Transforming the Contact Center into a Customer Experience Hub

By Mark Bishof, CEO, Clarabridge

Businesses house an enormous wealth of customer insights in the contact center. This information is no longer only accessible through phone call transcripts. Social media and asynchronous messaging have introduced a wide variety of support channels customers can turn to in addition to the phone. This evolution has resulted in a stream of customer feedback that pours into the contact center across a variety of channels. In a highly competitive environment, companies are challenged to organize these insights in ways that make sense, and act on them effectively. With the voice of the customer at your fingertips, however, there is a massive opportunity to transform the contact center into a revitalized hub of customer insights that can add value throughout the entire organization.

The customer journey is a linear progression that ideally results in the customer making a purchase. Too often organizations are blind to common pain points along the way. What if you could hear the customer’s voice at each step of the journey to understand what they’re saying about the process of doing business with your company? What decisions would you make differently if you had this informed view?

Transforming the contact center into a clearing
Leverage the potential of the call center to create a responsive enterprise

The contact center is uniquely positioned to collect and distill the voice of the customer.

- Use technologies such as natural language processing to turn the painstaking process of manually sifting call center data into a ready understanding of both customers and agent performance.
- Transform data into visualizations more intuitively and identify trends in key metrics.
- Share insights across the enterprise to increase the effectiveness of the enterprise and the shared value of the data.
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house of customer feedback empowers businesses to make informed decisions that boost customer satisfaction, reduce churn, and increase loyalty. Implementing processes to operationalize these contact center insights will help your business make money, save money, manage change and reduce liability over time.

A Forward-Looking Approach

Technology has improved significantly over the last decade, yet the way most businesses utilize the treasure trove of insights that pass through the contact center has largely remained the same. Many organizations still analyze call center data manually, with small QA or QM teams sifting through call transcripts to identify trends in customer feedback. This is a labor-intensive and inefficient process that by definition prevents companies from achieving a full view of the insights customers provide.

Adjustments in approach will turn this painstaking process into a source of tremendous opportunity for the business.

New technology like machine learning and AI can automate this once manual process. Instead of relying on human documentation, natural language processing (NLP) techniques can be used to accurately transcribe and analyze 100 percent of calls to identify elements such as customer sentiment, emotion, effort, call duration and agent performance. The same processes can be applied to all communication channels that funnel through the contact center including email, social and messaging to develop a holistic understanding of the customers’ voice.

This in itself is transformative. Organizations can now apply advanced technology to sift through massive amounts of data and develop a crisp understanding of customer sentiment and common pain points across all areas of the business. In addition, it opens up the teams previously doing these manual tasks to focus on more value-added work.

Visualizing these customer insights in aggregate is also extremely powerful. Visualizations of call spines that show trend lines across agents, customer sentiment, call duration and other key metrics provide a roadmap to improving performance and reducing costs across the organization. Showing these types of visualizations to the COO is like showing fire to a caveman.

Not only do these approaches modernize an antiquated, less precise and inefficient process, they also create a wealth of new opportunities for your business to improve the bottom line. For example, health
insurance and financial services companies face a host of privacy and consumer protection laws, which can be costly if not followed. Operationalizing a process that unlocks insights from all customer calls and messages will ensure that each potential compliance violation is logged and employee training is improved. This risk is more acute for companies that now must comply with GDPR regulations. Upfront investments in these areas will ultimately save the organization from potential fines and other damage to the brand that would follow.

CPG companies can apply these strategies to gain customer insights that inform everything from product-market fit to potential product defects and overall customer satisfaction. This enables better decision-making that results in getting ahead of a coming product recall or developing new lines of business based on what people are asking for. A large customer of ours, for example, has saved $30 million per year across global brands by identifying what customers want from their products in areas like packaging, size, flavors, etc.

In addition, these efforts can directly impact sales and marketing effectiveness by identifying upsell and cross-sell opportunities within the contact center and throughout the customer journey.

Once you glean sophisticated insights from the contact center, scaling up requires giving business owners across the organization direct access to the customer voice. Today, customer information is often siloed within the team of employees managing customer care or marketing, instead of being distributed to relevant teams including product, supply chain, and operations. This fiefdom approach to customer feedback is antiquated; and in today’s digital age where you can easily distribute information, there is no excuse to keep feedback locked up.

Take the banking industry, for example. We recently conducted research that found over 79% of Americans have a positive experience with their banks’ mobile apps, but they are typically only using the app to track balances and pay bills. While the customer care team may have insight into this feedback anecdotally, it can be transformed into action once distributed to the product team in aggregate. Because the product team is responsible for creating the user experience and functionality of the mobile app, knowing exactly why customers are reluctant to use it is pertinent information. Armed with insights about customer preferences and habits, the team is empowered to make changes that drive user adoption and increase brand loyalty.

In addition to providing crucial information for updating current products and services, the contact center is an untapped resource for conducting market research. Companies today invest a wealth of time, money and resources into industry-wide surveys when determining their product pipelines. In reality you already have customer preferences, desires and pain points expressed directly in the contact center. You can save money by turning your attention there. For example, if a kitchen appliances company wants to bring a new pressure cooker to market, mining contact center data to better understand consumer attitudes towards this device, insights on competitors, and loyalty to the brand could all help inform how the product is made and marketed.

A World-Class Customer Experience

Before heading down this path at full speed, many organizations are challenged with gaining buy-in from the C-Suite, which can be especially difficult when including emerging technology in the budget. While the impact and applications of the contact center can be incredible, the technology is relatively new and often perceived as both expensive and risky. The key lies in identifying a strong executive sponsor and positioning customer experience as an investment — the more resources a company puts in, the higher the return. Since business leaders care about the bottom line, it’s imperative to demonstrate how a well-executed strategy directly impacts the bottom line.

This transformation will manifest itself in a number of ways. For example, forward-looking hotels have begun to offer a virtual butler guests can communicate with before and during their stay. It can make personalized suggestions based on your preferences, for example, offering ideas for family-friendly dinner reservations located near your afternoon outing. Kimpton Hotels have applied this by remembering their guests’ drink of choice. If you’re checking in at night after a harrowing flight with numerous delays, they’ll send the bourbon drinker a bottle of Maker’s Mark to your room with a handwritten note. This gesture, based on an intimate understanding of customer preferences, goes a long way.

Organizations that execute well will push these insights into areas of the business that will affect change. The result will be a world-class customer experience. CRM