

WHITE PAPER

BUILDING A MULTI-CHANNEL CONTACT CENTER

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The traditional phone-based call center has evolved into the modern day multi-channel contact center, taking customer interaction from strictly voice to other mediums such as email, web chat, social media and more. As the new contact center standard emerges, smart businesses should be aware what communication tools are available and how they can be leveraged for the company's benefit. The modern multi-channel contact center can be made up of many different elements, and, although advantageous when used on their own, are significantly more valuable when integrated into a streamlined contact center solution.

Call centers have historically had the processes and dashboards to service voice calls, but today, these can be utilized to manage the new channels.

Traditional Call Centers Evolve

When call centers first emerged as a standard for companies providing customer service, the many other communications tools that have since become integrated into contact center operations were either not around yet or in their early infancy. So while call centers operated largely or solely around voice communications and traditional business telephone service, modern contact centers are vastly different.

For example, newly published research from ContactBabel found that more than 17 percent of interactions handled by U.K. contact centers today are performed via email, web chat or social media. Researchers also observed that non-voice communication in general is on the rise, with email alone accounting for 15 percent of all interactions. Moving forward, the more than 200 contact centers surveyed in the study indicated that web chat is the new technology that will see the most growth over the next year. The study demonstrated a growing need for advanced management information systems, with contact center respondents naming these as the most likely to be replaced or upgraded over the next year.

While this research was limited in scope to the U.K., similar trends are taking shape across the globe. One major movement that has been driving the transformation of the contact center is an increased focus on the customer, with more organizations basing business decisions around consumer demands. In the digital age, consumers have more communication channels to choose from than ever before, and the rising popularity of smart devices like smartphones and tablets continues to open up more opportunities to connect.

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As more businesses focus on the needs and wants of the customer, it becomes even more important to evaluate contact center solutions, as this is the most public-facing department of any organization. When reviewing existing contact center solutions, it is important to keep integration in mind so that the established strategy for improving operations is able to add value across the entire organization.

With customers empowered to take control of the conversations they have with businesses, service expectations are higher than ever before. In order to provide an optimal customer experience, organizations can utilize multiple channels to deliver differentiated experiences and enjoy the benefits of providing a more personal interaction. ShoreTel's Contact Center solution is ideal in this regard because it delivers highly reliable voice capabilities based on its advanced on-premise unified communication system with a simple interface that condenses all the various components of effective call routing, media handling and application integration.

The Multi-Channel Contact Center



While the multi-channel contact center is often viewed for the many advantages it has for the customer, there are also business benefits to consider. Since providing support over multiple communication channels has essentially become the standard for today's organizations, companies arguably need to implement a multi-channel contact center solution in order to remain competitive and successfully grow their brand.

However, it is not enough for companies to simply open up multiple channels to consumers

- businesses also need to ensure the channels are effectively integrated and efficiently managed. With ShoreTel's Contact Center solutions, agents and customers can communicate using the channel of their choosing, utilizing the latest telecommunication features in an easy to use yet powerful dashboard. In addition, management system capabilities and reporting tools help organizations ensure that everything is running smoothly and benefitting the business as a whole.

There are numerous challenges associated with building a multi-channel contact center, and TechTarget research revealed that one of the top issues is the rate at which technology advances and new communication channels or capabilities are identified. The problem is that most companies cannot afford to buy a new contact center system or upgrade hardware every time a new channel emerges, and costs aside, such a strategy could cause significant disruption to business operations and eventually damage an organization's integrity.

While TechTarget explained that some businesses choose to purchase new technologies separately, this is at best a short-term solution and can lead to data and functionality fragmentation in addition to complicating query routing between channels. The best option for dealing with rapid technological

advances would be to select a ShoreTel Contact Center solution, which not only offers a particularly low total cost of ownership, but also focuses on enabling integration so that business applications and new technology can be implemented as it surfaces.

“ShoreTel makes it easier for enterprises to achieve frictionless communication by removing barriers and offering more avenues for communication, in turn reducing wait times and complex navigations that get in the way of communication between a customer and company,” said Don Joos, senior vice president of business operations at ShoreTel. “ShoreTel Enterprise Contact Center gives agents and supervisors a powerful and consolidated suite of capabilities, including fully blended inbound and outbound customer applications, web chat and email. The same intuitive desktop interface that is used company wide as part of the IP phone system brings it all together, integrating IVR, routing and outbound into one customer-centric service solution.”



More Focus on the Consumer and Customer Experience

Customer satisfaction is an important part of business success today, and when a customer has the ability to interact using his or her preferred medium, customer satisfaction receives a dramatic boost. A multi-channel contact center should be managed to ensure that customers receive the same level of service regardless of which channel they select. One of the ways this is attained is with CRM integration, which can distribute entire customer histories and information across all channels. It is not enough to simply provide multiple communication channels, and organizations need to ensure those channels are well-integrated to be truly effective.

According to recent research from Aberdeen Group, best in class service providers with an integrated multichannel contact center reached 86 percent customer retention levels, a 21 percent decrease in total support costs and a 38 percent increase in agent productivity. This data demonstrates that the multi-channel approach is beneficial for a wide variety of business initiatives and is capable of better meeting consumer demands than other models.

Some have deemed modern times “the age of the customer” as businesses rapidly transform to keep up with evolving consumer demands. After all, a business is not really a business unless it has customers. One of the most significant benefits of employing a multi-channel contact center is that it can provide a 360-degree view of customers and their behavior. And when paired with proper reporting and analytics, organizations can gain a better understanding of their customers and make strategic decisions with them in mind. When a business truly understands its customers’ needs, customer satisfaction can be easily boosted which ultimately leads to an increase in customer loyalty as well.

What Do Customers Want?

With all the talk surrounding more focus on the customer and providing an exceptional experience, it is important to understand what it is that customers want. One key area to look at is self-service, which is the ability for customers to research and find important information on their own using the channel of their choice.

According to a recent ICMI survey of more than 400 contact center professionals from around the globe, nearly 80 percent of respondents indicated that they provide self-service opportunities. Furthermore, improvements in customer retention attributed to self-service strategies ranged from 11 to 51 percent increases.

Self-service gives even more control to the customer, and while some may claim it will contribute to the obsolescence of the contact center as whole, the truth is that organizations can leverage self-service options to their benefit. Most often, self-service is used by customers looking for basic information. If this information is clearly displayed on the website, this means that less agent time needs to be spent answering calls about simple questions. With less time needed to address these types of calls, more time is freed up to spend on the more complicated queries and call wait time can decrease significantly.

"In the age of the customer, contact centers do not have to close shop," David Lloyd wrote for DestinationCRM. "Instead, they have an opportunity to shine, by moving away from a traditional call center to a multichannel command center and using all the channels that are now available to better serve customers. At the same time, these new command centers must continue to leverage the same type of technology innovation that ushered in the age of the customer to their advantage and adapt to their customers' habits and desires for service going forward."

For a truly well-integrated multi-channel contact center, organizations can look to ShoreTel's Contact Center solutions, which are crafted to meet specific client needs. While self-service becomes increasingly important to support, companies can work with ShoreTel to add additional web chat features to their solution, further integrating multiple channels. This way, customers who are looking for a simple answer will likely head to the company website to find it. If this information is not available there and their self-service efforts were unsuccessful, customers can click on buttons that are strategically placed on the website labeled something like "Click to Ask." This can then allow for a seamless transition between self-service and Web chat.

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Social Media and the Contact Center

Another trend that will reshape the way people interact with businesses is the rise of social media. A recent Deloitte study demonstrated that although social media initiatives in contact centers are currently lacking, social media use is expected to increase significantly over the next two years. The results indicated that all contact center channels are expected to grow in volume over the next 12 to 14 months. In regard to specific channel growth, 46 percent of respondents indicated that email would increase in volume, 38 percent said social media and 32 percent said voice.

The study demonstrated that utilizing multiple channels will be the contact center's main focus in the coming years. In fact, 92 percent of survey respondents see "the customer experience as a differentiator" when provided via a multi-channel contact center. Of the 92 percent, approximately 42 percent currently offer social media, 34 offer voice self-service and 30 offer web collaboration in their contact center operations.

Measuring Success of Multi-Channel

In the digital age of the customer, capturing feedback is essential. Especially as organizations implement and manage multiple channels for customer interaction, it can sometimes be difficult to quantify the level of success. The Deloitte study also touched on this, finding that 55 percent of respondents believe phone call monitoring was the most effective way to capture customer feedback regarding the multi-channel contact center. However, direct customer feedback over the Web or email, in addition to customer surveys remain popular methods for measuring satisfaction. Furthermore, while only 13 percent of respondents cited social media as the most effective method for gaining feedback, this number is expected to grow dramatically over the next two years.

If pervasive technology trends have taught us anything, it is that the most successful businesses recognize the need to pursue a multi-channel contact center solutions to meet customers' expectations, maintain a competitive edge and achieve continued growth. ShoreTel's Contact Center solutions allow businesses to expand their reach, extend their growth and simplify customer communications. With a ShoreTel multi-channel contact center solution, a company can better interact with its most important partners: the customers.

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With all the emphasis on the customer today, it seems ineffective to end on a note that doesn't showcase this trend. To highlight how ShoreTel Contact Center solutions can positively impact customers, here is feedback from one of ShoreTel's own customers, Patrick Bruce, IT director at USO:

"We want our patients to have a high degree of satisfaction and confidence when they interact with our staff, whether it is in person or over the phone," Bruce said. "Before ShoreTel, we were experiencing hold times of several minutes in many cases, because agents had to look up information before transferring calls. Now with ShoreTel Contact Center, we've seen a dramatic decrease in call hold times from an average of 3 minutes to 25 seconds."

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ShoreTel. Brilliantly simple business communications.

ShoreTel, Inc. (NASDAQ: SHOR) is a leading provider of brilliantly simple IP phone systems and unified communications solutions powering today's always-on workforce. Its flexible communications solutions for on-premises, cloud and hybrid environments eliminate complexity, reduce costs and improve productivity.

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