

## The nine top trends in CEM today

*Customer experience management that genuinely enhances customer 'stickiness' depends on new strategies and now mindsets, says Frost & Sullivan.*

Speaking at the recent Interactive Intelligence Customer Experience Executive Forum in Johannesburg and Durban, Gareth Mellon, Programme Manager ICT for Frost & Sullivan South Africa, said customer loyalty was becoming an outdated term. "Loyalty implies an emotional connection. Customers are seldom emotional about the companies they support. It's really about retaining customer 'stickiness'." Mellon noted that both B2C and B2B customers were likely to stick with companies where the customer experience was a good one: where transactions were simple, interactions were consistent and service was good. "Bells and whistles and going over the top are not always necessary," he noted. "Often, ease and consistency are more important."

He said that Frost & Sullivan research in industries such as the ICT sector had found that where a number of service providers deliver similar services, customer stickiness tends to be based on a 'better the devil you know' approach. "However, some differentiators that would prompt customers to move were proactive engagement and the ability to enable innovation for the customer," he said.

Mellon highlighted nine key trends impacting the future of customer experience management and contact centres in Africa:

**Unification and single view.** A move to true omnichannel strategies and solutions that enable consistency across channels for the customer, and a seamless view of the customer's journey with the enterprise. However, multi-channel and omnichannel models should be well executed to be effective, said Mellon. "A single channel strategy is better than a badly executed multi-channel strategy," he said.

**Context is king.** All elements of a multi-channel or omnichannel experience must be context aware and relevant. Attempting to personalize interactions with a customer and getting it wrong ultimately annoys the customer, therefore context awareness is crucial, noted Mellon. "Consistency is more important than ad hoc attempts at personalisation?"

**Company culture and employee engagement.** Contact centre agents are crucial and will become increasingly so. Therefore companies must provide an environment in which skilled agents are empowered to deliver a good customer experience, and where agents are encouraged to feel passionate about the business, said Mellon.

**Qualitative and practical insights.** Predicting future customer behaviour is a top priority for companies, but the sources of valuable data are constantly expanding. “The challenge becomes ‘what can we do with the data that we’re getting?’” said Mellon. He said greater focus was being placed on improving the processing and analysis of data, as well as the linking of various data sources in timely ways.

**Real time insights.** In future, growing numbers of organisations will feed insights directly to the front line, giving them authority to act on them.

**Intelligence optimisation.** Analytics processes are increasingly being employed to improve processes and procedures, with the responsibility for customer experience becoming shared by the entire organisation.

**Testing and spontaneous innovation.** Forward thinking companies are moving to use real time insights to continuously adapt and tweak their products and services. This necessitates an effective feedback loop to all systems and processes, he said.

**Globalisation.** “It’s not just companies that globalise – customers globalise too,” Mellon pointed out. As customers increasingly buy products and services from organisations around the world, pricing and language become increasingly important, he said.

**Cloud – the customer experience wrap-around.** Cloud uptake is being driven by a need for scalability, reliability and accountability, and moving beyond just cost considerations, he said. As cloud continues to gain traction, the location of data centres will grow in importance he noted.

Mellon noted that increasingly, data analytics is the engine at the heart of effective customer experience management, and that integration of all CXM systems is needed to support innovation and proactive engagement.