In the Omnichannel Customer Experience, Consistency and Context Matter

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It's a story we all know: A customer experiencing a complex problem has to spend the first 10 minutes of each service call re-explaining their issue and the steps they've taken to resolve it. The service agent, hearing the issue for the first time, unknowingly offers solutions that failed to work on previous calls. Meanwhile, the customer grows increasingly frustrated with each re-explanation before eventually moving on to a competing product or service.

Situations like these are the exact opposite of the omnichannel customer experience businesses everywhere strive for these days. No longer content to deal with inefficiency and by-the-numbers treatment, customers have effectively demanded an acceptable level of care and consistency. From the sales counter to the support desk, companies flourish and fail by the strength of their collective communicative ability, no matter how strong their experience is otherwise.

Despite the effort that meeting customer expectations entails, these changes are far from a bad thing. It only makes sense that modern businesses must revisit the way they interact with customers and prospects, just like they did when telephones, the internet, and other groundbreaking communications technologies took hold in years past. These days, the stakes are higher—and consistency, more than any other singular factor, is key to meeting the standards consumers have expressed.

The Medium Matters in an Omnichannel Customer Experience (But Only to a Point)

Twitter. Facebook. SMS. WeChat. FaceTime. A customer might use any one of this array of voice-, video-, or text-based mediums when approaching a company. While organizations may feel compelled to add as many of these icons as possible to the "contact us" section of their site (and it's a worthwhile effort), a business can have a comprehensive collection of contact mediums and still miss the mark.

Instead of icons on the page, organizations should focus on consistency between channels. Customers have long treated their collective interactions with a business as a singular, ongoing conversation. It's time for businesses to do the same. By shifting from a series of disjointed, individual communications to an ongoing conversation, companies can establish a lasting relationship with customers.

Attaining true consistency means unifying every aspect of the communicative experience. Making this work in real life can take many shapes. The organization that builds a text-for-help button into various screens on the customer's self-service account dashboard engages in the omnichannel customer experience; going one step beyond would be using a back-end system to log which page the customer was on when they pressed that button.

Technology's Role in the Revamped Experience

Now consider the technical capabilities needed to make such a change possible. An organization needs customer service representatives capable of communicating and carrying out tasks in multiple formats, or at least a system that enables phone- and keyboard-based personnel to view the same information.

Likewise, they need contact centers, stores, and other points of contact capable of managing various mediums. Often, they need tools that offer connectivity with CMS infrastructure and other platforms, such as metrics monitoring or data analytics solutions. The longer reps spend digging through systems to find answers, the less data they have at their fingertips, the more the omnichannel customer experience suffers.

These areas and others highlight the immense value communications platform as a service (CPaaS) solutions offer. By enabling a cohesive customer communications experience, they free organizations from over-reliance on tools that are ill-equipped to handle the job. In this context, the key differences between CPaaS and traditional communications formats lie in malleability and adaptability. Whereas traditional landline-based communication methods are what they are—they facilitate the call and not much else—CPaaS tools can be deployed with specific contexts in mind.

The difference is subtle but substantial. For instance, take the "call now" button within an organization's mobile app. In a traditional communication experience, customers may click a hyperlinked phone number and be taken to their phone's call screen. They may then go through a series of IVR prompts and have to re-explain the purpose of their call, effectively starting from scratch when a rep picks up.

But a button built using CPaaS offers distinct experiential advantages:

- It can automatically direct the call to a sales team, service center, or similar specific group based on when and why the button was pressed.

- It also provides reps with useful contextual clues, which reduces the amount of fact-finding needed before getting to the heart of the customer's issue.

- It can store the exchange in the customer's history to provide context for any subsequent interactions.

Because CPaaS solutions enable flexible communications software, they can be built for numerous uses. If a company wished to send outbound branded SMS promotions, it could deploy CPaaS to ensure reps have context when customers call to learn more. Compared to traditional tools, this combination of capability and flexibility has undeniable allure, no matter how the technology is ultimately deployed.

Changing attitudes, intensified competition, and rapid technological advancement have all contributed to the growing need for an improved customer experience. While the term "omnichannel" may imply "multiple channels," it carries much more meaning for organizations making hard decisions around communications channels and features to offer customers. Though specific use cases will vary with each organization's offerings, goals, and customer pain points, these considerations give CPaaS revolutionary potential anywhere businesses need to rethink communications—which is to say, just about everywhere.

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