

Getting to Single Contact Resolution

Why your traditional contact centre is bad for your business

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Introduction

Traditional technologies and techniques for handling customer interactions are holding back improvements to single contact resolution, and directly impacting on the customer experience and putting customer loyalty at risk.

Modern Contact Centre platforms provide the next generation of technology and advanced the techniques required to improve the customer experience, ultimately making single contact resolution a reality.

“Investment in customer service and support technologies needs to balance potential productivity gains against the impact on customer experiences to effectively address organisations cost concerns and capitalise on rapidly evolving consumer expectations.”

[Jim Davies, Research Director, Gartner]

Problem Statement

Businesses are increasingly using multiple channels to deliver the best customer experience at the lowest cost to serve. These channels usually include the use of web self-service and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) solutions.

However, adding new technologies to the mix does not equate to improving the customer experience, and businesses are now pushing for solutions that allow any form of customer assistance to be completed within the first contact that the customer has made with the business.

Traditional techniques and technologies for transferring customer information from self-service systems to call centre representatives are inefficient, prone to error, and can be costly and complex to implement and maintain. Furthermore, once a transfer has been made the lack of collaborative

assistance between representatives only adds to the issues, and blocks any possible improvements towards realising first contact resolution.

These issues are caused by the traditional approach where an individual representative owns the interaction and the information within their session with the customer, and where the representative is running business processes within their context, not the customers. Such a system requires that, when a transfer or collaboration takes place, the information involved is duplicated across all sessions. This duplication is resource intensive and reduces the control and depth that the representatives have over customer information.

Modern Contact Centre platforms offer a new, elegant approach; the customer's interaction is independent from, and no longer owned by, a representative's session. Instead, these platforms offer technologies for viewing, sharing, and transferring the context of a single customer interaction across multiple channels, and enabling consistency and high levels of collaboration between multiple representatives without replicating information, reducing the risk of error and increasing the chances of reaching first contact resolution.

How traditional Contact Centres are flawed

A customer's journey through the business may involve transfers between different channels and collaboration with multiple representatives within the organisation.

In traditional approaches to this journey, the contextual information is typically built up during the processing of a call, from a self-service web application or through Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems.

Each time a transfer or collaboration takes place, the contextual information around the customer, their intent and interaction data has to be rebuilt on the representative's workspace before the interaction can progress. In the worst cases the customer may be required to restate information they have already provided.

More comprehensive solutions will pass some reference data during a transfer which can then be used to rebuild contextual information, but this type of solution is costly to build, maintain and adapt to future demands. Furthermore, such a solution runs the risk of losing the important contextual information that is key to providing a good customer experience.

For example, the context gathered during an IVR session includes simple call information data (account number, caller id information and so on), with more complex/heavy data being pushed out of the IVR system to a database with that call data remaining available for retrieval in the future.

When a call is transferred from IVR to a representative, a number of things happen:

1. The voice stream is transferred to the representative.
2. An event is sent to the desktop application and the incoming call information is displayed automatically on screen.
3. The desktop application, using the call information and database reference data, is then required to rebuild the context and present it to the representative.

In a production system, the main issue with this approach is the time involved in rebuilding the customer context each time within the representative's call handling application. This takes place after the customer's voice has been connected to the representative's headset, leading to an uncomfortable delay while the loading takes place. These delays are caused when re-establishing

integration end points, fetching data and building the landing screens that enable the representative to handle the call. Important information, such as the crumb trail and data captured within IVR that cannot be transferred is lost, leaving the representative with only a snapshot of the last action within the IVR.

During the planning and implementation of such solutions, design decisions are made around the data types and formats that will be passed between different systems during a transfer, which information should be built up during an IVR session, and how the information should be transferred and then rebuilt during the transfer. These designs are typically implemented in isolation across different systems that are not designed for change and flexibility, leading to higher costs as the solution tries to keep in step with business demand.

Where different self-service channels are available to the customer, the impact of these issues are multiplied when different design decisions, systems and processes are used to transfer and share information all of which leads to an inconsistent customer experience or, in the worse scenario, different results for every customer.

How modern Contact Centres succeed

A modern contact centre employs technologies that enable the business to define a single interaction which represents a customer's journey through the contact centre, with the information maintained across multiple channels, all of which can be viewed, shared and transferred to and from multiple participants.

Such technology significantly enhances customer experiences as well as driving down the cost and complexity of a multichannel contact centre solution.

Contextual information about a customer, their intent and interaction data is all built up and maintained within a single interaction. This interaction may have been initiated through a self service channel such as IVR or web self-service, but as the customer's journey progresses through the organization using transfer between channels and collaboration between multiple participants, the context moves along with it.

To make this possible, the business processes underpinning the interaction, are channel aware, enabling them to deliver consistency across multiple channels and seamlessly transfer between them. In addition, this technology shifts the definition of business processes to being developed in a customer centric, rather than agent centric, fashion.

For example, a customer has phoned into a credit card organization and is reviewing the last transactions made against their credit card using the self-service IVR. The customer will be following the same business process regardless of the channel they chose to start the interaction.

The customer notices a discrepancy in their transactions and wishes to be transferred to a representative for further assistance. As the transfer takes place and the representative starts talking to the customer, the call handling application will display a screen showing the process that the customer is currently running through, including the contextual information that surrounds it and an accurate history of the interaction steps the customer has taken so far. Importantly, this single interaction technology reduces the complexity of designing a mechanism for storing, fetching, and rebuilding the interaction context, eliminating the delays suffered by a traditional contact centre during such a transfer.

Moreover, enabling a single interaction to be viewed, shared and transferred, sets the modern contact centre apart from traditional methods, particularly when multiple participants collaborate together to resolve the customers issue on the first contact.

In our example, the customer inquiring about their credit card transactions may see a bank charge against their card that they were not expecting. The representative may need to consult a member within the department that raised the charge. This consultation introduces a third participant to the interaction, one who is able to collaborate with all the involved parties and is privy to all the required contextual information. The consultation may require the call to be transferred to be resolved but, importantly, it will be resolved on the first contact the customer made with the organisation, improving the customer experience whilst reducing costs.

Summary

Businesses seeking to drive more value from both multi-channel customer experiences and increased levels of collaboration are being held back by tradition contact centre solutions.

Modern contact centre solutions offer new approaches and technologies for improving customer journeys, enabling businesses to easily apply consistent, customer-centric business processes across all channels. They help reduce implementation and maintenance costs, and with the ability to offer single contact resolution they help promote higher levels of customer satisfaction, ensuring customer loyalty continues to grow.

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