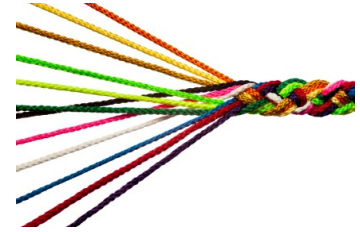


Putting Omnichannel at the Heart of Operations

By: Dominik Pacewicz

The traditional telecom industry has to reinvent itself in the face of strong competition from Over-The-Top (OTT) service providers. Consumers are becoming more vocal in demanding faster, cheaper and more personalized services delivered directly from their providers. In response to these demands, OTT companies such as Amazon, Skype, Netflix and others are serving up their entertainment and messaging services while eating away at operators' profits. These services were built digital-first and with customer experience at their heart, which is part of the reason they are so successful.



Combine this competitive pressure with the declining use of traditional voice calls and poor monetization of entertainment services, and you can see the writing on the wall. To add insult to injury, telecoms are also losing revenue on international calls and roaming charges, both of which can cost unwitting customers hundreds of pounds a year.

At the same time, there is more digital data being produced, consumed and analyzed than ever before. This data includes demographic information about customers, as well as where they live and work, who they connect with and how often, their interests, behavior and attitudes. More and more organizations are using analytics to develop insights that can open up new markets for them and drive profit and growth, while at the same time allowing them to provide better, more personalized service for their customers.

These digital disruptors are providing unique services tailored to individual customers, which means that operators need to rethink their customer strategy. CSPs, with their wealth of customer data, are in a strong position to redefine their business model around these critical technological and lifestyle changes.

In order to implement these changes effectively, telcos are moving towards an omnichannel strategy that allows them to develop a strong customer focus, understand (and act on) customer trends, make tailored recommendations to upsell to customers, and reduce customer churn. It is the only possible approach for a company that wants to be ready to meet a changing future.

Rethinking the customer journey

While many operators still think in terms of individual channels and touchpoints for customer services, the modern customer doesn't. He or she thinks of the overall experience—and the results.

Customers want to be able to use any channel that suits their needs at that particular time. This means the average customer journey could span any number of touchpoints from point of sale, TV ads and mail to social media, email and phone calls. Previously, when a customer wanted to contact his or her cell provider, he or she would simply call from that cell. Now there are so many more channels to choose from and, as customers have become more app-focused, the traditional call is becoming a last resort to contact any provider. Instead, the customer journey might start with a tweet, move to webchat, and end with one or more calls, all across different devices. Customers want to be able to switch between channels and not have to repeat the issue or request, and for the response they receive to be consistent, however many people they interact with during that process.

Most companies will have a multichannel strategy in place—meaning the ability to be able to

respond on each channel. But omnichannel brings far greater benefits to the business than simply introducing more channels to the customer experience.

[McKinsey's 2017 Customer Experience](#) report highlighted that customers are less focused on their experience of individual touchpoints than they are on their overall journey as a whole. Customers seek the same experience, no matter the channel they choose.

The key pillars of the omnichannel strategy are consistent customer information and identification across channels, combined with the ability to respond to channel switching. Everywhere the customer moves, data is collected and analyzed to give detailed insight into behavior.

To achieve this 360-degree view of the customer, all activity should be identifiable across different channels (creating a single customer identity, even if they have different user names per channel) and available to agents across all different channels.

By implementing an omnichannel strategy, telcos place their customers' convenience at the heart of their operations. It can be complicated to collate and analyze real-time data from multiple channels, but if telecom companies want to thrive in this economy, they need to ensure they are providing a seamless customer experience and digital customer enablement. An efficient omnichannel solution puts the customer's needs at its center and builds out from there.

Data-led, actionable insights

Telcos have a wealth of data available to them. But swaths of this data go unused. There's real value not just in the data you collect from customers when they use their devices, but also in the data you could analyze from their interactions with the telco itself.

If you aggregate and compare data from multiple customers across all channels, you start to see trends that give you insight into customer behavior and even into possible faults. Have there been a number of calls about a problem in the same area? Even a small number of complaints could indicate the beginning of a larger-scale issue, such as a problem with a base station or a transmitter. If you spot trends early on, you can act on them quickly to provide a solution. And if you give access to that insight to your customer service teams, they will be able to take proactive action to inform customers, putting you ahead of the game.

Then imagine adding another layer of data to provide insight into customer behavior from other connected devices, such as smart TVs, smart meters or virtual assistants. These could add to an even more complete view of customers' behavior, wants and needs that give telcos unprecedented understanding and the ability to tailor products, services and communications.

Providing a personal, contextualized customer experience

All this data means telcos can provide contextual customer service. The service experience can be uniquely personal to the customer.

Context matters. When a customer contacts a service provider, there is history behind that contact. Every previous experience informs how the customer will approach the experience. If the telco agent doesn't have immediate insight to that history, he or she is on the back foot from the start. Knowing that the customer had a similar problem two months ago will help the agent understand any frustrations and resolve issues quickly. When fully informed, agents can tailor their approach. In addition, if they use insights from customer data, they can make recommendations that are more likely to suit the customer's personal situation and circumstances.

All that will add up to productive and positive customer experiences. Customers end the interaction not just with an issue resolved, but also knowing that the service provider recognizes who they are and understands their position and history with the business. They feel valued.

Recommending and upselling products and services

Omnichannel doesn't just create efficiencies. It is essential to effective upselling through personalized recommendations.

The insight created from a deeper understanding of the customer leads to agents being able to recommend the right offers or add-on services to both new and existing customers. The recommendation can be timed and tailored to the individual customer based on a more complete view of his or her behavior.

Of course, an essential part of this is ensuring product catalogs are updated and synchronized across all channels.

Implementing an omnichannel strategy

Once the strategy is agreed on in principle, there are two approaches to implementing an omnichannel strategy in practice. The first is to build a separate layer over the existing architecture—although this can mean maintaining a legacy backend that is divided into silos, making full omnichannel impossible to achieve. It requires less time and effort, however, than building from the ground up, and can bring about efficiencies.

The second is more radical: to build from the ground up, transforming legacy tools and creating a new, fully harmonized, layered architecture separating the frontend and backend layers. The service layer will include product catalog, billing, recommendations, analytics and business processes. All channels access the same data from shared information sources, and the backend is connected to the frontend channels via an API layer.

Whichever approach you choose, the principles of omnichannel remain essential to a business looking to its future. Modern customers have many options when it comes to choosing a CSP.

Omnichannel solutions don't just make businesses run more efficiently; they bring the business closer to its customers. They facilitate customer journeys that leave customers satisfied no matter what channels they complete them on.