3 Keys to Omnichannel Customer Experience Success

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Savvy companies realize one of the key things they are being judged on today is customer experience. And that means capitalizing on each and every interaction they have with their customers.

In the past, customers had only a few methods for communicating with companies: visiting in person, writing a letter or calling customer support. Today, consumers have many more, including email, social media, and support forums. This omnichannel environment requires businesses to keep tabs on multiple contact points and to empower employees to interact on multiple levels. This is where Unified Communications and Collaboration (UCC) can be a huge asset, delivering outstanding customer service levels that enable businesses to stand out, but doing so in a way that optimizes productivity, efficiency and manageability.

Customers want to connect how and when they want to, and so successful businesses must offer a wide range of options to meet varying expectations. Organizations need communication and collaboration tools that break down barriers to information and enable them to service customers faster, more completely, more uniformly and more efficiently, whether that's in store, through a call center or online.

The Two Sides of the Communications Equation

Being able—and available—to communicate with customers at any time and any place can feel like an uphill struggle with so many digital channels and such differences in preference between Gen Z, Y, and X at one end of the spectrum and boomers and silver surfers at the other. The answer to this challenge lies in a solution that maximizes the knowledge and expertise of your own people and makes that information widely available to other associates whenever, wherever and whatever devices they and your customers are using to enable a fantastic customer experience.

Executing an omnichannel strategy is clearly the way forward, but first you need a properly grounded plan that takes both sides of the communications equation into account: your agents and broader employee base as well as your customers and potential customers.

Here are the three fundamental principles that any successful omnichannel strategy must be built on to most effectively leverage the power of today's advanced UCC solutions.

1. All interactions and data in one place

Customers do not care about the internal structures of organizations they buy from. They view you as a single brand and entity and expect each of your departments to act as one. The mere insinuation that your customer should make allowances for the fact

that department A (sales, perhaps) is located in a different place, staffed by a different team and managed in a different way than department B (e.g. shipping) is unforgivably old-fashioned.

So, Step 1 in your omnichannel plan should be to deliver centralized access to information for all of your employees so they can provide a consistently uniform and high level of service.

First up, everyone should have access to the full history of a customer's interaction with the company, regardless of who is interacting with them and which communications channel is being used. This is critical to delivering an optimal customer experience, because you never know when or where customers are going to pop up or how their customer journey will unfold. Who hasn't combined a visit to a store with a browse on their website and potentially even phone calls, chat sessions and social media interactions too? While face-to-face human interactions are arguably the most important, each interaction point along the way is critical, so it is crucial that you equip your floor staff as well as your contact center agents with the right information.

Of course, it's not just access to customer interaction history and personal contact details that can make a decisive difference to delivering optical customer experience. You also need to aim for consistently accurate and up-to-date inventory, pricing, live promotions and warranty information—and any other relevant data pertinent to your specific business or sector.

Once you have ready access to a secure, single view of a customer and their complete communications history and a great UCC tool with which to give your employees access to that data, you need to complement it with the type of valuable information that can elevate the customer experience.

This valuable knowledge comes from allowing employees to easily communicate with one another—across departments and even locations. It includes shared hacks and tips that employees can use to help customers with their purchases and inquiries, from relatively basic details such as up to date inventory levels and pricing to more advanced information such as insights on how best to support a certain product, details about complementary solutions due to be released soon or new promotions that can give the buyer more value.

To accomplish this, organizations must break down the silos that exist between departments and eliminate any jealously guarded "ownership" of data. By harnessing the full potential of truly open and shared information via your UCC solution, your employees will gain the most powerful weapon of all in the quest to deliver the optimum customer experience: on-demand access to not just detailed customer data but also each other's expertise and experience. This is essentially sideways communications within the organization on behalf of the customer, with the employee using the internal UCC system to access people and information significantly faster than if the customer tried to track it down themselves. How this plays out in practice could be a floor rep gaining rapid access to a product helpline for insights while speaking face-to-face with a customer on a technical issue, or a contact center agent consulting with one of the shipping team to help advise a customer on the best way to get a product delivered to a remote location or within a tight timeframe. The net effect is the same: a great customer experience.

2. Complete consistency in process and brand

Omnichannel experiences have to be seamless so that you don't confuse customers and erode their trust. In other words, you can't let customers see the differences in process and brand that potentially exist between communications channels.

Documenting and ensuring consistent processes are crucial for enabling an outstanding customer experience, so Step 2 in your plan should begin with conducting a granular assessment of how customers currently experience each of your communications channels in isolation and then comparing the findings. By identifying

discrepancies, you can target and manage improvements that bring all of your communications channels up to a consistent and optimum standard.

To do this, create test environments and attempt to break processes, taking careful notes along the way on what customers experience. Because at the individual level customer behaviors can be extremely unpredictable, you must cover all eventualities. In so doing, be sure to champion no favorite communications channel and to disappoint no customer segment.

The ultimate goal should be to successfully support whatever journey the customer wishes to take during their interaction; at the very least enabling them to fulfill a self-service action rapidly and efficiently, ideally with a view to optimizing the sales process for new and existing accounts.

Beyond creating uniform or at least complementary processes, creating a user experience with consistent brand, messaging and tone is also vitally important. Customers should feel a connection with your business that doesn't get disrupted no matter how many times they switch communications channels. This familiarity boosts loyalty while also making operations run more smoothly.

The same should be true for your employees' experiences, too. After all, employees are front-line brand ambassadors, and improving their working experience should be a key objective. Allowing them to more easily access information and solve customer challenges increases job satisfaction and reduces staff churn, keeping and expanding more knowledge and experience within the organization. Employees equipped with tools that make them better at their jobs are typically more motivated to expand their knowledge base, share insights and develop new skills. And as they become more efficient and productive, less of their time is spent on basic tasks and more on projects that deliver increased value to the business.

3. Anytime, anywhere availability

The first two steps above will remain entirely theoretical unless you successfully implement Step 3: enabling universal access to corporate information and resources as well as other employees at any time and from any place. Equipping your people with customer communication tools that deliver access to such vital data, regardless of location and device, is paramount.

With advancements in handheld computers and 4G/5G networks, organizations can support communication, collaboration and customer service not only within the walls of their organization but also extend it to fleet vehicles and field agents.One example of this is when a customer needs to change the time of a service appointment on short notice. Rather than creating stress, uncertainty and delay in relaying this fact and requesting a resolution, putting the right infrastructure in place makes it easy to connect them with the employee in the field so together they can reschedule for a more convenient time.

Another is the empowering effect of equipping store-based employees—wherever they might be at any point in time—who might otherwise feel a sense of isolation from important data when trying to help a customer. With the right tools, they gain easy access to colleagues, product information and transaction processing, as well as a permanent lifeline to the entire organizational knowledge base.

Having a bank of shared knowledge is immensely valuable and can be nurtured through shared collaboration spaces. But employees must ultimately want to contribute their questions, insights and templates for success, which is why it's so important to foster the right culture and "we're all in this together" camaraderie.

Omnichannel UCC removes data silos and streamlines customer experience data sharing

Employees will be more likely to commit to share knowledge when they have a strong understanding of the value that other people's shared knowledge brings them. Hence the ease of use of UCC tools is incredibly important, making it as simple and intuitive to deposit new data into the knowledge bank as it is to make a withdrawal—which boosts continual learning and improvement across the business.

Today's advanced UCC tools, which allow anytime, anywhere, any device access to information and resources, are core to the successful execution of an omnichannel strategy, making organizations more accessible and more attractive to customers, and enabling their employees and associates to deliver a competitive edge.

By putting these three principles at the core of your omnichannel approach, you can leverage UCC to optimize both sides of the communications equation and underline a strong reputation for fantastic customer experiences.