

BECOMING A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANIZATION

More and more businesses are looking to establish an advanced customer-first or customer-centric approach within their contact centers. Customer-centric companies are far more profitable than companies not focused on the customer. To achieve consistently superior customer experience, companies must invest effort across all touchpoints.

To achieve the most significant customer-centric experience, it is essential to understand the customer in terms of their interests, behavior and needs and do the utmost to communicate their needs, wants and requirements along with the products and or services being used to the your contact center. It is also essential to excel in customer-care and after-sales service so the contact center must provide all the tools and components in place to be customer-centric. The contact center must also structure the operations around the customer's perspective so the organization will be more focused on all the customer's needs and exceed expectations.

A customer-first strategy can make a real difference in terms of both sales and profits but is unable to be attained without full executive support and a genuine commitment from everyone involved to think "customer first." The contact centers are not able to achieve desired results unless there is an executive team assembled who can stay involved from the planning stages to execution and ongoing operations. A customer-first culture makes all the difference in how customers perceive a company, in most cases, it is the contact center that influences the first perception.

It is vital to have superior customer interaction and to create a regular dialogue with customers. Sending out annual surveys to see if a client is satisfied does not help in understanding the contact center's results or performance, so it is best to incorporate regularly used talk at crucial points in the relationship with the client, for example, when they have made a purchase, called for assistance or if calling to cancel an order/service. With proper tools implemented, it is easy to understand better the customer and the contact center service agents will be better able to act in their best interests. This is a core part of being a business that is perceived to listen to its customers.

A client-centric contact center must understand employee views, listen to the voice of the customer and share both the positive and negative feedback. Acting on negative feedback will strengthen customer engagement and sharing and working on positive feedback will enhance employee engagement. The result is achieving overall better retention rates for both customers and staff.

When a driving team made up of the company's executives and contact center executives is created to share in the responsibilities and construct a common goal, the operation will be much more successful. Change is constant and must be demonstrated. Employees should be prepared and empowered to act where and when necessary in order to strengthen the company culture. The driving team should engage employees when changes must be made and demonstrate why, and this is driven based on customers and employees measured Key Performance Indicators. (KPI) The KPIs are what tell when or what can be done better and what actions to take to improve the overall processes.

Staffing for better KPIs

Customer-centric contact centers can make a significant impact in revenue opportunities and operational costs with very few staffing changes if the driving team stays focused on maximizing top-line

“KPI” results and modify training and hiring practices to improve on the lower-line results. Hiring practices, for example, may need to shift as a new service or product is introduced and might create a need to start looking for people who have perhaps better or different skill sets instead of only customer service experience. Additional or supplemental training may also be required to help staff achieve the expectations and goals of the driving team.

The workforce is critical to the contact centers success; therefore, the “Driving Team” must clearly understand the demands of the customers to accurately forecast the required workforce needed when starting up the contact center. Understaffing increases the potential of losing customers, and over-staffing increases costs. By correctly predicting the number of contact center agents needed at any time optimizes both the workforce and costs. There will always be the challenge to identify ebbs and flows of inbound call volume to accurately assign agents as needed to assure the best customer experience, as well as variables that are beyond anyone’s control such as catastrophic events or a mix of random calls, can make forecasting more difficult; therefore contingencies should be put in place to address these unique events.

There are AI (Artificial Intelligence) options that can more accurately forecast staffing demands and can reduce the amount of time, management often spends manually by more than half. One of the keys to improve service levels is to minimize agent idle time. Simply put, when agent schedules are most accurately aligned with call demand, service levels improve, and software is much better suited to accomplish this task simply because the amount of data needed to achieve this task can be accessed quicker and schedules can be produced in minutes instead of hours or days.

Agent turnover is usually a common challenge in contact centers; however, by easily matching workload to workforce needed, involving the workforce in the process will improve the work experience and make it more predictable. The agents do better when they are involved in this process because it makes the agents feel empowered in creating their work/life balance, which they often accomplish by swapping shifts and work preferences. The software can make this task easy to execute and will significantly improve agent satisfaction and productivity.

The other advantage in using staffing AI is management is freed up to spend more time on coaching and improving KPIs resulting in a more customer-centric focused team.

One of the main drivers to employee attrition is inadequate training. Without a good executive driving team committed to developing and delivering in-depth training programs, both the customer and staff will suffer. The team may become disenchanted and look for change. Providing the most exceptional customer-centric experience and employee experience requires in-depth training sessions through multiple channels using a multitude of tools such as virtual learning, scripting tools, role-playing, clearly outlining and communicating company goals and expectations and providing the agents with enough information to give them the confidence to tackle any initiative. Training must be a top priority before any team member receives the first call.

Once an operation is up and running, the top agents should attend all training sessions to give practical input on how to improve. For the new hires, this will provide them with better insight into what they need to accomplish in their position along with the expected KPIs. Keeping staff informed and updated with new methods and process training is something that must be done continually. Even experienced

agents should receive several training sessions and refreshers per year to make sure their performance remains high and continue in their development.

With in-depth training, a high degree of collaboration can be accomplished, and this allows agents to switch tasks more efficiently, encourages communications, and makes for more engaged team-building exercises. In-depth training fosters agent enthusiasm keeps them interested in their job, and they remain challenged. Discussion and sharing of knowledge between the staff will make a significant impact on customer service and all KPIs. The more knowledge that can be provided to the team the more they will enjoy their work environment and the more effective they will be in their position. Many companies are now using software-driven personality testing to help place the proper people in the appropriate seat when scaling. This technology continues to improve year after year. Employees are more satisfied when they are sitting in the appropriate seat.

Customer service technology here to stay

These days many companies are using different types of software; customer service departments are most effective when they have been given not only the proper training but also the appropriate technology. Today there are so many companies who are using outdated technology that unfortunately end up hurting results. To get the maximum benefit of a contact center, it is essential to look at what all is needed and how the technology will be integrated. The contact center today needs to be equipped with technology that is intuitive and accurate. Many modern CRMs are easily integrated with these technologies, and the key is to make sure the technologies are not competing at the same time to deliver customer engagement capabilities. The driving team must bring in those best qualified for contact center technology integration, so the investment and planning align appropriately with the operational and business goals.

Today's customer-centric contact centers are well equipped around cloud computing. Cloud-based systems provide the contact center and the company with better customer orientation and dissemination of product information in a more service-based architecture. The advantage of cloud-based technology is that the upfront investment is greatly minimized and is much more flexible. Cloud-based technology also improves the overall communication experience between all channels.

Most customers use more than one channel to communicate, such as web, mail, chat, phone, e-mail, text. Today customer-centric contact centers need to provide not only multiple channels for clients to communicate, but whatever channels make the customer interaction more convenient. Webchat and social media seem to be trending as the more convenient interaction today, but email volumes will continue to increase as well, and new channels will continue to surface. It is essential to be able to integrate and manage these channels quickly.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is challenging human intelligence and infrastructure. Businesses are getting deeper into predictive analytics using artificial intelligence applications to help streamline call center experiences for customers and agents. AI has also changed the Mobil customer experience through things like Chatbots. Customer Care centers will see a significant increase in Mobil customer care, and it is vital to the customer-centric contact center to adopt these technologies quickly.

The emerging technologies most likely to dominate contact centers in the near future will be utilizing mostly "Behavioral" routing software that matches call-center agents with customers by personality and

behavioral characteristics, “Artificial-intelligence” agents, powered by advanced machine-learning methods, that customers can query—without human intervention, but supported or backed up with human support. This is considered a hybrid today but may become somewhat mainstream soon.

Visualization technologies will also continue to increase over the years but maybe at a slower pace. Visualization technologies create a more enhanced interaction between live agents and customers. Contact centers continue to invest in these technologies such as VR (Virtual Reality) and VC (Video Conferencing) to improve the efficiencies, so they give a better employee to customer experience. We accomplished the experience through both visual and data integrations.

KPI and Data management

Because contact centers are the frontline of any company and, in many cases, the customer first experience with the company, the bar has been drastically raised as it pertains to monitoring and measuring “everything” to determine the staff’s effectiveness and ability to provide the best customer-centric service and support to callers. Tracking and measuring all “metrics” and “key performance indicators” is required to evaluate the total overall contact center experience for the customer. Measurement involves not only KPIs related to the employee but all functionalities of the center.

Contact centers continuously work to improve their KPIs and metrics, from AHT “average hold time,” CHT “call handle time,” FCR “first call resolutions” to the overall customer experience. This is an enormous challenge for the managers, team leads, and agents but a must to make continuous improvements. It is important to give the customer an exceptional experience to not only support the business but so the contact center remains relevant. Managing KPIs properly can set the contact center apart from all others. KPIs indicate how well the overall operation is performing, the impact on the customer’s experience and economics of the business. KPIs are continuously measured, and results are acted upon promptly as the KPIs allow for making more informed decisions quickly that will help improve the center’s performance.

Without proper performance indicators, a contact center will never be able to create a customer-centric service for better overall customer experience. Key performance indicators (KPIs) consist of far more than just straight productivity and economic metrics. It is no longer feasible to be an efficient, high-performing, critical business entity without proper performance indicators. Emphasizing and balancing the KPIs will ensure to keep customer satisfaction and loyalty high while continuously improving the contact centers operations.

The contact center is vital to the overall health of the company as it is closely linked with sales, marketing, manufacturing, and nearly every other department within an organization, as well as being a key customer touchpoint. What happens or doesn’t happen in a contact center can help a company achieve great success and just as easily ruin its reputation?

Without the right information, a contact center will fail. When making improvements, reliable information is a must. Reliable information is where “big data” and predictive analytics come into play. The most common complaints heard about call centers are the hold times, slow resolutions, having to explain an issue multiple times, being transferred to several people, and lack of a satisfactory resolution.

By analyzing all the available contact center customer data, flaws in the process can quickly be identified, and improvements can be made, adding to the advantages of the contact center. As a result,

the customers will be able to get the solutions they need quickly and easily, and the experience will reflect well on the company. There's nothing more valuable to a company than exceeding a customer's expectations, especially in an area where the customer is generally always expecting a negative experience. If they receive a prompt, effective, and pleasant interaction, they most likely will not consider any other company offering similar services or products in the future.

The study of KPIs and metrics and monitoring are required for every contact center. Data collected and evaluated can not only improve the customer experience, but it can also reduce costs and lower employee turnover.

Cost center or profit center?

By delivering an unmatched customer, centric contact center experience quickly changes the overall results of a company, and the contact center can quickly move from being perceived only as a cost center, towards a profit center that should be given more support.

On average, it costs a company six or seven times more to gain a new customer than it does to keep one that exists, and it is a fact, repeat customers tend to spend more, thus increasing revenues organically. A contact center team that's able to solve any issue at hand and exceed expectations efficiently is one of the best ways to guarantee customers are coming back for more. The better the support team, systems, and tools in place, the better the customer-centric experience means the more revenue the contact center can drive. The experience received quickly proves the contact center is a valuable component rather than an expense.

Global Impact Sourcing has and uses all the tools described in this document, is ready to work with its prospects and customers to design the most cost effective and customer centric outsourced contact center solution.

If you would like to receive a free initial consultation with your company or discuss an outsourcing engagement, you may reach Dean Toro at dean.toro@globalimpactsourcing.com