



CONTACT CENTRES ARE BEING DIGITALLY TRANSFORMED

Three Questions: How significant is the role of the contact centre within a Digital Transformation (DX), what do vendors understand by the term 'Omni-Channel' and how important is this in the overall CX mix and here's a curve ball - what will be the impact of GDPR on the future role of the Contact Centre?

Customer Service Excellence (CX) is being touted as the new sales and marketing department and no business wanting to be taken seriously would not want to be making a big song and dance about their own 'Customer First' ethos.

At the same time, and some would say by extension, observers are increasingly touting the contact centre as playing a significant part in any Digital Transformation (DX) based on the premise that it is frequently the first point of contact the customer has with their supplier.

In this article we'll be looking at how call and contact centres can contribute towards that strategy by asking three key questions:

How significant is the role of the contact centre within a Digital Transformation (DX)?

"Is Customer Service the New Sales and Marketing? Definitely," says Phil Reynolds, CTO at Oak Innovation.

"Customer centric business strategies are increasingly important and organisations today recognise that a 'customer led' approach will result in a better understanding of what users want from their products and services. If you can also establish where the user pain points are it becomes far easier to develop your own offerings to meet those needs.

This customer first approach is a key and constituent part of the transition from working in departmental silos to one of adopting the wider business perspectives that can be gained from collaborative working and overall, it is a key element in a Digital Transformation.

If you then consider that often the first point of contact a company has with its customer base is via the contact centre it immediately becomes obvious that the experience each customer has must be excellent.

As enterprises undertake their transformations they need to take on board not just this ethos but also the technology to support, or even initiate, the processes and work-flows required to achieve their own customer service excellence (CX) goals.

We would therefore say that Customer Service could indeed be seen as the new Sales and Marketing, not least because the providing of valuable customer feedback and ideas for new products that were once hidden deep in the marketing silo are now coming from and being confirmed by new, additional sources.

And remember, good ideas are not the preserve of marketing nor any other single departmental silo."

Steve Tutt at VanillaIP says their view is that Digital Transformation is driving the interconnectedness of the

modern world, and that in turn is having an impact on how users behave and what their expectation is in terms of support channels and contact with businesses.

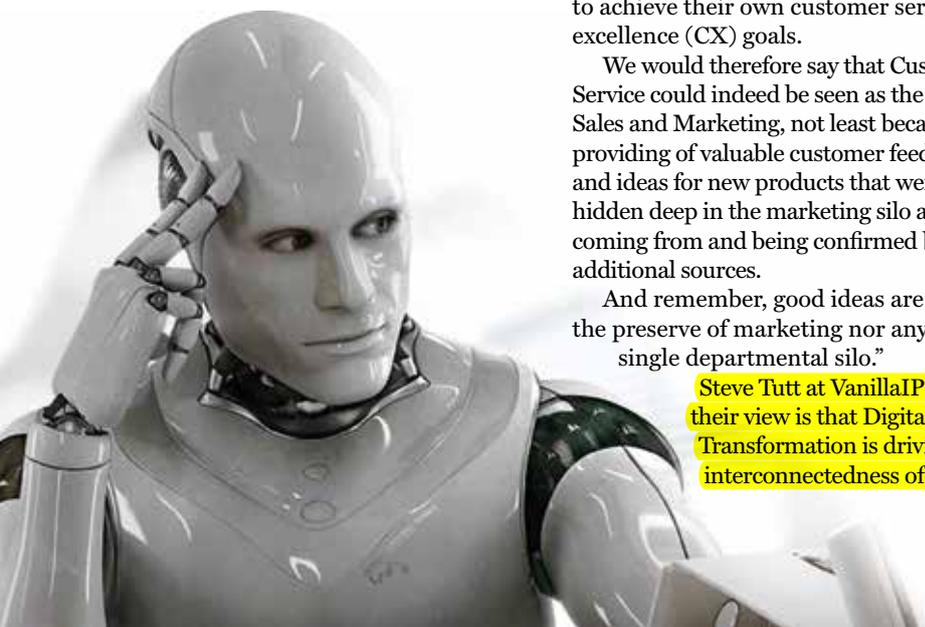
"For many of our customers this can blur the definition of 'product' to not just be about the tangible customer item or service but to be about the quality of the experience their customers are having in dealing with them. For example, just look at all the unboxing videos the millennials are posting on YouTube; it's about more than the product itself, it's the experience. As the technology provider for these customer touch points, the channel can help customers provide warmer interactions for their users.

The crucial element for optimising customer experiences is context. Where the Agent is informed about who the customer is and what they want before the contact is delivered speeds up the transaction and adds value for the end user. Currently we can profile all calls into the call centre against the CRM, such as Salesforce or Microsoft Dynamics, allowing the Supervisor to prioritise leads to the top of the queue or move them to a VIP queue. That's very powerful for customers."

Gary Bennett, VP Sales, EMEA Enghouse Interactive, says that the contact centre has undergone a digital transformation over recent years - and as the public face of many organisations, it often acts as a catalyst, helping to bring the rest of the business with it.

"The phrase, 'contact centre' still conjures up, in many imaginations, a massive open plan office, with people packed like battery hens with their headsets on, answering routine questions, or providing basic information around balance updates; changes of address and meter readings, for example. It's an increasingly outdated perception.

Today, in the era of digital transformation, many of these simpler





tasks are done by customers themselves through self-service channels. Take the airline experience, for example, people are increasingly checking in with mobile apps, printing their own boarding passes, or using the QR code on their phone to help them board a plane. They only interact with a human when they effectively ‘fall out of the normal parameters and boundaries’, if their luggage is too heavy or there are delays to their flight, for example.

The success of self-service in the new digital age has led to a changed role for the contact centre. With the simple routine tasks now taken care of, the centre and the agents working there, have become the public face of the business, focused on solving increasingly complex problems. That of course means that they are going to need more advanced skillsets, and to be empowered to make decisions in real time. More importantly still, they can act as the gateway to the wider organisation, with the knowledge and skill to understand presence and route queries to the relevant stakeholders.”

What do vendors understand by the term ‘Omni-Channel’ and how important is this in the overall CX mix?

Commenting on the need for an Omni Channel strategy Phil Reynolds says that this can be difficult for many firms to manage effectively.

“We know that users will attempt to contact their suppliers using the medium or method they are most familiar and comfortable with. For many this will still be the telephone but for other cohorts the telephone will be the last resort and used only when other methods have failed.

Today there is a trend towards using artificial intelligence (AI) – frequently presented in the form of Chat Bots, to handle user queries. Many users are entirely happy with this but enterprises need to recognise that Bots tend to address the lower hanging customer service fruit – essentially the ‘easy stuff’. And whilst that is great in itself the other side of that coin is that all the ‘hard and difficult stuff’ is left over for the real live agents in the contact centre to handle.

In practice this means that the enterprise must increase the call handling skill sets of their agents for these more awkward and challenging



**Gary Bennett, VP Sales, EMEA
Enghouse Interactive**

calls and/or deploy an effective skills based routing regime.

Further management issues can be encountered in how different contact methods are handled. In particular, the response times, queuing and integration of multiple contact form factors in to a coherent user response mechanism that solves their problems. This is all surmountable but should be anticipated by the contact centre.”

Tim Mercer, CEO of Vapour Cloud, says it must be acknowledged that contact centres play a significant role in leading the CX, particularly because

they often represent the first point of entry to a business.

“Consumers are demanding an increasingly omni-channel experience, to suit them (not the brand!) and they expect the comms to be seamless (especially because technological advances mean it needn’t be anything but). This can mean dialogue which goes far beyond the telephone, i.e. it integrates social media conversation too for instance, as well as SMS, Facebook, email and more.

Some contact centres are embracing omni-channel wholeheartedly and have even started to integrate recording features that analyse and report on the statistics to aid further strategic improvements. But others are behind the curve, e.g. they’re failing to admit the role that social media plays, for instance, or they’re embracing social media but it exists disparately to the rest of the contact centre comms strategy. Many contact centres therefore need to adopt this strategy, become more agile and rely on modern tech to do the ‘grunt’ work.”

Steve Tutt at VanillaIP believes that more channels will come on-stream based on user preference and ultimately that will decide what is required by omni-channel rather than the vendors.

Two recent surveys highlight some of the issues and user reaction to Chat services which are often now served by Bots as well as humans.

Rise of the Bot

Consumers saying a good chat experience will make them more loyal	72%
Consumers who are always happy with the service they receive	15%
Feel they get a personalised service	15%
People saying they’d use it instead of the telephone, email or social media, due to its real-time, conversational nature	68%

Source: Eptica 2017 UK Chat Study

Human Interaction

I tend to stay more loyal and increase my business with companies who offer a real person to talk to when I need it.	87%
I tend to stay more loyal and increase my business with companies who offer a choice of ways of getting in touch with them.	84%
I tend to stay more loyal and increase my business with companies who resolve my queries and enquiries quickly and effectively, however I get in touch with them.	92%
If I can’t get through to a real person when I have a query with a company, I tend to take my business elsewhere	69%
If my queries aren’t answered quickly and effectively by a company, I tend to take my business elsewhere	81%

Source: Yonder Digital Group – March 2017



“WhatsApp have announced they are piloting a business version which could see WhatsApp queues replace SMS queues into contact centres and become a requirement for omni.

Going forward the importance for customers will not be what channels they can support into the contact centre but how can they visualise their user contact across different platforms. So, marrying up cookies for webchat and browsing history, inbound CLI to call centre and email queues. Then we will be in marketing Valhalla! But it does raise the question, where does the contact centre end and the CRM begin?”

David Rowlands, Contact Centre Sales Director UK and EMEA at 8x8 believes that the traditional contact centre is changing.

“Our research revealed that there are currently 766,000 people working in contact centres in the UK but there are a further 4.6 million staff dealing with customer service enquiries, who don’t work in a traditional contact centre. Businesses are also developing outbound contact centres as a form of sales/marketing. All this means the modern contact centre is moving from a segmented part of a business that deals with interactions, to be at the heart of the operation.

If a business is looking to transform itself digitally, its contact centre should be front of mind.

The contact centre is increasingly becoming the only place that customers interact directly with a brand, more specifically



Chris Berry, Managing Director, Liquid Voice

with the people on the front line that represent it.”

According to Chris Berry, Managing Director of Liquid Voice, Omni-channel is now becoming a prerequisite for technology providers who must be able to demonstrate that their solutions allow all channels to be captured and stored on a single platform.

“For resellers of interaction recording, quality management and content analytics, it is important that they partner with suppliers such as Liquid Voice, which have the technical ability and proven experience of integrating their systems into these environments. Liquid Voice makes it easy for resellers to increase revenues in this area by providing the highest level of pre- and post-sales support for every deployment.”

And here’s a curve ball – what will be the impact of GDPR on the future role of the Contact Centre?

Reynolds says that the May 2018 introduction of the EU’s GDPR will pose many challenges for UK business and many issues will be contact centre specific.

“It is clear from what we know that user and customer data protection is at the heart of the GDPR and that positive affirmation of agreement by customers to the use of their data must be in place before it can be stored and used. Clearly this will impact many aspects of a contact centre including the recording of customers calls.

Many observers are saying that call recording must be allowed to continue; agents are incentivised on continual performance improvement so without that performance monitoring customer service levels will turn into a race to the bottom.

We believe there will be a number of challenges to the GDPR in the courts as fines for non-compliance start to be handed out and it will only be at that point – when reality meets regulation head on, that we will begin to fully understand the wider implications of the rules.”

Legislative changes cannot be ignored according to Tim Mercer at Vapour Cloud.

“GDPR for example, will force call and contact centres to change their operations and processes, not just from a data storage perspective but also with regard to PCI/DSS level 1 compliance if taking credit/debit card transactions -

even if that information is not retained!”

Gary Bennett at Enghouse Interactive believes that GDPR will have a significant impact on various aspects of contact centre operations today.

“GDPR will, for instance, place tighter regulations on how these calls are managed, and with fines as high as €20 million, or up to 4% of global turnover, there are serious implications for any company found in breach of the rules. Individuals will have a right to request access to any personal data stored by the organisation – even if this is in the form of a voice recording. Businesses will need to make sure that, if required, they can identify, access and delete any recording that includes a customer’s personal information.”

David Rowlands, Contact Centre Sales Director UK and EMEA at 8x8, says the GDPR is the new industry paranoia.

“Last year the rise of bots was thought to be a perceived threat to agent FTE and caused a similar stir in the world of comms. What GDPR is doing is forcing contact centres to focus on security and compliance. People need to rethink what they are doing with customer data. Complying to new rules does not mean the role of the contact centre will change, but the importance of security will increase with time.” **COMMSBUSINESS**

ED SAYS...

Analyst firm Forrester said recently that tectonic shifts in the market follow a relatively similar pattern: We see hints of it, we talk about it, we continue to talk about it, leaders act to gain first-mover advantage, and others talk and slowly accept the reality on the ground and start to move – hopefully not too late.

The question for most companies and business leaders is not if, but when and how do I take steps to achieve CX.

Companies across industries and regions are feeling the consequences of a customer-centric market that moves fast. For some, it represents an existential threat to their very survival; for most, it represents immediate and possibly prolonged revenue risk..