

Protecting customer experience in the face of IT disruption

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Navigating the new normal

On July 19, 2024, a global IT outage brought business to a standstill. Thousands of flights were canceled or delayed, hospitals postponed non-essential care, financial transactions failed to process, and federal agencies shuttered.¹ Throughout the day and the week that followed, customer service teams at affected companies scrambled to address the mounting number of customer complaints while keeping stakeholders informed.

The root cause of the massive disruption was traced to a faulty software update. This incident highlighted a critical reality: IT disruptions are not merely technical issues but business crises that directly impact brand reputation, customer trust, and revenue.

The challenge for customer service leaders is clear. They must maintain service standards while safeguarding customer experiences during IT disruptions. This ebook provides these leaders with practical guidance for understanding key challenges, protecting team bandwidth, anticipating and preparing for outages before the strike, and collaborating more effectively with technical teams to address incidents efficiently to maintain customer confidence.

By implementing these strategies, customer service and support leaders can build operational resilience to minimize the negative impacts IT outages have on customer experiences and business operations.

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/where-is-customer-care-in-2024>



Safeguarding the customer experience

The state of customer service is at an inflection point. As organizations increasingly rely on technology for operations, support teams must engage with users through digital channels while managing higher customer expectations, handling increased call volumes, and doing more with less.²

These teams are often the first to feel the impact when something goes wrong. With unplanned outages and major incidents becoming the new normal, customer-facing teams play a more significant role in the **incident management lifecycle**. As they work on the frontlines addressing customer concerns, they are responsible for everything from escalating issues to first responders to keeping internal and external stakeholders informed, and working with technical teams to restore services.

During digital disruptions, support teams can be left searching for answers with limited information to provide to customers. As frustrations mount, service centers can be overwhelmed with tickets, calls, emails, and social messages, straining the team's ability to maintain high service standards.

The growing scope of outage risks has elevated safeguarding customer experiences to a strategic priority, garnering attention at the CEO and board levels. This increased scrutiny has expanded the responsibilities of service and support leaders. Their role now not only encompasses resolving pain points and protecting user experiences, it includes contributing to revenue goals, optimizing processes and tooling, and driving digital transformation. This expansion in scope often comes with the added challenges of resourcing constraints and operating on a "follow the sun" model.³ To succeed, customer service leaders must embrace data-driven decision making, adopt emerging technologies, and maintain flexibility in times of change.

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/the-state-of-customer-care-in-2022>

³ <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/where-is-customer-care-in-2024>

Addressing key challenges

Customer service leaders operate in a fast-paced world where customer expectations are constantly rising, and technology complexity is ever-increasing. As the demands of their roles shift, they must continuously adapt to new challenges. Managing teams and talent shortages, working more closely with technical partners, and identifying opportunities to reduce churn demand more strategic planning and flexibility.

Among the key challenges for technical leaders are:

- **Ensuring adequate staffing:** Leading multiple customer service teams is no easy task. It requires efficient coordination, clear communication, and real-time tracking to keep everything running smoothly. Maintaining adequate staffing is critical for hitting KPIs and delivering top-notch service. When outages strike, leaders are forced to adjust staffing plans on the fly, driving up labor costs—especially in regions like the EU, where strict labor laws apply. This unpredictability can lead to team burnout, making it even harder to keep staffing levels consistent over time.
- **Fostering collaboration:** Disjointed communication between IT and customer service teams adds unnecessary obstacles. While IT is focused on incident response, customer-facing teams need actionable updates that help maintain customer trust. Leaders need to foster greater collaboration and streamline communication channels to ensure both teams are on the same page.
- **Optimizing processes:** The rapid pace of technology makes it hard to stay ahead of changing customer expectations. While customer service leaders are working to refine processes, outdated systems and poorly integrated tools can lead to inefficiencies or even service outages. To sustain seamless customer experiences, IT and service leaders should ensure that new technologies integrate effectively with existing systems and processes.
- **Embracing automation:** Process automation can streamline workflows and boost efficiency. However, integrating automation tools with existing systems is often easier said than done. Without proper integration, automation efforts can miss the mark, slowing down service delivery and hampering overall performance.
- **Enhancing data consistency:** Consistent, reliable data is the backbone of smooth operations. But in complex IT environments, keeping data aligned across teams is a challenge. When data is inconsistent, it becomes nearly impossible for customer service leaders to make informed decisions, impacting their ability to provide exceptional support and meet performance targets.



Protecting team bandwidth

In high-pressure situations where every second counts, customer service teams must rededicate resources to the most pressing concerns. Unplanned outages push teams to their limits as they scramble to relay vital information to first responders, interact with disgruntled customers, and try to determine the extent of an incident. Addressing other urgent tasks is put on the back burner until the situation is addressed, exponentially increasing support queues and delaying work on other projects.

Anticipating and preparing for outages before they strike is critical for sustaining seamless user experiences and maintaining customer trust. This proactive approach demands strategic planning and cross-functional collaboration. Customer service leaders should engage with key departments, including IT, engineering, and executive leadership.

Across each of these phases of the incident management lifecycle, effective collaboration, consistent and transparent communication, and setting clear expectations are crucial for success.

Before an incident

Customer service leaders must implement a **proactive incident response strategy** before a major incident or outage strikes. Taking this approach requires early and frequent engagement with technical and business teams to manage increased support queues, set reasonable expectations with customers, and keep the business updated with the right level of actionable information.

- ❑ Setting up real-time incident monitoring to receive early warnings about potential issues.
- ❑ Automating alerts and escalations to reduce downtime.
- ❑ Fostering effective communication between customer-facing and backend teams.
- ❑ Developing a clear communication plan to keep internal and external stakeholders and customers informed during incidents.
- ❑ Practicing incident response scenarios to enhance cross-functional efficiency.

During an incident

When disruptions occur, support teams serve as the first point of contact, assuaging customer concerns, gathering data on the extent of the issue, and escalating to the appropriate first responders. As the incident evolves, focus will shift rapidly, and emotions will be high. To navigate these critical moments, customer service and IT leads should align on a coordinated response strategy that prioritizes clear communication and facilitates swift service resolution.

- ❑ Streamlining incident reporting with customer service platforms for faster updates.
- ❑ Staying connected with IT and engineering to align on a coordinated customer response.
- ❑ Setting up automated status updates for customers and internal stakeholders.
- ❑ Tailoring communications to different groups with the most relevant and actionable information.
- ❑ Providing clear timelines and next steps to reassure customers and maintain trust.

After an incident

Once service is restored, customer service teams play a pivotal role in rebuilding customer confidence and trust. To prevent future disruptions, support teams should work with stakeholders to conduct thorough post-incident reviews that drive continuous improvement and proactive response.

- ❑ Conducting **post-incident reviews** to identify areas for improvement after each disruption.
- ❑ Refining workflows based on insights gathered during the review process to guide auto-remediation of common incidents and enhance future response.
- ❑ Sharing post-incident reports with stakeholders to document the root cause of incidents and how they were resolved.
- ❑ Tracking performance metrics to measure improvements in response times, resolution times, and customer satisfaction.

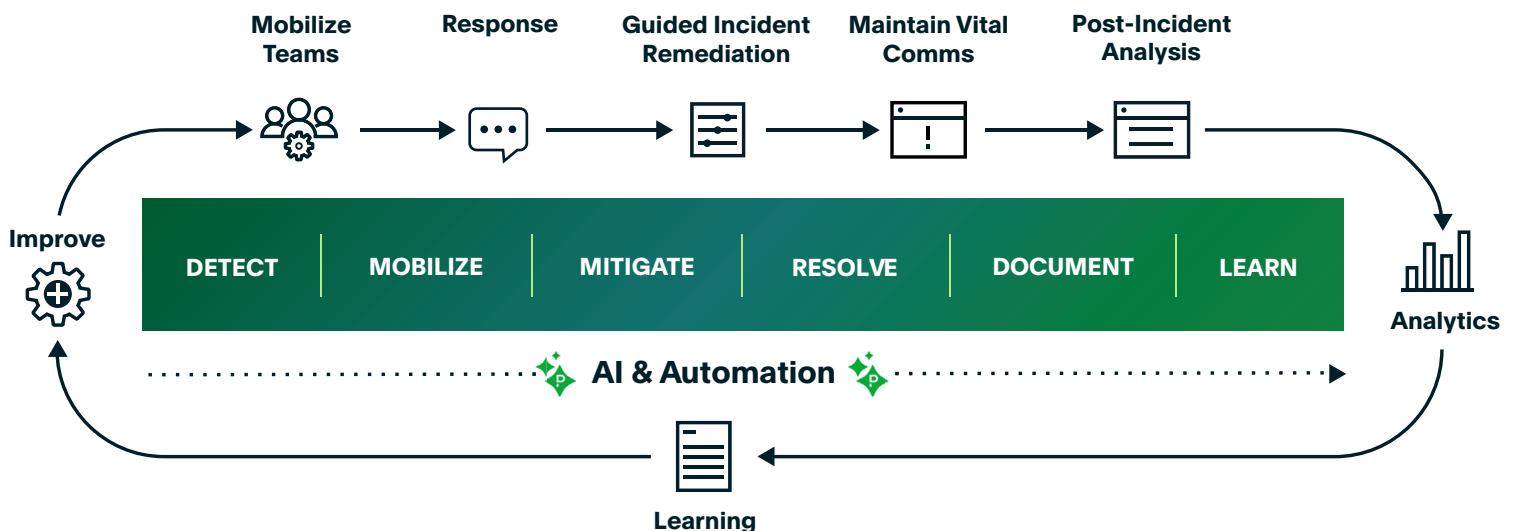
By following these steps, **customer service leaders can successfully navigate disruptions** while protecting their team's bandwidth, delivering seamless customer experiences, and strengthening their organization's operational resilience.

Building operational resilience with the PagerDuty Operations Cloud

To manage the challenges of major incidents and outages, customer service leaders need tools to help them stay ahead. With artificial intelligence (AI) and automation at its core, the **PagerDuty Operations Cloud** minimizes downtime and ensures effective service.

PagerDuty provides the real-time visibility and automation necessary to stay connected with customers and IT teams, ensuring smooth communication and quick resolutions of issues. By reducing risks, streamlining processes, and cutting costs. PagerDuty empowers support teams to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction, even as digital complexity increases.

With the PagerDuty Operations Cloud, organizations can protect their reputation, build operational resiliency, and position themselves for long-term success while equipping customer-facing teams to deliver world-class support, no matter the challenges they face.



Streamlining incident management for customer trust



TUI, the world's largest tourism company, **needed to simplify its complex IT environment** to meet growing demand. By unifying its fragmented systems with the PagerDuty Operations Cloud, TUI automated incident management and improved communication across teams.

The solution integrated real-time incident monitoring with AI-driven automation, reducing recovery times by 30% and accelerating resolutions by up to 90%. This enhanced operational efficiency and strengthened customer trust by minimizing service disruptions, allowing TUI to focus on growth and innovation.

Future-proofing customer service operations

As digital complexity accelerates, customer service leaders cannot afford to rely on reactive strategies. They must anticipate challenges and adapt quickly to protect the customer experience during disruptions. The PagerDuty Operations Cloud empowers customer service teams to stay ahead of incidents, ensuring both planned and unplanned disruptions are managed effectively, minimizing operational impact on customers.

This ebook has provided practical guidance for customer service leaders on how to anticipate and prepare for outages before they strike, protect team bandwidth, effectively collaborate with technical teams throughout the incident management lifecycle, and enhance customer communications. By turning unplanned incidents and outages into opportunities for growth and learning, these leaders can maintain a competitive edge and foster greater customer trust.

Having the right tools and strategies is crucial for building operational resilience and sustaining seamless customer experiences. To explore how PagerDuty can help your team achieve these goals, [contact us today](#) to schedule a demo.

About PagerDuty

PagerDuty, Inc. (NYSE:PD) is a global leader in digital operations management, enabling customers to achieve operational efficiency at scale with the PagerDuty Operations Cloud. The PagerDuty Operations Cloud combines AIOps, Automation, Customer Service Operations, Incident Management with a powerful generative AI assistant to create a flexible, resilient and scalable platform to increase innovation velocity, grow revenue, reduce cost, and mitigate the risk of operational failure. Half of the Fortune 500 and nearly 70% of the Fortune 100 rely on PagerDuty as essential infrastructure for the modern enterprise.

To learn more and try PagerDuty for free, visit www.pagerduty.com. Follow our [blog](#) and connect with us on [X](#), [formerly Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#). We're also hiring, visit careers.pagerduty.com to learn more.

Learn more about the PagerDuty Operations Cloud at pagerduty.com/operations-cloud.