

Bringing the contact centre and instore experience together

Summer 2024

Retail Leadership Forum attendees:

Aimee Bushell, Head of Customer Engagement, Smeg UK

Nick Coleman, Senior Manager Customer Care, Dunelm

Paul Cox, Senior CX Consultant, Kerv

Deborah Dearden, Remote Experience Design Manager, IKEA

Annalise Eldred, Head of Customer Contact Centres, Lookers Automotive Group

Stacey Mairs, Head of Customer Experience, Bensons for Beds

Graeme Matheson, Planning & Performance Lead, John Lewis

Lindsay Mitchell, Head of Customer Service Experience, Harrods

Samantha Richards, Head of Consumer Engagement Services UK&I, Nestle Purina

Jan Suessmeir, Customer Care & Services Director, Nespresso

Retail Leadership Forum

The Leadership Series is the documented output from CCMA's Leadership Forum meetings. These take place at the House of Lords and provide an exclusive opportunity for senior contact centre leaders to explore the key factors driving change in their industry and to consider how to continue innovating and adding value for the benefit of the customer, colleagues, and the business.

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Customers creating their own shopping journeys

Today's customers are increasingly blending digital and physical channels to create their own shopping journeys. At the same time research consistently shows that four out of five people conduct online research before engaging directly, and that people frequently use their phones instore to check out competitor products and pricing. So what impact does this hybrid way of shopping have on both the contact centre and instore employees? And how are both operations responding to a world where more informed customers are demanding expert assistance.

When it comes to merging the contact centre and instore experience, what does good look like?

Leigh Hopwood, the CCMA's CEO began the Retail Leadership Forum by asking attendees to describe how a successfully integrated instore and contact centre operation can work.

Aimee Bushell from Smeg felt it was vital that **"the experience is the same, however customers choose to get in touch"**. Deborah Dearden from IKEA added **"it's all about making sure that the brand point is always there. Whether you're working instore, in the contact centre, we all wear the same uniform. It's really important that customer always get the same IKEA service and responses."**

Looker's Annalise Eldred agreed, citing a seamless experience as the goal.

"What I say to the customer in the showroom has to be the same as on the phone or in livechat. Of course that can be tricky – everything we say in the contact centre is recorded, transcribed and quality-checked, but we can't do that instore."

At IKEA Deborah also acknowledged that customers would try to reach out to multiple channels at the same time, so they have introduced omnichannel customer-centric policies backed up by a knowledge base.

"Aligning our policies has been very successful, with happy customer scores up 15% in just two weeks. And because our contact centre was more mature in terms of technology, we've been able to push alignment into the stores,"

“We use the same knowledge platform for both to deliver a seamless and complementary brand experience as much as possible,” said Nespresso’s Jan Suessmeir, **“However this can be challenging to replicate without the physical experiences in our boutiques where customers can smell and taste our coffee blends. We try to enhance this with features such as AI to show people our machines in their kitchen and complement the contact centre journey.”**

Stacey at Bensons for Beds recognises this disconnect. **“The purchase of beds is immersive, with our customers needing to find and experience the bed that suits them best. We’ve tried adding to the instore experience with QR codes offering help using a variety of emoji options, but customers just didn’t use it when looking for beds. We also know that post-purchase our customers prefer to stay engaged with the store where they bought their bed – they didn’t want to deal with our contact centre. That’s why it’s so important that customers still have a choice.”**

What needs to happen to make the experience fully integrated?

Thinking back to Bensons for Beds’ CEO speaking at a recent conference, Annalise from Looker recalled the simplicity of his CX ethos:

“Be warm and friendly – that’s all the customer wants was the message, but surely that’s not quantitative?” While acknowledging this, Stacey explained how **“we focus hard on what it is in our journey that are the key points in keeping customers as promoters – we measure this in surveys and it’s always how we make them feel warm and friendly. And that’s not just instore or in the contact centre – it’s across the end-to-end customer journey. That’s why we also see our delivery drivers as having customer service roles.”**

Graeme Matheson from John Lewis echoes this, recalling how during the pandemic

“our drivers were encouraged to talk with customers and be there in the way that customers wanted them to be. Of course average delivery times went through the roof, but it was a way of elevating customer engagement at a time when our stores were closed.”

However, Graeme also believes it’s important that engagement matches brand expectations.

“Instore we have partners across different departments such as Kitchens, Bathrooms, Carpets and Furniture – ready to discuss customer requirements in more detail. To support simpler purchases we installed mini payment stations, but quickly found that customers didn’t associate this approach with their perceived John Lewis experience.”

“So we continue to look for ways to deliver high levels of engagement instore while also providing our partners with a more joined up view of the customer through mobile access to our CRM application,” continued Graeme. **“That’s important as customers returning to a store often prefer to resolve their issue by speaking to the same partner who initially made the sale.”**

Contact centres gather so much information around the instore experience – what do we do with it?

For many attendees this is an issue that needs to be treated cautiously. According to Deborah from IKEA: **“there’s a danger that this can turn into ‘them and us’ if you’re not careful. At IKEA you can’t really achieve the perfect order unless everyone across the store, picking and delivery is working together seamlessly”.**

Annalise at Lookers sees the contact centre as the place where customer issues get resolved, **“but that can be potentially expensive when you’re dealing with vehicle sales. Perhaps if responsibility for resolution sat directly on someone’s P&L there would be a greater focus on avoiding potential issues.”**

For Stacey from Bensons for Beds it's important that the contact centre offers regular feedback. **"Customer concerns are always top of the agenda at our weekly trade reviews, and every month and a half advisors get the chance to say what's not working or what's niggling customers. If lots of advisors are coming up with the same issue, it's probably a big deal. However, it's also important for leadership to point out where something is policy and will never change."** Smeg's Aimee agrees. **"We encourage our people to say if there's a problem, but they need to feel free to do so."**

Do instore people ever come to the contact centre?

Recalling the many examples during the pandemic when instore employees joined their contact centre colleagues to help handle increased demand, Leigh asked **"whether this was a one-off, or were instore people still coming into the contact centre?"**

Deborah described how at IKEA they were running a trial to let instore and contact centre people experience each other's roles. **"We've got store people seeing what it's like to be a remote omnichannel co-worker, while our contact centre staff get to experience the instore environment and learn about our products."**

We're interested to see what happens."

At Nespresso, Jan feels it's vital that the brand's contact centre colleagues get a feeling for the products. **"All our advisors and contact centre have full access to our range of machines, coffee and accessories so that everyone has genuine knowledge and enthusiasm for our products before they speak to customers – they're our brand ambassadors and are pivotal in bringing the Nespresso experience to life."**

Leigh referenced brands that have all their products in the contact centre to help with product queries, while Lego had as many builds as possible available to support customer queries. Aimee said that at Smeg they also had the full range of Smeg products downstairs.

However this wasn't really practical for brands like John Lewis who simply have too many products to do this. **"We have back-office tech support specialists where needed, but we frequently get the people who fix things to come into our contact centre to talk to our agents and give them the information they need to help customers with more common faults,"** explained Graeme. **"We want our contact centre people to be experts in our brand, not necessarily all our products."**

Is the nature of conversations changing?

The discussion then focused on the evolving role of the contact centre advisor. Mindful of the growing trend to refocus the advisor role to become more of



a digital co-ordination function, Leigh asked if the nature of conversations was changing.

“With brands investing significantly in digitising various aspects of the customer journey, it doesn’t make much sense for advisors to spend their time simply replicating these processes when customers call up,” explained Leigh.

“Obviously there are situations where this is still important, but for the majority of customers it makes sense to help them by talking through how they can do this for themselves.”

Nick Coleman has sensed this change in the dynamic

at Dunelm, but he also sees it working the other way round.

“We’ve got people in our contact centre who are busy co-ordinating our customers’ digital experience. They’ve got huge amounts of knowledge and understanding as they help people sort out their orders for any of the thousands of products that we have online. This perhaps contrasts with our super-manual instore click and collect service, where customers have been known to ask why they can’t get the same kind of service that they get online!”

Annalise said **“we’re also**

seeing things evolving in car dealerships, with an e-commerce drive to encourage customers to self-serve when buying their car. This means customers will need an email address to create an account to buy a car, and that potentially locks out people who don’t have an email address. Instead of a heavy sales focus it will become more about co-ordinating the customer experience. Fixed prices mean that the only negotiations are around part exchange values – it all makes for a very different experience for customers!”



Advice for contact centre managers looking for closer instore integration

In closing the CCMA Retail Leadership Forum, Leigh stressed the importance of having an aligned brand across all of your customer-facing operations – from the contact centre, across digital to the store. She then asked each attendee for their advice for other leaders looking to achieve better integration between their contact centres and stores:

Graeme Matheson, John Lewis - "I've always believed in walking a mile in the other person's shoes. During lockdown we had store employees working in our contact centre, and they certainly appreciated the challenge of moving from a specialist role instore to one where they didn't know what would be happening next!"

Aimee Bushell, Smeg UK - "Of course there's always them and us scenarios, and everyone else's job is always much easier. But when you take steps to understand each other's roles - and how different parts of the business work together - we always end up being nicer to each other."

Lindsay Mitchell, Harrods - "Having recently joined Harrods and inherited a legacy customer service environment, I'm looking to optimise performance while simultaneously evolving operations as the contact centre role becomes more that of a digital co-ordinator. As with any transition, it's essential to bring the team along with you."

Jan Suessmeir, Nespresso - "It's vital to share customer feedback, particularly information from our retail sites and B2B discussions. The more we share the better we can understand what this could mean for our customers and their journeys."

Paul Cox, Kerv - "One of the best ways to achieve better integration is to make sure that you have a single knowledge base that

is shared between your instore and contact centre teams. This can not only ensure that you have the latest information available across the board, but also that your answers have the right tone of voice and are always consistent. The good news is that this is something that doesn't take long to deploy and that you can switch on quickly."

Deborah Dearden, IKEA - "At IKEA we're got 22 'big blue boxes' and two contact centres that we call 'remote customer meeting points'. Regardless of where we're located we're all doing the same job. It's following our core values of co-creation, togetherness and shared goals that helps ensure we're on track when it comes to achieving better integration."

Nick Coleman, Dunelm - "With over 180 Dunelm stores around the country there's clearly a huge volume of conversations going on with people that can give us real insight into customer behaviours. But how do we capture that? How do we close the loop between our stores and the contact centre? More importantly, what can we action on the back of this insight? That's a huge challenge, but what an opportunity!"

Annalise Eldred, Looker - "Define your standards clearly and let them be your guiding light - whether that's 'warm and friendly', 'smart and professional' or whatever best reflects your business - and then live it and watch it weave itself through your customer journey."

Stacey Mairs, Bensons for Beds - "Whether you're instore or in the contact centre you need to leverage the voice of the customer and use it to break down barriers and be more collaborative."

Samantha Richards, Nestle Purina - "We encourage everyone across the business to listen to customers. We've had people who had been with us for 20 years who never had the opportunity. However, it's not just listening - we've also got to act on what we've heard and take it back out to the supply chain."

In memory of Graeme Matheson

About the CCMA

For 30 years, the CCMA (Call Centre Management Association) has been the longest established contact centre industry body who are dedicated to supporting contact centre leaders across the UK.

Founded on the principles of sharing best practice and networking to improve skills and knowledge, the CCMA is a thriving community that represents leaders from a huge cross-section of the industry.

Membership of the largest contact centre community offers unique opportunities, such as free annual benchmarking of 25+ KPIs, access to become an Accredited Contact Centre with the Contact Centre Standards Framework, free entry into the UK National Contact Centre Awards, free tickets to the UK National Contact Centre Conference, invites to Executive Networking Dinners and Leadership Forums, and other exclusive events for members-only. Members also benefit from discounted training through the UK National Contact Centre Academy, the industry's training partner.

To support the industry further, the CCMA conducts regular original research for download, including the annual Voice of the Contact Centre Consumer research, the Evolution of the Contact Centre tracking the industry's progress and Good Practice Guides on a variety of topics.

www.ccma.org.uk



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