



Do your customers trust you?

How organisations should use new technologies to deliver the ultimate customer experience in the last mile





I think it's fairly safe to say that we've all taken a day off work to wait in for an engineer or a parcel. And then been pretty cross if things didn't turn up. When it comes to managing customer expectations in the final mile, technology can make a dramatic difference. When you can harness the power of 4G - and now 5G - to help engineers pinpoint lockers, organise collections and returns, and self-serve 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, it's a game-changer. See how technology can help you plan more, promise more and do more for your customers.

Steve Maddison
MD, BT Final Mile

Customer satisfaction is everything. Just one bad review online can drive away 22% of customers. Three bad reviews can put off more than 50% of people.¹ That's why companies everywhere are doing all they can to keep their customers happy. And many are turning to tech to help.

Some are using personal data to tailor communications. Others have chatbots to respond to queries 24/7. Tracking deliveries from depot to doorstep is common too. But it's not always enough. Internet-savvy customers are increasingly sceptical about the way such technology is being used. You need to give them confidence that you're a company that does the right thing.

In the end, it all boils down to trust.

According to a global survey of 25,000 people, 81% said they'd need to trust a brand before they'd consider buying something from them.²

The World Economic Forum agrees: "It's often said that 'data is the new oil'. Instead, we'd argue that it's trust that will decide whether businesses... succeed."³ But that doesn't mean it's a case of choosing between one or the other. Embracing big data doesn't always mean you'll lose consumer confidence. In fact, in today's always-on world, you can't have one without the other. As PwC analysts explain: "Digital ecosystems can only function efficiently if all parties involved can trust in the security of their data and communication."⁴

Giants of the retail sector, like Amazon, have done exactly that. They've perfected their supply chain operations through big data. So their final mile operations now achieve what was once considered impossible. Impeccable levels of customer service, time and again. But other sectors aren't so lucky.



Field engineering teams, in particular, find this much harder. Most likely because it's a lot more complex than delivering a package from A to B. There are far more people and resources to coordinate. And getting to a customer's address is only half the battle. An engineer still needs to complete the installation or repair, and that's not always straightforward.

Imagine you're a remote worker and your internet connection goes down. Your internet provider's customer service team tells you an engineer will arrive at 09:00 to fix the problem. You trust that to be true. So you tell your boss that's when you'll be back online to complete that all-important task.

What happens when they turn up late or don't have the right parts to hand? Remember – it only takes one bad experience to lose customer trust. Field engineering needs the right technology to help keep its promises.



Delivering a better customer experience in the last mile today

Customer expectations today are high. Two in five people can't bear to get a 'sorry, we missed you' card, saying it's the most annoying part of a missed delivery. People hate not knowing when their delivery will arrive, because they can't plan the rest of their day. And 40% consider a delivery window of more than two hours unhelpful.⁵

To get it right you need three crucial components: speed, accuracy of data and availability of parts. But speed and convenience can come at a cost. "Ecommerce in particular, was built without sustainability in mind – the focus has always been on online sales and how retailers can set themselves apart from the pack based on how fast and how cheap they deliver their products," observes Angela Hultberg, Head of Sustainable Mobility at IKEA Group. "But this is horrible for sustainability and isn't always the most convenient way."

So how can technology help field engineering teams work fast, but also deliver a more sustainable experience for customers in the final mile?

“Because of the different parts involved and the number of engineers involved, the possibility of using blockchain is interesting,” says Professor Lenny Koh from the University of Sheffield’s Advanced Resource Efficiency Centre. Originally developed to work with Bitcoin cryptocurrency, blockchain is essentially a database of information (the blocks) that runs across many devices (the chain). Although anyone can view the information within the blocks, it’s almost impossible to tamper with. Lenny explains: “It can ensure full visibility of the supply chain, while maintaining security.”

We have been using this approach ourselves. Final Mile is our UK-wide network of intelligent lockers. We have 5,000 lockers across more than 1,800 sites, capable of servicing more than 40,000 field engineers. We deliver parts to a locker within 15 minutes* of an engineer, so they don’t waste time driving to collect things from large depots. Orders arrive at the lockers before 08:00. Meaning engineers can pick up everything they need en-route to the customer, and still be with them for 09:00 as promised.

Satellite services play an important role too. “Many IoT (Internet of Things) and smart devices link to satellite services so we can pinpoint exactly where the part is,” continues Lenny.



“Combined with data, this traceability means that businesses achieve wider transparency across their entire supply chain. Of course, they must be careful in how to manage that data to ensure it is secure.”

When you can see the entire supply chain, you can tell others what’s going on. Our Final Mile online portal lets you track every collection and delivery. Our Final Mile app gives your engineers maps, locker PINs and everything else they need for collection and returns. And we’ll text them the minute their part arrives. No more wasted time, or fuel, driving to collect something that isn’t there. And you can keep customers in the loop so they don’t have to wait in all day for the engineer to show up.

“Of course, with 5G coming in, engineers will be able to improve the speed of delivery considerably by checking data and locating parts quicker, which enhances customer service even further,” says Lenny.

Angela agrees. “Delivery isn’t just about innovation in technology, it’s about innovation in business models too,” she says. “We are trying and testing many of these things to improve our deliveries, from exoskeletons to help people carry heavy loads without hurting themselves, to more efficient warehouses, lockers, and common collection points in neighbourhoods, which can be more convenient than home delivery.”



Future technologies to enhance tomorrow

At its core, customer service is about giving your customers what they need – sometimes before they even know what that is. The exciting thing about the digital future is that it's built on foundations of data. And data can show us the shifting needs of customers, to help us stay one step ahead.

Intelligent technologies will help take customer experiences even further. By collecting and analysing huge amounts of data over time, they can find patterns that help predict trends and behaviours.

“IoT-related technologies, like AI and machine learning, allow organisations to manage the current demand so engineers know what parts are required for a particular job,” says Lenny. “But they also collect data for the medium to long-term, which can help to determine what the future demand is from the client pool and engineers. This data can then be used to improve operational efficiency, as well as optimising and tailoring services.

“There's also potential for that data to be used for maintenance and service, because you know who is or isn't a good user, and the state of health of the parts. Potentially, organisations can use AI and machine learning to optimise and design more suitable services for those engineers.”

The ability to do what you said you'd do

There's no doubt that embracing new technologies can improve customer experience. We've tried and tested Final Mile with our own field engineers, and service some of the largest field engineering workforces in the UK. TalkTalk's team is travelling 189,280 fewer miles every year. And Calor Gas has reduced its driving by 145 miles per day. That's more time for everybody to spend with their customers.



But time savings are only an added bonus. The real benefit is that it lets you deliver on your promises. You can tell customers, confidently, when to expect you. You can turn up on time, with the right parts. You can fix things when you say you will.

One of our partners, EDF Energy, is installing millions of smart meters for its customers across the UK. "We need to make sure that our engineers get the equipment they need to be able to get on and do the thing they're good at. That is really what the BT solution is all about," explains Jim Poole, EDF Energy's Director of Customer Operations.

It sounds simple enough – just do what you said you'd do – and yet so many organisations fail to deliver. But if you can be the one who does, you'll earn your customers trust and appreciation – and perhaps a good review.

An 'excellent' rating can make customers more than twice as likely to use your service. But a good reputation doesn't just make people more likely to recommend you to others. It also brings in new talent and even improves your stock performance.⁶ So, it makes sense to use today's technology to encourage greater trust in your business. The only question is: when are you going to start?

*Terms and conditions apply. See finalmile.bt.com/terms-and-conditions.html

Appendix

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