

REFERENCE CASE

How Vattenfall Achieves The Best Customer Experience

Fellowwind



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Introduction

“Ultimately, it is the answer to the question, how do you put your customers first? Everything you do in your customer contact channels should always contribute to the goal of providing the best customer experience.” We are speaking with Marike van de Klomp, Channel Transformation & Strategy Specialist at Vattenfall.

Martijn Euyen of Fellowmind speaks to her about how to optimally implement digital channels to provide the best customer experience. We talk about how Vattenfall uses digital channels, the opportunities it offers, and what the pitfalls are. It is a conversation about Vattenfall’s journey from live chat to messaging, and about the enormous potential of widespread automation, the implementation of bots, and how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is playing a bigger role in customer contact. We also talk about the importance of a unified approach and the crucial role of focusing on people. In short: an inspiring conversation with an enthusiastic professional who is passionate about customers.

Over Vattenfall

Vattenfall is a European energy company with approximately 20,000 employees. For more than 100 years Vattenfall has electrified industries, supplied energy to people’s homes and modernised our way of living through innovation and cooperation. Vattenfall is determined to enable fossil-free living within one generation. Together with partners, Vattenfall is taking on the responsibility to find new and sustainable ways to electrify transportation, industries and heating.

-  6,8 million Electricity customers
-  1,8 million Heating customers
-  3,3 million Electricity network customers
-  2.3 million Gas customers
-  19.859 Employees



Marike van de Klomp, specialist Channel Transformation & Strategy at Vattenfall



Our journey

“We first started with live chat at Vattenfall with a team of 5 people,” Marike explains. “We realized that customers were increasingly using chat apps to communicate with each other. Why shouldn’t we focus our efforts on methods where customers feel most comfortable? How could we provide customers with a live chat solution?”

Vattenfall is always looking for ways to make the customer’s life easier. Think about the time and effort it takes to arrange for energy service and the various contact moments that are needed to stop service at an old address and start service at a new one. Using digital channels was the obvious way to meet customer needs and expectations.

The key is to always think about how you can make the customer’s life easier

“We already saw it being used at telephone companies and internet providers. Communications that were previously done by telephone, letters, and e-mail were increasingly being done with short and repetitive digital communication. For us, live chat seemed to be a good first step to meet the needs of customers. Therefore, we started our journey with live chat.”

Live chat was already being used by Sales, but we weren’t offering it in Customer Service. “In Customer Service, the contact

volume is higher, so our expectation was that it would add even more value there.” Additionally, you must have enough staff to keep up with live chat in a customer-friendly way. That means having enough people to handle the volume during your opening hours. The more contact volume you have, the easier it is to get enough people to support the opening hours and service the customer properly. As such, there is a direct relationship between customer contact volume, the way in which digital channels are used, and the staffing available to handle those channels.

Insights

“We noticed that we needed to change course. Fellowmind helped us to define the KPI’s relevant to using digital channels. Think about competition, cost per conversation, and the number of conversations handled. Digital channels work very differently than telephony where conversations are handled one after another.”

“We also noticed that the contact volume with customers increased because we were offering live chat in several places on the website. This caused even more volume because it is much easier to start a chat session than to pick up the telephone or look for a knowledge base article in the Help section of the website. In a way, live chat was competing with our efforts to support self-service.”

Along these lines, it is important to really think about what you want to handle via self-service, a digital channel, or telephony. “What offers the best customer experience? That should always be the deciding factor in your considerations. With that in mind, we subsequently started with Messaging.”

From live chat to messaging

“When we first started thinking about using Messaging, WhatsApp was the most obvious choice because of the wide adoption of that messaging platform. Our premise was to use what the customer uses, and it would therefore cater to their needs. With around 12 million users in the Netherlands, WhatsApp was a logical choice.” Marike lists 3 perspectives from which a digital channel such as WhatsApp has a lot to offer: the customers’, the employees’, and the organization’s.

Customers

Convenience is by far the biggest argument to choose WhatsApp as a channel of preference. Customers ask questions and then reply to the answers when it is most convenient for them. Especially for questions that are important but not urgent, WhatsApp is a great solution. Take relocating for example. If you want to stop service at an old address and start it at a new one, you don’t expect an immediate answer. However, your request should still be handled with care. As such, receiving a proper answer is more important than receiving a quick one.

Employees

Employees experience WhatsApp as a nice channel to work with; however, it’s not for everyone. “You have to be able to deal with several conversations at the same time,” says Marike. “You have to be able to take that kind of pressure. On the other hand, you have more freedom than with telephony or live chat. Customers don’t mind not getting an immediate answer. This allows you the freedom to consult with a colleague for an answer or go to the restroom if you like. That’s not possible if you are on a telephone call.

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“Moreover, we’re seeing a good mix of **young** and more **experienced employees** who **enjoy using WhatsApp**”

“We can’t emphasize enough, the importance of investing time in training and coaching of employees in the usage. Fellowmind really helped us with that back then. The fact that our employees were well trained was instrumental in the success of the implementation.”



Organization

From the organization's perspective there are considerable advantages. WhatsApp turned out to be a strong channel to proactively approach a large group of customers. "Based on data we were able to proactively advise customers on their energy usage. This is important for customers and for Vattenfall because we are actively working towards a fossil fuel free future together". That makes WhatsApp a strategically relevant channel in the interest of customers, and from an organizational perspective.

It is also very easy to identify and measure trends with a digital channel like WhatsApp. The data that is collected can be used to improve your processes and procedures to meet customer needs even better. This is a great example of how customer and company interests overlap.

// Customer, Employee and Company interest go hand in hand

Marika: "From the moment we started with WhatsApp, we saw quick growth. When we began, we had 10 members in the team. That doubled in no time. In 2021, we were up to 100 agents that service customers via digital channels and WhatsApp is 40% of our total customer contact volume."



A Unified Approach is Essential

Digital channels are not standalone. Customers use various channels depending on what's convenient. It is a challenge to know what works across all channels. That's why a unified approach is essential. At Vattenfall this the customer experience across all channels is the focus. The trick is to continue measuring in all channels to see what the customer experience is. Marike explains, "We measure what happens in all channels. If we notice that customer satisfaction from the interaction in the payments dialog is very high in WhatsApp, then we also route more conversations to that dialog with chatbot Nina." This is only possible when you have a unified approach to customer contact. A solid customer contact strategy is thus essential to the successful use of customer contact channels in general, and especially with a digital channel.

The human aspect of change

"That unified approach is needed for a successful plan, but attention to the human aspect of change is just as important. For example, we have diligently invested in the training of employees. With that, we not only trained them on using the applications that are needed to work with digital channels, but we also explained 'the why' digital channels are important for customers. By explaining that the reason to use digital channels was to meet the needs of customers, it became clear how important it was to make sure that the project was a success."

// Attention to the human aspect of change is essential for succes

Not everyone is cut out for working with digital channels. Age certainly isn't everything. You need to be able to multitask because you are handling several conversations simultaneously and working with different systems. Furthermore, you must have good language skills and be proficient in speaking and writing. The ability to properly formulate questions and answers has a big impact on the customer experience. And of course, you must type quickly and accurately. It also helps if you are computer savvy because you need to be able to quickly switch between different systems. If you select employees on these skills and further help to develop them, then customers will notice, and customer satisfaction will increase.

Change also means constant improvement. "We use data to help improve employee performance. Since it's easy to measure customer satisfaction within digital channels, we can take a targeted approach to improving the skills of our employees. In short, digital channels need to be well implemented, and subsequently, you need a well thought out process for continuous improvement. This requires a change in thinking and working which needs to be properly supervised."



Customer behavior also changes due to digital channels becoming more mainstream. "For example, customers are getting used to the way in which to best interact with our chatbot Nina. They formulate questions differently, shorter and with the right keywords. That works well for handling requests. It's interesting to see how our behavior is influenced by technology."



The future is now: Integration and AI

“I was talking about the company interest of using digital channels earlier. Now, we’re creating an environment to identify which channel is best for providing proactive advice. That’s only possible if your data is in order, and you have an environment where you can analyze that data and use the results to create the best customer service experience. Bringing together the data and insights from the relevant customer contact systems is a high priority for us.”

“Moreover, it’s my opinion that there should be a single conversation platform for customers and employees. Exchanges between employees and customers, and employees among each other, are both relevant in offering the best customer experience.

Integration of platforms, data, and processes offers big opportunities

“If you’ve managed to get the integration of data and systems sorted out, then the integration of processes makes a lot of sense.” Marike continues, “If you centralize all knowledge and expertise in 1 team, you can build optimized conversation models based on the data available from the conversations across all channels. You can then take those optimized conversations and use them where you expect them to make the most impact based on the data. Because the data is available to the team, you can apply the lessons learned to internal and external interactions. This allows you to not only use a chatbot for customers, but also for employees and internal processes as we are now doing for HR, Purchasing, and Finance.”

Widespread Automation and AI

Nina

By using a digital channel such as WhatsApp it is possible to simplify and expedite processes through widespread automation. The use of chatbot Nina in the WhatsApp channel is an excellent example. Nina is not only capable of independently starting a conversation and understanding the customer's request. It can also carry out the request without intervention from a live person. And when that's not possible, Nina can make sure that the request is delivered to a customer service agent. The agent can then complete the request using the input from the chatbot conversation.

The combination of chatbots and AI offers extraordinary opportunities for customers and agents

AI for Customers and Employees

Artificial Intelligence plays a big role in process automation. Because algorithms never get tired and are extremely scalable it's possible to use them in many different situations.

AI for Customers

With AI for example, is it possible to help customers find information and the handling of certain requests can be fully automated. AI uses customer and contact data to determine what topics are most applicable when offering suggestions, so that the most relevant information is given. By using 'intent-recognition' and with the help of AI, some requests can be totally handled by the customers themselves. AI can also initiate automated processes such as processing an address change, escalate the conversation to a specialist, and much more. Combining AI with a bot like Nina is an enhancement that helps both customers and agents. Agents that assist customers by telephone or via digital channels can use the same techniques to quickly retrieve information, initiate processes, or direct customers to the right place during a chat conversation. Ease of use for agents and customer satisfaction goes hand in hand when using AI and bots together.

AI for Employees

"When it comes to quality assurance, AI also plays a role," says Marike. "AI is capable of analyzing conversations and identifying the overall sentiment of the customer. Those insights are used to assist employees in their development and to improve the chatbot. Vattenfall makes optimal use of people and technology to continually improve everything we do to provide great customer experiences.

Voice AI

The latest development in AI is called Voice AI. What we mean with this is using AI to analyze voice commands in channels. More specifically, people controlling devices using their voice. These conversations are then saved in a data format. Likewise, telephone conversations are more often being saved as data. The interaction between people via telephony, and between people and devices using voice, creates a huge amount of data. Partially due to this development, voice AI is booming business. With the help of AI, we can recognize patterns in those interactions. What works well and what doesn't work well in those interactions? How can we improve the dialogs at the foundation of those interactions to provide a better customer experience? AI is the driving factor in that process. And here again the key question: How can we make the customer's life easier?

"At Vattenfall, we mainly use voice in transactional dialogues at Customer Service," says Marike. "Think, for example, of processes such as authentication or changing an monthly energy fee. Voice is especially easy for customers. It's easier to say something than to type. As a result, people (throughout all generations) sometimes prefer Voice AI over messaging channels via a chatbot. We try to respond to that need for convenience."

Fellowmind as business partner

The Agent is Key

What role has Fellowmind played in Vattenfall's journey? There are several partners involved in a project of this magnitude. Fellowmind helped with the implementation especially by seeing things from the employee's perspective. We wanted the solution implemented to of course be used by the employees who have contact with customers. As such, Fellowmind focused on the agent as the stakeholder. Agents were therefore given a voice in the development process. By including them in the early stages we created buy-in with regards to the usage.

Different Key Performance Indicators

The introduction of digital channels requires different Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). Fellowmind helped us with defining the right KPI's and how to stay focused on those KPI's. Where a KPI for customer service may be Average Handling Time (AHT), for the digital team we would for example focus on Closed Conversations per Login Hour. (CCPLH). The dashboards that were developed together with Fellowmind helped us start conversations with management, but they also helped us to stay focused on the right KPI's after implementation.



Change

The developments we have gone through are all changes that have an impact on employees. It is crucial for the success that you have management behind you and can explain the strategic relevance of digital channels well. Fellowmind played an important role in that.

Being able to explain the connection between Vattenfall's strategy and what we wanted to accomplish with digital changes, we were able to make a good business case, which included a complete roadmap with innovative follow-up steps, to get our stakeholders on board.

Good training is also essential for success. Fellowmind trained the employees to be proficient in the use of digital channels in such a way that it would have a positive effect on the customer experience.

Conclusion

Vattenfall's journey is never ending. Because providing the optimal customer experience is our priority, it remains challenging to continually improve and innovate. The customer contact strategy offers sufficient growth potential to offering the best customer service experience. There is a solid foundation that is continuously being further developed together with partners. Rapid developments in technology keep the pressure on to ensure that the organization stays on the ball. "That makes it fun and exciting," concludes Marike. "The world of customer contact is constantly changing, and in my current position I can contribute specifically to our ambition to put the customer first every time. Because technology quickly advances, we keep learning and developing."



About Fellowmind

As an innovative business partner, Fellowmind helps companies become future proof. We assist clients with their digital transformation, and together we devise smart solutions for the challenges of today, and ways to face the challenges of tomorrow. Our Fellows are motivated, knowledgeable, and value a personal approach. We strive to understand what motivates our clients and what their ambitions are. Therefore, a meaningful relationship with our clients speaks for itself. Technology is an important driving force behind innovation, but it is people who give it meaning. Or as we say at Fellowmind:

Technology connects, people create meaning.

Vision and Strategy

The digitization of our world has rapidly increased in recent years. A variety of technologies are prevalent in people's business and private lives. Additionally, interactions are becoming more and more digital to the extent that it seems as if technology is replacing human contact. Fellowmind sees technology as a facilitator of better human

connections and is of the opinion that human interaction forms the core of our digital future. Thanks to automation less time is spent on repetitive and manual tasks, which frees up time to make meaningful and valuable connections. It is also important that digital interactions feel natural, intuitive, and personal. Additionally, people should get pleasure from technology, and it should work for them. It is our mission to achieve this together with our clients.

Working Together

At Fellowmind we are actively alleviating burdens daily, just as our clients. We serve as a guide and fulfill a leading role in the ever-changing IT landscape. Thanks to our industry knowledge, we know the challenges the market faces. At the same time, we see that clients require more from us because the challenges are increasing in number and complexity.

This keeps us sharp and on our toes. We engage in the conversation and look for the story behind the questions and build relationships with our clients. Our core beliefs guide us in this:

- Always personal
- Better together
- Serious about fun
- Act with courage.

To continue meeting the needs of our customers, we continue to reinvent ourselves and where necessary we seek cooperation with (specialized) partners. This allows us to better guide our clients with their digital transformations and offer them the best solutions to the challenges they face.

Fellowwind