Everyone has communication preferences. Some people never return phone calls, opting to send essay-long text messages instead. Some people love to video chat. Others cringe when the word "FaceTime" appears on their caller ID, particularly on bad hair days.

To keep today's customers happy, businesses need to provide an omnichannel customer experience.

In all seriousness, many grandparents love Facebook Messenger, and some millennials use phones the way Alexander Graham Bell intended. Most people switch seamlessly between channels for personal communication, and everyone wants the same omnichannel customer experience when communicating with businesses.

What does omnichannel even mean these days, and what technology can help companies achieve it?

You Call That an Omnichannel Customer Experience?
Enterprise leaders often believe they've achieved omnichannel status because they can reach customers through various channels — social media, email marketing, mobile apps, and text messages — and gather data from these channels. That alone is a multichannel (not omnichannel) approach.

A truly omnichannel experience does the following:

1. Enables two-way communication across channels — think conversations, not just broadcast marketing

2. Integrates the data from these channels so companies recognize individual customers regardless of the channels they're using, and customers have seamless brand experiences as they switch back and forth

How does this approach facilitate more successful customer interactions? It takes their communication preferences into account, rather than forcing people to use channels they don't like or ones that aren't convenient at the time.

This approach also enables companies to personalize customer communications, including outgoing marketing messages and incoming customer service queries. So, however people choose to contact a business, company representatives know who they are, which digital channels they're coming from, and what they've been reading, watching, or shopping for while on those channels. Armed with these contextualized insights, representatives can deliver faster service and more relevant answers.

The most challenging part of delivering an omnichannel retail experience is that there are so many channels. Simply establishing a brand presence on every single social media network is a lot of work. Responding instantly to customer inquiries through those channels — and the company's website, mobile apps, and regular old phone lines — is a daunting task. However, if companies have tools in place to streamline communication across channels, it becomes a lot more manageable.

Depending on the nature of an enterprise, one or all of the following solutions can help:

**UCaaS with CRM Integration**

With unified communications-as-a-service (UCaaS), all of an enterprise's communication tools — voice, video, messaging, conferencing, and more — live on one platform. Employees can make and accept calls in any format, from any internet-connected device. They can also send and receive messages just as easily.

When a company integrates UCaaS with a CRM platform, customer calls trigger the system to retrieve records of previous interactions. Customer service representatives and salespeople know exactly which customers they're talking to, what they've bought or thought about buying in the past, and what (if any) problems they've had with those products or services. Meanwhile, the system automatically logs calls and prompts employees to update customer records with information about the current interactions, which is more useful data for future communications.

*Most people now switch seamlessly between channels for personal communication, and everyone wants the same omnichannel customer experience when communicating with businesses.*
CPaaS with Developer-Friendly APIs

These days, any enterprise with a strong digital marketing department already has plenty of ways to talk to customers. The problem is that it's still hard for customers to talk back. Instead of being able to respond at the moment, in the app, or inside the social media network, they have to look up phone numbers or log in to corporate websites to send messages. Communications platform-as-a-service (CPaaS) lets them reach out with one click.

CPaaS is a cloud-based development framework that enables businesses to synchronize real-time communications (RTC) features such as voice, video, text, and instant messaging. Using developer-friendly APIs, they can add RTC features to their websites, mobile apps, and social media content. So, mobile app users can call customer service, send queries via Facebook Messenger, or video chat with representatives without ever leaving the app. Meanwhile, enterprises can keep the lines of communication open across channels, all from the same platform.

Omnichannel Contact Centers

Omnichannel communication sounds good in theory, but who is going to answer all those instant messages and field all those video call inquiries? Why not the same people who already answer the same questions over the phone?

Many enterprises already have call centers staffed with knowledgeable representatives. Those folks are capable of so much more than just answering phone calls. With an omnichannel contact center, representatives can communicate with customers through voice, video, instant message, or email — and switch seamlessly between them. So, when a phone-shy customer decides it actually would be easier to type than talk, the representative can make that happen without dropping the call.

Consumers live and work in an increasingly omnichannel world, and they expect brands to keep up. However, there's good news for enterprises: The same disruptive technologies that have made people so demanding — mobile devices, data analytics, and artificial intelligence — also provide new omnichannel communications solutions for businesses.

To learn more about how cloud communications can help your enterprise deliver an omnichannel customer experience, speak to a Vonage Business representative.