

How can banks turn stressful Black Fridays into a customer service win?

By [Ryan Falkenberg](#)

21 Nov 2023

For most people, Black Friday is a chance to buy that must-have item they've had their eye on for months. It's also a massive day for retailers. Outside of the week or two before the start of the festive season, there are few other times when they have so many shoppers determined to buy products.



Image by [Steve Buissinne](#) from [Pixabay](#)

But things can also sour quickly. We've all sat in frustration waiting for an online retailer's site to come back online because its servers couldn't handle the traffic. We've also all seen the damage that desperate shoppers can inflict on physical retailers. And with online retailers in particular experiencing record Black Friday sales year on year, such incidents will only become more common.

Retailers can deal with most of those incidents in-house. But things are very different when there's money involved. In a physical store, thieves might steal a customer's phone before gaining access to their banking app and emptying the accounts (this is a fairly common occurrence in South Africa).

Online shoppers, meanwhile, might fall victim to Black Friday scams. For their part, retailers may struggle with the increase in transaction volumes or encounter payment processing issues. When any of those things happen, people turn to their bank.

The impossibility of instant scaling

More specifically, they turn to their bank's contact centre. That can be frustrating at the best of times but it's doubly so on days like Black Friday. Wait times are magnified. Harried contact centre agents, desperately trying to get through as many calls as possible, probably can't give your query or complaint the attention it deserves.

With so much data at their disposal, banks anticipate these increased call volumes. And many do scale up in the run-up to (and aftermath of) Black Friday by making sure as many contact centre agents as possible are on duty.

While that absorbs some of the pressure, it is often not enough to meet customer demand. That's to say nothing of finding extra floor space for temporary contact centre agents or the need to train them up simply for a week or so's work. Even if they've worked in a bank's contact centre previously, there are still unique systems they need to be trained in. Scaling human capacity up and down to meet demand spikes is challenging, but what alternatives are there?

Embracing automated conversations

One option is to embrace automated conversations. Let's say someone calls a bank's helpline with a Black Friday-related query or presses the Help button on the bank's app. Instead of being put in a queue to speak to a human agent, they're immediately connected to a virtual agent.

These agents have all the expertise of a senior contact centre agent or even a banker and can independently help most customers with the majority of rule-bound queries.

They can also work across multiple channels at once, and can handle thousands of customers at a time. They stick to rules yet can shape to each customer's context. This ensures every conversation is consistent, compliant and hyper-personalised. As a result, they can process most of the high call volumes, handing off to human agents only when they get stuck or there is real emotion involved.

With lower call volumes to deal with, contact centre agents can focus on the calls where a human connection is essential. They can better handle these calls with empathy and care because they are not chasing an Average Handling Time clock. This not only makes customers a lot happier, it makes human agents happier too.

There's no doubt that, as much as banks appreciate the extra transaction volumes, Black Friday can be a stressful time. But with the right tools in place, it doesn't have to be.

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