Your Best Multichannel Customer Contact Strategy

By Lori Bocklund, President and Maren Symonds, Consultant
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Today's multichannel customer contact landscape looks a bit like farm country – there are silos everywhere! Different departments own different channels; lines of business call the shots for their own set of applications. As web chat, social media, mobility, proactive outbound alerts, and more continue to push the boundaries of customer contact, the all too common troubles with non-integrated services can only get worse, impacting the company's efficiency and the customers' experience. Typical challenges include:

- Customers log in to different services using different IDs. *[Is it a wonder that they have trouble remembering their passwords and call the center… or stop using the service?]*
- There are inconsistencies in services and user interface across the various channels.
- Few have systems that track customer interactions across channels. *[Yes, we still need <u>real</u> CRM, and we need it to cover all channels).]*
- Transitions between channels are bumpy – e.g., IVR to CSR, web to CSR. Customers who were mid-stream in a transaction often have to start from the beginning. CSRs may not know much about the services that their customers were trying to use and, therefore, can't provide helpful advice or take note of where customers are struggling.
- Reporting and analytics (if present) only address the individual channels and lack insight into the customer experience. First *Contact* Resolution doesn't get the attention that it's due.
- In the rush to get on board with social media, few are paying attention to the processes that create appropriate responses to customer posts.
- Channel enhancements are driven by the loudest advocate, not the customer's or corporation's needs.

It's easy to shrug your shoulders and resign yourself to the current state of affairs given the complexity of getting all the players on the same page. But when a recent study shows that customer loyalty is *highly correlated* with solving problems quickly and easily,[1] it's time to get your act together. The need for cross-functional collaboration across the organization is very real, and the contact center can play a vital role in making it happen.

Top Six Things on Your Strategic "To Do" List

1. **Secure executive sponsorship.** This step heads the list as it is crucial for securing cross-functional collaboration. If you are fortunate to have an executive who "gets it," get him or her engaged early and often! This person is pivotal for establishing a multichannel governance council to prioritize channel development initiatives, identify synergies and points of integration, allocate resources, and track results. He or she will also provide visible support and reinforcement for people and process changes as you roll out your projects.
2. **Get a clear understanding of your business strategy** and how it impacts the multichannel strategy. Know your industry, markets, and customers and how various transaction types and channels suit their needs and preferences. Consider whether you should steer different groups toward different media or respond differently (e.g., faster) based on cost, value, or other factors.

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[1] http://hbr.org/2010/07/stop-trying-to-delight-your-customers/ar/1

3. **Conduct a baseline audit** of customer contact. What do you offer? Who owns each channel/customer interaction? How much is each channel used? How does it perform?
4. **Engage all stakeholders in defining a vision** for multi-channel customer contact. Identify the right channel(s) for each function/application by considering the level of effort for the customer to use them and the likely value the customer and corporation will gain from them.
5. **Take a critical look at your current technology**, its limitations, and the requisite integration to support multi-channel efforts. Assess the level of effort to realize your vision by qualifying the development, deployment, and support costs for technology, process changes, and one-time and ongoing resource demands. *[Be sure to account for training and skill requirements within the contact centers.]*
6. **Build a 3-5 year road map** for channel enhancements, channel integration, and new channel development. Note which gaps can be filled with process improvements and other low investment actions and which require technology enablers and/or significant cultural change. Address known areas of customer dissatisfaction as you build organizational momentum for your strategy.