



How digital meets human

An integrative approach for increasing conversions and revenue in contact centres

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Introduction - The critical factor

The critical factor in increasing revenue in contact centres is how effectively a digital platform¹ supports agent competency during each customer interaction. If a digital platform successfully guides agents to enrich customer journeys during every call, the results can significantly increase customer satisfaction (c-stat) and Net Promoter Scores (NPS), ultimately leading to higher conversions, cross-sells, and upsells.

Easier said than done. But not as difficult as it may seem when a digital platform is strategically integrated to enrich agent-customer interactions, improve customer relations, and attract advocates for long-term growth.

How does a contact centre properly integrate a digital platform? Let's begin by understanding the *misuse* of digital platforms.

The Challenge

Misusing digital platforms

Clearly, innovations in technology are driving the future of contact centres. As channels and content continue to multiply and become increasingly diverse, contact centres are looking to new technologies to manage the complexities.

100% of its contact-centres responders indicated plans to invest in emerging technologies, with more than 60% naming new channels and workforce solutions, and 73% prioritising service improvements

Source: Deloitte's Global Contact Centre Survey 2017

¹ Note: Industry terms vary for technology solutions, e.g. business intelligence solution (BIS), customer relationship management (CRM) platform, Information Technology (IT) solution, etc. This paper uses the term "digital platform" to refer to a technology solution.

But what are these new technologies being used for? Taking into account the differences between captive and outsourced centres, more often than not, contact centres seek to automate as much of the customer experience as possible. They are used to improve FCR (first call resolution) and reduce AHT (average handle time) and CES (customer effort score).

But it is a misuse of digital platforms to focus on using automated solutions to fulfill customer needs. Automation is greatly limited in assessing the complexity of customer demands and the nuances of saleable opportunities. In short, machines do not make sales and generate revenue; agents do.

Losing sight of the highest priority

All call centres use some kind of platform, to varying degrees according to various strategies. But a proper integration requires a holistic view of the value and function of customers, agents, and technology in the right hierarchy of priorities.

Business has changed dramatically in the last few decades, but one adage is as true today as it ever was: the customer comes first.

In the midst of numerous challenges to business (increasing competition, limited budgets, disruptive innovations, and more), it can be easy to forget that the customer experience put first is what generates conversions and revenue.

Today's top contact centres globally rank the customer experience as the most important strategic performance measurement.

75% of companies recognised customer service as central to being competitive, and—most importantly for contact centres—they viewed the contact centre as a key differentiator in c-stat.

Source: Dimension Data Global contact centre benchmarking report 2015

It sounds like a no-brainer, but companies often lose sight of customer satisfaction as the highest priority and end goal. They can also miscalculate how agents are the best providers of c-stat when provided with the right technological tools.

90% of respondents consider the customer experience a primary driver.

Source: Deloitte's Global Contact Centre Survey 2017

Underutilizing the power of c-stat and NPS

Reports from surveys of several hundred call centres globally reveal a direct relationship between revenue and positive c-stat and NPS.

57% of companies can relate improving customer experience levels to profit growth.

Source: Dimension Data Global contact centre benchmarking report 2015

But despite the connection to these metrics and revenue, c-stat as it relates to contact centres, continue to be low. Dimension Data says it clearly: "Customer satisfaction has fallen to its lowest level since 2011 and it's the fourth consecutive year in which we've seen a drop."² In the two years since, not much has changed. Ovum reports that contact centres continue to frustrate at least 50% of customers.³

Nearly 75% of companies indicate c-stat as having a high or crucial impact on conversion rates that "ultimately lead to overall revenue growth.

Source: "The Untapped Benefits of Proactive Customer Communication: an Omnichannel Engagement Focus Is Critical To Success," Forrester, 2016.

³ "Get It Right: Deliver the Omni-Channel Support Customers Want", Ovum 2016.

Focusing on c-stat and elevating their NPS, customers who rank as “promoters” can spend an average of more than 30% on upsold and cross-sold products.

Source: Bright 2017 “The 2017 guide to improving your contact centre Net Promoter Score”

If customer service is so important, then why is c-stat consistently low?

Automating customers away

There is evidence that customers do not always want to speak with agents, and automation in call centres can serve them efficiently if the issues are simple and direct, such as accessing account information. This may be why call centres are making the mistake of automating customers away by relying too heavily upon automation to increase first call resolutions (FCR).

Still, 43% of customers report being dissatisfied with the amount of time it takes to reach agents.⁴ Why? Because when customers have complex problems, they want to talk to human agents who are knowledgeable and competent. And in light of the 43% it must be remembered that the majority of customers call to solve issues only. If connected to agents, the conversation could be taken further.

When call centres rely upon automation, they miss the opportunity to connect customer with agents who can solve their issues while discussing additional products and services, potentially increasing c-stat and NPS.

⁴ Ovum, 2016.

Missing the loyalty opportunity

A positive NPS indicates the strong likelihood that a customer will recommend a service or product to others, and a high probability the customer will remain loyal and increase their spending.

Focusing on automation may succeed in increasing FCR for straightforward issues, but it misses the opportunity to cultivate customers loyal to your brand who will also promote your products and services to their network.

Automation takes a narrow and short-sighted view of c-stat and brand loyalty, even when accounting for the operational differences between captive and outsourced call centres.

Forgetting about the agent

They can recommend products and services that meet customers' personal needs. And at times more importantly, agents can anticipate customers' needs in advance of the customers' own knowledge or awareness.

Agents properly supported by a digital platform can solve complex customer issues more efficiently than automation.

Call centres overlook that a well-supported agent is a happy agent. And a happy agent makes for happy customers. Bright's research, for instance, found a relationship of "nearly 1:1" between happy agents and happy customers. For every "1pt you manage to increase your Employee NPS score, your Customer NPS will also increase by 1pt."⁵

What can call centres do about the inadequacies of the current approach?

⁵ Bright, 2017.

The Solution

Taking an integrative approach

An integrative approach for both captive and outsourced contact centres is essential in increasing conversions and revenue. Sales begins with c-stat, but they don't end there. Contact centres need educated and supported agents to upsell, cross-sell, grow basket sizes, and increase NPS and customer advocates for future revenue growth.

The idea bears repeating: agents make sales, not machines.

Agents increase c-stat and make sales when they are supported and mentored by the digital platform.

The right digital platform is critical, but its function must be understood as a means, not an end.

What drives revenue and conversions at contact centres are agent-customer interactions. Digital platform by themselves cannot cross-sell, upsell, or engage customers in a meaningful conversation about their needs. Technology cannot turn detractors into advocates, but the agent/customer interaction can.

Supporting agents to improve customer interactions

Interactions may begin with a customer seeking to solve a problem, but the interaction becomes meaningful with the help of a well-educated and continuously supported agent.

Agent training typically takes place during onboarding and then ends abruptly. Afterward the initial training, agents interact with hundreds of customers each week, relying on education they may or may not have sufficiently internalized. But training doesn't have to stop after onboarding.

Agents today don't need to retain information as much as they need to know where to find it. The right digital platform can continue agent training by guiding them where to find the right information, and coaching them to leverage each customer's unique habits, interests, and needs.

Agents are crucial in determining the customer experience and leveraging saleable opportunities. The consequences of agents continually mentored by a digital platform is that customer interactions can become more nuanced, meaningful and profitable.

Personalising sales journeys for customers

Nearly 70% of contact centres report the customer "experience" is predominantly influenced by receiving "accurate servicing information."⁶ But the information customers need varies with every customer and interaction over time.

That is why contact centres are looking for sales and service journeys to be personalised and better aligned to customer needs.⁷ Digital platform helps agent handle highly segmented customers, diversified needs, and multi-channels. When contact centres use a digital platform to mentor agents, the end goal is to increase NPS through personalisation and deliver an outstanding customer experience.

Using gamification to maximize cross-selling and upselling

A digital platform offering individual coaching to agents is more effective than traditional, competitive forms of driving performance, such as leaderboards.⁸

Individual coaching by a digital platform can remedy the unfortunate fact that 44% of agents aren't being prompted to identify sales opportunities.⁹ The right platform

⁶ Deloitte, 2017.

⁷ Forrester research commissioned by Honeybee Solutions, 2017.

⁸ Forrester research commissioned by Honeybee Solutions, 2017.

⁹ Dimension Data, 2015.

alerts agents to potential cross-sells and upsells based upon the specific profile of the customer on the phone, not a generalized script.

One way a digital platform can offer agent coaching is through a gamified experience.

Gamification makes the identification and leveraging of sales opportunities fun for agents. It can also stimulate achieving personal sales bests and competition among other agents.

The important idea is that the digital platform should identify for the agent the opportune times for sales opportunities, as well as offer expert advice at every turn to personalise recommendations and maximize basket values.

Conclusion - conversions and revenue

How contact centres align their digital platform with human agents to build customer relationships is the critical factor in increasing revenue in contact centres.

The support of the right platform should coach agents to guide customers through every sales journeys to address customers' unique needs and include tailored recommendations. It is the integrated strategy of digital and human that leads to increased c-stat, NPS, better conversion rates and ultimately greater revenue growth.