FRONTLION GUIDE

Why Virtually Queued Customers Buy More

How virtual queuing reduces wait-time anxiety and turns idle browsing time into buying time.

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Introduction

An Oracle survey from 2018 discovered long wait times were the most often cited reason (by 51 percent of respondents) for an unsatisfactory customer experience. The same survey revealed that 77 percent of respondents said that bad customer experiences negatively affected quality of life.

Essentially, a long wait isn't just inconvenient—for most consumers, it diminishes the in-store experience. That doesn't exactly help sales ...

Virtual queues offer a way to reduce wait times—both perceived and actual—while achieving efficiency and restoring customer enthusiasm. This guide will examine why long waits are such a problem for businesses and how virtual queues give consumers a reason to buy more.

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Ease the Wait: Decrease Anxiety, Reduce Abandonment, and Increase Returns with Virtual Queuing

Waiting in a queue is an inevitable, annoying part of life and has been for decades. People find themselves stuck in traffic, airport security lines, emergency rooms, stadium restrooms, and so on—and they mostly have to grin and bear it because they really don't have any other choice.

Consumers do have a choice: If a line is too long or a wait is too great, they can decide to take their business somewhere else. Losing business not because its product or service is of poor quality but because it can't deliver in a timely fashion is a worst-case scenario for an enterprise.

HIGH ANXIETY

A long wait can cause actual anxiety in consumers. Likely, you've been caught in a line, looking at your watch, worrying you might be late for your next engagement. In those situations, how often do the next people in front of you in the queue take their sweet time ordering, or two employees suddenly go on break? These inconveniences are infuriating when you're already in a rush—and they increase anxiety.

This anxiety often manifests itself in the healthcare space. Long emergency room waits are a fact of life and why ER visits seem even worse than they are. However, even just routine trips to a physician ramp up patient anxiety. A study found that 30 percent of patients left an appointment if they thought it was taking too long to be seen. In other words, not waiting is more important than receiving care to three of 10 consumers.

Consider what that study's finding says about wait anxiety in other industries that don't involve people's health. We've all walked into a business, seen the line, and walked out. And we've all experienced painfully slow service after stepping into a queue or sitting down at a restaurant, then decided life is too short and left. If your lines are causing anxiety, you have the power to make a change.

TIME IS MONEY

A 2019 study discovered that people generally spend more money when they are actually shopping in a brick-and-mortar store than when they shop online. The same research found that shoppers are more likely to buy unexpected items—impulse purchases—in person rather than online (and often, they only make extra online purchases to hit a minimum for, say, free shipping).

These findings reinforce what retailers have known for years: Getting people into a store and giving them a positive experience increases sales. Although the research was conducted pre-pandemic, consumers still enjoy the in-person experience and kind of miss it. Finding that additional item, whether you need it or not, feels like a victory: time saved, discovery made, efficiency gained.

> *Getting people into a store and giving them a positive experience increases sales.*

However, customers might never get to those additional items if they are stuck in a line—and today's businesses are full of them. Large retail stores may have pharmacies, electronics counters, and customer service desks that force people to wait. Fast casual restaurants make you wait to order before you can even sit down. Even in an amusement park, if you are waiting in a long queue for an in-demand rollercoaster, that's minutes to hours you aren't spending buying high-margin concessions and playing midway games.

People may endure a long wait, but they'll be ready to get out of the business when it's done (or, at the amusement park, into another queue)—thereby eliminating minutes that could be spent browsing, considering, and, ultimately, impulse purchasing. Eliminating revenue strategies, such as a pharmacy or a wait staff, isn't usually an option. Rethinking how you queue customers is.

PERCEPTION TRUMPS REALITY

The expression "time flies when you're having fun" is rooted in the idea that the good times don't last long or, at least, that they zip by too quickly. Decades of science have reinforced this perception, including research that the brain releases dopamine when fun is occurring that affects how we judge time.

The opposite is also true: When something is dreary, it really can seem like it lasts forever. Widely cited research from decades ago found that people overestimate their time in line by 36 percent. Our brains would rather be doing something else, and time drags until we can.

However, 15 minutes of exhilaration and 15 minutes of boredom each last, empirically, 15 minutes. Shopping at a retail store might not be that thrilling, but being stuck in a queue to pay for your purchases often feels annoying—enough to cement a negative impression of the experience. Unless the good or service purchased is truly amazing and worth the wait, that poor experience may prevent you from returning, even if the reality didn't produce much of an actual wait.

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Consumers don't want to be antsy, hate waiting in lines unless they absolutely must, think they're mired in lines longer than they actually are, and will spend more money if you keep them moving around the store rather than stuck in a queue. The COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened the idea that we want most customer experiences—from shopping to healthcare to services—to be as seamless as possible. Get what you need and get out.

Sometimes, what people need is a pleasant experience that isn't necessarily efficient. You may know what classic vinyl album you want at a record store but take an extra 20 minutes to browse. That's great for the customer and bodes well for the business, which might get an extra sale out of that browsing.

Long queues tend to sour the customer experience in just about every business and public setting. Some people endure the wait, some accept it but are leery about the next time, and some lose their patience. Approaching your queue management differently can help change the experience without actually decreasing the sometimes unavoidable time spent waiting.

> *Uncover opportunities to capture an additional sale during the waiting process.*

Virtual Queues: Customer Engagement Boosts Buying Behavior

Over the last several years, technology has slowly been making its way into queue management. For example, DMVs started issuing automated numbers to people as they walked in so they wouldn't need to stand in line—but they were still forced to sit and wait, watching as numbers progressed at a molasses pace.

Not every development has been so disappointing. Disney's FastPass, for example, allows guests to enjoy more of the park while still experiencing major attractions. Smartphones, however, have ushered in a new era of queue management, enabling virtual lines, streamlined appointment processes, and satisfied customers who spend more money.

THE POWER OF DISTRACTION

Businesses know that their customers don't like waiting. They might provide magazines in waiting rooms and televisions in view of queues to try to alleviate people's impatience. Even gasoline pumps have video screens to make the three-minute process of filling up your SUV seem less tedious.

In the 2020s, conventional wisdom might say that customers are less likely to be bored because they have smartphones. The average American spent more than four hours a day on their phone in 2020—a number that, understandably, increased during the pandemic. Furthermore, smartphone owners, on average, check their devices every 12 waking minutes. But therein might lie the problem: People are so accustomed to being distracted by their phones that it doesn't always work to reduce wait anxiety. Waiting in line with a smartphone has become almost the same as waiting in line with nothing to do.

> *The key is empowering people to make the most of the experience and allowing them to wait on their own terms.*

Distraction still matters in queue management—anything that can pass the time more efficiently and reduce the feeling of helplessness customers may feel is a good thing. The key is empowering people to make the most of the experience and allowing them to wait on their own terms.

THE VIRTUAL OPTION

There are businesses and circumstances in which a physical queue is unavoidable and even preferable. For example, could you imagine the chaos of a TSA line if everyone was just milling about the airport waiting for their turn to get through security?

Moreover, some businesses can't staff enough employees to serve every customer immediately—some sort of queue is necessary just to keep operational costs in line. Customers understand this, but their patience stretches only so thin.

Virtual queues offer an option for businesses that can't totally cut out the wait but want to eliminate long, disorganized, frustrating lines. Customers enter the queue via a kiosk, greeter, or their own smartphone; for appointments, people book from home on a computer or on the go through their phones. Once their place in the queue or their appointment is established, customers are alerted—via their smartphone—when it is their turn to be served. They can wait nearby for that turn, or they are free to move about the business or attend to other tasks and errands. The choice is theirs.

This digital virtual queue concept might sound a little like something that already exists: the red "take a number" dispensers often seen at bakeries and deli counters. The basic idea is similar—you get a place in line without having to stand in a long queue.

However, taking a number tells customers that they are nothing more than numbers (particularly when an employee shouts out "No. 43! Is No. 43 here?"), and they must wait ... or else. A virtual queue treats customers with respect by showing that their time and their patronage are valued. It also helps employees better serve those customers.

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Digitally Engaging Customers: Enhanced Customer Queuing as a Revenue Driver

Virtual queues offer a sense of control and relief for customers who aren't tethered to a line or a waiting room. The benefits don't stop there—here are several ways going virtual encourages customers to buy more from your business.

BETTER CROWD MANAGEMENT

Unstructured lines snaking through a store are generally unwieldy. People might not know where they start and might inadvertently jump ahead in line, and other customers are forced to navigate these crowds.

Physical queue barriers and waiting areas can help, but they take up valuable floor space and may involve a capital investment that isn't feasible for every business. Plus, in times when socially distancing is common, not many people look forward to being in close proximity with others for extended periods of time. Virtual queues remove physical lines from the equation, improving customer flow and safety while also improving customer moods.

MORE SALES

As already stated, the more time that people can wander about the business, the more they buy. If they're not physically waiting in a set line, they believe they're spending less time waiting. And the happier they are with the customer experience, the more likely they'll be repeat customers. Virtual queues achieve all three goals.

Furthermore, at-the-register impulse purchases don't diminish because customers aren't standing in line—if anything, they might be more likely to make these purchases if they aren't feeling so anxious to get out.

Just as importantly, customers who use retail apps buy 33 percent more often, buy 34 percent more items, and spend 37 percent more than non-app users. Clearly, mobile matters to consumers, and organizations that handle mobile well are poised to impress their customers. Using digital tools to reduce wait times and mitigate customer anxiety supports that strategy.

BETTER INTERACTIONS

Customers standing in line or sitting in a waiting room often aren't able to discuss their needs until it is their turn to be served. With a virtual queue, those customers can enter that information when they enter the queue via the kiosk, smartphone link, or website. Besides reducing the time needed for each face-to-face interaction, this allows employees to better prepare for customers, which not only is better for the business, but also improves the customer experience.

Staff can even interact by message with customers before it is their turn—something that is practically impossible with people waiting in line. A 2018 survey found that consumers are 80 percent more likely to make a purchase when offered personalized experiences. Connecting with customers when they are in a virtual queue fosters that personalization.

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DIGITAL DISPLAY ADVERTISING

People with a place in a virtual queue will look at their smartphones at least once: when they receive an alert saying their turn has arrived. More than likely, given how much we all look at our phones, they'll check a few times for updates. Digital display advertising can be incorporated into alerts so customers see promotions and offers as they check on their place in line.

Targeted digital advertising—via social media, smartphone apps, search engines, and so on—is an important strategy for the modern business. Adding this feature to virtual queue alerts expands reach at a fraction of the cost of other paid advertising tactics. The potential ROI is impressive, particularly because customers are seeing promotions for a business they're likely already in.

DATA, DATA, DATA

Virtual queue platforms manage waits and appointments while generating valuable data in the process. You can track how long people are waiting, how much they purchase, whether they return as customers, if they give up their spot, average wait times on shifts, and so on—then correlate that information to inform sales strategy. Much of this reporting isn't possible on a standard queue and takes too long to gather with basic appointment processes. With virtual queues, it is rooted in the solution.

EFFECTIVE EFFICIENCY

When staff members better anticipate customers' needs (perhaps even assigning the right specialist to help certain customers), you gain efficiency. When customers are less anxious, they also interact better, thus completing the transaction faster and adding to that efficiency. When you know what's working and not working with your queues thanks to advanced metrics—you guessed it—efficiency increases.

Ultimately, all this efficiency helps the bottom line. You see more customers. You can streamline operations and right-size work shifts. You gain a reputation as a business that prioritizes customers and doesn't leave them dangling. And your employees feel less frazzled by harried customers—which can energize them to deliver even more efficiency and to enthusiastically sell additional goods and services.

Tomorrow's Virtual Queue—Today

Noted customer strategy consultant Esteban Kolsky conducted research that found that of 26 unhappy customers, just one will complain. The other 25 just leave.

The opposite of this is demonstrated in a PwC survey, which found that 43 percent of consumers would pay more for greater convenience and 42 percent would pay more for a friendly, welcoming experience. Virtual queues can achieve both. Virtual queues with Frontlion achieve much more.

Frontlion brings decades of queue management expertise to an innovative digital solution that the modern organization needs for its customers. Features of our platform include:

- Virtual and mobile queueing and appointment scheduling
- Communication functionality that enables team members to interact with queued customers via text messaging or website
- Contact-free service that protects customers and staff while facilitating social distancing
- Digital promotions that show customers relevant offers and advertising as they check their smartphones for queue updates
- Easy-to-deploy technology, fully scalable and agile, with no hardware required
- Advanced reporting and analytics that deliver rich customer insights

Frontlion is the perfect virtual queueing solution for a variety of industries, including healthcare, banking, public sector, retail, and telecommunications. Contact us today to schedule a demo.

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