

How to drive value up and costs down in the contact centre



Customer expectations for effortless service experiences have never been higher. The appeal of fully automating customer service functions is clear - opening up opportunities for 24/7 support while also deflecting many interactions into self-service channels.

However, while digital innovation and automation are revolutionising the customer service business, they can never be the whole story. Many predicted that the era of digital transformation would displace contact centre employees for good, but this simply isn't the case.

Indeed, today's most successful contact centres are those that successfully combine automation and AI with human intelligence to create ideal customer experiences across all channels, touchpoints and key moments.

So in order to not just drive down costs but also drive up value from their contact centre operations, brands need to secure exactly the right mix of human and digital technology services. Getting this right requires four key elements:

- a data-driven CX strategy that's powered by **customer insight**
- continual investment in **people skills**
- **omni-channel technology** powered by the latest cloud, AI, machine learning and RPA technologies
- ongoing **optimisation of CX operations**

Bring these elements together successfully and the results can be astonishing. Indeed, some organisations are now targeting CX cost reductions of around 25%-30% while still delivering the highest quality customer experience.

1) Building a data-driven CX strategy that starts with the customer

It sounds obvious, but it's surprising how many organisations offer customer journeys that have evolved around their own internal structures and silos - rather than the other way around. So, start with your customers. Understand where they are today and find out where they want to get to. And ask your contact centre advisors what causes customers the most frustration. They always know!

You also need to really understand your data, particularly if you're looking to create CX journeys that intend to provide customers with an effortless end-to-end experience. This means looking beyond your CRM to capture how your customers engage across your business - on your website, with your service operation and via your sales and marketing activities.

Considering all these different customer views will help in building a CX strategy that's right for your customers. Avoiding traditional areas of customer frustration can result in quick-wins throughout the journey, building loyalty and increasing opportunities to cross-sell, up-sell and secure repeat business.

With the right data in place it's also possible to be

much more strategic in your planning. For example, you may want to target a 30% improvement in First Contact Resolution – but have you looked beyond a likely return in sales value to also consider its impact on customer experience and loyalty?

2) Invest in your people to take your customer service to the next level

A large percentage of people still prefer human assistance when they get in touch with an organisation. Many might feel their issue is too complex to be handled by a chatbot or a virtual assistant. Others simply find automated systems too cumbersome and impersonal. So if people still need people, then it makes sense to ensure that your frontline ambassadors represent the business as effectively as they can.

That's why it's so important to do everything you can to create and maintain a highly-skilled and motivated contact centre workforce – one that wants to work for a company where they feel appreciated and valued. Customers want to engage with friendly problem solvers, so your advisors need to be able to build relationships, establish loyalty and communicate authenticity with customers. These are exactly the skills needed to deliver amazing customer experiences – which, in turn helps build lifetime loyalty.

It also makes sense to look after your workforce, as great employee experiences correlate to amazing customer experiences. So, empower your colleagues with learning and development opportunities, provide them with the latest equipment, and offer gamified career paths to help advance their careers.

3) Creating seamless, omni-channel CX across all touchpoints

Customers just want their query answered quickly, whether they're communicating with a human or a bot. People of course have their own preferences, but today's reality is that most customers use multiple engagement channels during an interaction – so integration and continuity should always be a key concern.

Technologies such as cloud CX platforms, AI-enabled self-service channels and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) systems all have an important role to play in enabling seamless, omni-channel experiences that can range across multiple touchpoints. Intelligent channel orchestration is essential here to ensure that different interaction channels work together to make things as

easy as possible. At the same time, what's faster and more effective for the customer also translates directly into operational efficiencies and reduced employee effort – unlocking further value for the business.

AI is, of course, a game-changer for seamless CX. Its potential for identifying people at their moment of need and leveraging analytics to serve them on time couldn't be any simpler for customers. This could be either in a digital channel or via an advisor supported by an intelligent virtual assistant during an interaction. These kind of personalised and powerful customer experiences can only take place as part of a fully-orchestrated customer journey, but they can also unlock significant value through delivery at scale.

4) Optimising contact centre operations needs to be continuous – there's no going back...

Creating successful, data-driven customer journeys, supporting the contact centre workforce to offer amazing customer experiences, and deploying the latest CX technologies all combine to unlock significant value and productivity benefits. However, organisations also need to recognise the need to continue evolving their digitally-transformed CX processes as new competitors, channels and technologies introduce further disruption.

Optimising contact centre operational processes has a key role to play here, and that requires deep expertise in customer care, digital technologies as well as core enterprise systems and other back-office processes. Selecting the right metrics will be critical, providing they accurately track your overall performance against key contact centre and broader business outcomes. Traditional contact centre measures such as Average Handling Time and First Contact Resolution don't always tell the whole story. That's why it's also important to track CX success through CSAT (Customer Satisfaction) and NPS (Net Promoter Score) measures.

So, for organisations looking to drive down contact centre costs while still unlocking further value, contact centre operational teams will have to stay agile and recognise when it's time to recalibrate their customer journeys. Having the right data insights, contact centre workforce and innovative technologies in place will help them stay ahead of the CX transformation curve.