

Tech Round-Up

Live Chat

What You Should Know Before Starting the Conversation

BY LAURIE PETERSEN

Speed, lower cost and customer adoption are making live chat an increasingly popular method of delivering online customer service. In its latest survey of 100 retailers during fourth quarter 2012, the e-tailing group found that more than half the surveyed merchants, 56%, are now using live chat. That's up from 47% in the same period last year.

Customer participation is on the rise as well. Shoppers like live chat because it's convenient. They can multitask and get their questions answered on the spot. Nearly 70% of all Internet shoppers have now engaged in live chat, and 20% prefer it to any other method of contact, according to the 4th annual survey conducted by BoldChat.

So-called proactive chat, in which a strategically timed question is put to the customer at some point in his or her site visit, is also on the rise, says BoldChat, with 23% using it in fourth quarter 2012, versus 21% in 2011.

Timing and approach are everything where proactive is concerned. Customers who are lingering on a product page or with their shopping cart may appreciate the appearance of a support query asking if they need help, whereas inserting an agent when the customer first arrives can come off as too intrusive.

Some retailers, such as Best Buy, have eliminated email customer support altogether and are relying on live chat to provide the service.

Getting Started

So if live chat is now expected as part of the customer experience, what does a live chat operator need to know, and how do you build the service into your budget?

While fewer agents can answer more ques-

tions, a chat operator's skillset is not the same as a telephone operator's skillset. For starters, there's basic spelling knowledge required in addition to product knowledge.

Many systems have a spellcheck function, but contextual language understanding is still required. Also, there's the need to be able to respond to multiple, simultaneous queries—which is what can make live chat a cost-effec-



What To Ask

What should you include in an RFP for a Live Chat vendor?

- Are you a specialist or an integrated solution? Does your company offer live chat only or as part of a suite of services?
- If integrated, can live chat be separated out?
- How can the experience be customized for branded messaging?
- Do you understand our industry?
- Specify how many agents you are starting with.
- Can we easily add agents?
- How does agent assignment work?
- Does the ability exist to insert an agent photo?
- Is the service SaaS based or does it require IT involvement?
- How does it integrate with social?
- How does it integrate with mobile?
- Is there a video option? (Note that audio or video eliminates an operator's ability to handle multiple clients simultaneously.)
- Can screens be shared?
- What reporting is provided?
- Can conversions be tracked?
- What is the security, particularly for regulated industries such as financial services and healthcare?
- Does it integrate with other messaging systems? (AIM, Google Chat, other)
- What training is included? How is it provided?
- What hours is customer support available?
- What is the performance record (up time) of the chat vendor's platform?
- Is service priced at a flat per-agent fee or per transaction?
- Is there a minimum fixed contract?
- Can you supply references in our industry?



tive option.

Prices vary depending on the number of seats required and the complexity of the feature range offered by the live chat vendor. A typical starting point ranges from \$49 to \$89 per month for one seat, and a reduced cost after that for each additional seat. However, each vendor has a specific price structure and enterprises are priced on a consultative basis.

If You Do It Yourself

Mobile capabilities are increasingly important as tablets and smartphones become devices of choice. Consumers expect the same capabilities in their mobile shopping as in their laptop shopping.

In the smallest businesses, where proprietors might actually be the ones answering the questions, mobile takes on another magnitude of importance because the flexibility to answer questions wherever you are is impor-

tant. (Think of it as the equivalent of a pager.)

If you're not going to man your live chat service consistently, it's better not to have it at all. Or, make it crystal clear to customers when this service is available and then deliver during those times.

STELLAService, a customer service measurement company, clocked a live-chat-agent wait time of 1.5 minutes at electronics retailers in October 2012. In the week of Cyber Monday and Black Friday, that escalated to almost 6 minutes, according to CEO Jordy Leiser.

"If the value of the live chat experience is that it's an instantaneous thing," Leiser notes, "then you're doing yourself a disservice by not doing it well."

Vendors vary from live chat as part of a suite of services (some call it multimodal) to standalone live chat. Over the past year or two, Oracle has acquired several live chat companies (including ATG/eStara and Right Now),

and LogMeIn acquired Bold Chat (which it says will continue to operate independently). Industry consolidations and acquisitions are likely to continue, so it's important to discern, if possible, whether your independent provider will be swallowed by someone larger, and if that matters to your business.

Most vendors offer a free trial demo period averaging 30 days to provide potential buyers with a chance to test drive the platform. There are differences in the customer look and feel of each product, but it's the backend agent view that tends to show the most variance. For instance, how easy is it to tap into customer history from the operator's view? And how obvious is it that a customer has been waiting online for an answer? The ability to see who is actively asking a question and tie that back to the customer's history is a valuable offering. Take the opportunity to try before you buy.

A Sampling of Vendors

The information below shows the variations in some representative chat vendors. Ask about promotional price offers as these come and go all the time. The information contained here was drawn from public sources with attempts to validate directly with all vendors. We recommend you consider this directional and a start to your own research. Providers are listed alphabetically.

Bold Chat

(Independent division of LogMeIn NASD:LOGM)

www.boldchat.com

2024 N. Woodlawn, Suite 350

Wichita, Kansas 67208

Contact: Steve Castro Miller, VP, Chat Products, 316-462-7190; 866-753-9933 (toll-free); sales@boldchat.com

Year Established: Parent founded 2003

of employees: Parent has 500 employees.

of clients: 9,000+ in more than 70 countries.

Sample Clients: 3M, American Cancer Society, Corel, Dean & DeLuca, ViewSonic

Pricing: \$9 per month to \$99 per month based on feature set

Enterprise option: Has a suite of products that can integrate.

Mobile Option: Yes

Real-Time Language Translator: No

Product Feature Comparison Chart:

<http://boldchat.com/live-chat-features-chart.asp>

Integrations: Salesforce, Open API

Supports: Windows 7 iOS, Windows Vista, Windows XP

Kayako

Privately held company

www.kayako.com

420 Main St.

Suite 203

Boise, Idaho 83702

Contact: James Edwards, chief business development officer,

888-212-2140 (sales); 208-906-2753 (worldwide)

Pricing: \$29 per month, \$29 for each subsequent operator.

Mobile Option: No

Real-Time Language Translator: No

Product Variations: <http://www.kayako.com/pricing/>

Established: 2001

of employees: 61

of clients: used by 30,000+ organizations

Sample Clients: NASA, Pearson, Saatchi & Saatchi, Virgin Mobile, Unisys

Integrations: None

Supports: Windows 8, Windows Vista, Windows 7, Windows X

Live Chat

Privately held company focuses on small and medium enterprises; releasing new version in Q1 2013

www.livechatinc.com

405 North Street

Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Contact: Mariusz Cieply, CEO, m.cieply@livechatinc.com, 415-800-3838 or 919-648-0609

Pricing: \$36 per month, then \$24 thereafter

Mobile Option: Yes

Real Time Language Translator: No

Year Founded: 2002 in Poland; 2007 worldwide

of employees: 30

of customers: 4,000

Sample Clients: Adobe, Salomon, ING, Bose

Feature List: <http://www.livechatinc.com/feature-list/>

Integrations: Salesforce, Google Analytics, Facebook, Zendesk

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP, iPhone, Mac, Android, Windows Phone 7

Live Help Now

Privately held company.

www.livehelpnow.net

726 Fitzwatertown Road, Suite 6

Willow Grove, PA 19090

Contact: 877-548-3001 x 708 (small/mid-size business);

877-548-3001 x 709 (enterprise); Benjamin Grinberg, director of marketing (ben.grinberg@livehelpnow.com)

Pricing: \$21 first operator and \$21 for each subsequent.

Mobile Option: Yes

Real Time Language Translator: Yes

of clients: 10,000+

of employees: 22

Year Founded: 2002

Sample Clients: Lincoln Trust, Navy, New Pig, Send Out Cards

Integrations: Salesforce, Google Analytics, Facebook

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP, iOS



Live Person [NASDAQ:LPSN]

Offices in Tel Aviv, UK, Atlanta, San Francisco, France.

www.liveperson.com

475 10th Avenue, 5th Floor
New York, New York 10018

Contact: Jeremy Sokolic, SVP Marketing, 212-609-4200; 212-609-4299 x4007 (small business); 212-991-1794 (enterprise)

Service introduced: 1998

of employees: Approximately 700

of clients: 8,500+

Sample Clients: HP, IBM, Microsoft, QVC, Orbitz

Pricing: \$109 per month, \$99 thereafter

Mobile Option: Yes

Real-Time Language Translator: Yes

Integrations: Salesforce, Google Analytics, Facebook

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP

Moxie Software

Privately held company (formerly nGenera); offices in Bellevue, WA; Austin, TX; United Kingdom and Germany. Focuses on enterprise customers.

www.moxiesoft.com

150 Mathilda Place, Suite 302
Sunnyvale, CA 94086

Contact: Tara Sporrer, VP, Marketing and Sales Operations, 800-474-1149; 650-294-4680

Pricing: Chat Spaces list price is \$150 per user per seat.

Volume discounts apply starting at 50 users.

Founded: 2006

of clients: 600

of employees: 200

Mobile Option: Yes

Real-Time Language Translation: Yes

Sample Customers: 3M, Crocs, eBay, Dell, Epson

Integrations: Salesforce, SAP, Oracle, Microsoft, Workday, Facebook

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP

Netop Live Guide

Founded in Denmark. Enterprise office in Chicago. Other offices in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Romania. (Shares listed on Copenhagen Stock Exchange)

www.netop.com/live-guide

15725 SW Greystone Court
Suite 225

Portland, OR 97006

Contact: Greg Griffiths, Live Guide Marketing Manager, Americas, grgr@netop.com, 503-352-3573

Pricing: \$80 per month, first operator, then \$80 thereafter

Year Founded: 1981. Changed company name and introduced live chat in 2008

of employees: 130

of clients: 400

Mobile Option: Yes

Real time Language Translator: No

Sample Clients: Apollo, SAS, ITSRX, Nykredit, governments, financial services, professional services, health, retail

Integrations: Google Analytics, Facebook

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP

Olark

Privately held company Habla Inc (dba Olark)

www.olark.com

245 Ramona St.

Palo Alto, California 94301

Contact: Sunir Shah, CMO, 888-959-4408; support@olark.com

Founded: 2009

of customers: 5,000+

of employees: 14

Pricing: \$17 per month for one operator; up to \$219 for 15.

Mobile Option: Yes

Real-Time Language Translator: No

Sample Customers: Printfection, 99 designs, Disqus, Michigan State University, Shopify

Integrations: Salesforce, Google Analytics, ZenDesk and many other CRMs, CMS and shopping carts

Supports: All Windows, Mac, Linux, iPhone, Android, BlackBerry, Windows Phone

Oracle

Publicly traded company (NASDAQ:ORCL); offices nationwide and around the world.

www.oracle.com

500 Oracle Parkway

Redwood Shores, CA 94065

Contact: 1-800-633-0738

Founded: 1977

Chat Products Right Now and ATG: Saas

of customers: 10,000+

of employees: 10,000+

Pricing: Varies by customer based on services included.

Mobile Option: Yes

Real-Time Language Translator: Yes

Sample Customers: Autotrader, LOREX Technology, Intertek

Integrations: Custom

Supports: Custom

PHP Live

Privately held company OSI Codes Inc.

www.phplivesupport.com

50 Lexington Ave. #118

New York, New York 10010

Contact: JC Fortier, client relations, 917-338-7663; sales@osicodesinc.com

Pricing: \$49.95 unlimited

Company Founded: 1999

Mobile Option: Yes

Real-Time Language Translator: No

Sample Clients: Gurkee's, Nova Scotian Crystal, Identity

School of Digital Art, MyShiba

Integrations: Facebook

Supports: Windows 8, Windows XP, Windows 7, Windows Vista

Velaro

Privately held company offers custom management program to aid in implementation; sole focus on chat.

www.velaro.com

8174 Lark Brown Road

Suite 201

Elkridge, MD 21075

Contact: Jeff Mason, VP marketing, marketing@velaro.com; 800-983-5276

Pricing: \$99.95 first operator and \$52.95 each subsequent

Mobile Option: Yes

Real Time Language Translator: Yes

Sample Clients: Dell, Comcast, AutoZone, Pfizer, Penn, Wynn

of employees: 20

of clients: 1000+

Year Founded: 2000

Integrations: Salesforce, Google Analytics, Open API for CRM

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP

Website Alive

Special expertise in sports and ticketing. Provide graphic services to small businesses. Also partners with call centers on "live concierge" service for SMBs who pay by lead. Privately held.

www.websitealive.com

2100 West Loop South, Suite 900

Houston, TX 77027

Contacts: 877-930-7483; Adam Stass, CEO, adam@websitealive.com, 888-696-4513 x720

Year Founded: 2004

of Clients: 11,000+

of Employees: 12

Sample Clients: Ballena Technologies, Comcast Spectator, Personalize Gifts, Collage Video

Pricing: \$29.95 for two/then \$19.95 thereafter

Mobile Option: Yes

Real Time Language Translator: No

Integrations: Facebook

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP

WhosOn

Privately held company Parker Software headquartered in London; verticals served include real estate, automotive, retail, travel, hospitality.

www.whoson.com

4767 New Broad St.

Baldwin Park

Orlando, FL 32814

Contact: 800-680-7712; Ian Rowley, business development manager, ian@parker-software.com

Pricing: \$39 per month, then \$25 for each after

Mobile Option: Yes

Real-Time Language Translator: Yes

Year Founded: 2003

of clients: 2000+

of employees: 17

Sample Clients: Chula Vista, AVIVA, John Smedley, iYogi

Supports: Windows 8, Windows 7, Windows Vista, Windows XP