



Optimizing the Customer Experience

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It's the dawn of a new day for contact centers and their corporate peers. They've awakened to the fact that their customers' *total experience* with the company and its products/services drives loyalty, purchasing behaviors, and testimonials (both good and bad). Companies have to move away from looking at performance for isolated departments or transactions and start looking at the end-to-end experience from a customer perspective across all channels, and contact center leaders are uniquely positioned to lead the charge.

Take a moment to think about the people, processes, and technologies with which your customers come in contact. A lot of different hands could touch an interaction. The hands vary by media and step in the overall process – including front line and back office. Each organization has diverse processes and standards for contact handling and follow-up. End-to-end satisfaction demands that upstream and downstream processes execute flawlessly – or very nearly so – with good bi-directional communication. And all of the right technologies need to be in place to support the people and processes – from initiation of contact to contact routing to contact tracking to desktop applications and knowledge tools to analytics.

Consider all of the departments that have a hand in each customer interaction. The contact centers and IT come to mind immediately. Your horizon also needs to extend to web, social media, mobile, branch or store operations, and other channel owners. And, of course, there may be some third parties to throw into the mix. In a perfect world, you'd have a single owner of the customer experience – such as a Chief Customer Officer, Customer Strategy Officer, or Customer Experience Manager. More often than not, a diverse set of leaders influence the customer experience. They may not come together on the organization chart until the very top (e.g., CEO) with multiple layers of management in between.

It's time to rise up to the challenge of end-to-end customer satisfaction by committing yourself and your organization to doing it right. *[Don't just pay lip service to it – your customers and your employees can tell the difference!]* Keys to success include:

- Developing a common strategy, vision and goals with all of the leaders whose groups have a role in the customer experience
- Focusing on your customers (*really!*) as you map out their experience with the company, not an individual department, functional group, or channel
- Setting project priorities for the company as a whole – even when it means that some departments don't get what they want, when they want it
- Defining measurable performance metrics – such as First Contact Resolution – that reflect the customer's experience

The contact center should play a key role in getting this initiative off the ground and driving it to conclusion. You own at least some of the channels – voice, fax, email, and often web chat– and play a key role in contact handling. You need to know all of the channels to support customers effectively. *[Let's face it, when customers cross channels, they often come to you!]* You are in the ideal position to bring diverse leaders and their teams together to talk about the end-to-end customer experience and explore ways to optimize it.



The task at hand won't be easy, but there's a clear call to action to do it. Customers demand it. Your competitors are taking note. And with increased diversity in interaction channels, the job won't get easier as time goes on. It's time to lead the charge.