a good local plumber for the job ASAP—but they also still need to get their kids to school on time and then deal with a full day of meetings at work. That doesn't leave a lot of time for making phone calls to plumbers. When they turn to Yelp, they have an easier option: Request a Quote.

Service businesses can choose to enable asynchronous messaging with Yelp's Request a Quote feature, making it easy for interested customers to contact you for more information on the service they need within moments.

Over the last year, Request a Quote has been one of the fastest growing lead sources on the platform.[14] Over 60,000 new requests for quotes, consultations or other messages are sent to businesses on Yelp every day.[15]

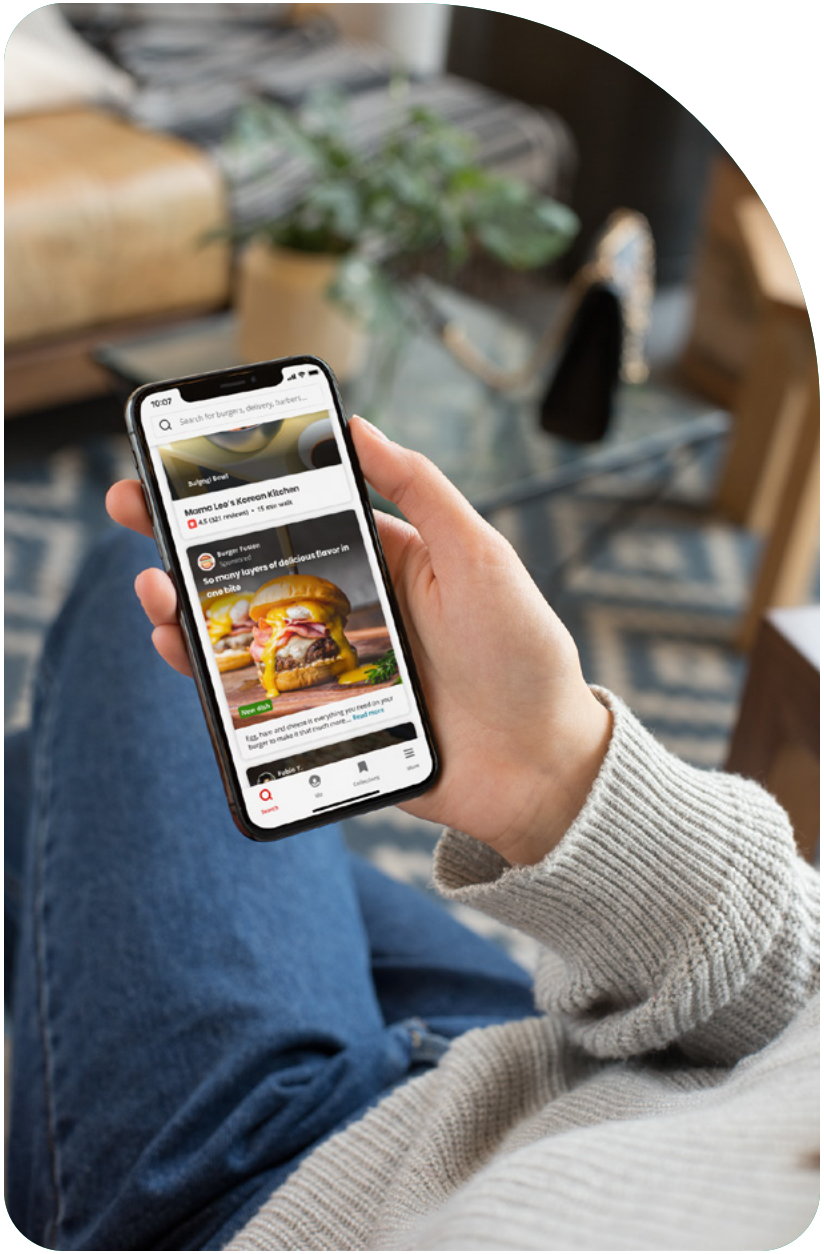
Yelp's Request a Quote feature isn't only for quotes from home and local services businesses. The call to action (CTA) just varies based on business category.

[14] Yelp Internal Data, 2024. Compares RaX to calls and external website visits for home services businesses from March 2023 to March 2024.
[15] Yelp Internal Data, 2022. Based on an analysis conducted between April 2021 and April 2022.

For example, a lawyer's CTA will say "Request a consultation," while a nail salon's CTA will say "Request an appointment." Note that you must have messaging enabled to receive any type of request from potential customers.

In addition to seeing the CTA on your business page, consumers will also see it in Yelp search results. And because 90% of searches for home services on Yelp are for a product or service, not a specific business,[16] Request a Quote gives you the chance to get in front of a new audience of prospects actively looking for the types of services you offer. With 83% of users choosing to hire or buy from a business they found on Yelp,[17] that also comes with a good chance of conversion.

Once a consumer uses Request a Quote to contact you, you're given all the relevant details of their request so you can reach out with your response. The Yelp Leads API then lets you connect these leads to your CRM so they can seamlessly feed into your current lead management workflow.



[16] Yelp Internal Data, January 2021.
[17] Based on a survey conducted by Yelp in August 2022. Methodology used Comscore demographics and people who reported having used Yelp in the prior 3 months.

TIPS FOR GETTING ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION RIGHT

As you add asynchronous channels to your communications mix, create a strategy to ensure you manage them effectively. These channels are only valuable if you give them proper attention and maintenance. Some of the most important best practices to implement are:

1. Respond quickly—and always do respond

While asynchronous communication doesn't require an immediate response, you still want to get back to customers as soon as you're able to. Zendesk recommends replying to emails in 12 hours or less but within an hour is best; while social media messages should be responded to in under 5 hours.[18] When possible, getting replies out faster is even better.

Do your best to get back to customers by the next day at the latest. Even if you occasionally fall behind on that goal, the most important thing is to make sure you *do* respond. It's not only good for customer service, but it's also good for business. On Yelp, businesses that respond to a message can receive up to 2x as many page visits.[19] If a customer reaches out and doesn't get any reply at all, that's a surefire way to lose the lead and potentially hurt your reputation in the process.

[18] Zendesk, First reply time: 9 tips to deliver faster customer service, 2024.
[19] Yelp Internal Data 2022. Based on a study of unreviewed claimed businesses. Average results within 90 days of claiming a business page. Study conducted between September 1, 2021 and April 30, 2022. Results may vary.

2. Provide employee training

As critical as speed is, supplying useful, accurate answers to the customer is more important. Any employee tasked with responding to customers should be provided ample training in how to:

- Respond effectively to common issues or frequently asked questions
- Communicate with customers respectfully and professionally
- Handle sensitive situations, like customer complaints, with tact
- Construct grammatically correct responses without errors or typos
- Work efficiently

Customer-facing employees have a strong impact on how customers perceive your business. Do your best to make sure they have the knowledge and tools they need to represent your brand well.

3. Consider using templates and automation features

In addition to good training, do your best to provide staff with resources to help make the job easier such as:

- **Templates:** Pre-written templates that demonstrate useful responses to common questions can give employees a headstart on getting a good answer out. Instead of writing every response from scratch, they can pull one up that's near ready and tweak it as needed to match the customer's situation. Just make sure employees understand to always take time to proofread, confirm the answer is applicable and apply some personalization to the response. You don't want to end up accidentally sending an email that starts with "Hi {first.name}" or one that provides an answer to the wrong question.

» **Automation:** Smart use of automation can take some customer inquiries off your staff's plate completely. For example, if a customer asks a straightforward question via messaging, you can program responses to provide the answer and/or a link to a page on your website with more information on the subject. That leaves your staff more time to handle issues that require a human touch.

4. Monitor and improve

One of the benefits of many asynchronous channels is how easy it is to track the details of your customer communications and turn them into meaningful insights. You can use the analytics you collect to look for ways to continually improve your customer experience. Tracking the questions and issues that come up the most enables you to develop better strategies and content for handling them. And measuring your team's typical response times and resolution rates helps you determine how well you're meeting your goals.

CHAPTER 4

NURTURING LEADS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

How you handle first contact with a new lead is undoubtedly important, but long-term success depends on continuing to win the consumer over beyond that point. Asynchronous communication channels can be just as valuable in the lead generation and customer service stages as they are at the top of the funnel.

While some consumers won't reach out until they're close to making a decision, others will seek more information from you while in the research stage. You want to have a plan for nurturing these prospects.

And when that pays off and you earn the customer, your job *still* isn't done. You want to offer exceptional customer service and keep the relationship going far past the sale—hopefully winning repeat business in the process. Salesforce found that 88% of customers say good customer service makes them more likely to purchase again,[20] while Zendesk reports that more than half of surveyed customers will switch to a competitor after a single unsatisfactory interaction.[21]

[20] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, 2023.
[21] Zendesk, CX Trends 2023.

1. HAVE A STRATEGY FOR FOLLOWING UP

Many companies have a great strategy in place for responding to new leads but less of a plan for staying engaged with cold leads. That makes having such a plan a good way to differentiate yourself and stay top of mind for prospects still making up their mind.

Companies that use Yelp's Request a Quote have multiple ways to manage the leads that come through the platform. You can monitor leads via your Yelp inbox, located in your Yelp for Business account, or set up the Yelp Leads API to automatically integrate these leads with your CRM. Whichever option you choose, don't let new leads push the older ones out of your workflow; give those cold leads a second or third chance to see if any come to fruition.

Establish what a good follow-up strategy looks like for your business. How often will you contact these leads and at what intervals? Be careful not to overdo it and be seen as a nuisance.

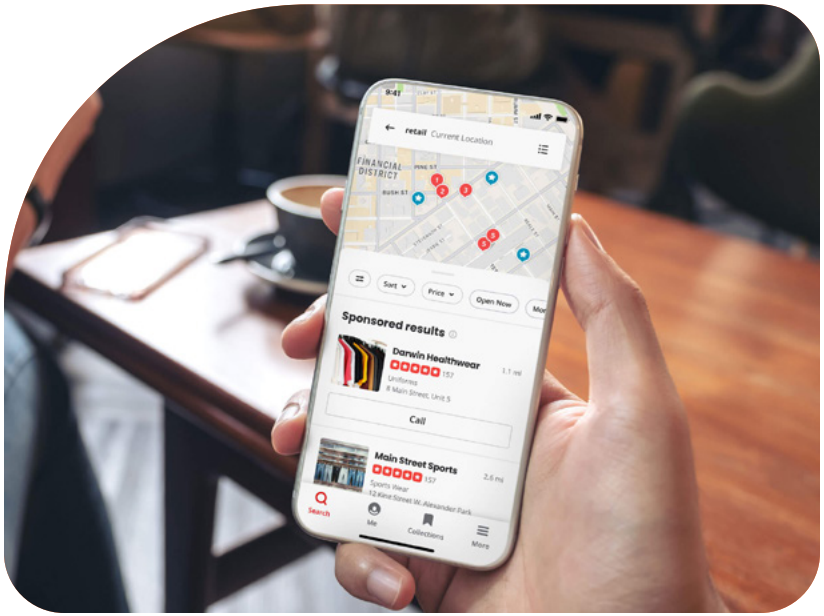
Your follow-up strategy should even extend even after the sale. If a customer is satisfied by your work once, they'll likely choose you again and may even refer you to others. Stay in touch over time to help them remember you.

2. CREATE HELPFUL CONTENT (AND MAKE IT EASY TO FIND)

Content can be useful for both lead nurturing *and* customer service. Leads still on the fence may be swayed by content that demonstrates your expertise and makes the case for the services you offer. And many customer service questions don't necessarily require a response from a staff member; they can be answered just as well with a strong FAQ page or helpful blog post.

The content you create has to be easy for customers to find for it to serve its purpose. For leads that sign up for your mailing list, that can mean sending relevant content straight to their inbox. For those that don't sign up, make sure the content on your website is easy for people to find with intuitive navigation and a search feature. You can further improve its findability by implementing SEO (search engine optimization) best practices, so consumers that search online, instead of looking at your website first, can still easily discover the content you've created.

You can also program chatbots to provide relevant links based on the questions customers ask, helping them solve their problems without having to wait until a human representative is available. That can reduce how many responses your support staff needs to field when they're back, making it easier for them to respond more quickly to the asynchronous queries that *do* require their expertise.



3. MAKE IT EASY TO REACH A HUMAN

As companies embrace automation and generative AI, many let it replace the easy ability to get in contact with a human. As mentioned, people want communication *options*, and in certain instances, only a human can satisfy their request.

Pairing asynchronous communication with a live call line gives your phone team more time to respond to the inquiries that require a human touch, which in turn provides shorter wait times to customers that call in. Follow these tips for balancing the two communication types:

- Make it easy for people to find information on their own, but make sure that those who prefer interacting with a person have that option.
- Keep enough employees on staff to respond to all the messages that come through your asynchronous channels promptly.
- You can use automation to help your support staff do more in less time, but emphasize the importance of taking time to check and personalize every response they send to make sure it addresses the customer's needs.

A thoughtful human response can help customers feel seen, and that may just be the differentiating factor that makes a customer choose to stick with your business long-term.

IMPLEMENT ASYNCHRONOUS CHANNELS TO IMPROVE CONVENIENCE AND REDUCE WORKLOADS

Asynchronous communication is a common expectation for today's consumers and one that benefits both them and the businesses they contact. By offering customers communication options that make their lives easier, you can also reduce the load on your staff, while maintaining a great CX reputation.

Enabling asynchronous communication on Yelp can have a significant impact on increasing service leads and consumer inquiries across your locations—helping you grow business and improve the customer experience at the same time. If you're ready to learn more, get in touch for a demo.

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