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INTRODUCTION

As you consider your company's approach to customer service, think about how you expect to be treated as a consumer today. Chances are you regularly interact with businesses on a variety of channels, including mobile, social and the phone. You expect your interactions to reflect the device or application you're using: buttons designed for a small screen on your phone, or a tone of engagement that feels appropriate to Twitter or Instagram and different from what you'd get on the phone. You probably get frustrated when a live agent doesn't know that you just entered all the data she's asking you for again or any of your buying history with the organization. And you want offers for products that show the company knows something meaningful about you; you're happy to share information about yourself if it means you'll get a personalized experience in return—but when you don't, you feel like a number and will quickly find another vendor.

So how do you meet those needs in your own organization? You certainly need to; customers will quickly switch to your competitors if you don't. Frost & Sullivan recommends embracing Digital Transformation to deploy an omnichannel solution that gives your agents a single, integrated desktop and ensures your customers have a seamless experience across every channel. Getting rid of the siloes most organizations have in their contact centers—the result of time and growth in the face of new capabilities and channels—allows agents and their supervisors to get one view of the customer across all interactions in a single user interface. The result: no more duplication of effort, simplified management, higher usage rates and lower costs, as well as a much better customer and agent experience.

Doing that requires that you seamlessly support customers on any channel they like, even as those preferences change, sometimes on the fly; integrate with your preferred CRM system; leverage expertise throughout your organization; and put the power in the hands of your people to make decisions and take action as soon as it is needed.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS: THE GAME HAS CHANGED

Customer expectations have undergone rapid change in just the past few years, and companies must adapt quickly or they'll lose business—fast. Today's buyers expect companies to meet them on their channel of choice, and then deliver a consistent, exceptional experience across all media and platforms. Whether customers prefer using an app or SMS on a mobile device, a traditional website, a community of interest or picking up the phone, they expect a data-driven interaction that gets them the information they need as soon as they need it—and that seamlessly connects and leverages all their previous contacts with the organization.

Meeting these expectations requires rethinking the contact center and recognizing that it is an integral part of the brand. Too often, companies think of customer service and support as a cost center, rather than a revenue generator. But by switching from a reactive to a proactive model, organizations of all sizes can positively impact the customer experience *and* the bottom line.

Doing this requires a new approach to customer engagement that goes beyond the traditional contact center and supports an integrated view of all interaction channels. These should include social and mobile apps and services, as well as traditional voice and web interactions. And since most companies touch customers at multiple points along their journeys—marketing and sales, purchasing, customer service and support—advanced data analytics and complete integration with CRM and other back-end systems are critical to getting a complete view of the customer over time.

All these capabilities should be delivered to agents, managers and even back-office employees in a single platform that drives usage and enhances training and support. A cloud-based solution can offer significant benefits as well, including faster time to deployment; better reliability, flexibility and scalability; immediate access to new features and updates; and consistent costs on a regular basis with limited up-front investment.

Frost & Sullivan research shows that contact center managers are responding to the new reality. In a survey of more than 300 contact center decision makers, new points of contact are surpassing traditional channels when it comes to IT investment. For instance, while email, live-agent voice, and IVR are all expected to see declining use in the coming years, web self-service, social, video, and mobile apps are all expected to grow—in many cases, by double digits.

Figure 1: As Customer Demands Change, So Must the Contact Center



As Frost & Sullivan research shows, customers are looking for a wide range of contact options when it comes to getting information and service—and the one they use largely depends on where they are and what else they’re doing at the time, as well as their specific needs at that moment. Customers don’t want static email and IVR interactions; they’re looking for self-service options accessible on mobile devices or the web, especially when it comes to product purchases, order tracking and managing their accounts. But they want to be able to easily escalate into a live chat or voice call immediately when needed for in-depth customer service and technical support. And they like to channel surf; they may start on one channel and then quickly switch to another if their needs or circumstances change. All the while, they expect the company—and the agent or system they’re working with in any given interaction—to know the full extent of their history with the organization, and then leverage that information to deliver a truly personalized and immediately satisfactory experience.

THE CAPABILITIES YOU NEED TO MEET CUSTOMER DEMANDS

As you think about transforming your contact center, don’t just meet your customers’ needs—exceed them. By deploying a range of advanced applications—including social media, data analytics and mobile messaging—you can support your customers at every step along the buyers’ journey, from education to purchasing to support. But customizing that experience requires a complete set of tools delivered in a single platform.



Support for all channels. Start with the basics—voice, email and IVR—then layer on all the modern channels your customer expects. That includes web-based chat, ideally customized for each interaction. But it should also cover mobile devices, including apps and text, and social media, which has quickly become a channel for customer interaction. Make sure your mobile experience is designed specifically for smaller screens and to take advantage of built-in capabilities like speech recognition and geo-location. Think of social as more than just a branding opportunity; you should be using Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to deliver targeted content, create a community and offer immediate problem resolution.



A consistent experience. Regardless of how they contact you, customers expect to receive the same level of care. They realize the tone and tenor of any given interaction may differ based on the medium; no one thinks a Twitter exchange should feel like a phone call. But the results should be the same: a personalized engagement that gets to the heart of the matter and quickly resolves the problem. Leverage persistent chat to log customer interactions, allowing agents to access that history when the customer re-engages.



Advanced routing for all channels. Just because your customers can contact you on their channel of choice doesn't mean agents are equally good at handling all those interactions. Some people are naturals on the telephone, while others shine over live chat or SMS. And social is its own special breed—a mix of authenticity and marketing savvy that can take time and experience to perfect. Omnichannel routing should take these factors into account, along with more standard metrics such as previous interactions, purchasing histories and agent availability. Also, make it easy to engage managers and back-office knowledge experts on demand.



Advanced analytics. Omnichannel contact centers work best when they help agents and managers understand the full extent of each customer's journey. It's no longer enough to monitor IVR usage, identify repeat contacts and measure first-call resolution. Today, a customer may receive resolution on the phone in minutes, but she may have tried numerous other avenues first. To get a complete picture of her experience, you must have visibility into all these interactions. Text analytics helps you analyze unstructured customer data, including social media posts, surveys, chat and texts, by tagging and cataloging them according to their unique language rules.



Workforce management. Built-in tools for optimizing your workforce will help you transition to a modern contact center. While you may be used to doing forecasting and scheduling by pre-set time increments, such as half-hour blocks, that won't work for all real-time interactions or broader customer-journey engagements, which don't always conform to neat timeframes. Finally, use channel-specific service-level agreements (SLAs) based on the needs of helping customers within that unique environment.

Technology can support your initiatives to transform the customer experience, but if you don't change the corporate culture, it will be hard to achieve success. It's critical to empower all employees to put the customer relationship first by giving them the power to make decisions.

A FOUR-STEP GUIDE TO GETTING THERE

1

Assess your needs. The only way to ensure that any new technology deployment will support your company's customer contact needs is to know exactly what those needs are. Do a full analysis of "who, what, where and when." Who are you trying to serve (customers, agents, managers, back-office employees, partners)? What do you want to accomplish (faster response times, higher satisfaction scores, personalized experience, workforce productivity, higher revenues)? Where do you want to take action (agent desktops, multiple channels, in stores)? When do you want to implement these changes? **Pro Tip:** Tap your front-line employees to get a clear understanding of where they want to see improvement; they live this every day—they know what's working and what isn't.

2

Benchmark where you are today. Before you start evaluating and deploying new contact center tools, it's important to have a good understanding of what applications and processes are already in place. Make a detailed list of all the contact center applications in use across the organization. Then, look at the back-office software that might also impact the customer experience. Finally, catalog the processes (both formal and ad-hoc) that your agents and their managers use to deliver customer support. **Pro Tip:** Make sure to uncover any BYOT (bring your own technology) efforts in the contact center; your employees may be using their own technology and process work-arounds to improve their productivity. The only way to get a complete picture of how things work today is to ask.

3

Identify the technology gaps. Now that you know what you are trying to accomplish and what tools you already have in place, it's time to identify the gaps: where do you need new capabilities and/or process changes to meet your goals. Consider what it will take to offer omnichannel support in a modern workplace. You'll need contact center applications that let your customers connect with you on mobile, social and traditional channels; integrate with back-office software; enable better workforce management; and come in a single platform that will ensure your agents have a complete picture of every customer—and that every customer has a seamless experience, every time. **Pro Tip:** Invite several providers to suggest ways for improving on what you have. This is their area of expertise; they should be able to offer clear, cost-effective suggestions for filling in the gaps.

4

Make a plan for action. As with any new IT or business initiative, it's critical to make a detailed action plan before you begin implementation. IT and business managers must work together to ensure the plan meets everyone's expectations. Start with the technology you want to deploy: How will you rank vendors' offerings, what kind of payment plan do you need, who will you roll it out to first, what features will you start with and when do you want to layer on more capabilities, how will you handle day-to-day management and support, do you have training in place? Then make a parallel plan for changing the related business processes: What new channels will need support, how will you assign agents to them, what training will they receive, what data will you be collecting and what will you do with it, how will you measure performance, which back-office employees will be tapped for customer support and how? Make sure your plan has numerous "checkpoints," allowing you to track your progress as you go. **Pro Tip:** Set clear metrics for success—then use them. Too many companies fail to actually measure their performance against goals, leaving them with no idea whether they met their return on investment.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PROVIDER

Contact center and other business managers should work closely with IT to determine the criteria for selecting a provider that can meet all your customer needs. They're the experts in everything technology, and they'll offer sage advice on how to turn your dreams into reality. Plus, you need them to actually implement, manage and support any new apps and services. That said, it's worth having a broad idea of what you're looking for. Here are some recommendations:

- **Single platform, omnichannel applications.** Today's customer expects to be able to interact with your business on any channel at any time. If you can get all the features you need in a single platform, that's far preferable to working with a varied set of stand-alone solutions. An integrated system will let you tap into new features as you need them, knowing that they will work together seamlessly. A single platform should also give you common administration and reporting, making it easy to add new channels and get a clear picture of the customer experience.
- **Advanced analytics.** If you want deeper and better insight into what your customers want, need and are willing to buy, invest in a platform that offers analytics and reporting. Together, they can help even mid-size companies personalize customer interactions across a multitude of channels and throughout the relationship. Analytics can also be applied to the workforce, allowing managers to better understand who's performing well and under what conditions, and offering insight into how to jump-start poor performers.
- **Application integration.** While upgrading your contact center is important, so is linking it to your back-office software, including CRM and marketing automation solutions. It's the only way you can be sure you're getting a complete view of the customer over the course of the entire relationship.
- **Consider the cloud.** Cloud-based solutions are especially valuable for mid-size companies that lack the internal IT expertise to support new channels, advanced analytics or other functionality. With a modern cloud solution, some day-to-day tasks that have historically required IT expertise can be managed by just about anyone within the contact center—without having to open a trouble ticket or wait for minor adjustments. The cloud offers myriad other benefits, too, including quick and easy deployment to get you up and running immediately; simple scalability so you can add or remove agents as needed; flexibility so you can easily add new channels and features; reliability; and 24/7 service and support.
- **A vendor with strength and experience.** The contact center arena has seen a lot of mergers and acquisitions in the past few years, and several providers are struggling financially. Make sure your vendor has the stability to deliver products and services for the long haul, with a clear roadmap for adding new, more advanced features. Knowledge and experience in both the contact center and the industry in which you operate are critical to ensure success.

When companies deploy cloud-based solutions, they still need internal IT staff to manage the relationship and ensure all priorities, policies and service agreements are being met. But since those employees don't have to worry about day-to-day service and support operations, they can spend more time working toward leveraging the new tech for better business ends—making them, and their role, much more valuable to the organization.

CALL TO ACTION

In an always-connected world, customers expect an immediate response anytime and on any channel—across geographic boundaries, time zones and cultures. An omnichannel contact center lets you support a wide variety of customer communications—from voice and email to chat, social and mobile apps—and is mission critical for any modern contact center. You also need to apply advanced analytics and integrate with back-office software like CRM to ensure each customer gets a truly personal experience, every time and with every agent.

A single platform that integrates a variety of functions in a consistent interface makes it easy for agents to serve your customers and has the added benefit of making workforce management better and easier, too. A cloud-based solution can deliver myriad benefits, including low barriers to entry, access to new features, scalability, flexibility and remarkable reliability and redundancy. The result: better outcomes at a lower, predictable cost.

Contact center managers should work with IT staff to create a list of needs linked to business processes with clear, measurable metrics for success, and then identify the technology best suited to help you meet your goals. This will allow you to leverage IT's knowledge and expertise in your effort to deliver an exceptional customer experience.

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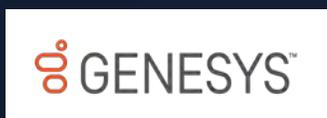
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ABOUT CCT

CCT is leading the way in Omni-Channel customer engagement solutions. CCT helps companies communicate with existing contact channels and a new generation of customers, through web and mobile based interactions, such as Web RTC, chat, co browsing and video, ensuring their contact center agents adapt to the changing customer landscape, decreasing contact center costs and providing efficient relationships with their customers.

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