

Being the Voice of the Customer's Strategic Hub

Summer 2025



Supported by



CCMA Leadership Forum Series

The Leadership Series is the documented output from the CCMA's (Contact Centre Management Association) series of Leadership Forum meetings. These take place at the House of Lords and provide an exclusive opportunity for senior contact centre leaders across key sectors to explore the factors that are driving change in their industry. The forum also provides a valuable platform to discuss continuing innovation and how to unlock further value for the benefit of the customer, colleagues, and the business. In this Leadership Forum the discussion focused on some of the key strategies that retail and travel sector leaders are using to move up the value chain. It also features the importance of having reliable data you can trust, and outlines steps towards creating a customer-centric culture.

Leadership Forum attendees:

Tessa Bishop, Sales Manager, Ocean Holidays

Deborah Dearden, Remote Experience Design Manager, IKEA

Cheryl Fuller, Customer Care Experience Manager, Panasonic Consumer Europe

Jo Garland, Customer Engagement Director, LEGO Group

Ian Harrison, Head of Customer Engagement, LeShuttle

Harry Hastings, Co-CEO, Ocean Holidays

Nick Mills, Head of Strategy, Planning & Controls, Customer Care, The Very Group

Caitlin Neary, Global Contact Centre Director, Dorchester Collection

Mick O'Brien, Head of Business Integrity & Compliance, First Customer Contact Centre

Joe Quinlivan, Head of Customer Care, Gousto

Lucy Smalley, Head of Customer Support Centre, Boots

Lucy Stewart, Customer Director, Vivobarefoot

Tom Watsham, Head of Customer Service, Vivobarefoot

Lou Zonato, CX Director, Loveholidays

Nick Broderick, Enterprise Account Director, Edgetier

Bart Lehane, CCO & Founder, Edgetier





Moving Contact Centres up the Value Chain

The CCMA's CEO Leigh Hopwood began the Leadership Forum by identifying some of the key challenges – such as the pressure to adapt quickly to fast-changing consumer demands, as well as increasing financial strain – that are impacting the retail and travel sectors. Leigh suggested that: “This places pressure on the contact centre to deliver on its pivotal role to champion the voice of the customer. Critically, the contact centre also has a key role in capturing and providing the insights needed to enable data-driven business decisions.”

Leigh went on to suggest that “getting this right is essential if we are to move up the value chain, effectively re-balancing emphasis from the supply chain to the contact centre. However, it's also vital that our industry leaders continually prove the value that their operations bring to the business.”

Who Owns Customer Experience?

Leigh asked guests about customer experience (CX) ownership within their organisations. Cheryl Fuller highlighted Panasonic's really strong brand ethos. “We've been around for over 100 years and, when it comes to CX we all own it – across every single thing we do,” she said. Jo Garland from LEGO agreed, describing how everyone took CX ownership in LEGO, from the product development teams through to distribution and to those designing the packaging.

Vivobarefoot's Tom Watsham said: “CX sits within our

customer service team, and it's our job to make sure we place the customer at the heart of everything we do.” However, sometimes it's more complex. Nick Mills stated that at Very Group, everyone was expected to ‘own’ CX, adding that, “we have to act as one business, which involves working closely with our outsource partners”.

At Ocean Holidays, Harry Hastings said, “our DNA is as a travel agency where everyone owns the customer. But this evolves as business changes – whether it's on-site or on the high street, that's all fine, but when it gets to ‘B2B2C’ transactions, then things become less clear.” His colleague, Tessa Bishop, added: “we look after the B2C part of the business, but every department owns the outcome – it's our job to join up the dots from the beginning of the process that can be up to three years before a cruise embarks.”

For Caitlin Neary from The Dorchester Collection, “there has to be a golden thread that runs through everything – in our case it's guests researching their stay, booking, pre-arrival, arrival and departure. And we've got to maintain that despite a third of our business coming via agents, a third direct from guests, and a third from their PAs or Executive Assistants.” Mick O'Brien from First Group works with a range of train operators, in an industry that faces constant change. “Our clients would say they own the customer, but they often have very different views when it comes to CX.”

The Complexities of CX Ownership

Ian Harrison heads up customer engagement at Eurotunnel LeShuttle and was keen to understand just how co-ordinated people were in terms of customer ownership. “At LeShuttle

we have an operation that embraces commercial bookings, check-in, car parking, terminal retail activities, border control with Kent Police and the UK Border Force, LeShuttle itself, the French Police, lane allocation, and post-journey contact. It's inevitably complex, so it's hard to maintain that golden customer thread when it's woven across 15 separate entities."

IKEA's Deborah Dearden said that it was important to take a long-term approach to CX. "We like to think we all own the CX, but in reality we're still on a journey. We're a major organisation and it can sometimes still be very segmented. However, we're working to bring all this together, so lots of end-to-end mapping activity going on."

Lucy Smalley talked about how customers were demanding more and more. "Even though 70% of Boots revenue is from stores, most of our contact centre volume is related to the website. We're constantly working with other departments across the business to make things better for the customer."

Lou Zonato at Loveholidays, described how the private equity -backed business was placing an increased focus on CX – particularly following the success of initiatives in its German operation. "We've obviously focused hard on margins and bookings to keep our investor happy, however the customer needs to be at the table too."

Joe Quinlivan, Head of Customer Care at Gousto outlined how, "each team at Gousto represents an important part of our customer journey. Customer care takes ownership and runs across all these elements. A key focus for us is making sure that the data we surface is shared across the business to fix some of the issues we're uncovering."

What are Customers Telling You?

Leigh asked participants whether – with customer ownership now seemingly sitting across the business – it's feasible to deliver additional value from within the contact centre. She suggested that, "we have all the data in the contact centre, so it's important that we weaponise it and use our insights to help optimise experiences across the customer journey. What are you learning from your own customer data?"

"We're finding that speed-to-response has become even more important, and we're seeing extraordinary levels of customer frustration," explained Harry Hastings. "The good news is that we're B2C at heart, so we aim to always answer the phone quickly and the results from a rapid response are impressive – it turns out consumers will pay a premium if they get to speak to you quickly. This also applies on the sales/lead generation side – we filter enquiries before they reach the contact centre, so we can get to these customers even faster."

Deborah echoed the importance of speed-to-answer, with customer feedback clearly showing how delays were impacting the brand. "We invested significantly in headcount to resolve this issue, and it's already having a positive effect at IKEA with our Happy Customer Score already up 10%. It was a strong reminder that we need to be there for our customers, and available when they want to talk to us."

Ian added that it's important to act on the data you receive. "We found that NPS in our first class lounge was drifting in



the afternoons, so we immediately turned to the verbatims to find out what customers were saying. It turns out some customers still wanted breakfast at 2pm, so we extended our pastries from noon to 4pm. Immediately we saw our NPS come back up again. We see NPS as a great way to identify dissatisfaction, but you have to make changes. I also think we should never go on gut feeling. Each Monday morning I read through a couple of hundred verbatims that collectively show what's going on."

Lou added that Loveholidays does its NPS at the end of a holiday, not during it. "We find that otherwise, it's easy for scores to get polluted – effort scores get us a bit closer, but we're working on a more passive customer effort score that takes lots of additional measures into account."

Where Are You on the Data Maturity Curve?

Leigh suggested that today's contact centres, with access to far more data and the ability to act on it, are in a much stronger position than ever before to help drive change outside of the contact centre. "We're seeing a growing gap between teams that might have loads of data but are unsure how to use it, and those who are already leveraging AI to see exactly what's going on." Leigh then asked attendees to talk about their progress on this data 'maturity curve'.

"At The Very Group we focus on why people are calling us," explained Nick. "We've built a Power BI dashboard that

uses speech analytics to break calls down by the second and attach a value to them. That way we can determine, for example, exactly how much it costs us to service a promo code call. Ultimately it would be amazing to be able to cross charge other departments for the calls they generate."

Bart Lehane from EdgeTier added: "there's a lot of sense in translating contact centre data into something that the rest of the business cares about, like money and time. For example it would be useful for a retailer to know that they maybe had 500 products in their catalogue that were costing them money just to serve."

Lucy outlined how other departments within Boots are now much more interested in how the contact centre can help them. "By far the largest volume of our calls are related to Boots.com. By quantifying these interactions and identifying why customers are calling we've been able to highlight root cause issues."

At IKEA, Deborah found that, "the more insight we provided to people in other areas of the business, the more they wanted. Our data is growing arms and legs!" Harry also felt it was important to act on data within the contact centre with team leaders on board and working to make sure insights were properly acted on.

Jo said that sometimes data could be used too reactively. "Understand exactly what's happening in the customer journey before any changes are made, so that you are always aware of the inevitable knock-on effects". Ian added: "We've moved on from the times when marketing did promotions



and didn't tell the contact centre. The reality is that we do have valuable insights into promotions that worked and those that didn't!"

"I love Monday verbatims and always spend a few hours each week going through them, just like Ian," added Cheryl. "Positive NPS is always great, but you have to be looking out for the neutrals, possibly where you're just about to fail but are hanging on by a thread. These are definitely worth calling."

At Panasonic we put NPS ahead of any kind of operational stat. Our score was 30 when I joined, and it's now 63 – but we've done all the easy actions! Now we're concentrating on the hard stuff. We cross charge every business function for what they do, we act on our verbatims, and we keep beating the drum."

She added: "So long as you really know your data you can act on your hunches and your data will back you up. It took four years to let us sell direct, but now we're heavily focused on direct-to-consumer in the UK. Once you've got the data, it just takes having the right conversations with the right people."

Is it Still Difficult to Get Your Voice Heard?

Despite having all the data and insight from verbatims, do contact centres still find it difficult to get the voice of the customer heard. "At Gousto we're very fortunate to have an AI sentiment tool behind us, but there can still be an element of C-suite detachment," said Joe.

"Rather than trusting the data, there's still an inclination to just get on the phone to customers. The reality is that the contact centre almost certainly knows more about the retention impact of a bad customer experience, and we understand exactly what this means in terms of impact on lifetime customer value."

Leigh then asked whether attendees trusted verbatims. According to Ian: "there's nothing like actually being there and seeing how customers react to situations. I'll sit and watch how customers respond when there's a train delay or cancellation. They just want to know how long they're going to have to wait – anything else is unnecessary. Seeing things first-hand is the key."

Cheryl added that "verbatim always embellish – we have them on chat and voice, but in many cases it's still time to respond on emails that can drive customer dissatisfaction."

The discussion then focused on how to collect data. Tessa at Ocean Holidays said they tried to collect NPS data from as many points as possible, while Ian said LeShuttle waited until post-travel. Lucy from Vivobarefoot raised the interesting question of NPS best practice: "Which was better, a higher NPS score or less calls coming into the contact centre?" Bart Lehane suggested a lot of this depended on whether you were measuring for policing or understanding. He felt that it was also important for contact centre teams to understand the impact that NPS has on the business – for example, what does each two point increase in NPS mean in terms of revenue?"

Nick added that The Very Group had two correlated NPS scores – one that was focused on capturing a general feeling towards the brand weighted according to the tenure of the customer, and one that was a touchpoint NPS so that everyone in the business could be bonused according to their relationship with NPS. Lou echoed this, suggesting that NPS could be used as more of a long-term customer loyalty measure.



Advice from the CCMA Leadership Forum

In concluding the Retail & Travel CCMA Leadership Forum, Leigh asked guests to share advice around how you can best use your data and help ensure greater collaboration across the business. Here's their advice:

Joe Quinlivan, Gousto – "It's important that contact centre leaders really focus on educating the rest of the organisation by quantifying the voice of the customer and what it means for the business."

Jo Garland, LEGO – "Everyone has an impact on customers, so it's important to back initiatives with strong stakeholder management. Also sit people down with advisors, they'll learn so much."

Cheryl Fuller, Panasonic – "While it's important to take people on the journey with you, they also need to do it at their own pace if they're to become really passionate about the voice of the customer."

Tom Watsham, Vivobarefoot – "You've got to effectively provide a translation service for the rest of the business. Voice of the Customer and CSAT doesn't really mean anything in their departmental speak."

Lou Zonato, Loveholidays – "Understand what's really driving your colleagues. What are they targeted against? Not everyone is NPS or CSAT-driven. How can you help them achieve their target through their own lens?"

Bart Lehane, EdgeTier – "There's huge power in analysing verbatims – now imagine how you can use AI to share findings proactively across the business, focusing in on the findings that are relevant to each department."

Harry Hastings, Ocean Holidays – "Don't let the speed of change in technology disassociate you from being empathetic and seeing life through the lens of a customer. However, our Voice of the Customer tools are becoming faster and better, and that's great because it leaves us more time to spend with customers."

Caitlin Neary, Dorchester Collection – "Service improvements often start off with Voice of the Customer feedback from our team. It used to take 45 minutes to create a pro forma invoice, we worked hard to integrate this into our CRM, and it's now done at the click of a button. It now works so well that people don't remember how it was before."

Mick O'Brien, First Customer – "Trust is vital. Believe in your people, believe what they say, report what you think and trust your judgement. Spend time with your people and give them support."

Ian Harrison, LeShuttle – "It's important to build credibility when reaching out to the business, without that it doesn't really matter whether you're dealing in data or verbatims. We've found that engaging in the awards process has helped our customer relations team become much more respected in the business – and also given them much more confidence."

Nick Broderick, EdgeTier – "There's huge pressures on CX leaders to be a source of knowledge when it comes to customers, and to be able to do this in real-time. It can be taxing to get to the nub of issues, it's our responsibility to get colleagues equipped to use all this data strategically."

Lucy Stewart, Vivobarefoot – "If you've invested correctly in AI systems and people at the start, then you will be ideally placed to support the business with added value and great storytelling information. It certainly turns the contact centre into a value-add operation, and we've been able to do so much more over the last 6-9 months with AI."

Nick Mills, The Very Group – "You need to have absolute confidence in your data – whether it's through AI or manually tracking through calls – particularly if you're getting involved in cross-charging."

Tessa Bishop, Ocean Holidays – "We've certainly been able to accelerate activities with AI, both through listening to people and enhancing our coaching materials. Strengthening our Voice of the Customer activities can unlock real value for the business."

Deborah Dearden, IKEA – "When talking about customer insights I always try and highlight individual customer stories, it makes much more of an emotional connection for stakeholders. We've also got involved and won industry awards – that's certainly helped to put our contact centre on the map within the wider organisation."

Lucy Smalley, Boots – "We work closely with stakeholders across the business, especially the marketing team. We've been able to help them increase the number of Advantage loyalty card customers, including many boots.com customers that didn't have the card. Bringing this together has helped unlock around £10 million assumed additional revenue, so – all of a sudden – we've effectively paid for our customer contact costs!"

About the CCMA

For more than 30 years, the CCMA has been absolutely dedicated to supporting contact centre professionals. We're constantly pushing ourselves to do more for our thriving community, which happens to be the largest community of contact centre professionals in the UK. The CCMA was founded with the goal of sharing best practice and networking to improve skills and knowledge in order to progress contact centre operations – and we live by that to this day.

We give those that work in contact centres the chance to discuss ideas and share experiences through member-only Special Interest Groups and online and in-person events.

Members are invited to become Accredited through the Contact Centre Standards Framework and get independent guidance on where to focus for improvements. There is also the opportunity to benchmark the operation against 25+ KPIs.

The CCMA Academy gives everyone a structured learning opportunity to support both personal and professional development for the benefit of their operation.

And of course, we celebrate the progress our industry is making through the UK National Contact Centres Awards. Those that win go on to share their stories through channels such as the UK National Contact Centre Conference, Best Practice Visits and CareerTalk. They are invited to input into the Special Interest Groups and other events.

www.ccma.org.uk

About EdgeTier

At EdgeTier, we help customer support teams uncover the true value of every customer conversation. Using a suite of proprietary models and the latest Generative AI, EdgeTier analyses each customer interaction in real-time, surfacing actionable insights that detect emerging issues, reveal the root causes of customer problems, and identify key trends. This visibility allows support teams to resolve issues faster, improve agent performance, and make data-driven decisions that drive business impact.

Our mission is to turn customer support into an insights engine, empowering teams to share reliable insights with the rest of the business and drive continuous improvement. Leading brands like Abercrombie & Fitch, TUI Global, Belmond and Simplyhealth trust EdgeTier to understand customers' needs, improve CSAT, create efficiencies, and keep customers coming back.

Recognised as one of Deloitte's Technology Fast 50 and among Sifted Europe's Fastest-Growing Startups, EdgeTier is reshaping customer support analytics, supporting customer service teams to become the true voice of the customer.

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