Cloud contact centre success strategies 2019
Introduction

Operating within the fragile environment of the customer interface, the contact centre has become the most critical determinant of business success today. Sales, marketing, technical support, brand management, logistics...virtually every function of every organisation, regardless of size, is reliant on contact centre performance to meet targets, achieve KPIs and fulfil corporate objectives. So, it’s crucial to get contact centre strategy right.

Not surprisingly, businesses across all sectors are installing, replacing or renewing their contact centre systems. For some this is driven by the cost advantages of cloud-based technology. For others, it’s the opportunity to automate processes and improve productivity. For all, it’s essential to winning and retaining clients through a better customer experience.

Whatever the motive for moving to a new contact centre system, a clear strategy is essential to reliable performance now and, above all, in the longer term. The list of considerations can be extensive, and we will address these in the future. For most organisations, though, there are three key factors that are essential to a successful contact centre strategy today:

1. The importance voice as a foundation for building other channels
2. The interaction of voice and chat in contact centre design
3. Best practices for building a seamless customer experience
1. The importance of voice

There is little doubt that the optimal customer experience relies on the frictionless transition between communication channels that only an omnichannel contact system can deliver. However, numerous surveys show that customers continue to rate a voice conversation with an agent as their preferred channel of communication. For example, recent research from Genesys estimates that 75% of consumers still believe humans provide the most effective customer service.

Of course, voice communication can be delivered by machines and software as well as humans. Natural voice recognition, intelligent IVR, proactive voice messaging, AI and digital personal assistants like Alexa are blurring the boundaries of human and digital voice. Uniquely, though, voice managed by a skilled agent has the power to convey tone, warmth and likability in a way that can emphasise emotional brand values and enhance the customer experience far beyond the capabilities of digital alternatives.

Generally, contact centre agents like to deal with voice. Compared with many digital channels, voice requires less training, it’s simpler to use and easier to adopt. Inherently, it’s a fast, economical channel of communication and, perhaps most importantly, it’s the only channel that can be trusted for dealing with high-value or high-sensitivity calls.

For all contact centres, from the simplest to the most complex omnichannel systems, voice is a common denominator providing the foundations on which additional layers of communication can be built. For this reason, voice is the starting point for creating your contact centre strategy.

The need to get voice right

There are numerous reasons why voice retains a high level of preference amongst customers. For example, voice is always preferred when speed is an issue or when the severity and complexity of an issue are critical factors. The majority of consumers believe voice is the quickest way to get a solution to their problem and prefer voice over texting or typing for convenience and security reasons. For example, typing is not practical while driving a car and verbal communication is preferred when personal information is to be provided.

With this level of criticality attached to voice, it should follow that companies are prioritising voice and implementing quick, efficient voice channels that offer the best experience for their customers. Strangely, that’s not always the case. Market feedback confirms that, many customers are still interacting with contact centres that apply outdated IVR and virtual assistant technology with poor voice recognition, resulting in voice channels that deflect or contain conversations, rather than resolve issues.

The result can be a frustrating for consumers and costly to businesses that place customer loyalty at risk. The need to implement voice correctly, whether virtual or human, is central to any contact centre strategy and critical to achieving an optimal customer experience. Voice is an ‘all or nothing’ channel. Get it wrong and customers will leave you. Get it right and they will stay with you forever.

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Evolving solutions

The need to ‘get voice right’ in the contact centre is a strategic imperative. The agent has always been the focal point of this challenge and effective strategies are recognising the need to place greater control in the hands of the agent. In particular, contact centre design needs to provide the simplest possible user experience to allow agile working and easy access to information before, during and after the call.

Equally, supervisors can improve agent productivity and customer experience with skills-based routing, where calls are allocated to agents best qualified with the experience to handle specific customer issues.

In the past, businesses have attempted to manage voice communications using basic voice recognition in IVR or self-service processes. In many cases, the quality of voice recognition has been poor with callers having to repeat phrases until pronunciation has been understood by the system. Far from removing simple calls from agent workload, this has often created the opposite result. In the future though, advances in natural language speech technology is poised to improve matters and drive growth in self-service functionality. Customers can speak in a natural way rather than having to provide one-word answers to specific questions, and the system will understand. This capability is already playing an increasingly important role in routing callers more accurately and streamlining the IVR process.

Natural language speech analytics now goes further than this to understand how sentences are spoken and their underlying meaning. The software can analyse the caller’s tone, vocabulary and mood to establish emotion and satisfaction levels. It can even detect a caller’s age, which can help to ensure the call is routed to the right type of agent. When combined with predictive analytics, systems can also identify when a caller is getting frustrated or angry, or when they are lying, or even when they are trying to commit fraud. These insights help agents to handle calls in the best way and improve the overall customer experience.

Speech analysis can also prompt agents to respond in a specific way when certain words or phrases are spoken, and it can help to identify any gaps in an agent’s knowledge to inform future training requirements. It’s useful for contact centre managers too. They’re able to use speech analytics software to monitor customer – agent interactions, ensuring that any scripts are being followed and that conversations meet regulatory compliance.
2. Voice vs. Chat

Sometimes, a product can change its purpose. Designed for one thing, in practice it is actually used for another thing. Bubble-wrap was originally designed as wall-paper, Viagra was developed to counter high blood pressure, and the list goes on. A less dramatic but similar invention is web chat. Originally a crude form of text for busy techies working on support desks, the tool has migrated onto web pages and is integrated with contact centres of all types. Thanks to machine learning, this simple tool is now famous for its ‘bot’ mode that can automate all or part of chat conversation.

Widescale adoption of web chat and chat bots has been driven by three original perceptions:
- chat is cheaper than calls
- chat is quicker than calls
- multiple chats can be managed by an agent whilst handling calls

To the contrary, experience now shows that all three claims are inaccurate. Amongst some contact centre managers, chat is being pushed hard as a boost to productivity. However, many instances demonstrate that the customer on the receiving end does not receive the slick, informative response expected. Contradictory accounts of good and bad customer experience abound and the role of web chat versus voice calls has become central to contact centre strategy for many businesses.

The trade-off between voice calls and web chat is different for every business, but here are a few pointers, taken from a consensus of various surveys, to help you judge for yourself:

Phone calls are cheaper than live chat

It is claimed that, on average, agents can successfully manage a maximum of two live chats. With three chats, productivity plummets. That's because switching between chats means the agent is having to re-engage with a previous conversation, picking up an earlier train of thought and taking time in the process. Hence, calls are typically half the length of a live chat session and, correspondingly, cost less.

Customer experience is driven by emotion, not a text message

Brand values and customer experience are based on the type of emotional connection that a good contact centre agent can create. Chat lacks this capability. To compound the matter, customers dealing with chat are aware that they are one of several being handled by a multi-tasking agent on the other side of the web page. A phone call is one-to-one, chat is one to many. The resulting feeling of not being special and not being the focus of the chat conversation can be damaging to the brand and the experience.
Chat duration is unpredictable and counter-productive

Typically, customers using chat will respond irregularly, delayed by interruptions or a general perception that there's no pressure to respond promptly and the agent will be available to answer indefinitely. The extended handling time exacerbates the challenges faced by the agent in juggling multiple conversations and maintaining continuity of thought.

Multi-tasking doesn't motivate

Agents faced with multiple concurrent chat sessions lose a sense of ownership and conscientiousness that doesn’t happen in a phone call. Furthermore, the relatively low attention span of dealing with a live chat on a sensitive subject is, intuitively, counter-productive to the job satisfaction and motivation of the agent (as well as the customer). The impact on simple, transactional dialogues is less important.

Only 12.5% of respondents hate bots

A survey by Genesys has established that, as usual, voice is by far the preferred contact centre channel and most customers would prefer to deal with a human. Equally, only 12.5% of respondents didn't want to use a chat bot. It seems that having the choice to use chat, as and when suits, is more important than the medium itself. When chat suits, it’s fine. Given the choice, though, voice always wins hands down.
3. Building the Customer Experience

The choice of voice, chat or any other communications channel will impact the customer experience but there are important factors and different approaches that need to be considered beforehand.

The starting point can differ according to the type of business and the type of customer. For example, do you prioritise the customer profile, behaviour and needs to accurately predict and anticipate the customer journey through the contact centre? Or, do you focus on reducing effort in the transition through touchpoints to a live agent, adding value on the way?

At this point, it can be tempting jump directly to the functional requirements of the contact system, skipping the important step of defining the actual customer experience. In particular, it’s important to design a journey and memorable experience that fits with your brand values and sticks with the customer after the interaction.

Here are six best practices to help you design and implement that experience.

1. **Identify your target customer segments and what matters most to them**

   Consider who are your most profitable customers and determine their critical needs. Determined what market needs you are going to address and align these with your brand values.

2. **Ascertain the current customer journey for each segment**

   Identify the high points and the low points along the way and define the journey from the emotional perspective of the customer. Empathise with the customer’s emotions by putting yourself in the customer’s place or even actually making a purchase. You can use tools, including voice of the customer surveys, call recordings and customer focus groups, to more precisely validate the current customer experience.

   Step back and look at the journey to see if anything is unacceptable or consistently causing customer churn or abandonment and be sure to note what experience and emotion the customer retains at the end of the journey. It is a high point or are you taking them though processes that leave a poor experience.

   Loyalty to a brand demands that the experience is memorable, leaving on a high note with a lasting impression.
3. Prioritise and plan improvements to the customer journey

Determine where you need to focus to provide the optimal experience. Map out a four-quadrant matrix. You will need to identify each step in the journey and its importance to your company and the customer.

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The upper right quadrant becomes the place where you need to focus most. Map out the improved customer journey, prioritising the emotional factors, and align high points in the customer journey with customer needs and your brand values. Prioritise the points within the journey where it impacts brand values and needs most and include touchpoints where these help.
4. Use context - some examples

- **Personalise the web experience**
  When a customer is browsing on the company website, identify online activity like login authentication and leverage the context of who they are, to dynamically personalise the website content. This personalisation may include offering other products, services or promotions.

- **Cross-channel journey with deflection**
  A customer places an order online and calls later to check on progress. IVR is aware of the online order, so it intercepts the call and provides a status update. The customer still may want some assisted service from a live agent and the customer is offered a call back, making best use of the agent resources. The call back is then made at the most appropriate time with full context.

- **Extending context beyond the contact centre**
  The customer is shopping online and receives a promotional discount offer provided by a QR code. To meet the expiry date, they visit the retail store, where the assistant scans the QR code, collecting context of the customer’s website activity and past interactions.

5. Measuring success

To achieve an accurate measure of customer experience performance, the metrics used on a day-to-day basis for business processes need to align with customer experience metrics.

6. Adjust resources, routing and reporting.

Having planned the customer experience, effective implementation will require adjustments to contact centre operations, including:

- Alignment of training, skills and staffing of resources with the experience
- Adjust web, voice and mobile self-service and assisted-service choices for customer channels by target customer segment
- Configure intraday and historical metrics for reporting
- Adjust interaction routing rules
Customer Testimonials

**Boston Borough Council**

“The decision to move to Foehn's hosted telephony was simple. The council has knowledge to inform future training requirements. It’s useful for contact centre managers too. They’re able to use speech analytics software to monitor customer – agent interactions, ensuring that any scripts are being followed and that conversations meet regulatory compliance.”

*Roger Coleman, Director*

**Theatre Sites**

“Making the move to Foehn hosted telephony was exactly the right thing to do. Not only does it support our business in ways that any telephone system should, it also provides us with higher levels of flexibility and scalability.”

*Roger Coleman, Director*

**Communique**

“I’m sure Foehn’s technical support is as good with well trained staff. The fact is that I’ve never had to call them.”

*Gary Warland, Commercial Director*

**Accumulus Consulting**

“Our new system works well and does everything we need it to do. Also, any member of the team working remotely can simply plug in their headset to their laptop and function as if they were working in the office. The quality is good and Foehn customer support is very responsive.”

*Geoff O’Shea, Accumulus Consulting*

**Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman**

“In terms of financial and operational benefits, significant cost savings, productivity and efficiency gains feature highly.”

*Adrian Beaumont, LGO IT Manager*
About Foehn

Foehn provide cloud communications products, delivering unified communications and contact centres to the private and public sectors since 2000.

We continually challenge ourselves to solve problems and build better cloud communications to help you work smarter. By combining our own technology, with uncompromising design principles and the power of open source, we can deliver truly intuitive communications products.

This is how we make the complex simple. Regardless of your needs, our experienced team can help reduce the challenges and costs of moving to a new generation of cloud communications products.

We are the ITSPA Best VoIP Software Winner 2018 with customers spanning every sector. We have also won awards for our contact centre implementations as the Genesys PureCloud partner of the Year.

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