Humanizing the online customer experience

If shoppers got the same kind of experience in real-world stores that they've come to expect online, sales floors would soon become a sea of empty shopping carts - and, despite fuel prices, customers would be pulling out of parking lots in droves to head for the competition.

The Internet has seen massive adoption. Online retailing has continued to dramatically build its customer base and more and more companies are sending their offline customers to the Internet for service and support. To service both these old and new customers, the Internet has already had an abundant history of "self-service" tools that have each seen their boom and bust cycle.

Active forms, eCRM and analytics have all tried to make the Internet an equal, but more cost-effective, participant in the world of customer communications along with Mr. Bell's great invention, the telephone.

A problem remains. In spite of the Internet's massive adoption, in spite of its remarkable power to make (and unmake) entire new industries, online customer service remains the ugly stepchild of corporate America. We say that we want to satisfy customers online. We say that we want them to feel just as well-served online as in the high touch bricks and mortar store or when they are on a telephone speaking with a human sales representative.

Why does customer service lag so far behind on the Internet, even as so many are adopting the Web as their favored method of finding goods, services and information?

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