

THE POWER OF BUSINESS MESSAGING

CONVERSATIONAL
COMMERCE
PLAYBOOK



FACEBOOK     

INTRO- DUCTION



It's difficult to believe that SMS was the messaging platform of choice only a few years ago. Clunky and costly, sending an SMS might have felt convenient at the time but it's a far cry from the fast-paced ways we message these days. WhatsApp, with its low cost and sleek, user-friendly interface, has become the mainstay of anytime chats with friends and family. It's easy to see then that, due its familiarity and immediacy, WhatsApp is now starting to find its way as the preferred method of communication between customers and businesses/brands.



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For the Mobile Marketing Association of South Africa (MMASA), this trend doesn't go unnoticed and points towards an even more immediate and far more convenient way to communicate with shops, brands, service providers and businesses of all sizes. And as far as knowledge of messaging is concerned, who better to lead the discussion than Facebook? With Messenger, Instagram, and WhatsApp in the stable, Facebook is well placed to chat about conversational businesses, moments that cultivate conversations, as well as the tools specifically created for business to better manage these communication channels.

We are delighted that Facebook is the sponsor of this, the MMASA's third Playbook, and we deeply appreciate their continued support. I believe that once again our members will find the information presented in this Playbook not only prescient, but also – more importantly – highly beneficial to the ways they approach upcoming campaigns.

I hope you enjoy the read.

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Introduction

Providing a good customer experience has become the benchmark for defining a good business. No matter what business you're in, you're focused on improving customer experiences. And one of the main ways businesses go about this is by improving communication. Communication can make all the difference between a good customer experience and a bad one.

People are more likely to buy more, make a purchase, and recommend businesses that offer communication channels that people prefer.¹ Because of this, businesses have continually adapted to new communication methods to communicate in the ways that customers prefer, to make themselves more accessible and more connected. In fact, the average business currently relies on 6-7 different communication channels just to keep up with communicating with customers.²

1. January 2021 Forrester Consulting report titled "What Businesses Need To Know About Communicating With Consumers" commissioned by Google.
2. Ipsos Survey, n=300 of business decision makers who support marketing/sales and/or customer service in companies with 500+ employees. Survey conducted: September 8–19, 2020

Unfortunately, the majority of customers still feel that communication with businesses is lacking:

When Twillio commissioned a survey case study in the US, UK and Australia, they learned that nearly **7 in 10 businesses surveyed believe they are communicating with their customers effectively, but only 2 in 10 customers surveyed agreed.**

Looking at the data, we can see that this is due in large part to the fact that most people are unsatisfied with traditional channels of communication:

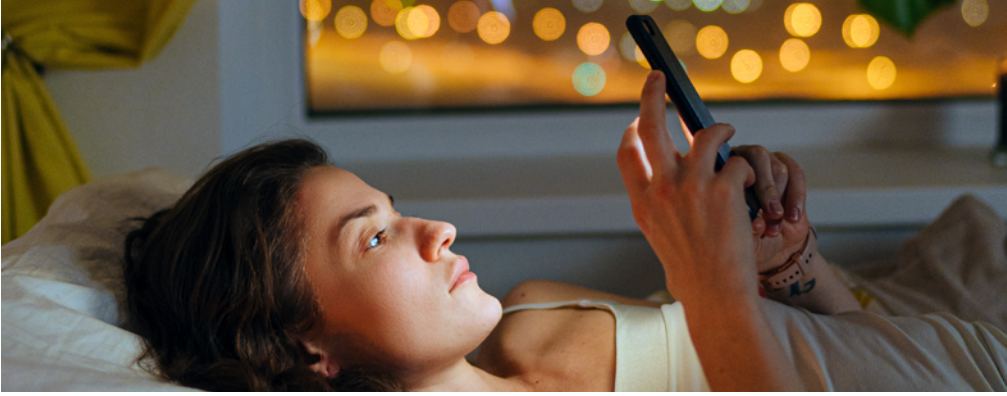
Over half (54%) of international adults said, **"I find traditional forms of communications (e.g. phone, email, in-person) with a business can be frustrating."**

72% of people agree that waiting on hold to speak with someone at a business is a waste of their time.

And really, we don't need data to understand this issue, we've all felt it. Across the board, it has become notoriously frustrating to get information from a business in the moment needed.

Phone calls seem like the quickest way to reach out, but there are **long wait times and it's common to get switched around between agents. And interactions are often oddly formal**, where you feel the need to bring out your 'phone voice'.

It's clear that traditional communication between people and business isn't working. This is because communication doesn't necessarily mean connection.



Via email, there can be slow response times, or sometimes even none at all.

And **with business' various web-based chat interfaces, you're completely on the business' terms.** You either have to download their app or learn a new chat interface that changes from business to business. And if you step away for a few minutes to run to the bathroom or give attention to your crying child, the session automatically ends and you have to get back in line to wait for another agent.

It's clear that traditional communication between people and business isn't working. This is because communication doesn't necessarily mean connection. But there's also a clear solution emerging that's helping people communicate AND connect in the way they want: messaging. **75% of international adults said, "I want to be able to communicate with businesses in the same way that I communicate with friends/family through messaging (e.g. via a chat app, text)."**³ People are more open to communicate with a business over messaging apps than in person, SMS via phone call or through dedicated website chats. **61% of shoppers in South Africa say they are more likely to consider purchasing from a business they can message.**

3. "Harris Poll: In September 2020, we commissioned The Harris Poll to conduct an online survey of the U.S., Germany, the UK, India, Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia to understand their thoughts about business messaging. The survey was conducted among 8,214 adults ages 18 and older and specific brands and products were not mentioned, including WhatsApp."

The Impact of Covid

The Covid-19 pandemic has further accelerated the shift to messaging. When businesses were forced to close their doors and enter lockdown, many lost the option to utilise traditional forms of communication like in-person or phone, leaving them disconnected from customers. It is believed that the pandemic accelerated 5-10 years of digital transformation over the course of a few months and catalysed the shift to messaging even further.

But while we were apart from friends and family, we turned to messaging apps to stay in touch. Over the last year, during the height of Covid, total daily conversations between people and businesses on Messenger and Instagram grew by more than 40%. Over 100m messages are sent per day by businesses using the WhatsApp Business API alone

It didn't come as a surprise that companies like retailer QVC sent their support agents home and were running customer support operations entirely over messaging apps. For small businesses, many adopted business messaging for the first time. They are using messaging across the entire customer purchase funnel as a lightweight way to replace in-person interactions.

While the shift to messaging was a necessity during the pandemic, as the world returns to normal messaging is expected to continue.

The Benefits of Messaging

For customers, messaging builds confidence and trust because they know they can get what they need quickly. Messaging is both convenient and immediate, plus it delights people to know they can communicate in a way that is comfortable and secure. It's easy to see why, since it liberates them from hold times, unanswered emails, and agents who don't have any context on who they are.

But the wonderful thing is that messaging isn't just a better option for customers, it's also an incredibly beneficial option for businesses. Indeed, messaging increases customer satisfaction and lowers costs while increasing ROI.

Messaging can:

Increase efficiency.

It's possible to manage multiple conversations simultaneously and use automation to drive cost savings.

Grow sales.

Conversations help move customers from consideration to transaction.

Build loyal customers.

Better business interactions result in loyal, repeat customers.

By switching from outdated (channel-specific, ticket-based) tools to modern ones, businesses are seeing documented efficiency gains, including higher customer satisfaction and lower labour costs. It's simple to scale and it drives higher customer engagement.

Conversational Businesses

These benefits of being familiar and convenient make messaging about more than just communication, it's about conversation. In a conversation with a friend, people feel seen, heard, and understood. Their conversations can pick up where they left off, and are always there when they're ready to connect again.

The businesses who are thriving today understand that conversation has the power to help them connect with people on their terms. And they aren't just focused on communicating, they're working to build lasting relationships. And that's the crux of the matter - Conversation Creates Relationships

A conversational business treats every moment with customers as an opportunity to build a relationship. Conversational businesses are there to support people in the moments that matter:

From that late night retail therapy session when someone isn't sure whether to order a pair of cool new shoes in size up or a size down

To an urgent need to report a lost credit card

To a spontaneous urge to change travel plans midway through a trip

Ultimately, a conversational business creates meaningful, lasting relationships.

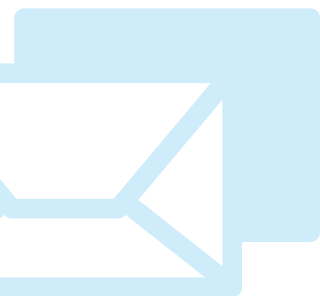
From Out-of-Touch to Always There

That said, the shift from out of touch to continually connected requires businesses to rewire their communication strategy. This is not about creating a short-term marketing strategy or a once-off campaign, this is about building a future-forward, full-funnel customer experience with messaging at the core that will set your business up for future growth. This is about being a conversational business.

From discovery to purchase to care, conversational businesses build relationships with people that ultimately drive sales, loyalty, and trust. And for many, the best place to do this is on Facebook apps and technologies. Facebook business messaging solutions are revolutionising the way people and businesses connect by putting the relationship back at the core of customer relationships.

You may have heard the term Conversational Commerce, but the potential of conversation is far greater than just facilitating transactions. In fact, the power of conversation spans all the elements of a thriving business, from lead generation to customer care to loyalty.

There are several enterprise business messaging offerings that help people get what they need in the moment they need it. Let's quickly look at an overview of how Facebook messaging solutions enable businesses to become conversational businesses.



Facebook Business Messaging Solutions

Platforms that Bring People Closer

Facebook has a series of platforms that allow you to connect with more people in the places they spend the most time, via conversations that are always there when people want to connect with you.

Moments that Cultivate Conversations

Convenient Entry Points – on and off of Facebook – make it easier for people to connect with businesses in an instant, seamless way, in the places where they're most likely to engage with and respond to messages.

Versatile & Dynamic Communication Tools

Facebook's suite of versatile and dynamic communication tools remove friction for people and businesses, both while shopping and getting their questions answered.

Experiences that Foster Long-Term Relationships

And all of these interactions combine to create experiences that drive loyalty, sales and the business results you care about most, not just for now, but for the long term.



Platforms that Bring People Closer

It's clear that people are losing interest in connecting on traditional channels. In fact, people are 30% more open to communicate with a business over a messaging app than through a phone call or in-person interaction.⁴ And 74% of customers who messaged with companies during 2020 plan to keep doing so.⁵

And when it comes to messaging, Facebook is the industry leader with three of the world's largest messaging apps in the world: Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram DM. Across these three platforms 2.78 billion messages⁶ are exchanged with businesses every day on Facebook's platforms - a 40% increase since last year.

Each of Facebook's apps gives you a unique opportunity to connect with customers:

4. BMRI

5. <https://www.zendesk.com/cx-trends-report/>

6. Unidash internal data



Messenger

Messenger makes business personal and convenient. The enterprise-grade API is open to all businesses to build a manual experience from your Facebook page or a custom experience with a platform development partner. A list of approved partners can be found [here](#).

Overview of tools for businesses:

- Page Inbox
- Business Inbox in Messenger
- Messenger API
- Facebook Chat Plugin.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp's mission is to enable any person to discover, communicate and transact with any business. 175 million people message a WhatsApp Business account each day. Small businesses can download the WhatsApp Business App to get started for free. The API is built for medium and large businesses. To get started, it's best to work with WhatsApp Business Solution Providers, listed on its [partner directory](#).

Overview of tools for businesses:

- [WhatsApp Business API](#)
- [WhatsApp Business App](#).



Instagram

People use Instagram as an interest destination to connect to the people, brands, and things they love, with businesses a core part of that ecosystem. They have SMB solutions available in the app and on desktop when you integrate your Facebook page, and recently Facebook announced that they are opening a Messenger API for Instagram to all developers. This will make it possible for brands to combine messaging with applications and workflows to better monetise their presence on Instagram, similar to what is currently possible with Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Overview of tools for businesses:

- Professional Inbox
- Messenger API for Instagram.





Ultimately companies like Facebook are building a business messaging ecosystem across WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram, while also investing in others, like Kustomer, to help create more frictionless experiences that are beneficial and satisfying to both people and businesses.



Moments that Cultivate Conversations

The magic of conversation won't be realised if you can't connect with people in the moments that matter. Let's look at a few examples of how being available in the moment can cultivate valuable conversations, and in turn, drive people to take action.

Meet Mpho, Jade, and Thabo:

Mpho loves spending time discovering and shopping from niche brands on Instagram. While scrolling through her feed, one of her friends sends her a link to the profile of a small jewellery brand via Instagram DM. Mpho has been searching for unique gold jewellery and this shop has the exact pieces she's been looking for. Mpho sees the business has a message button and decides to reach out to the business through DM, since she's already on Instagram, to ask what materials they use to make their jewellery. The business responds instantly with a message that explains everything Mpho needs to know.

On-Facebook entry points:

Page/Profile CTAs can encourage customers to message you from your Facebook page

Story Replies - stories are highly interactive and a great way to encourage conversation

Various ad formats offer the ability to click to message - whether to Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Instagram Direct or all three.

Off-Facebook you can point users to chat with:

M.me and WA.me links
Chat Plugin
QR codes

Jade recently excitedly booked a trip to see her family in East London, whom she hasn't seen in over a year. As her flight date approached, she reviewed her itinerary and noticed that she mistakenly entered the wrong origin airport. In a panic, she decided to call the airline to change it, but the wait time was going to be 40 minutes. While listening to the hold music messages for the fourth time, she heard the robotic voice mention that it was quicker to get help over Messenger. She logged on to the airline's site and saw they had a Messenger chat plugin, where she was able to get automated help changing her flight in less than five minutes.

Thabo has been living in Johannesburg for the past few years and has decided to buy a car. He isn't too tied to a brand, and one day while browsing on FB sees a Click-to-WhatsApp ad from a car brand advertising virtual test drives. They also offered the ability to book an appointment to finalise the car he wanted through WhatsApp. He started his search with them.



These moments can happen while people are on Facebook's platforms or off, as a conversational business, no matter when someone wants to connect with you, you make it easy for people to do so.

Like Mpho, Jade, and Thabo, there are a variety of ways people can connect with you in the moment. From page call-to-actions, to story replies, to ads that click to message, people are connecting with businesses in a variety of ways and Facebook's platforms make those connections seamless.

Versatile & Dynamic Communication Tools

Traditionally, commerce and care tended to be viewed in silos - different departments, different teams, and different outcomes. But as expectations of the customer experience grows, it's clear that care and commerce fuel each other.

When we look at all the reasons people message businesses, we see that of people surveyed across ten markets globally:⁷

68% reach out for research⁸

81% ask about products or services

72% get support for a product or services

60% make a purchase or reservation.

In addition to helping people feel more connected, conversations in Facebook apps are streamlining the customer experience by making it possible for customers to shop and get help, all within a single thread.

7. BCG

8. BMRI

Consideration:

People can reach out with a question about a product.

Purchase:

When they've decided to buy the product, they can usually purchase directly from the chat.

Post-Purchase:

Once bought, they can get a receipt or reach out to ask about shipping.

Loyalty:

A few months later, they may see a CTX ad on Facebook for the same shirt in a different colour and re-order.

Taking this into account, conversation removes barriers and gives people a chance to buy the perfect product or ask the pressing questions that give them the confidence to take action. This holds true across the funnel, from discovery to post-purchase.

Finally, there's an added benefit for businesses, since enabling agent efficiency also creates happier agents, reducing employee churn.

Facebook's business messaging suite is built to be flexible to your business needs over time. Once you build a messaging experience on one of their platforms, you can utilise your messaging channel to continue to build for different use cases to help you get more leads, more sales, and more trust. This gives people confidence to move from consideration to action.



**To help you
build, there
are thousands
of third-party
partners available
to help enable
businesses of
all shapes and
sizes to leverage
our business
messaging tools.**

Conversational Marketing

Driving discovery and higher return on investment with conversation

- Messenger API
- Whatsapp API
- Lead Generation in Messenger.

Conversational Commerce

Bringing together the intimacy of a physical retail experience with the immediacy of online shopping.

- Catalogue
- Shops
- Payments (selected markets)
- Click-to-message ads.

Conversational Care

Creating more efficiency for businesses, increased agent productivity, and lower support costs.

- Conversation routing
- CSAT template
- Live agent support.





Experiences that Foster Long-Term Relationships

Conversational businesses provide great customer experiences that foster a relationship of trust that in turn drives loyalty and creates repeat customers. Facebook's business messaging solutions are made to help you nurture and retain the customer relationships you have while connecting with new ones.

Fact is, people want to connect with brands they love over and over again, since 69% of people said interacting with businesses via messaging apps helps build relationships with those businesses.⁹

When you invest in messaging solutions that meet people where they already connect, you can create the kinds of experiences that create lasting relationships.

9. BMRI

INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS



NNEKA KESHI

Client Partner, Facebook

From your perspective, what do you believe is the most important thing to understand about Chat Commerce?

Through Chat Commerce we are seeing consumers adopting the ability to easily direct message businesses. In fact, 75% of international adults surveyed said they want to be able to communicate with businesses the way they communicate with friends and family. It's now up to the businesses to pivot and capitalise on this change in consumer behaviour.

Are there any misconceptions about Chat/ Conversational Commerce you would like to expel?

Businesses sometimes feel like it may be complicated to get started. Whether you want to build the experience on Messenger or WhatsApp, there are a lot of third-party providers that can help if you decide on going with a chatbot. What's even more interesting to me is that small businesses are taking advantage of the tools that are available. Chat Commerce need not be a difficult or expensive exercise.

What are the first steps to take to start implementing an effective Chat Commerce strategy?

Map out the full consumer journey to better understand what you want the chat experience to do. Start with looking at the potential possibilities of a chatbot. For many customers, the reason they would want to get in contact would be customer care related. To ensure that the first experience with your chatbot is a positive one, focus on making sure you get the customer care side right from the start. From there you can move on to, for example, transactional abilities.

The customer journey will also help you with the briefing session with whoever will be designing your chatbot. Don't limit yourself to what functionality they must include, meaning let them integrate both customer care and transactions from the start.

And then finally, make sure your chatbot provides a pass off to a live person, because there's nothing worse than being stuck in an ever-going bot loop.

How is Chat Commerce being used in the financial services and telco space?

From a local perspective, we have Nedbank's Money Message service, which allows small businesses to receive in-chat payments via WhatsApp. Essentially, small business merchants are able to register for this service and send an invoice to customers which can be paid straight through WhatsApp.

From the telcos side, Vodacom launched its Tobi digital assistant chatbot that can help customers buy airtime bundles and check account balances. In Kenya, Safaricom has Zuri, which works on WhatsApp and Messenger. In addition to being able to buy your airtime and bundles, you can also do loans and savings within the WhatsApp channel.

Access Bank and United Bank for Africa in Nigeria both do customer care through WhatsApp, but also allow for the ability to check the Bank Verification Number or even open a bank account.

Any final thoughts you would like to share?

It's not enough to build your chat service, you need to market it too. Companies have a tendency to create a service but not back it up through advertising to their customers. When it comes to chat, customers will not automatically start using it, they need to know about it and have good enough reason to engage. Once set up, your chat service would require the same marketing effort that any new product or service does, by using ads like Click-to-WhatsApp and Click-to-Messenger in Facebook that directs the customer into the experience.



KERRY HO-VAN RENSBURG

Head of Marketing, iKhokha

Ex-head of Digital Marketing, Massmart Retail

How would you describe Chat Commerce?

With the new digital age as well as the growth in which digital has grown due to the pandemic, customers expect quick delivery and services. It is no longer a nice-to-have but an expectation from the customer. The expectations from customers are that brands should be always on.

Chat commerce gives customers the ability to self-serve, giving them access to information they need 24/7 anytime, anywhere, when it is most convenient for them.

If businesses build their chat functionality correctly it can assist customers with real time support, retrieve information that they need, and even provide the ability to pay for items or bills via the chatbot. This saves support costs and overheads, plus frees up their time for more complex matters.

When did you decide to integrate WhatsApp for Business in the Massmart group?

I integrated WhatsApp for Business within the Massmart group. Makro's WhatsApp bot was trialed in November 2018 and we took it to market mid-2019. Game's WhatsApp for Business was launched mid-2020.

Both Game and Makro's chatbots were developed by Feersum Engine and they customised the bot journeys to cater for each chain's specific needs.

How is WhatsApp for Business used?

It is currently being used as a self-service bot. Customers can retrieve their Makro card number, find their nearest store, view current catalogues, and check the status of your online order, while the bot has basic natural language functionality so customers can ask questions. It is also used for competitions where people can enter and be prompted by the bot in order to stand a chance to win.

There isn't a dedicated team for the chatbot but it was managed through innovation, ecommerce and marketing so there were multiple people assisting, although it was not their full-time job.

Have there been any surprises?

There have not been any major surprises, but implementing natural language is a tough one as you constantly have to ensure you pick up on questions and cater for them by adding certain keywords and growing the natural language functionality as customers interact with it. The bot journey takes time and grows as you add new functionality which needs to constantly be maintained.

What do you believe have been the biggest benefits so far using WhatsApp for Business?

Definitely reducing call centre queries on basic information which the bot now provides. Customers can easily retrieve their Makro card number via the bot instead of getting a new card at the

information desk when they are in store. It also gives the customers an added channel to connect with the brands.

Can you point out the challenges of WhatsApp for companies considering implementation?

The challenge most companies face is finding the right partner. WhatsApp business licenses and the development is very expensive if you are going to use a legitimate WhatsApp business licence. There are many companies out there which have developed WhatsApp chatbots and services but are not on a legitimate WhatsApp business account. This is cheaper but too risky. If a business is going to invest in this channel they need to do it the right way.

It also takes a lot of time and effort to get it right for your customers in order to see the results and meet business objectives. If any business is thinking of implementing this as a channel they need to have a sound strategy and roadmap as it is not a cheap exercise, but when done right it has numerous benefits for any business.



WERNER LINDEMANN

Clickatell Senior VP Commercial: Middle East and Southern Africa

Why do you think interest in Chat Commerce is growing?

The rise of on-demand business models, such as Bookings.com and Uber, has led consumers to expect more convenience and immediacy from brands. Added to this, consumers want to engage with brands on their favourite chat apps that they already use daily.

Chat apps have surpassed social media networks in their popularity and influence a few years ago. There are now more than six billion people around the world who use chat platforms like WhatsApp and WeChat. This is now bigger than the internet!

Consumers are getting tired of downloading applications and remembering passwords, and therefore, brands need to go where their customers already are and are spending most of their time – on chat – or they will risk being disintermediated by digital disruptors.

Convenience is often touted as a key aspect of Chat Commerce, but you believe it goes further than this. Can you explain?

We believe that chat commerce encompasses the full consumer engagement journey, from researching about a product, to purchasing, to after-sales services. For brands, chat commerce results in better customer service, convenience, improved engagement, increased revenue, and significant cost savings.

Chat is both convenient and pervasive, unlike other channels. A telephone call, for example, will just go away if it is unanswered, and an email goes into an inbox. Chat is asynchronous, which allows both the brand and the consumer to engage at a time and a channel of choice, which changes the whole consumer experience. The consumer expectation is always different in an asynchronous channel than for example IVR, with the convenience of engagement history and context at one's fingertips.

Why should chat be included as part of an omnichannel offering when it comes to financial services?

Including chat in an omnichannel offering can make a substantial difference to Financial Services Institutions (FSI's) competing for customers' buying power.

There are three key reasons why chat is an important catalyst for the digital transformation of FSI's:

1. The convenience of customer experience: Having your bank serving customers over the channel they prefer to use is key for a good customer experience.
2. Cost optimisation, through customer self-help automation and call centre deflection: Chat agents can handle 4-5 times more customers than a normal call centre.
3. Time to revenue: We have case studies of banks across Africa that have seen massive growth and customer retention by leveraging chat as a channel for catalyst services.

A robust omnichannel strategy and the smart use of chat commerce can be used as a catalyst for digital adoption and transformation projects in financial services companies. It's all about the customer experience.

What are your thoughts on the true value of Chat Commerce in the retail space?

Covid-19 has seen a swift rise in digital innovation from South African retailers. New customer behaviours have forced retailers to find new ways to reach consumers where they are instead of attracting customers to their stores. Retailers' customer service is more important than quality and price.

South African retailers are positioned perfectly to take advantage of the opportunities offered by chat commerce. An entire customer journey from product exploration to secure transactions including returns and product ratings can happen within the chat experience. This includes the ability to have customers engage with live agents to deal with complex queries.

We expect Chat Commerce to transform the way consumers find, discover, and purchase products and services. It can start with as simple a journey as automating delivery tracking on a chat channel.

How are the prospects looking for payment through the chat channel?

Payments in chat are secure, easy, and the process is convenient. What's more, chat commerce is frictionless. The convenience of chat commerce and being able to browse products, obtain customer support, and make payments on one screen via a favourite chat app is increasingly becoming common in people's daily lives.

With consumers having limited data and space on their phones, it's hard for brands to generate ongoing app downloads and usage. In fact, app penetration in Africa stands at just 18%. Chat channels like WhatsApp, however, can extend penetration to 64%, which is more than a 300% improvement in reach when compared to traditional apps.

As the infrastructure for self-serve and payments become more solidified and more merchants come on board, chat will enable consumer services in areas across industries.

What's your opinion on the state of Chat Commerce locally?

Consumers have shifted from social platforms to chat platforms and the simplicity of chat commerce will become even more attractive. Our phones are already part of our digital identities, with the capability to do biometric authentication for transactions and engagement.

This is a great opportunity for brands. Not only do they get to serve their customers on chat apps, but they also get to be in their customers' contact lists right next to their friends and family.

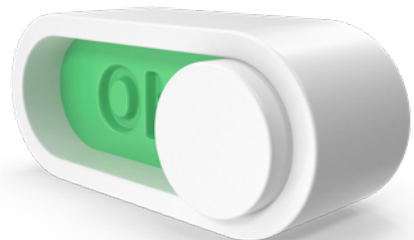
Brands gain and lose market share based on their ability to serve customers, and therefore it is imperative to be on the same platforms as your customers. The power of the chat platform economy will really be felt in the next 18 months as adoption is gaining rapid momentum.

Any final thoughts?

If brands get customer engagement right in chat, the rewards are significant. A recent Aberdeen research report found that companies that incorporate chat capabilities experience 75% greater year-over-year growth in annual revenue and 89% greater annual growth in cross-sell and up-sell revenue.

The next billion people and millions of merchants will not be onboarded through websites or email, but through digital and chat commerce experiences.

As the pandemic has now forced brands to interact and transact with their customers where they are, there has never been a better time to embrace commerce in chat and get closer to your customers than ever before.



RICK JOUBERT

Chief Executive, Yonder Media

What do you understand as Chat Commerce?

The use of digital platforms – mainly IM – which are predominantly used for person-to-person chat, for automated brand to consumer chat, in support of a broad range of possible commercial objectives. These could be in areas like new business prospecting, contracting, e-commerce, product or service information delivery, customer care, process digitisation, process efficiency improvement and many others.

On what platforms have you been involved with on the messaging side (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram Messaging)?

WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, SMS and USSD. WhatsApp, due to its dominance as the de facto peer-to-peer messaging platform in SA, has seen more Yonder Chat Commerce deployments than any other platform in the past 12 months.

Our core YOMO platform, which powers our Chat Commerce solutions, is able to integrate to any other IM or telco messaging service if required. Instagram being our most likely next integration due to how tightly coupled it is to WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger in the Facebook family. And probably also Google Business messaging which is becoming commercially available soon based on the high number of Android handsets in the market.

Can you perhaps expand on the most important projects and share any successful outcomes?

For sheer scale of user adoption there is very little that I am aware of locally to compare to the Chat commerce solutions Yonder has developed for Shoprite Group (across retail brands). Features included everything from loyalty program registration, instant access to local special offers (which were traditionally only available in print), access to financial services, and management of your Shoprite money account with unique account authentication. Customers also have the ability to purchase Vouchers without leaving the bot, and one of my personal favourites - Shoprite Group job applications. This allows tens of thousands (monthly) of local job seekers to seek and apply for store level job vacancies in WhatsApp, also creating significant productivity gains for Shoprite HR via integrations to Shoprite enterprise systems for management of the recruitment function.

We continue to roll out a solution for Colgate's Bright Smiles Bright Future project across numerous countries in Africa promoting oral hygiene education and linking school children, their parents and educators together with data capture and user data query happening entirely using a WhatsApp solution going forward.

Lastly a very recent Yonder project worth mentioning, even though it's first phase has just gone live and therefore it's not possible to report on impact yet, is the KFC WhatsApp Conversational Commerce bot. This project is extremely exciting because it represents what we believe to be the first full WhatsApp e-commerce solution from a big brand in SA. It's 'full' in the sense that the entire KFC menu is available with both Collection and Delivery options and with order payment in WhatsApp, POS integration, location awareness and many other features leveraging the unique power of WhatsApp and YOMO tech. I believe this project has the potential to set a near-term benchmark for a new kind of e-commerce for developing markets.

What do you wish more people understood about Facebook/WhatsApp/Instagram chatbots?

The fact that for mainstream consumers in general these are significantly more accessible than most other digital assets used by brands to engage consumers (websites, apps, contact centres, etc.), as these platforms, especially WhatsApp, command such a large share of daily consumer attention compared to any other app on a smartphone. This is not to suggest that chatbots are a substitute for sites and apps – they are not. However, they can play a powerful complementary role for a range of use cases.

With some of the customer conversations, it's not possible to rely solely on a chatbot. How do clients integrate messaging within their social media/client services team?

Yes, it is true that even with sophisticated natural language processing, machine learning, and the deployment of advanced AI, automated conversations will not be able to solve every customer need and escalation and handover to humans is required in such cases.

Our YOMO conversational commerce solution includes a handover protocol which intelligently determines (or asks consumers) when to move the conversation to humans in a brand's contact centre or support team. And then seamlessly does so with the conversation remaining in the same WhatsApp stream.

As you've completed more chat-based projects, where do you believe the true value of chat/messaging lies?

As long as marketers understand the context and the limits of chat automation, there are many UX benefits which make deploying a chat solution for specific use cases a great idea, maybe even essential in competitive markets. In my view the most profound value is that the marketing promise (since the birth of the internet) of personalised direct relationships at scale – between brands and consumers – is closer than ever to being realised.

This is made possible by exploiting the accessibility and immediacy (via automation) of conversations enabled by well executed conversational commerce solutions. And in this context the word “conversational” is critical because of the attempt to simulate the most natural way that humans have engaged in commerce for millennia.

What would be your advice to clients wanting to get involved with conversational commerce?

Before committing to any solution to follow a rigorous strategic thinking process up-front, in order to first clearly understand the problem you are trying to solve and /or the new value being created, and the use cases being addressed. For most brands a Chat Commerce investment should be something done for the long-term. It's the creation of a key new digital asset, which should work with (and in some cases integrate to) many other organisational touch points - everything ranging from e-commerce systems, websites, enterprise databases to point-of-sale infrastructure, reporting systems and many more.

Any final thoughts?

Yes, be careful not to make the classical error so often made in digital, which is to impose the application of a legacy digital concept upon a newer technology. A great example of this could be seen in the early years of the mobile internet. Most brands and publishers initially made the mistake of thinking of the mobile web as simply the web on a smaller screen rather than asking themselves what made mobile unique and how to exploit all the new stuff to create even better experiences for consumers. It took well over five years but eventually ‘mobile first’ thinking came to dominate digital marketing strategy.

Do not add a chatbot to your digital asset arsenal if all it's going to do is replicate what your website or app is already doing. Clearly understand how and why consumers are using IM services in the first place and use that as your starting point.

CASE STUDIES



Carling Black Label

The Bravest Thing

Carling Black Label wanted to be a force for good during the lockdown, creating The Bravest Thing, a WhatsApp line launched in partnership with LifeLine and Father A Nation. It offers help to men and women in abusive relationships and is a non-judgemental place where victims of abuse and men seeking mentorship can be put in touch with different organisations to get the help they need, silently.



#NO EXCUSE
FOR WOMEN ABUSE

In March, before South Africa went into lockdown and alcohol sales were banned, Lifeline received about 12 000 calls for help. In April, one month into the lockdown, calls surged by 500% to 80 000. There was no way for anyone to get help silently (important in South Africa where families live in close proximity to each other) and the volume of calls was leading to burnout for councillors at LifeLine.

The Bravest Thing allows anyone to WhatsApp the word “Brave” to 0800 150 150, and users can then start chatting – silently – to a bot that will route them according to their needs. This could be as diverse as dispatching emergency services to a dropped pin or chatting to a counsellor or getting in touch with a mentor. It performs as a dual platform for getting men in touch with mentors and abuse case management. For the FAQ part of Gender Based Violence the bot routes to a Facebook Messenger bot run by rAlnbow.

According to Arné Rust, Carling Black Label’s Brand Director, WhatsApp was chosen for its familiarity, functionality, and because it’s discrete. Victims can drop a pin, so Lifeline knows exactly where to send the police or emergency responders. They can also upload images as proof of the abuse, which serves as irrefutable evidence of the incident.

The results were much bigger than expected. The brand anticipated 500 engagements on the platform in the first week, but 5176 people reached out for help. A month after launch, there had been over 8000 unique engagements, 2000 of which were with men. Users sent an average of 10 messages each, and the campaign also trended three times on social media during the launch.

Gustav Praekelt, Founder, Praekelt.com and Co-Founder, Turn.io on the impact of WhatsApp

As Founder of Praekelt Group, Gustav Praekelt is no stranger to mobile, having first created USSD appointment reminders for AIDS patients at Helen Joseph Hospital. His involvement in health has now come full circle as the Praekelt Group implemented WhatsApp COVID information solutions alongside the World Health Organisation (WHO) and governments across the globe. The WhatsApp Business API has been essential, making it possible for Praekelt and his team to create chat-based communication strategies that included an innovative COVID chatbot.



During a pandemic, speed is everything. WhatsApp provided a real-time secure channel for the WHO to help chat to millions worldwide, providing information around the virus, as well as on self-diagnosis and where to get tested. Hopefully, the final phase is now in action, with vital information regarding the vaccination programme being offered.

Praekelt, alongside Facebook, is also involved in the Chat for Impact Summit powered by WhatsApp. Here 30 organisations across the globe have been selected to help incubate WhatsApp-based solutions in order to provide vulnerable and minority communities with easy and secure access to vital information and support. It's important to note that several hundred organisations applied, seeing value in the power of chat-based communication platforms, especially in education and knowledge transfer.

Talking at the Facebook EMEA Marketing Summit 2021, Praekelt notes the motivation to change something is not enough, also needed is the knowledge to know how to change it, plus the support or the resources to make it happen. This certainly holds true for entrepreneurship, and Praekelt believes WhatsApp can also play a role here.

“In Africa we definitely have the motivation, with amazing entrepreneurs that are building their businesses. But what they lack is the knowledge, resources and support. I think what’s going to be really fascinating and incredible is the way WhatsApp will be utilised to provide not only real-time information and the knowledge, but also the support to grow businesses on the continent,” Praekelt states.

Summary

The importance of messaging platforms has become undeniable. As part of our daily lives, messaging is such an integral part of how we stay in touch, connect and share that it's hard to imagine not being able to quickly send a WhatsApp.

It's no surprise then to see more businesses finding innovative ways to integrate messaging into daily operations. By finding the customers where they already are – WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram DM – businesses are having conversations never before possible in such an immediate and convenient fashion. And these chats, however long or short they might be, spark relationships that ultimately lead to loyal customers and a growth in sales.

For businesses then, the move towards Conversational Commerce is the right one, but it goes along with choosing the best messaging platform to suit the customers' needs. WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram DM have been integrated with carefully considered business functionality, complete with APIs for better customisation and unique functionality. It's here where Marketing, Commerce and Customer Care can come together to create those special experiences necessary to foster long-term relationships. Experiences that for the customer are never more than a simple message away.

