Have You Got Your Multi-channel Customer Contact Act Together?

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Contact centers are waist-deep, if not neck-deep, in the multi-channel world. The overwhelming majority support *or have plans to support* voice, email, fax, voicemail, IVR, and web self-service. Proactive outbound alerts and web chat are gaining traction with a majority of centers anticipating adoption within the next two years.[*] Most organizations are making progress on their social media and mobile application strategies. **Is the contact center prepared for all the "border crossings" from self-service to assisted service?**

It's an unfortunate reality that the contact center is often the "last to know." To keep apace of industry trends, customer needs, and competitive incursions, new venues for customer interaction get added to the mix with responsibility for application design, development, and administration of new channels landing in various departments. For example, marketing tends to carry the ball for social networking, and IT tends to drive mobile applications *(no pun intended!)* When polled, most contact centers report feeling as though they're lagging in adoption with both of these technologies.[*]

Your customers don't care about the internal workings of your organization or the means through which you establish ownership for the interaction mechanisms. They want what they want, when and how they want it. They expect a consistent, high quality experience no matter which "door" they enter. And they'll show up at the call center when there's a mismatch between what they need from a service channel and what they're able to receive.

In an ideal world, all channels have access to a common customer relationship management system that carries detailed information about each customer's needs, preferences, and interaction history. Processes are in place to manage transitions seamlessly across channels so that customers don't have to start over at each junction. A common knowledge management system and/or wiki provide access to a corporate repository of information that provides the consistent answers to inquiries from all channels. Customer experience analytics provide insights on each channel's activity and "border crossings" as well as the organization's performance on first *contact* resolution.

So what if your organization is less than ideal? Here are some things you can do to move in that direction:

- **Forge relationship with the other "channel managers."** Take the opportunity to educate one another on your respective offerings, plans, and operating environments. Identify people, process, and technology gaps in the customer experience and develop plans to shore them up.

- **Train your front line staff on the spectrum of service offerings** with which your customers might be familiar. Identify one or more groups of "go to" agents with deep knowledge of the applications. Make sure you have a list at the ready of other organizational resources who "own" other channels and can lend support. *Flailing is not an option!*

- **Help senior leadership see your company through your customers' eyes.** Give them a sense for the highs and lows of the customer experience and the operational challenges of delivering service excellence. Tie your findings to metrics in which they have a stake – customer acquisition, customer retention, "wallet share," operational efficiency, customer satisfaction ratings, regulatory oversight (if any).

[*] Source: http://www.strategiccontact.com/surveys/MultiChannelSurveyResultsDec2010.pdf