

The importance of CEM in building business

 By [Steve Briggs](#)

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In increasingly commoditised markets, the most important way for an organisation to distinguish itself from the pack - in a sustainable way - is through providing customers with a quality customer experience and adding value to customers' lives wherever possible.



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Because of this, the discipline of customer experience management (CEM) has risen to the fore in recent years as organisations re-imagine the meaning of customer service. Once seen as a cost-centre and an operational headache, customer relationships are now being defined as one of the most important assets a company can have - intangible as they may be on the balance sheet.

Today's customer is a fickle being: they can turn against you, based on just one poor customer service interaction or they can hold the potential to become fiercely loyal brand advocates.

However, the hard-won process of naturally converting people to becoming brand advocates cannot happen without providing consistently excellent customer experience and drawing key insights from each interaction.

Innovations of customer-facing and back office technologies can play a pivotal role in executing an effective CEM strategy and turn customer relationships into valuable corporate assets.

Multichannel engagement first step

The first step is to ensure your organisation is available to customers via whatever channel of communication they prefer. Moving to a multichannel environment involves augmenting the traditional voice and email channels with things like web-based instant messaging, video chat, SMS, 'call me back' buttons and social media.

The beauty of the multichannel environment is that each of the touch-points has its own advantages. Video may be useful for complex tasks such as providing technical assistance to customers or discussing high-value product purchases. A simple text-based web chat may be appropriate as a pop-up invitation when it becomes clear a customer is struggling with something like an online payment gateway for instance.

With a multichannel contact centre, there is a communication medium that suits every organisation, customer preference and point in the enquiry, sales and support processes.

This also improves the chances for 'first-time resolution' - which is something all contact centre managers are constantly striving towards. Being able to facilitate first-time resolution via the customers' channel of preference could be regarded as a further enhancement on this - something of a 'holy grail' in the world of customer experience.

Instant backend updates critical

If first-time resolution, via the channel of choice, is the ultimate goal at the front-end, then at the backend the most critical activity would be consolidating all the rich data from the interactions across the various channels, into unique customer profiles.

Stored centrally - and preferably hosted as a cloud-based solution - this data should update instantly as agents capture new information immediately following a customer interaction. The system should detect certain patterns and common themes, to be relayed back to business decision-makers in an understandable format.

Next - personalisation

Having this clear and comprehensive view of the customer paves the way for another key facet of successful CEM: personalisation. This concept goes beyond simply adding a customer name to the top of an email - it involves a deeper understanding of the customers' lives and preferences in order to serve up tailored offers and specials, with text and imagery that speaks to the customer's identity.

Sometimes, achieving the goal of providing superior customer experience means being able to give customers the opportunity to assist themselves, without ever needing to speak to an agent. Many customers will only revert to the contact centre as a last-resort - after firstly trying the self-help tools at their disposal.

More often than not, this process of self-service begins on the organisation's website. An effective self-service customer support centre includes relevant, up-to-date information, intuitive navigation, and excellent search capabilities - for example, keyword searches. Self-service content can be in the form of frequently asked questions, community forums, manuals, videos and interactive web-based decision trees or diagnostics tools.

Watching for emerging technologies

Finally, for an organisation to retain its competitive edge in the field of customer experience, it needs to keep a close hand on emerging technologies and the ways in which they can further enhance the customers' interactions. New waves of innovation in the areas of big data and biometrics - for instance - will rapidly alter CEM.

Big data is the term loosely describing the process of structuring and using the massive volumes of contextual information contained within customer emails, phone calls, web chats, instant messaging sessions and any other channel. Today, most companies let this information slip away without recording it and utilising it for better understanding their customers.

Voice biometrics, on the other hand, is an innovation with a far more specific application in the multichannel contact centre. For voice interactions, this technology is useful at the authentication layer - where a customer simply repeats a pre-selected sentence. This avoids the customer having to answer authentication questions, or punch in numbers, for example.

Ultimately, the degree to which an organisation embraces all of these technologies, and how well they are integrated into the back-office workflows, will determine the success of its customer experience management strategy.

There are already a number of exciting tools available to optimise the customer experience - and many more on the horizon.

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