LANGUAGE I/O

2023 Trends in Multilingual Customer Support

Contents

It's safe to say that the business landscape shifted dramatically in 2022. The year began with thinkpieces reacting to the Great Resignation and a sense of optimism about growth in a post-lockdown world, but ended with concerns about a new recession and mass layoffs across industries.

If the final quarter of 2022 is any indication, 2023 will be a uniquely challenging time for businesses—but one that is also rife with opportunity to differentiate and grow.

Successful organizations will be those that focus efforts on the customer experience. Understanding what customers want and expect from brands will be paramount to maintaining growth against a backdrop of economic uncertainty. And what customers want, more than anything, is to feel heard by brands.

"the human desire to be heard and understood is universal, especially in today's digital world."[1]

– Bruce Temkin, Qualtrics

For global enterprises, making customers feel heard means speaking their language—literally. Research shows that providing support in the customer's native language creates loyalty, with 75% of consumers reporting that they are more likely to purchase from the same brand again if customer care is offered in their preferred language.[2]

As digital means of communication continue to drive a more connected world and technologies such as artificial intelligence and natural language processing evolve, consumer standards for multilingual support will heighten. This puts more pressure on brands to stay abreast of the latest and upcoming trends in multilingual customer service communication.

Here are four trends—and one bonus "future" trend—for brands to consider throughout 2023 and beyond.

[1] Business Wire
[2] CSA Research

1

Multilingual Chatbots and Conversational AI

Business adoption of conversational AI has grown significantly over the past several years, and it's only expected to continue: Deloitte predicts that the conversational AI market will grow 22% between 2020 and 2025.[3]

By far the most common application of conversational AI in business is the chatbot. Across industries, customer service teams employ chatbots to act as the first point of contact when a customer needs assistance. This benefits customers by reducing wait times, as chatbots can handle any number of conversations at once and be available 24/7, while also giving brand representatives more bandwidth to work on more complex, rewarding customer cases.

Customers are increasingly warming up to chatbot-based support as well. 40% of shoppers saying they don't have a preference as to whether or not they are helped by an AI program or a human, so long as their question or issue gets resolved.[4]

As chatbots continue to become more prevalent in customer service, businesses cannot overlook a glaring gap in the chatbot experience: namely, the lack of multilingual chatbots.

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of shoppers say they don't have a preference as to whether or not they are helped by an AI program or a human, so long as their issue gets resolved

The majority of brands' chatbots are available in English only. Considering that fewer than 20% of the world's population speaks English—and for the majority of those speakers, English is not their native language—this means that the vast majority of the world is being excluded from the opportunity to interact with and reap the benefits of chatbots.

Brands seeking to gain a competitive edge and serve a wider audience must invest in resources and/or technology to take their chatbot from mono- to multilingual.

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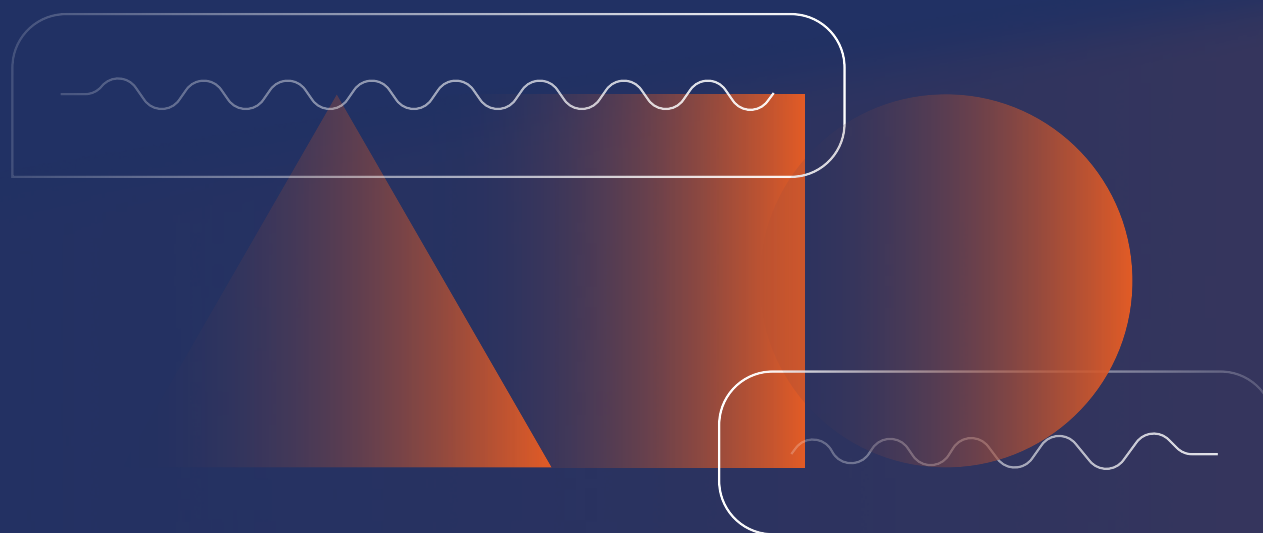
2

Augmenting Your Team
with Technology

Throughout 2022, major companies like Amazon, Apple, and Meta have implemented hiring freezes that are expected to extend into 2023. Meanwhile, 54% of CFOs surveyed cited hiring and retaining staff as the biggest challenge expected over the course of the next 12 months.[5]

With hiring freezes and budget cuts preventing customer service teams from growing —or, in the worst case scenario, forcing those teams to get smaller—these departments must find a way to do more with less. Brands providing multilingual support may no longer be able to hire additional fluent speakers to service customers in each language they speak, putting more pressure on existing staff while likely jeopardizing the quality of the global customer experience.

To avoid poor customer experiences such as long wait times for in-language support, successful brands will embrace cost-effective technology to amplify the power of their existing teams. Real-time translation technology that enables monolingual (e.g., English-speaking only) agents to communicate with customers in any language significantly expands the reach of an otherwise limited team.
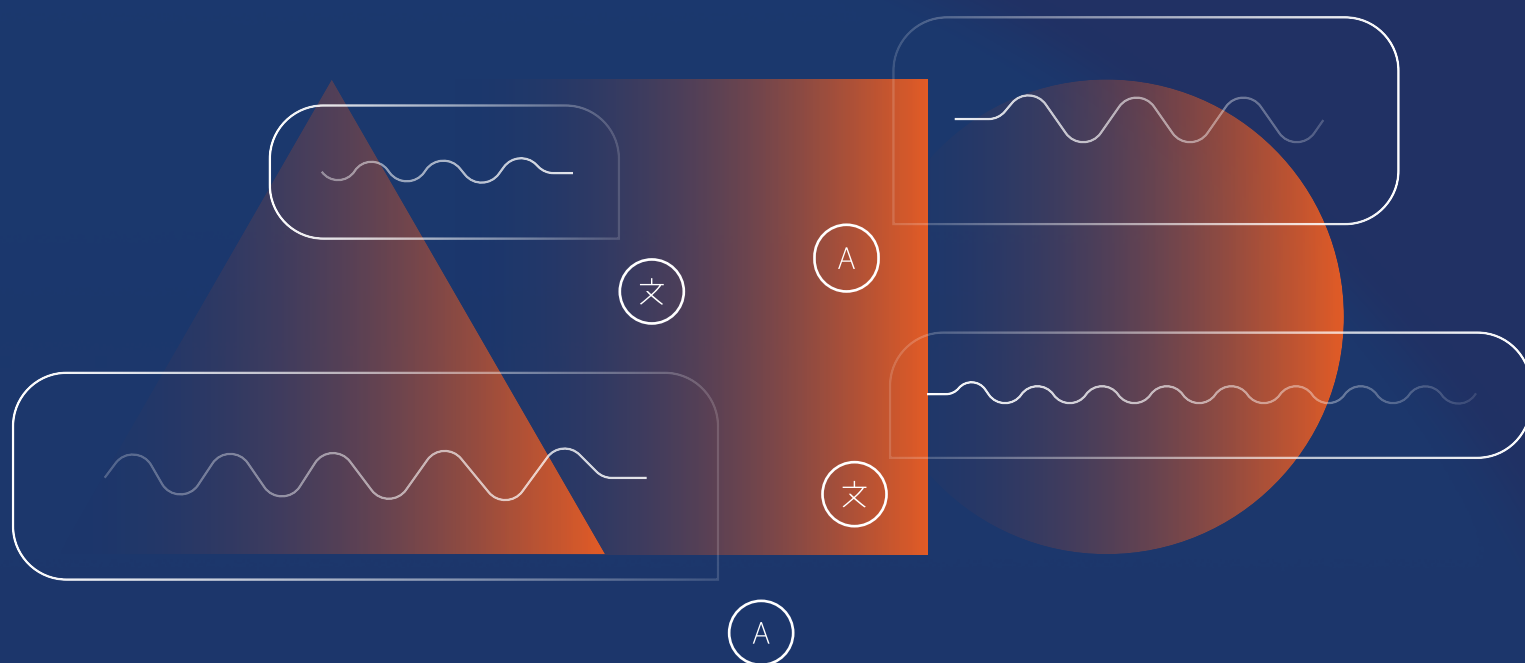
Here's an example: a retail brand's online storefront is consistently growing in popularity among Chinese consumers, but a hiring freeze has prevented the brand's customer service team from bringing on additional Chinese-speaking agents to support these new shoppers. The team's only Chinese-speaking customer service agent is swamped with tickets to address, while none of the other agents can jump into help even when they have idle time, all due to language barriers. By introducing technology that automatically translates incoming and outgoing messages, every single agent on the team can now communicate with Chinese customers.

Using this technology—which, depending on the volume of text being translated, can cost less than one full time staff member's annual salary—the retail brand is able to scale up multilingual support coverage without adding headcount. When considering how many languages this scenario could conceivably occur in, the cost and efficiency benefits of using translation technology become clear.

Language I/O makes it easy for your monolingual customer support agents to communicate with customers in 150+ languages, all directly within your CRM.

Learn how you can save time and budget while scaling up global support

Visit our website

3

Multilingual Voice Search

The recent rise in remote jobs and digital means of communication have certainly made text-based support channels such as email and live chat more prolific, but voice-based communication still has a role to play. However, voice-based conversations don't necessarily require both sides of the conversation to be human.

Voice search, such as that conducted via virtual assistants like Siri or Google Home, is an increasingly popular way for consumers to interact with brands. 51% of U.S. shoppers use voice assistants in the research process prior to making a purchase, while more than a quarter of the world's online population regularly uses voice search on their mobile devices.[6]

Just as providing a chatbot only in English excludes speakers of other languages from communicating with it, optimizing English-only content to show up in voice search results ignores global customers who don't speak English.

Even in the case of brands already investing in multilingual website content and SEO, it's likely that content isn't optimized for voice searches specifically. As the popularity of voice search continues to grow in 2023, brands must ensure their multilingual content is in the right shape to get picked up by voice assistants.

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Tips for optimizing content for voice searches:

- Research common questions and phrases related to your solutions, as well as how they are asked in other languages

- Keep website content natural and conversational rather than formal

- Develop multilingual FAQs that incorporate questions into the text while also providing an answer

- Answer questions in a concise, to-the-point manner

- Make sure your website is mobile-friendly

- Optimize your site speed so that pages load in under 2-3 seconds

4

Strategic Expansion of Multilingual Sales and Marketing Materials

With 40% of customers outright refusing to buy from websites that are not in their native language[7], it's never been more critical to provide multilingual experiences from the second a potential customer begins interacting with your brand.

Website and marketing localization is nothing new, but it's time for global enterprises to rethink multilingual content experiences and how they impact each potential customer's chance of making a purchase. This is particularly important given the previously mentioned economic uncertainty of 2023, as organizations cannot afford to take the same blanket approach to localizing each and every aspect of their brand when budget and personnel limitations are in place.
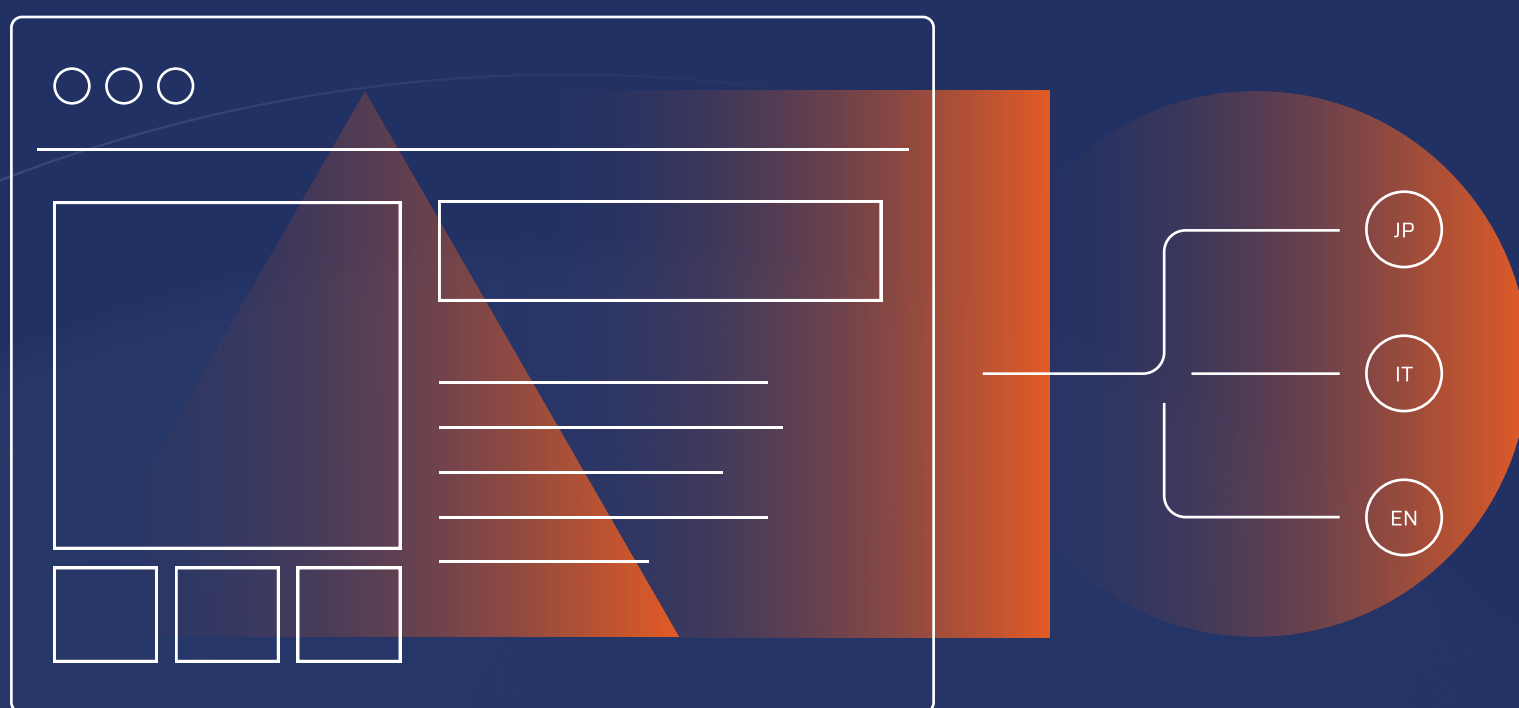
Both brands that are either getting started with multilingual marketing and those that are expanding into new markets and want to be intentional about how to incorporate localization practices should take the following steps:

1. Define the markets for expansion and the primary languages spoken in those markets. Expanding into one new region doesn't mean that only one new language will be relevant, so research must be done to understand how many languages must be accounted for.

2. Identify the pieces of content that are most critical for potential customers to understand, and make sure those are translated or localized appropriately. In the case of retail businesses, for example, product reviews cannot go overlooked, as 73% of consumers want product reviews to be provided in their own language if nothing else.[8] Prioritizing the pieces that have the greatest impact will make the most of a limited budget.

3. Understand the channels that shoppers in the new region(s) prefer to use for brand interaction. For example, some populations are more active on email while others may prefer social or text messaging with brands. Once identified, define a strategy for supporting multilingual communication over those specific channels. This is another area where multilingual chatbots have a role to play, as 55% of businesses that make use of chatbots in the sales process generate higher quality leads.[9]

Strategic multilingual communication in the pre-sales process sets the stage for a rewarding post-sales experience—one that will keep customers around the world loyal to your brand.
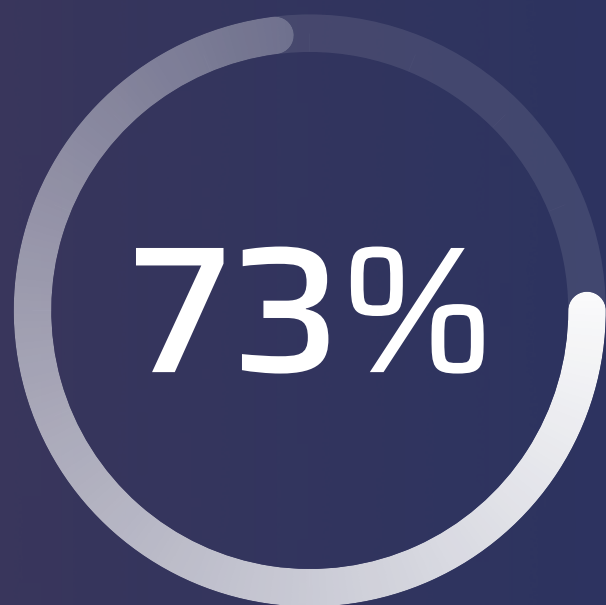
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[8] CSA Research

[9] Drift

Bonus: Future Trend

Translation Everywhere

Digital communication rules the world of customer service interactions, but that's not the only arena where people are accustomed to speaking with each other in a primarily virtual or text-based environment.

Even before the pandemic, many businesses used instant messaging technology like Slack or Microsoft Teams to enable fast, text-based communication between coworkers. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, usage of these systems exploded, with Microsoft Teams experiencing growth of 894% between March and June 2020.[10] Even as the world has opened back up, these apps have seen a steady increase in usage— one that is only predicted to continue. Now, 25% of professional jobs in North America are remote, meaning that for a quarter of the North American population, virtual means of communication are the default way in which they interact with colleagues.[11]

The explosive growth of remote work gives organizations the ability to hire not just based on location, but on raw talent. Of course, the most qualified candidate for a job is not always located in the same city, country, or even hemisphere, leading to the globalization of the workplace as we know it.

At organizations where employees from all over the world communicate via real-time instant messaging and asynchronous project management systems, language barriers pose a real threat to productivity and inclusivity. Assuming that everyone is comfortable speaking the same language by default may bring about communication issues that can lead to awkward situations or even legal repercussions. To foster better cross-language conversations in the workplace, brands will begin implementing technology that enables multilingual internal communication.

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[10] Business of Apps
[11] Forbes

LANGUAGE I/O

Language I/O makes it easy and cost-effective for brands to provide high quality multilingual customer support over chat, email, social media, FAQ articles, and more.

By plugging Language I/O into their CRM, organizations empower monolingual (e.g., English-only) agents to communicate in real time with customers in more than 150 languages, all at a fraction of the cost it would incur to staff up a team of fluent speakers.

See how Language I/O can transform your multilingual customer support experience in as little as 24 hours

Get a demo