Empowering contact centre agents

Organisations need to empower contact centre agents and inject structure, meaning and leadership into their engagement with customers.

Leon Stafford

Speaking during a webinar with Chris Wood, MD of Engage Customer, Leon Stafford, Territory Manager of Interactive Intelligence, said that the contact centre is no longer about calls, but about relationships.

"The so-called 'customer 3.0' has teeth. Customers now have the power to go online and learn, rate and review on multiple channels," he said. While businesses should be cognisant of this, it did not mean they should attempt to be present on every channel customers are using, just for the sake of it. "Too much multichannel presence can create noise, dilute your messaging and commoditise services," he added. "To retain customer value and your margin, you need to differentiate yourself. If we're not making customers lives easier and better, then what's the point?"

Stafford noted that the contact centre agent is at the heart of customer-facing activities, but is not always equipped to deliver a good customer experience. "We generally find agents want to do a good job, but they have to 'paddle hard under the surface' just to do a slightly better than average job. Many 'best of breed' technologies deployed in contact centres in recent years have just been cobbled together, resulting in agents being confronted by more screens." He explained that agents could find themselves spending more time connecting the dots between multiple screens than they did actually adding value to the interaction.

Delivering good service

With the right tools in place, the contact centre agents no longer need make many manual adjustments and cover cracks in the process to present something to the customer that appears seamless, he said. "They can focus more on delivering good service, really listening to what the customer says and going the extra mile."

"Imagine what you could achieve with technology that really empowers. Imagine, instead of nibbling at margins, you address the core challenge of making agents more effective and their jobs more enjoyable. The good news is that this actually achievable," he said.

Stafford highlighted Interactive Intelligence tools allowing companies to capture interaction data from all channels and make it easily available to agents. With flexible tools that are integrated and web optimised, agents and supervisors are 'unshackled' and empowered to deliver a better customer experience, he noted.

However, many companies have been slow to move to web-optimised, advanced tool sets and cloud-based services. Stafford estimates that between 10% and 20% of contact centres are currently in the cloud at the moment, although new projects are tending to move direct to cloud. He said the proportion of Interactive Intelligence's new projects that are cloud based have jumped from 50% last year to 70% this year.

For legacy contact centres to embrace new models, a new mindset, leadership, and a 'blank page' is needed, he said. "If you design your organisation's perfect customer engagement model, you need to ask: What tools do you give your agents? If your messaging is around inbound phone contact, dismantle all existing tools, break them down and prioritise various ingredients to deliver something that matches the target operating model." If a business wants the ability to put customer contacts, history and records of engagements in one place, it becomes necessary to abstract the functionality and embed it where it is most appropriate for the business, he explained.

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