Technology evolution continues to bring with it wide-ranging opportunities for shared services centers (SSCs) to raise their game. These opportunities require service center decision makers to be selective about which technologies best support their core mission. Compared to externally facing contact centers, SSCs are often lagging in their use of sophisticated tools and enabling technologies. To unlock their full potential, SSCs can leverage advanced contact center technologies to improve customer service and operations. Here are three key benefits SSCs can reap by adopting these enabling technologies.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a sea of change when it comes to customer behavior, making customer service one of the most competitive battlegrounds for businesses. That is why contact centers are always on the lookout for more effective methods to improve customer experience. By leveraging various progressive contact center technologies, some of which may have become mainstream already in external centers, SSCs can boost their game in service delivery and meet shifting customer expectations.

Engaging with Customers through Social Media

For businesses, social media has evolved from an outbound marketing channel to a proactive customer care tool. More and more external contact centers are responding to customers through social media platforms, which is the preferred method of contact for many customers, especially Millennials. According to Aberdeen, from 2010 to 2013, social customer service programs increased by 59% and by mid-2014, 70% of businesses adopted social media for customer service.[1] However, SSCs are more used to conventional contact methods, communicating with their internal customers through traditional media like email or phone. The adoption of enterprise social media platforms is making this channel feasible for SSCs.

70%
of businesses adopted social media for customer service

The benefits of social media go beyond solely monitoring relevant customer conversations. These tools provide the convenience internal customers are looking for in terms of accessibility and real-time response and also help businesses capture crucial customer feedback data. For example, service centers can keep track of the interactions across their Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn communities and join in the conversation when their followers are looking for a direct response from them. They can be used as a vehicle to let customers know that their issues have been heard or handled and post status updates with current caller wait-time. Service centers can also redirect customers to online chat and Q&A pages for a potentially quicker experience or to web-based surveys to provide feedback. Other social media platforms, such as YouTube, blogs, and wikis, can also serve the purpose of providing and sharing quick solutions, expertise, or how-to videos to further improve customer experience.

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[1] Aberdeen, Social Customer Care, 2013

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Using Mobile Technology to Elevate Service Delivery

Smartphones and tablets are revolutionizing the way customers interact with every business. Increasingly, customers want information on the go. Mobile devices give customers various channels for reaching out, and mobile apps further allow interaction through internet, voice, video, self-service, and other means. At the same time, younger and ever-more-mobile workers are rewiring work in service centers. Mobile devices provide service center agents with real-time contextual information, such as browsing history and self-service actions taken in the apps to facilitate their communication with customers. Providing mobile integration within service centers can thus help enhance customer experience and deliver competitive advantage.

Leveraging Advanced Voice Self-Service and Call-Back-in-Queue Functionality

Despite the rapid growth in the use of web-based services, the importance of the voice channel has not diminished. Customers still find voice the most convenient, flexible, and quickest communication channel in many instances, especially in older demographics and for complex inquires. Using voice self-service to provide basic information to customers reduces the need for agent help and can provide a significant reduction in call volume. For example, HR customers can get answers to commonly asked questions, update personal information, or review current benefits selections and check on reimbursement status.

Even though many customers are willing to solve problems by themselves first, certain situations require more interaction. When this occurs, customers want a seamless transition when they need to reach an agent. IVR tools that include call-back-in-queue functionality can greatly enhance the customer experience. Call-back technology helps address one of the biggest customer service issues—long wait times that lead to abandoned calls. Intelligent call-back technology provides the ability for customers to schedule call-backs at their convenience. It also provides the flexibility for customers to choose the mode of call-back—voice, web, or mobile. This allows customers to obtain service on their own schedule and terms.

REDUCED COSTS

In order to remain competitive, SSCs are looking for innovative ways to effectively reduce operational costs without detracting from their quest for accelerated performance and increased customer satisfaction. This sounds great, but how can you actually do it?

Migration to Cloud Solutions

Leveraging cloud solutions is an effective model for delivering technology-enabled business services at a lower cost. Cloud solutions enable freedom from hardware investments and hassles required with on-premise service center systems. This strategy enables a just-enough,

six out of ten contact centers have plans for cloud-based deployments

just-in-time approach to technology with less up-front investment. Cloud solutions also allow easy, rapid scaling to respond quickly to changing demand. Cloud software vendors often bundle all of the necessary service center capabilities and offer it as a service for one monthly fee per agent. This allows companies to be highly nimble, and extremely cost competitive, while still offering an excellent

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customer experience. Additionally, fierce competition in this market yields competitively priced solutions. According to DMG, six out of 10 contact centers have plans for cloud-based deployments, with nearly 150 vendors competing for user attention.[2] Also, because cloud vendors operate on a pay-as-you-go basis, they have a huge incentive to continually provide their customers leading-edge technology and features at a highly competitive price.

Live Chat and Virtual Agents

Live-chat software has also consistently demonstrated that it can save on both employee task time and phone expenses. Live chat reduces overall contact center costs by lowering average interaction cost. It also increases efficiency by allowing live-chat representatives to handle multiple chats simultaneously, thus reducing the need to hire more representatives to handle additional volume. With service center agents spending less time on the phone, they can multi-task during chat conversations and cut the waiting queue to a fraction of its former size. Virtual agents, who communicate and respond like humans, are increasingly being utilized to help perform tasks such as locating information or answering customers' questions with even lower support costs than live human assistance. One of the most popular examples is Apple's Siri. IBM also released an artificially intelligent agent named Watson. The online auctioneer, eBay, is already facilitating 200,000 customer conversations a day with virtual agents across six countries according to Bloomberg Business.

INCREASED OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

The pressure to increase operational efficiency is another dominant issue that service center leaders face. Some emerging technology solutions can positively impact service center operations and boost efficiency by improving staff effectiveness and optimizing workflow and processes.

Desktop Analytics

Desktop analytics are designed to analyze and report employee desktop activity to determine patterns and complexities that create inefficiencies, and thus improve productivity and quality. One of the key benefits this technology yields is staff effectiveness. SSCs can identify technology issues that hamper agents from resolving the customer requests and improve process efficiency via employee activity tracking and process analytics. Also, by monitoring each agent's desktop, SSCs can drill down on the individual sessions and issues and provide step-by-step instructions to further facilitate the agent's work. Another potential benefit SSCs can gain through desktop analytics is the reduction of work through process automation, by integrating data and functionality from multiple applications in one interface. SSCs can automate data movement between employees, groups, and systems through the use of workflow.

Omni-Channel Integration

Recent Aberdeen studies found that 74% of consumers use three or more channels when engaging with companies.[3] Yet many of the customers have to repeat information over and over to agents or IVR systems because the systems do not support the ability to "remember" the conversation and transfer information across touch points. Omni-channel contact centers have a formal strategy in place to

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[2] DMG, 2014-2015 Cloud-Based Contact Center Infrastructure Market Report
[3] Aberdeen, The Business Value of Integrating the Contact Center within Your Omni-Channel Strategy, 2014

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deliver personalized and consistent customer experiences across multiple channels and devices. With this capability, service center agents have the context of the interaction, customer profile, preferences, and relevant history and have the ability to track and support, emails, chats, mobile transactions, self-service interactions, and live conversations to ensure continuity of conversation. Additionally, equipping the agents with access to relevant customer data frees the agents' time for productive work. Those same agents are able to handle more calls, leading to shorter wait times for customers and increased first-contact resolution by having the full history at their fingertips. Furthermore, integrating all communication channels in the same solution helps companies to deliver consistent, speedy customer service through all channels and route contacts to the correct agent right away, resulting in higher process and staff efficiency, as well as improved customer experience.
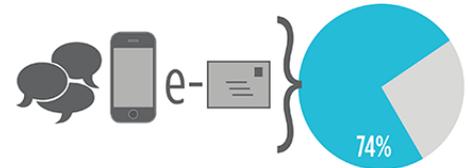
74% of consumers use three or more channels when engaging with companies

Video Assistance via WebRTC

Browser-based voice and video support that provides Web Real-Time Communication (WebRTC) is another big disrupter of current contact center technology. It supports browser-to-browser applications for voice calling, video chat, and peer-to-peer file sharing without the need of either internal or external plugins. For customers, WebRTC allows Internet users to reach the agent without having to leave their web or mobile application. Through direct video calls and screen sharing, customers can show the exact issues they're running into instead of only describing to the agents via phone. WebRTC also enables agents to seamlessly move between channels and provide speedy resolution.

Putting a technology strategy in place is a competitive imperative for shared services centers. However, before making the switch to any new solution, SSCs should conduct a full assessment of technology assets currently within their own company, especially in externally facing contact centers. In doing so, SSCs will be able to decide which technologies will be most beneficial, the best approach to source the technologies, and how to measure cost metrics and correlated performance gains. Contact us for more information on SSC technologies.

ABOUT SCOTTMADDEN'S CORPORATE & SHARED SERVICES PRACTICE

ScottMadden has been a pioneer in corporate and shared services since the practice began decades ago. Our corporate & shared services practice has completed more than 1,100 projects since the early 90s, including hundreds of large, multi-year implementations. Our clients span a variety of industries from entertainment to energy to high tech. Examples of our projects include business case development, shared services design, and shared services build support and implementation.

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