

Omnichannel strategies: what you need to know before implementation

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There is no doubt that omnichannel matters for contact centres today. Channels other than voice are becoming increasingly important to the customer experience, with the use of new channels such as web chat, social media and SMS, for example, growing rapidly and going mainstream.

Across South Africa and globally, forward-looking contact centres are looking to incorporate additional channels in to their contact centres. However, some are labouring under the misconception that additional channels can simply be plugged into existing infrastructure and managed in isolation. Doing this can add complexity to contact centre management, and could even downgrade the customer experience.

When managing channels in silos, contact centres lose the ability to deliver seamless and smooth service, and are unable to view the customer experience in a holistic manner. True omnichannel is the ability to offer and manage a consistent customer experience across all channels, giving the customer a positive experience and allowing the agent to have a single view of all interactions. It requires tying phone and digital channels together so a consistent, granular, and coherent view exists for real-time interactions, and for critical recording and compliance. Data must flow between channels to inform and improve interactions so the agent has visibility into the customer profile, and prior interactions across all channels – phone and digital, self, and assisted service.

Before embarking on an omnichannel deployment, there are some important issues to consider:

[if !supportLists]• [endif]**Current performance.** Before you add new channels, it is important to optimize performance within the

channels you already have. It is necessary to consider whether you are consistently achieving service level goals, managing the channels efficiently and providing a positive customer experience, because you have to have a strong foundation before adding complexity.

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Customer journey.** Adding a variety of channels is pointless if your customers will not use them. It is important to map your customers' preferred journey from initial awareness, through to purchase and sharing of satisfaction, to understand the channels they use and which channel is preferred for which purpose. Understanding the preferred channel of interacting allows you to create connections with contextual information, thus empowering agents to become emotionally engaged and vested in the customers they serve.

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Business goals.** Chasing undefined objectives with no understanding of the bigger picture will overwhelm and frustrate your staff. It is important to have a clear definition of the experience you want to deliver to your customers and what the business goals are. Consider: What are the business goals of each channel? Is each optimized to deliver on its business goals?

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Channels.** Are there channels customers request that are not yet in use by the contact centre? If so, how should they be seamlessly integrated to improve customer experience? Are there indications that new channels will become necessary in future? Will it be possible to seamlessly integrate them?

While advanced solutions can enable fully integrated omnichannel functionality, there are still challenges to be overcome when implementing an omnichannel strategy. Most of these challenges are strategic and operational in nature. The contact centre will need to consider:

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Channel goals**, including how you will measure success and what the outcomes will be.

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**High priority customers** and how their contacts will be routed and prioritised through an ecosystem comprising a number of new channels.

- [if !supportLists]· [endif]**Simultaneous interactions** and how these will be managed. For example, will agents complete email interactions before taking a call from the queue? Should they (and can they) engage across multiple channels with multiple customers simultaneously?
- [if !supportLists]· [endif]**The workforce.** Omnichannel is a game changer that adds complexity to forecasting, scheduling and reporting, making advanced workforce management important.
- [if !supportLists]· [endif]**Agents** will also need to become multi-skilled and capable of handling complex interactions that cannot be managed through self-service.

With the right solutions in place, it becomes possible to overcome these hurdles to ensure seamless customer interactions and efficient management of the omnichannel environment. Technologies to enable effective omnichannel contact centres include:

- [if !supportLists]· [endif]**Universal queue and intelligent routing** leveraging a single platform with unified routing rules and unified reporting. By seamlessly blending Internet and phone-based service requests into a universal contact routing engine, all customer contacts are managed according to consistent business rules, which allows cost and quality to be optimised. Intelligent routing allows the contact centre to route voice and digital interaction types by dozens of scenarios, including agent skills, caller priority, customer value, data directed routing, context, and conditions. And when information from CRM databases and back end systems is incorporated into routing decisions and displayed to the agent, customers receive personalized, effective service.
- [if !supportLists]· [endif]**Multichannel workforce management** is important to support complex, real-time management, forecasting, scheduling and reporting
- [if !supportLists]· [endif]**Unified real-time and historical reporting tools** allow the contact centre to track trends and improve performance across all contact methods. Agent

quality is also assured through built-in multichannel recording, agent forecasting, and scheduling tools to support cost containment and consistent quality improvement.