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WHITEPAPER

ICMI

3 Insider Perspectives on [redacted]
Removing the Roadblocks to an Effortless [redacted] Customer [redacted] Experience

Consider the impact of every contact center agent having the knowledge, tools and ability to provide a flawless experience; think about the results that are possible when an organization perfectly aligns their mission, vision, and values with the needs and expectations of both their customers and their employees. Envision all of this being the case for your organization.

This is not an easy task for even the most sophisticated of organizations: The complexity of today's contact center is at an all-time high with a future indicating more channels to manage, increased customer expectations to fulfill, and a need for a frontline workforce that is, by no means, "entry level". This doesn't mean providing an effortless customer experience is impossible, it just means that you need to be ready to handle whatever comes your way.

Creating an effortless customer experience requires insider knowledge from three key stakeholders:

The Customer

The Agent

The Organization

We have insider perspectives from each of the key stakeholders on what you can do--right now-- to remove three common roadblocks to an effortless customer experience. In this whitepaper, you will receive tips for solving these problems and putting an effortless customer experience within your reach. From the customer's core expectations, to the systems and processes that agents need for success, to the right metrics for the organization to measure, you will have the core components required for lowering customer effort and elevating the overall customer experience.

The Customer:

What do they want:

Service when they want it, how they want it, and they do not want to worry about it once they have it.

The customer cares about their experience. While understanding this truth is one thing, understanding what steps can be taken to affect and improve it are another. What contributes to a great customer experience and what takes away from it? The answer to this question is closer to home than you may realize. More often than not, the greatest detractor to the customer's experience is the organization itself; are you getting in your own way?

For example, think about the last negative experience you had as a customer somewhere. Chances are high that the company could have done something to prevent or fix the negative experience. Whether it was an employee with an attitude of indifference, a policy that was too stringent, or a faulty product or service, the company fell short of your expectations. Now, think of your own company. Do you know where you are falling short of the customer's expectations?

If you're an opportunist, this is outstanding news because it implies that improvements to the customer experience are not only possible but within the grasp of every single organization today. The concept is relatively straight forward: identify what's detracting from the customer's experience and fix it. You are probably thinking one thing, "straight forward and easy are not one in the same," and you would be correct. Fortunately for you, we have gone a step further and specifically identified some common detractors and potential improvements for each.

1. Ineffective self-service options

ICMI research has uncovered that customers are most satisfied when offered their channel of choice and —for a large percentage — that channel is self-service. Self-service is an attractive option for organizations as it can improve process efficiency and reduce overall costs, and it is a convenience for customers as it enables them to acquire the knowledge themselves without investing the time and effort required to contact an agent. **(ICMI research revealed that 45 percent of contact centers saw quicker response times through self-service).** A significant impact to first contact resolution was also discovered, with 43 percent of respondents citing improvements as a result of self-service options. All of that said, when customers attempt self-service and are unable to do so successfully (whether it is due to missing/inaccurate information or customer error) that system of efficiency comes crashing down. In addition, customers are more likely to escalate due to their frustration, lack of trust, or general discontentment with the organization.

What is the fix for your self-service systems? Understanding that self-service is not a "set it and forget it" channel and it must be maintained and tested for usability and effectiveness. Does your organization know how many customers attempted to help themselves in the IVR before opting for a live agent? Can you assess how people are utilizing your website, forums, or mobile app for information and where they are running into snags? If your answers are no, this is a great place to start collecting insights.

2. Limited channel availability

Gaining the understanding that customers are more satisfied in their channel of choice frequently leads to the assumption that you must provide service in every channel. This is not necessarily right or sustainable for every business. Just as each organization, its products, and the needs of its customers are different, so are the mix of channels necessary to provide the right customer experience. Today's multichannel world makes this both a blessing and a curse to organizations, as it gives customers options like never before and enables organizations to gather deeper insights on preferences and behaviors, yet is the source of much agony and frustration when attempting to understand the implications of staffing, ensuring quality, protecting the organization's integrity and effectively leveraging data.

The key to providing the right mix of channels begins by gaining an understanding of your customer's needs and expectations. If you are unsure as to what these are, then you need to ask your customers! Once you are armed with customer insight, first consider the capabilities of your existing technologies and identify whether or not it will continue to meet your needs. Second, review the experience and abilities of your existing staff to determine where additional training or hiring is required. Lastly, review how this new channel aligns with your organization's goals, missions, and values to determine if and how it should be served by the contact center. It is a delicate balance to get right, as you want to be certain that the quality of the experience, accessibility of the channel, and appropriateness of the conversation is consistent across each channel.

3. Data misuse and abuse

Today's customer is hearing about breaches in security on a regular basis and has witnessed several large organizations fall victim to these crimes over the past 18 months. As a result, there is a growing distrust in providing personal information to organizations and ongoing concern over the privacy of data that was previously provided. This is a genuine challenge as customers expect custom, personalized experiences to be available on-demand. Add to this, Forrester research has uncovered the number one thing customers want is respect of their time.

While there is no easy solution to overcoming these breaches in security, what you can affect is the way in which you leverage existing customer data to provide these personalized experiences and the tools, training, and authority that you provide to your frontline staff.

Here is the summary of that equation: *Reluctance to provide personal data + Expectations for personalized products and services + Low tolerance for waiting* = Heightened importance for you and your company to leverage customer data you do have in order to empower agents to provide an exceptional experience in as little time as possible.

The Agent:

What do they want:

Clearly defined expectations that make sense and are designed to avoid burnout, and the tools, knowledge, and resources required to fulfill them.

What does this mean to you and your organization? The agent cares about everything that is or should be within their control. When they are measured on metrics that they can not affect, held accountable for standards that are not sustainable, or put on the job with broken or ineffective resources, there is a volatile recipe for disengagement, dissatisfaction, and ultimately, attrition.

Some of the most common examples in today's contact center include holding agents accountable for an "average handle time" objective, applying a "big-brother" approach to quality monitoring, or using coaching opportunities to exclusively address negative performance.

ICMI research revealed that the happiness of the agent correlates to the happiness of the customer, so what is detracting from agent happiness and getting in the way of them providing an effortless customer experience?

1. Limited authority

Historically, the role of contact center agent has been viewed as an entry-level position which required little to no formal education or training. Considering that many contacts were traditionally quite transactional and task-oriented this was appropriate for the times, but times have changed. Due primarily to the increased prevalence of self-service options, many of the simple interactions are moving away from live agents and towards self-service channels. Therefore, interactions happening in the contact center are more complex and complicated in nature. This has impacted average handle times and cost per contact, both of which tend to rise, meaning agents are required to have a skillset that is well beyond entry-level.

This shift in complexity is only beginning to have an impact on contact centers and will continue to shape the landscape of this environment in ways that have yet to be seen on a large scale. Beyond the changes that must occur in job descriptions and pay scales, current trends indicate that more authority must be given to frontline agents. Unnecessary escalation, restrictions on discretion, and limitations to issue resolution will only further hurt an organization's reputation as customers seek answers and resolution in quick and easy ways. If agents are not fully empowered to provide the best experience possible, you are unintentionally building a barrier to the most important touch point on a customer's journey: their interaction with the agent.

2. Missing or inaccurate resources

In many of the same ways that self-service is important for your customers, the resources and self-service options for your agents must be well-maintained and tested for effectiveness. If an agent discovers a resource to contain incorrect or incomplete information, or finds a tool complicated to utilize, they will resort to using assumptions, best guesses, or archaic resources that take more time and energy. None of this is a winning combination for providing an effortless customer experience.

One of the best approaches to seeing success with employee resources is to deploy a robust knowledge base that is easy to search, navigate, and leverage as a tool. It is critical to assign specific responsibilities for monitoring and updating information, and focus groups, surveys, and ongoing discussions can all be used to keep the tool current.

The Organization:

This sounds simple enough. "Use as few resources as required and drive revenue where possible," but are many of today's organizations confusing "cost" with "value"? Is a misalignment of the mission, vision, values, and customer expectations of your own organization wreaking havoc on your ability to hit KPIs, build cross-functional relationships, or drive a positive culture? Is this focus on cost efficiency wrong and, if so, where should your focus lie?

In many ways, cost efficiency becomes an outcome of "doing the right things" in terms of meeting customer expectations and empowering your agents. For example, if you could reduce repeat calls by 15 percent as a result of providing accurate information during the first contact, what would that mean for your operating costs, agent occupancy, or customer satisfaction? If you could reduce handle times by 30 seconds as the result of improving your internal knowledgebase, how would it impact employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, or cost per contact? You will quickly discover by removing the customer or employee roadblocks – the third common roadblock – concerns over the costs of servicing the customer – becomes a non-issue. In other words, providing an effortless customer experience produces more value, whether it is through process and agent efficiency, customer loyalty, pure revenue generation or a combination of them, rather than focusing solely on efforts to "reduce costs."

The Summary:

Creating an effortless customer experience is something every organization can accomplish once they understand their three key stakeholders and know the secrets to delivering what each stakeholder truly wants.

The customer wants "Service when they want it, how they want it, and they do not want to worry about it once they have it." Your ability to deliver on this will require you to drive successful self-service options, deliver service in your customer's channels of preference, and respect for time and their data.

The agent wants "Clearly defined expectations that make sense and are designed to avoid burnout, and the tools, knowledge, and resources required to fulfill them." Successfully removing roadblocks will provide the agents with greater responsibility, comprehensive training, and the tools and resources necessary to get their job done.

The organization wants "Cost efficient service that maximizes revenue."

Remember:

- **Focus on understanding your customer**
- **Align yourself with the mission, vision, and values of your organization**
- **Build the infrastructure, processes, and personnel to support the customer journey**
- **Proactively identify and remove the barriers along the way**

When you do all these things, your customers' "wants" become an outcome of simply doing the right things.

By understanding and leveraging these three insider tips, you can remove your roadblocks to effortless customer experience. Providing an effortless customer experience has the potential to produce tremendous amounts of lifetime value, whether it's through process efficiency, customer loyalty, pure revenue generation or a combination of them.