WHITE PAPER

Managed Engagement: Transforming the Customer Experience
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Conclusion
Customer expectations have been growing rapidly over the past few years. According to the Harris Interactive Customer Impact report, 86% of consumers quit doing business with a company because of a bad customer experience, a 27-point increase (up from 59%) since just four years ago.

To stay competitive in this transformative landscape, companies must focus on building strong relationships by offering their customers easy-to-understand information when, where and how they want it. Noting customers’ preferences during each interaction builds trust and results in lasting, open relationships. A Forrester study on customer experience found a high correlation (0.71) between consumers’ CXi rating of a company and their willingness to buy from the company.¹

In this paper, we explore the concept of managed engagement to build a stronger relationship with customers. Complete satisfaction during every contact is the driving force of the customer journey. Rather than viewing the customer experience process as a contact center transaction, we recommend treating it as a managed engagement.

¹Source: Forrester, The Business Impact of Customer Experience (CXi)
PART 1

It’s a New World
Forrester Research recently coined the phrase “Age of the Customer,” suggesting that the customer now controls the access of information along with the customer experience.\(^2\)

Increasingly, digital devices are leveraged to access information, anywhere, anytime. This signifies that the power in the relationship between companies and their customers is shifting.

With customer expectations changing dramatically, it is important for companies to assess their contact center approach to ensure they are providing exceptional service to existing and prospective customers at all touch points.

To implement effective strategies and meet the demands of emerging challenges, businesses need to create an environment where customers feel comfortable. This is best accomplished through a managed engagement center approach for handling customer contacts and inquiries.

\(^2\)Source: solutions.forrester.com, The CIO’s and CMO’s blueprint for strategy in the age of the customer, Forrester Research, Inc.
PART 2

Redefining Customer Service Strategies
As the Age of the Customer advances, customers want:

› A voice
› Recognition
› Respect
› Individuality
› Simple explanations

In a recent Harris Poll for Lithium, 82% of U.S. corporate executives said that customers’ expectations of their company were somewhat (47%) or much (35%) higher than they were three years ago. And it’s not easy to keep up, as nearly six in 10 said it was somewhat (50%) or very (9%) difficult for their company to please customers.³

A managed engagement center provides a solution to these challenges, building customer relationships throughout the customer journey, from the first interaction through every interaction that follows.

Source: ³Harris Poll for Lithium Technologies, 2015
PART 3

What is a Managed Engagement Center?
Every day, there are an estimated 80 million interactions between customers and contact centers. The way these transactions are managed has a tremendous impact on customers’ perceptions.

As customers take more control, it is essential to revise traditional contact center methodologies by moving to a managed engagement center, with a balanced focus both on customers’ perceptions and on companies’ operational objectives.

The following points represent a framework to transform existing contact centers into managed engagement centers.
Empowered contact center agents are essential to implementing managed engagement centers. The prototype agent is highly trained in relationship and communications skills, fully capable of engaging customers while working through inquiries or problems as a team. As a result, conversations flow naturally, and a bond forms between agents and customers.

As agents are empowered, they become more confident when helping customers solve problems and answering questions. Communication skills are emphasized, and a results-oriented engagement (from the customer perspective) becomes clearly visible. Having the right information available, at the right time, for the right question, is essential to building a unified workforce. In managed engagement center operations, training, customer experience and information technology resources work together to equip and empower the agent.

An invested agent reassures customers that the company values their time and truly cares about their well-being. As a result, customers are more inclined to stay with the company longer, even with increasing competition.
Each transaction offers a window into the interests and perceptions of the customer. As information is captured, an increased understanding of customer preferences emerges.

Soft-skill communication training programs arm empowered agents with the ability to effectively communicate, leading to free-flowing conversations that result in improved trust and customer confidence. This focus on the conversation reassures customers that the company understands them and values their business.

Flexible communication strategies build customer rapport beginning with focused training on the following essential conversational skills:

› Probing inquiries
› Restatement of conversational elements
› Intentional listening
› Adjusting communication style to align with the customer
  – Provides comfortable, understandable information effective across multiple communication channels

Customers value conversations that are easy to understand and, therefore, they are more willing to provide additional information. When customers feel welcome and comfortable in the conversation, they gain confidence in the company and relationships are strengthened.
Information systems must offer a variety of customer data elements in real time to equip the contact center agent with the most up-to-date view of the customer experience. This includes reference information for all contacts across multiple communication channels along with previous contact results. With this information, agents effectively respond to their customers’ inquiries or concerns, once again increasing trust and confidence.

As data elements are collected across communication channels, care must be taken to deliver the variety of contacts within a single system interface that provides agents with the most current customer interaction information. An integrated customer experience system interface also assists in evaluating the consistency of the exchange of information across media channels. As a result, conversations are more meaningful. As agents interact with customers, they have a clear view of the number and variety of inquiries up to the point of the present contact, which enables empowered, confident agents to better connect and resolve the issue or question.

Systems that deliver real-time data allow agents to provide information to customers when, where and how they want it based on their personal preferences. This further strengthens the customer/company relationship throughout the journey.
Performance measurements or key performance indicators are consistently tracked, analyzed and evaluated in a managed engagement center. Traditional contact center measurements are still monitored to guide production efficiency, but a new set of customer-centric measurements are also implemented to forge lasting relationships with new and prospective customers.

This effort to define and measure the world through new criteria offers the greatest opportunity for developing lasting relationships with customers as they engage with companies.

As new data elements are defined and analyzed from the customer perspective, companies respond to customers’ emerging needs and expectations more quickly and accurately.

Each of these elements, when combined in practice, produces a dynamic organization that adapts to the changing nature of customer expectations within an increasingly competitive marketplace.
PART 4
Making Engagement a Habit
As contact centers become accustomed to the managed engagement center methodology, a cultural shift begins. Performance scorecards for agents and the overall team move from a purely quantitative approach, focusing primarily on processing efficiency, to also include qualitative measures.

**Customer Effort**
› How difficult is it for a customer to secure information from a company’s contact center?

**Customer Satisfaction**
› How meaningful were the solutions provided to the customer by the company’s contact center?

The voice of the customer also begins to emerge more clearly as the contact center seeks to manage each engagement with the objective of completely satisfying the customer. By carefully listening to customers during each engagement, contact centers can note and evaluate customer comments and provide them to company leadership as valuable insights.
Agent Experience
Recognition efforts also assist in this transformation. Team-based feedback sessions offer the opportunity for empowered agents to share success stories along with difficult conversations. These sessions help improve the customer experience across the engagement center.

Customer Input
Recognizing customers for their suggestions is also a powerful tool in building trust. The information obtained during conversations is collected, and innovative customer suggestions are noted and shared with company leadership. As much as possible, this activity involves unfiltered feedback to highlight significant insights that are visible only from the customer perspective.

This approach engages agents and offers significant opportunities for customer involvement in the process as their experiences are collected and shared.
This customer-centric approach provides a framework for companies to deliver exceptional value to customers who are becoming increasingly informed and involved. Managed engagement centers provide an effective link between empowered and equipped agents and customers who are looking for help.

Trust, improved customer loyalty and value are the results.
Conclusion
Solutions that focus on a managed engagement process stand to gain significant ground in the quest to build win-win relationships with customers.

Personal conversations – providing customer-centric information through empowered contact center agents – also support the goal of making products and services easy to use and understand.

To succeed in the current market, companies need to not only listen to the voice of the customer but also learn how to manage every engagement. Success is achieved by empowering contact center agents, creating a comfortable environment and valuing customer insights from the first interaction to the last.
As a senior operations executive, Cass has spent over 30 years successfully leading customer contact operations in support of a number of Fortune 100 companies. He has developed and implemented award-winning customer experience applications for client engagements through an intense focus on mining the voice of the customer and building professional communication skills in customer-facing associates.

Cass has an MBA and a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Saginaw Valley State University and is an active member of the Great Lakes chapter of SOCAP.