



BEGINNER'S GUIDE

TO CONTACT CENTER MANAGEMENT

Insights into contact center technology, challenges faced by call centers, and the role of omni-channel presence

– Excerpts from Ameyo Callversations Blog

Francis Cyriac and Silky Sinha
Ameyo: Customer Interaction Suite

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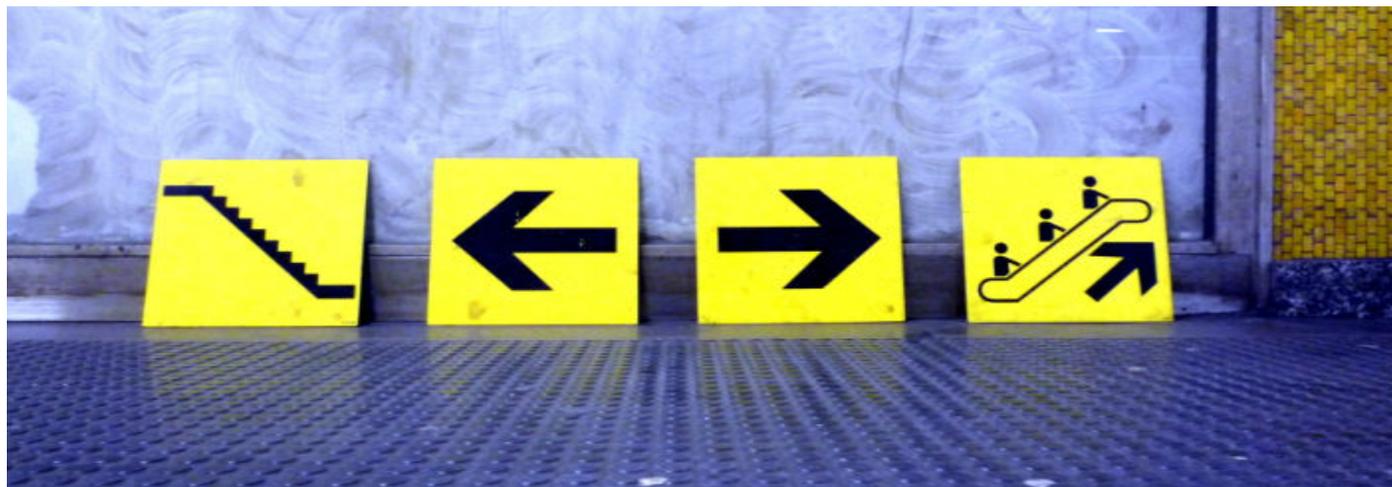


CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO CONTACT CENTER TECHNOLOGY

- ✓ How to Choose the Right Contact Center Software
- ✓ Re-architecting your Contact Center Software
- ✓ Customer Experience as a Business Strategy
- ✓ Tips on Improving Customer Experience
- ✓ Personalized Customer Engagement – Getting Started

How to Choose the Right Contact Center Software



Contact centers have been around for more than a decade and continue to show slow but steady growth. However, for most of the contact center setups, it is due to intermediaries, human errors or other dependencies that such business usually turns into a bad investment.

Broadly the three pillars of such businesses are:

- Business Development and Customer management
- Quality of Agents and operations
- Connectivity and Technology

Historically, these start-ups are mostly entrepreneur driven businesses and micro management of all the three pillars is done by a one man team. Such entrepreneurs instead must focus on Business Development and customer management rather than operations and fire-fighting of technology issues. The latter should ideally be handled by hiring good resources or finding good technology partners.

However cash-flow problems and stringent budgets in a small setup push entrepreneurs to curtail expenses on basic infrastructure and agent quality and thus the entrepreneur is always left to managing the operations internally rather than focusing on business development. Contact centers are primarily ITeS, and IT obviously plays one of the most important role among the three pillars. Therefore it should not be compromised to below hygiene levels

Technology options available:

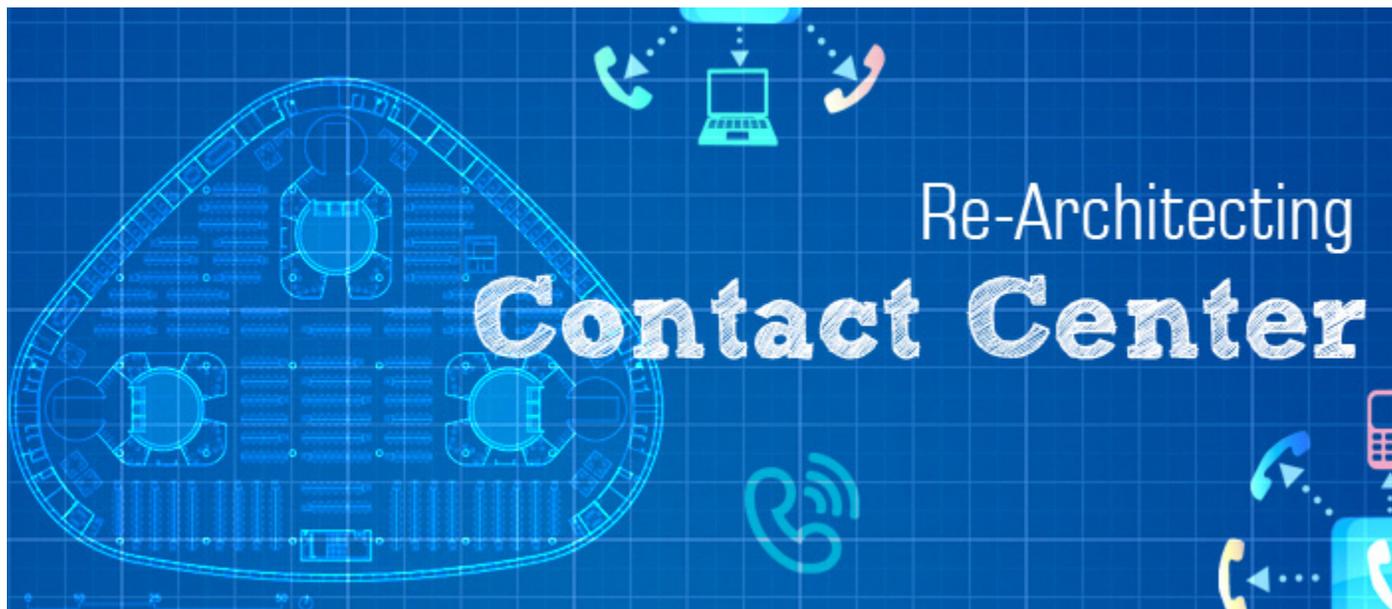
Globally Renowned Solutions: A What makes them an unpopular choice among the contact centers is the cost implications with each seat costing around \$2K+ dollars including other add on costs like software OS/DB/Server licenses or hardware implications. Recurring service and maintenance costs are additional pain areas.

Free or White Labeled Solutions: These are almost free solutions that can be downloaded off the internet and sold or white labeled by few companies at costs as low as \$500 for limitless licenses in a setup costing up to only \$200 per seat. They are not meant for serious business and are at most a short term fix. Sales or engineering oriented teams download an open-source solution and either sell it as a service or in most cases illegally white-label it in their name. The companies selling this freeware usually deploy onsite engineers who do very frequent site visits only to simply reboot the server and restart the application rather than fixing the bugs.

So the bottom line is that the right solution should be one which offers:

- 1)Robustness and Reliability
- 2)Intelligence - Predictive Dialer, ACD systems, AMD, Lead Management, Call Back Management, CTI, Supervision and Reporting, Voice Quality and VoIP Handling, Dynamic IVR.
- 3)Return on Investment

Re-Architecting your Contact Center



Did you know that two-thirds of your customers have hung up during service calls before their particular issues could be addressed? And a whopping 71% were extremely annoyed at not being able to reach out to a real person on the phone, while 56% were infuriated because they had to go through multiple phone loops to get the right information. Do these figures ring a bell? If you want to be in business, you need to evolve your process and re-architect your internal and external systems. The company that offers a positive customer experience will survive, while the rest will fade into oblivion.

Ways to Boost the Value of your Contact Center

Here are some steps that you can take to ensure that your contact center adds value for your customers:

Start with the Staff: Go by the long standing ideology of the contact center world – “happy employees equal happier customers.” Agents, on an average, attend 10,000 calls in a year from angry and upset customers, and the negativity is sure to affect them at some level unless the working environment is positive and cheerful. Begin by hiring the right set of people, who don't not fit in with the needed educational qualifications but also do exceptionally well in the soft skills area. Then focus on their retention by providing them the right environment, comfortable working area and incentives that actually work.

Incentivizing it Right: Money can't buy love. So, plan your incentive right. Do not tie up the agent's performance to the number of calls a day. Rather, choose a qualitative approach. Set a performance evaluation parameter, based on customer complaint resolution in the first call and the customer's feedback. Reward agents for meeting or exceeding performance metrics and let their focus be on enhancing the customer experience.

Catering to training needs: To provide cross-channel customer assistance, there is a need for cross-training on multichannel interactions. This training will allow managers to pull agents off from one area to assist in another, as and when needed. However, it is also important to cater to the training needs of supervisors. Supervisor training should focus on optimum utilization of agents, assessing their training requirements, and motivating and leading their team to success.

Tackle the technology: A survey conducted by Velociti Partners points out that the average customer care executive in a financial services contact center uses seven or eight applications every day to resolve issues. Moreover, the applications and databases connected to them are siloed, which means that even the simplest processes takes extra time and effort. As a result, call handling times, customer satisfaction rates and even costs, suffer. Consequently, the first step to tackling technology issues is breaking down silos and integrating data across departments.

However, you can ensure the following to enhance long-term customer and employee satisfaction:

- Automate and synchronize customer data across multiple systems by logging all customer interactions (regardless of the channel) and automatically adding them to customer records.
- Automate the delivery of cross-sell or up-sell offers to your customers. You can do so by allowing employees to access data stored in multiple applications, databases or servers from one application with a single user-interface, and providing a means that generates automatic alerts to agents when a high-value client is on the line.

Customer Experience as a Business Strategy



For enterprises, business does not end with creating products and being content at selling them. A great business strategy needs vision. An added bonus is excellent insight of customers and the markets which help a business succeed. Business requires more work than just randomly making sales pitches to customers. It is about finding the right customers and creating products and services for them. But where are these exclusive customers?

Business strategies and marketing techniques

Physical retail stores dress up their windows with wares that attract customers and allow retailers to interact directly with the customer and gain their feedback. So far, this has been an effective strategy but it is restricted to a physical area and depends heavily on foot traffic. E-commerce sites however, have no such restrictions and global shipping has brought markets in foreign countries closer than ever. So, retail businesses should learn from them.

The first and foremost objective of every business strategy in e-commerce is Customer Experience Management (CEM). Any enterprise that can manage to create differentiators in service delivery is able to decipher the code of Happy Customers. Today businesses which are aware of the best practices of CEM and are widely implementing automation systems to optimize their service delivery methodology will be considered smart.

Some of the best practices of CEM are as below:

Minimization of routine enquiries by proactive outreach: Everyday customer queries like order status, confirmations etc., can be minimized by an effective outreach system that proactively connects to the customers via multiple communications channels including phone, SMS and e-mail.

Not missing even a single customer call: Any e-commerce business just cannot afford to miss calls. The missed call could mean a lost business opportunity, or further annoying a dissatisfied customer which could be disastrous for any B2C business.

Giving special attention to repeat calls: It is very important that an e-commerce business is keeping a close watch on the kind of customer calls they receive. If there are repeat calls from a customer, connecting him/her to the right agent can make all the difference to the experience he/she takes back home.

Measuring experience across platforms: Businesses should be able to monitor and analyze the service delivery across the entire business applications infrastructure. Each technology component facilitating business processes plays a crucial role in customer experience delivery and needs to be measured effectively.

With an excellent customer experience management strategy enterprises can add the power of proactive customer service to their day-to-day business operations. A robust contact center solutions allow this value-add to enterprises. The experience going forward is a good one and spreads through word-of-mouth bringing you repeat and new business from the same customer base.

Tips on Improving Customer Experience



Experiences have become value propositions for every firm because every company struggles in delivering customers experience that hits the spot. And hitting the right spot has become a herculean task for many enterprises because of a myriad of customer touch points made available through the advent of technology advancements. Long gone are the days where customers judge the brand, product or the company from the price, performance or the quality of the product. We exist in an era where experience matters; experience is the quarterback of every company and will never cease being the Most Valuable Player. Like it or not, consciously or unconsciously, customers evaluate business relationships every time they touch the company.

You should be capable to manage each and every touch point to build and maintain customer relationships of customers that are empowered to be brand agnostic and effortless switchers. On the same note, constancy can also be a firms pitfall, because the customers are able to reach your company through various touch points that constantly evolves. Delivering consistent experience at all possible contact points has become a requirement rather than a perquisite.

Having an effective contact center in your organization is valuable in providing satisfying customer experiences, but there are companies that still live in the past. Impersonal communication, unskilled agents and long waits on hold can be frustrating for the customer that drives him to do his business elsewhere. Contact centers are the main point of customer interaction and are to be powered-up to provide unsurpassed customer experience. Contact centers, the front-line of most businesses, have made and lost revenues, not on price or performance, but to the quality of experience.

Here are a few customer service tips that could be implemented to improve your customer experience.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) : CRM software are now top priorities for additional spending on enterprise applications. CRM tools are focused on customer retention, satisfaction and attracting new customers. CRM software integrated with Computer Telephony Interchange would display the details of the customer that is on call, which lowers the average call handling time, which in turn helps the customer in getting the issue resolved in minimum time with little or no verification details, improving their experience. CRM technologies help companies to develop a more meaningful relationship with the customers rather than merely running marketing campaigns.

One view of the customer: One of the best ways to kill customer experience is through maintaining customer information silos . Each department should be able to view the customers information and his/her previous interaction history that has been lodged in any of the department in the company. Requesting the customer to repeat the issue is a risk that would most likely make the customer frustrated. In customers perspective every interaction that he makes with the company is one single experience. Companies should ensure that this experience is not broken down when the customers navigate across multiple channels.

Invest in your agents: Agents are most influential point of customer contact for your organization. They account for almost half of your contact center costs, therefore they are to be optimized to deliver experience that impacts the customer for future sales. Agents are to be trained, motivated and acknowledged for their efforts. They are not to be treated as mere machines or robots. Agents in most of the companies, are the only voice that the company has.

Social Media Integration: Social Media has transformed itself in being an ecosystem, where individuals and customers share their emotions, mainly grievances to the rest of the world. Companies ought to invest in social media monitoring to address these grievances, because there are instances where these grievances have made the companies lose millions of customers. Complaints aired in social media have the potential to grow into a social outbreak reeking havoc on the company.

Monitor effectiveness: Evaluating your contact center periodically is important for its improvement. Stagnant and unattended contact centers prohibits growth and customer engagement. Companies should adopt an aggressive and proactive approach to explore the myriad of data available. Reporting tools are to be implemented to measure KPIs and the effectiveness of the contact center. The company should leverage on metrics and analytics to identify opportunities to improve agent productivity and performance.

Invest in state of the art Contact Center Technology: Contact Center technology is not cheap, but definitely worth every penny paid. Now the most important question facing such companies becomes what are the technology options available to the companies and what parameters should serve as a yardstick for choosing an optimal solution which offers a decent ROI. One has to follow the methodology of doing it right the very first time therefore a hit and miss method is highly unadvised.

By implementing top-notch customer service solutions, your company can create a better overall customer experience. Higher Customer Satisfaction scores translate into long term loyalty and strategic business objectives like bolstering brand image and building revenue. With this solution in pace, opportunities for continuous improvement and redefinition of service processes for the future can be attained.

Personalized Customer Engagement: Getting Started



Personalized customer engagement is not a one-time occurrence, it is a course of improvement and advancement that requires a tenacious workforce and infrastructure. Once you have a persistent workforce and infrastructure lined up, you can begin the journey of personalized customer engagement.

Organizations aim to deliver world-class, second to none service, to meet the increasingly demanding customer base, who are well aware of their alternatives. Technology has now empowered the customers more than ever. It has changed the game, and the customers have changed the rules. Customers are now digitally connected, socially networked, and always game for technology revolution. They have to access to social networks, mobile applications, technology devices where they are able to connect and access information on the move.

Once the commitment has been made to provide personalized customer engagement, start where the biggest impact can be made: Contact Center. Contact center is the face of your organization, so make sure it is presentable to your customers because this is where you interact most with them.

One of the challenge is the unpredictable nature in the mode of communication. Customers will decide when, and how to communicate with you, and they expect to be appropriately responded through the same with no delays. Organizations should aim at delivering consistent customer experience at their preferred mode of communication. Another challenge is to gain a comprehensive view of the customer when handling queries and resolving complaints. Customers expect to be known, acknowledged, and respected for their queries. Customer dialogue is not a series of discrete, unique experiences, it is a part of an ongoing relationship. Violating this relationship will result in profound consequences.

Arm your agents with the right technology tools and customer information to provide them with a 360 degree view of the customers, thereby allowing them to instantaneously obtain customer information from multiple systems that typically exist in departmental silos. A contact center technology will seamlessly integrate information from multiple silos and creates comprehensive information without exhausting the time of agents toggling between multiple systems. Developing such a paradigm of exceptional service with personalized customer engagement, might seem as an overwhelming and daunting task, but once the process has been initiated the *goals of increased loyalty and long term revenues can be achieved.*

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