

## A history of customer service

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Humans figured out trade very early on. By 3000 BC, humans were setting out on missions of waterbound trade, and by 1000 BC, merchants were becoming a part of societies. There were ideas about how to treat customers. The butcher, the baker and the local perfumier had to meet the needs of the customer with custom products as well as nascent marketing techniques.

The beginning of the industrial age brought the vast new challenge of a customer base the proprietor would likely never meet in person.

The Internet makes that problem more extreme but it also offers new opportunities to bridge the gap. Here is a brief overview of some of the milestones in Customer Service and where we might go in the future.

**1760-1820:** The industrial revolution creates the concept of "scale" and the need for customer service teams.

**1776:** Adam Smith publishes the [Wealth of Nations](#), establishing the basic ideas of competition in the marketplace.

**1868:** Watkins Liniment became the first company to offer a money-

back guarantee.

**1876:** Alexander Graham Bell patents the electric telephone. Customer service takes a leap forward as customers can avoid having to travel long distances for product information or to arrange for repairs.

**1887:** Coca-Cola issues the first discount coupon.

**1946:** The International Organization for Standards formed in Geneva, Switzerland.

**1965:** MIT's CTSS Mail becomes the first host-based electronic mail program. Email becomes the primary way of interacting with customers online when the Web emerges in the 1990s.

**1960s:** [Private Automated Business Exchanges](#) (PABX) began to be used to handle large numbers of calls. These became the "call centres" we're more familiar with now, where a large number of operators handle customer conversations in one location.

**Early 1980s:** The invention of Interactive Voice Response (the thing that lets you say "yes" or "representative" to the telephone and automatically connects you).

**1980s:** Database software, which would evolve into Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software, evolves to be used in customer service.

**1983:** The term "call center" is created.

**1980s:** The help desk emerges to deal with a host of new DOS-wielding office workers. By around the year 2000, these had evolved into the "service desk" concept that could help users with the integration of all of their business technology, though the term help desk" still is applied.

**Late 1980s:** Quantum Link creates On-Line Messages (OLM) for the [Commodore 64](#), paving the way for instant messaging and later, live chat. Q-Link later became AOL.

**Early 1990s:** Computer Telephony Integration (CTI), works with IVR technology to collect information about customer behavior in telephone systems.

**Early 1990s:** People begin to use the Internet. You may have heard of it.

**1992:** [Customer Service Week](#) established as the first week in October by President George H. W. Bush

**Mid-1990s:** The CRM as we know it began to emerge, led by software company Gartner, though many others also competed. As a result of more sophisticated customer data tracking, more companies began providing gifts for customer loyalty, such as cash back on credit cards, frequent-flier miles and discounts for multiple purchases.

**1998:** Jeremie Miller invents [Jabber/XMPP](#), the open-source technology that most live chat is built on, including GTalk, Olark, and others.

**1998** LivePerson, now the largest live chat company, launches their service.

**Late 1990s-early 2000s:** Outsourcing customer service to offshore locations gains popularity as the dotcom bust occurs and companies overall look to cut costs.

**1999** Salesforce.com launches and grows to be the global leader in CRM.

**Mid-2000s** The rise of the online help desk, with the launch of Zendesk, Freshdesk, Zoho, [Desk.com](#) and others.

**2006:** Twitter launches. By 2011 65 million tweets are sent each day and companies begin to find Twitter a good platform to respond to customers quickly when they have issues (or compliments) and to have a sense of the person's "social relevance" based on number of followers.

**Late 2000s:** Some companies [turn against offshoring](#) customer service as customers feel alienated by agents who they can't relate to or don't seem to have agency within their organization.

**2009:** [Olark](#) creates the first live chat that stays on-page, eliminating the need for the annoying "pop-out." Live chat brings back the imme-

diacy of human interaction to the internet.

**2015:** Facebook launches Messenger for Business, and sets the pace for companies using messaging technology to contact customers on their mobile devices.

**2016 and beyond:** You can read what I have to say about [what to expect in customer communication in 2016](#), but here's the tl;dr:

- AI - artificial intelligence - speeds innovation;
- Slack becomes an even stronger support tool;
- Mobile chat gets way better;
- Even small businesses get in on the customer support act.

**2017:** The chat world becomes differentiated by [Live Messaging and Live Chat](#) .

The AI debate heats up, as Facebook rolls back their chat bot, and customers become frustrated with the lack of quality in a bot.

The Customer Service industry is organizing into a proper professional organization with conferences, meetups, and clearer career progression within support.