



Contact Centres Still Can Play an Important Role in Delivering Customer

D. Kehoe
April 06, 2017

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Summary

Issue/Analytical Summary

Delivering a personalised customer experience is a top corporate priority for Australian businesses, according to GlobalData research. This is closely followed by the need to solve internal challenges (e.g., people and process) and having the right platforms in place to target and engage customers in the most cost-effective manner. The end goal for CX is the ability to know your customers, understand how they traverse traditional and online channels, and have the ability to catch them at the right times, capturing context to deliver a strong user experience. As businesses continue to explore ways to become digital, the onus moves to developing an 'omnichannel' strategy to better engage the market. Customers will choose how and when they want to engage a brand. Businesses then in turn are looking at the right mix of channels to satisfy customers and court prospects.

With up to 15 different ways a customer can engage a business through a digital channel, we argue that the

contact centre is still an important anchor for customer engagement, as it is the logical orchestration point for digital channels, handoffs between them and even escalating to a live agent if need be without losing the session. However, the contact centre alone is not the panacea and it is transforming, too. Due to the adoption of cloud contact centres with the pervasiveness of mobility, agents are moving from a centralised back-office location, such as an office, to one that is distributed, such as a home office location, with flexible and remote working practices sweeping across Australia. This can also drive an increase in employee satisfaction, which can also influence customer experience.

This article will consider the role contact centres can play in driving a better customer experience through changes in the market alongside the adoption of digital channels.

Key Takeways

Contact centres should be the main orchestration point for driving CX. The challenge is in integration and making sure data can cross channels in the same session.

The number of digital channels will increase, and businesses will need to strike the balance between customer experience and operational efficiency.

Analytics can be an important capability to know your customers by understanding past transactions to anticipate current and future needs.

Through more data collection and analytics, businesses should also start to get a handle on micro-segmentation.

Contact centres themselves will change as they move to the cloud and agents embrace remote and flexible working patterns.

Over time, the function of contact centres will morph into other roles and customer experience will be more about the ability to have a unified front line and point of accountability.

Perspective

Current perspective

The journey towards offering an exceptional customer experience is multi-faceted; the contact centre is and should be seen as the logical orchestration point for engaging customers across channels. The challenge here will be a matter of integration, making sure the right information feeds from online, social and mobile apps are able to transfer across channels and, in cases where a session is escalated to a live agent, this information is also passed on in the same session. The logic is if an agent can understand 'context,' there is a stronger chance that the agent will be able to judge the next best step to finding to a resolution – and this may avoid upsetting the customer for repeating the same problem multiple times. This may be having access to browsing history from other channels to give an agent enough data to close a sale, pulling up

additional data points to resolve a trouble ticket or using sentiment analysis, for example, to know when to route an inbound call directly to a supervisor. Over the past few years, businesses are looking for ways to integrate the myriad of digital channels, such as mobile, social, online and e-mail, into the contact centre to improve the customer experience. However, there is also a fresh wave of new technologies such as voice-activated virtual assistants and text-triggered chatbots which are rapidly becoming the new tools of trade for improving customer experience. When deployed correctly, this can lower the overall cost of a customer interaction and support a greater volume of traffic, done in a way that improves customer experience such as offering more self-service or reducing average wait times.

Integrating Traditional and Digital Channels

Contact centres have their roots in telephony and voice-centric applications such as IVRs, ACDs and outbound diallers. While voice continues to be the mainstream channel for customer communication (in absolute terms), the growth is coming strong from digital channels (in relative terms). Within the next two years, digital channels will overtake traditional channels in overall traffic volume. At the same time, the number of digital channels will also proliferate. While customers will typically engage with their suppliers through about eight different channels in Australia, this number could double within the next two to three years.

Even within some major channels, such as social, there will also be several variations for a business to consider (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and others), and each will require a different type of engagement and monitoring mechanism. In Australia, GlobalData research has found that online, social, mobile apps and messaging are the most common types of new investments in the contact centre for 2017. Personalisation services are gaining the most interest in terms of future deployments for transforming customer experience.

Solving for Context with Analytics

Customers expect their vendors to know something about them and why they are calling and tend to get frustrated when they have to repeat themselves. Analytics can be an important capability to know your customers by understanding past transactions to anticipate current and future needs. For example, understanding purchase history can provide a better means to recommend similar products. Alternatively, knowing something was ordered could warrant a proactive notification, such as an SMS, on delivery times. A good analytics program should look to integrate with as many data sources as possible. It should consider new metrics, such as cross-channel engagement and purchase history, with existing data sources such as quality management scorecards and customer satisfaction surveys. Over time, the business should start to piece together an end-to-end view of what a customer journey might look

like. With some knowledge around how customers traverse channels, more information will become available to start to improve processes. This can be, for example, a reduction of waiting times or better ability to understand potential 'trigger points,' such as a good time to sell a service or recommend a product bundle.

Through more data collection and analytics, businesses should also start to get a handle on micro-segmentation. For example, understanding and identifying the top customers might translate into preferred routing, bypassing a queue, tailoring products, and offering discounts and loyalty cards. This latter may often be carried out in partnership with the marketing department, which is keen to translate customer experience into increased sales and improved brand loyalty.

Impact on Cloud Services Coming to Contact Centres

Contact centre solutions themselves have been moving to the cloud. Nearly all greenfield projects are pure cloud implementations. At the same time, agents are starting to work remote and/or enjoy some benefits around flexible working, moving away from a 9-5 model. As a result, there is an increasing number of instances where agents are distributed across many locations, not restricted to a single building, and dialling in to work flexible hours. The demographics will also mean more diversity in the workforce and better ability to serve customers during peak times and minimize quiet times where the channels fall silent. However, contact centres will also morph into customer engagement points and will increasingly spread across to more roles and even into traditional channels. Customer engagement, within some parameters of security and

privacy, will happen in traditional channels, such as a store location, or extend to a customer-facing mobile fieldworker. A mobile fleet worker, for example, could have access to the same records as a contact centre agent (in the traditional back-office sense), be able to access the same analytical capabilities to understand 'context' and be empowered to take the next best action. With contact centres moving to the cloud, mobility and trends in flexible working, front and back-office teams will start to converge. Customer experience could be single point of accountability passed down to employees from the same company. While the technology in and around the contact centre will be the enabler, delivering an exceptional customer experience will also need to be met with significant changes in the underlying people, culture and business process.

Future Outlook

Improving customer experience will continue to be a top corporate objective for marketing and customer care organisations for the foreseeable future. However, the reality is businesses still have a long road ahead in terms of the alignment of an organisation and business processes with technology. Within many companies, there is not a single person charged with customer experience reporting directly to the CEO, but customer experience is more of a shared KPI that is measured out through a number of ways. While data is invaluable for understanding customers, it is something that is often not shared across departments.

Even when data is shared, there is not a uniform way of collecting it. In most setups, each channel will have its own way and appliance for collecting data on the backend, and without some form of automated and connected systems in place, there will continue to be real challenges with passing data from one channel to the next. Few businesses have found a way around this, and while customer journey mapping is alive and well, the norm so far is to paint this picture through traditional means such as customer surveys

or pulling together data through more manual processes. Rather than looking at existing limitations, whether disparate systems, departments or business processes, the companies that will be most successful at customer experience will be the ones that reimagine what the end state should look like and build backwards from that point. Transformation projects should be grounded in research so that businesses are able to design the channel strategy that maps to their customer requirements, factoring in demographics to achieve the desired outcomes. While the number of channels will increase, businesses need not support every one, but consider opportunities in newer technology such as IoT, data/video analytics or virtual assistants that will enable the company to leapfrog the older technology. However, this new way of engaging customers should also factor in changes in the workplace, the need to change company culture (e.g., encourage data sharing) and working together to improve customer experience. There are a number of factors, and it is about getting them all in synch.

Recommended Actions

Buyer Actions

Know Your Customers. Businesses should keep age and demographics in consideration when building a multichannel strategy. While telephony is the primary means for Baby Boomers and preferred way for Gen X when contacting a business, mobile apps are often the primary means for Gen Y and social media is the preferred way for millennials to engage.

Setting Out New Measurements. With digital looking to outstrip traditional voice-centric channels, it is important for businesses to plan for ways to measure success and effectiveness in the digital world. Workforce management, for example, has its legacy in solving issues such as staffing levels and average handling times in a voice-centric contact centre. It is not geared for other channels such as social media or responding to inbound enquiries through a website.

Social Presence Inevitability. Rather than evaluating the case for having a social media presence, it might happen anyway. Recently, we uncovered a CIO from a consumer food company ambivalent about extending company presence to social media who later found that a customer created a presence for them. The good news is this was an advocate looking to engage likeminded customers. Since this can happen both ways, it is better for a company to take the initiative.

Every Channel Is Important. Once the decision is made to invest in a channel, businesses need to make sure they are funded correctly, serve a purpose, are able to collect complete data sets and have ways to pass this on to escalate to the next channel within the same session to keep the customer journey real. Often, customer information resides in different channels – from retail stores to social and call centres. Businesses should also start to invest in technologies that at least provide better visibility across channels and to analyse disparate sets of data to get greater customer insights. This will help to put in place metrics that define success as engagement moves from voice-centric to a data-centric world.



Basingstoke

4th Floor, Northern Cross
Basing View, Basingstoke,
Hampshire, RG21 4EB,
UK
+44 (0) 1256 394224

Beijing

Room 2301 Building 4
Wanda Plaza, No 93 Jianguo Road
Chaoyang District
Beijing 100026, PR China
+86 10 6581 1794
+86 10 5820 4077

Boston

179 South St, Suite 200,
Boston, MA 02111
USA
+1 617 747 4100

Buenos Aires

Basavibaso 1328, 2nd Floor
Off 206, Buenos Aires, 1006
Argentina
+54 11 4311 5874

Dubai

Dubai Media City
Building 7, Floor 3, Office 308
PO Box 502635
Dubai
United Arab Emirates
+971 (0) 4391 3049

Hong Kong

1008 Shalin Galleria
18-24 Shan Mei Street
Fo Tan, New Territories
Hong Kong S.A.R
+852 2690 5200
+852 2690 5230

Hull

GlobalData PLC
Shirethorn House
37-43 Prospect Street
Hull
HU2 8PX

Hyderabad

2nd Floor, NSL Centrum,
Plot No-S1, Phase 1 & 2
KPHB Colony, Near: BSNL Office
Hyderabad-500072
Andhra Pradesh
+91-40-30706700

London

John Carpenter House
7 Carmelite Street
London
EC4Y 0BS
+44 (0) 207 936 6400

Madrid

C/Jesusa Lara, 29 - Atico J,
28250 Torrelodones Madrid,
Spain
+34 91 859 4886

Melbourne

Suite 1608
Exchange Tower
Business Centre
530 Little Collins Street
Melbourne
3000, Victoria, Australia
+61 (0)3 9909 7757
+61 (0)3 9909 7759

New York

441 Lexington Avenue,
New York, NY 10017
USA
+1 646 395 5460

San Francisco

Progressive Digital Media Inc
425 California Street
Suite 1300
San Francisco
CA
94104
USA
+1 415 800 0336

Seoul

Global Intelligence & Media Korea
Limited
11th Floor, West Wing,
POSCO Center Building,
892, Daechi-4Dong,
Gangnam-Gu, Seoul 135-777
Republic Of Korea (South)
+82 2 559 0635
+82 2 559 0637

Shanghai

Room 408, Jing'an China
Tower No: 1701,
West Beijing Road
Jing'an District, 200040,
Shanghai, PR China
+86 (0)21 5157 2275(6)

Singapore

1 Finlayson Green
#09-10
049246
Singapore
+65 6383 4688
+65 6383 5433
USA
+1 415 800 0336

Sydney

Level 2
63 York Street
Sydney
NSW 2000
Australia
+61 (0)2 8076 8800

Tokyo

Global Intelligence & Media Japan
Tokoyo
Level 3,
Sanno Park Tower,
2-11-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo, 100-6162
Japan
+81 3 6205 3511
+81-3-6205-3521

Toronto

229 Yonge Street
Suite 400
Toronto
Ontario
M55B 1N9
Canada

Washington

21335 Signal Hill Plaza,
Suite 200, Sterling,
VA, 20164
+1 703 404 9200
877 787 8947 (Toll Free)