

Live chat – it is all a matter of perspective

03 June 2014 by Peter Voit

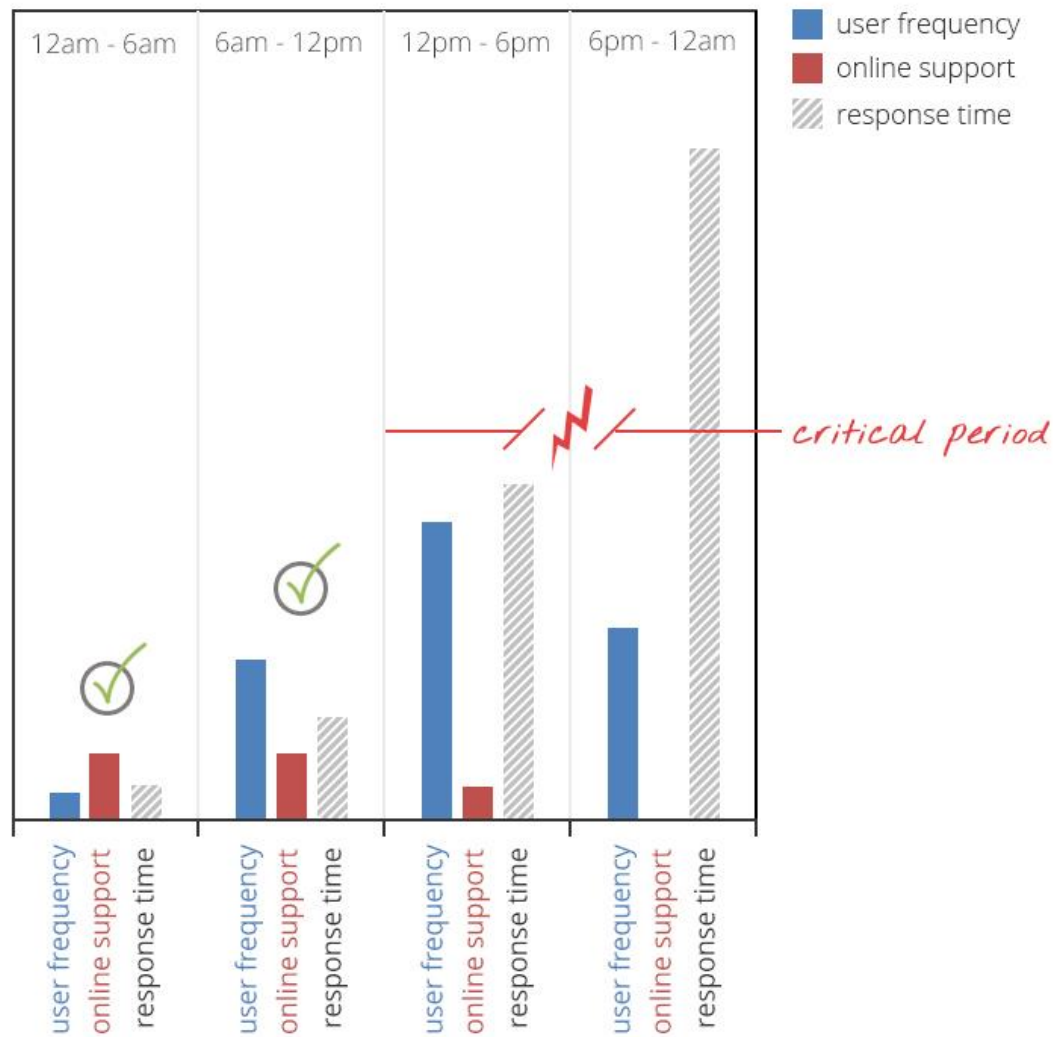
Promoting a high level of mutual interaction and intensive communication between company and clients is certainly the main priority in every client-orientated business. This perfectly justified wish is however hampered by the fact that the webpage visitor's identity is generally protected. So, how can a company achieve better communication with its clients? One solution to this problem could lie in the effective use of live chat functions on the company's home page. Appropriate choice, correct application and careful operation of a live chat system can indeed provide any company with a useful tool to boost mutual trust between supplier and customer.

In principle, the following rule applies: try to see things from the customer's point of view! How would you like to be contacted, how many channels of communication should be available – and, would live chat be a useful addition? How have customers so far been able to contact your company or your customer service? Who are your target groups, what are the options you offer them to contact you, and where would they find them?

Interactive widgets might be small, but their popularity is most certainly growing rapidly. Deciding which website would benefit from this type of extension and which one is better off without it is a matter of personal preference in most cases. It is not just about providing answers to questions put to you by visitors of your website, as they could probably find them in FAQ's anyway. The crucial point is convincing potential customers of the quality of your company's products, the services it offers and its customer service. After all, each direct communication with a visitor presents an opportunity that should not be wasted: it is the chance to gain a customer. Now all depends on marketing strategies, the way you come across and how promptly you are able to react.

Those looking for answers don't want to be stuck in the waiting-loop

In contrast to communication via email a website visitor in a live chat won't be prepared to wait for an answer for any length of time. Tolerance levels online are lower than they are in face-to-face conversation or on the phone. Therefore it is very important to keep response time to a minimum, particularly during normal business hours.



Source: Based on Bergx2 GmbH's own application experiences

Solution A

Additional support staff could be employed to deal with live chat requests after business hours; that way there would be no unanswered chat requests.

Solution B

Live chat functions could be deactivated during the night with the option for the user to leave a message.

But there is a possible drawback as well

If chat requests are not dealt with promptly, the result is counter-productive: all the visitor is aware of is

communication that does not work. In that case it is better to auto-hide the additional live chat offer when there is no support available.

Each request has to be treated with equal care and attention

Product presentation is as important on a company website as it is in traditional business; positive reviews are important too. Websites are restricted to graphics and wording, but on the other hand the advantage of a written response is the fact that due to a slight time delay the reply can be more detailed and to the point, and with particularly awkward questions more knowledgeable colleagues can be consulted without interfering too much with the correspondence.

It is important to treat all requests – no matter how trivial they might be – with the same courtesy and attention, as any kind of interaction via live chat creates an impression that might make all the difference to future customer decisions. Investing time and effort into communicating with customers will be well worth your while.

Real professionals do a lot more than just answer questions: the customer might be interested in other products or alternatives or might even agree to a personal consultation. For those who are unhappy with what they got you might be able to offer tailor-made solutions – who knows?

Multi operator live chats

One of the main advantages of live chats lies in the fact that support requests can be dealt with in record time. A single operator can easily attend to two or more requests at the same time without exceeding response time limits to an unacceptable degree. It is even possible to briefly refer to the company's data base if information is needed, without keeping the customer waiting for too long.

Live chat or no live chat?

Companies marketing complex products and services that require explanation or companies with on-line shops will find live chat extremely useful when dealing with customers, as it enables them to provide swift and competent support, for instance, or to answer questions customers might have before concluding their purchase. Constant availability, even outside business hours, is another big advantage of live chat. For blogs or portfolio pages without e-commerce function live chat tends to be less useful due to irregular availability periods of the operator. The message: "we are not available right now ..." would be more likely to put customers off than being useful in any way. In a case like this it would make sense to resort to the configuration option – if it is included – and auto-hide live chat as long as there is no operator available.

The technical side of it – what do I need to know?

Most live chat or support systems use integration based on JavaScript which is easy to include in an existing website. In most cases all you need to do is incorporate a small snippet (ready-to-use code snippet) into the

centre of the source text on your page. The advantage with this type of JavaScript snippet lies in the fact that programming is automatically executed by your browser. Thanks to so-called “client side programming” there is no need for you to be an expert with PHP scripts, MySQL or even programming in order to start operating live chat respectively live support.

SPAM protection

One of the disadvantages of live chat is the fact that it is not only used by genuine potential customers but by spammers as well. If it comes to the point when the spam proportion of received messages gets to an unacceptable level it is necessary to review your live chat integration, or resort to anti-spam tests such as Captcha-Code. This will not prevent spams altogether, but will help to considerably reduce their number.

Live chat pros and cons:

Pros

- Direct communication with the visitor
- No language barriers through regional accents or dialects
- Multi-tasking: several users can be served simultaneously
- Added efficiency: ambiguities on your website can be removed instantly
- Simply copy & paste from links
- No added cost for website visitors
- Offline option: in case you can't be there

Cons

- Some users don't get their head around it
- Support must be prompt at all times
- Delays such as interruption in the middle of a conversation are not tolerated
- On mobile platforms mostly unusable or awkward
- Selection of wrong chat tools (Third parties' advertisements or similar)

Bottom line: what does the provider have to bear in mind?

Live chat or live support are not just about solving problems or answering questions the customer might have. Just like in a face-to-face chat in a shop you are provided with the chance to suggest alternatives and offer individual solutions, gain the potential customer's trust and ultimately attain your original objective of selling a product or a service.

Short list of suppliers, as of 05/2014

• **Zopim** – <http://www.zopim.com/>

• **Olark** – <http://www.olark.com/>

- **Live Help** – <http://livehelp.stardevelop.com/>
- **Live Chat** – <http://www.livechatinc.com/>
- **Volusion** – <http://www.volusion.co.uk/live-chat/software/>
- **Comm100** – <http://www.comm100.com/livechat/>
- **Website Alive** – <http://www.websitealive.com/>

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Zopim



zopim.com

Chat invitations look very much like the chat window on facebook. The advantage lies in intuitive function recognition, the disadvantage lies in limited customization options. In a nutshell: very intuitive; a cost-efficient alternative.

Lite: EUR 0 / p.m.

- for individuals
- one user account
- one simultaneous chat
- 14 days chat record

Basic: EUR 14 / p.m.

- for small teams
- two chat request types
- for two departments/accounts

Advanced: EUR 25 / p.m.

- unlimited chats
- unlimited chat requests
- unlimited departments

Olark



olark.com

Filter function: fine-tuned options who you want to chat with. Magento or Shopify enable you to make contact while filling your shopping basket --> upselling. Also provides option to answer questions at the crucial moment and thus influence the outcome of the transaction.

Bronze: ca. EUR 13 / p.m.

- one user account (operator)
- all core functions

Gold: ca. EUR 37 / p.m.

- as bronze
- + four user accounts
- + SSL security

Platinum: ca. EUR 99 / p.m.

- as gold
- + group chat

Ultimate: ca. EUR 187 / p.m.

- as platinum
- + telephone support

Live Help



livehelp.stardevelop.com

Total adaptability and real-time translation automation guarantee close customer contact. But be careful not to overload the system with all the available optional features.

Single Domain License ca. EUR 122 / single payment

- Multiple Domain License
ca. EUR 230 / non-recurring**
- + no monthly/yearly charge
- + unlimited user accounts
- + unlimited departments
- + email / chat: tech. support

Live Chat



livechatinc.com

This mobile application runs on most smart phones and tablets. Some of the essential customization options are not available on the programming interface. Nevertheless suitable for small teams.

Solo: ca. EUR 28 / p.m.

- unlimited chats
- ticketing system
- enhanced security
- basic reporting

Team: ca. EUR 30 / p.m.

- as solo
- + chat reporting
- + group function

Enterprise: ca. 45 / p.m.

- as team
- + advanced reporting
- + work scheduling
- + unlimited number of visitors

Volusion



volusion.co.uk

Comprehensive customization options. Attractive to Mac users and works equally well on mobile appliances.

Individual Plan: ca. EUR 29 / p.m.

- one account user / chat operator

Professional plan: ca. EUR 86 / p.m..

- four account users

Comm100



comm100.com/livechat

Choice of pre-fabricated designs depending on individual expertise. Not all standard functions are available which makes integration in particular more difficult.

Basic: ca. EUR 16 / p.m. / user

- for startups
- unlimited chats
- visitor monitoring

Professional: ca. EUR 22 / p.m. / user

- + complete customization
- + pro-active chats
- + mobile apps

Enterprise: ca. EUR 37 / p.m. / user

- as professional
- + routing for departments
- + performance reports

Website Alive



websitealive.com

The desired language can be selected in the chat window, but there is no integrated translation option. The mobile app makes sure that you don't miss any chat request. Perfectly suitable for small companies.

Lite: ca. EUR 22 / p.m.

- Two user accounts included – ca EUR 8 per additional user account.

Pro: ca. EUR 53 / p.m..

- as Lite
- + Admin Rights
- + Chat Sharing

Pro +: ca. EUR 75 / p.m..

- as Pro
- + user account evaluation