

A View Into the Minds That Matter

Hot topics for any customer facing executive

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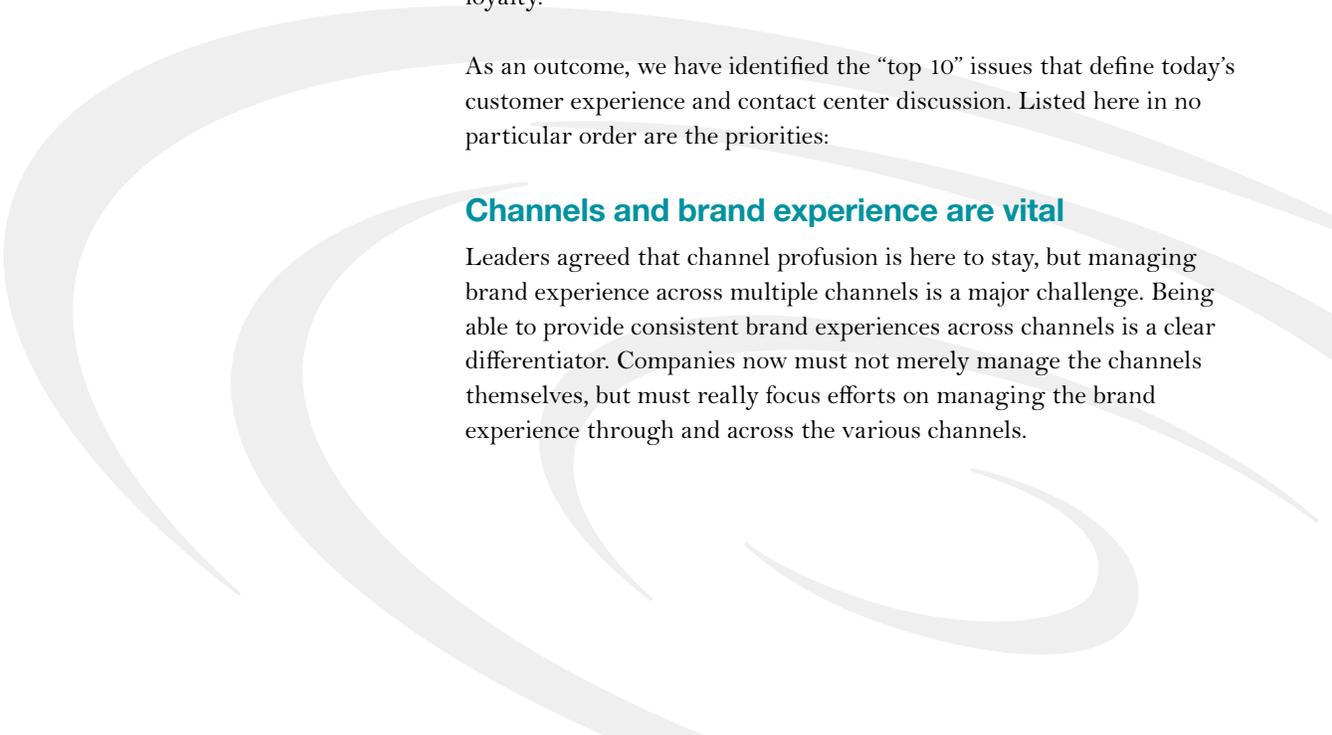
In the course of interacting with dozens of top customer facing executives, we've listened to and discussed many of their most pressing challenges, the innovations they were pioneering, and their visions for the future of customer interaction. Overall, customer facing executives consistently voiced a strong refocus on the customer, evolving views of channels, and a passionate interest in customer insight. Customer facing executives also take different approaches to tackling social networking, transforming how analytics bolsters innovation and insight, and prioritizing integrated customer experiences. One of the key aspects was the focus on building and maintaining the right brand experience in a transparent and multi-channel world.

While leaders are consistently excited to discuss the future, they also value many of the successes of the past, including the importance of high quality person-to-person contact, managing costs smartly, and being pragmatic in how they develop customer advocacy, satisfaction, and loyalty.

As an outcome, we have identified the "top 10" issues that define today's customer experience and contact center discussion. Listed here in no particular order are the priorities:

Channels and brand experience are vital

Leaders agreed that channel profusion is here to stay, but managing brand experience across multiple channels is a major challenge. Being able to provide consistent brand experiences across channels is a clear differentiator. Companies now must not merely manage the channels themselves, but must really focus efforts on managing the brand experience through and across the various channels.



Single view of the customer is back on the agenda!

Management of the experience was seen as critical going forward through single views of the customer and unified channel communications. A key and difficult enabler was creating a single view of the customer across interactions, channels, products, and time. Beyond being able to obtain a single view, acting on this view was critical to achieve a positive experience. Likewise, delivering unified, coordinated communications was vital.

Integrated channel experiences continue to be the goal

An integrated channel experience is highly desired by almost all leading companies, but very few companies can deliver integrated channel experiences at this time. Despite the technology-centric nature of many new channels (e.g., internet, SMS, social media, device, chat) few find technology to be a barrier, but instead are hampered by organizational and process obstacles, particularly “fiefdoms” within the enterprise. Leaders agreed that the challenge is to capture and optimize the customers’ time, knowing that an increasingly time-taxed and impatient customer base is demanding easy and compelling channel experiences.

Social media is hot (and sometimes too hot to touch)

Almost all customer facing leaders are excited, intrigued, and scared by the hot, hot social media phenomenon. Many are interested in using social media as a channel, but apprehensive of using it as a means of open communication to proactively message to the market. In general, social media is open to the masses and largely uncontrollable. It is still a place likely to create communication confusion and misfires as much as it is a directed and positive dialogue, if it is not managed proactively and carefully as a channel.

IVR realignment—return of the humans

Many leaders feel that IVR is currently overused and that consumers are growing increasingly weary of its use. Many leaders are switching back to simple options, sometimes choosing appropriate channel deflection (especially given the desirability of new channels), and even a return to more classic voice-to-voice interaction. Is “Human to Human” the new way forward?

Computers that listen—speech tools and analytics only on the cusp

Customer speech analytics and its potential is currently drawing a mixed review of those excited for it and those who are less so. Many in the technology marketplace see unstructured analytics and speech analytics to provide exciting future opportunities. Many did, though, find it to be a useful application in agent selection, pairing the right person, skills, and experience with specific customer situations.

Contact centers change their identity from cost centers to sales centers

To many, contact centers were still too often thought of as cost centers within the enterprise – a necessary function that should be largely viewed in terms of expense and efficiency. But, has the world woken up to the untapped potential of the contact center for upselling? Increasingly, organizations are waking up to the potential for contact centers to be important facets of their brand, sales efforts, customer experience, and CRM strategies, and have found new opportunities in generating revenue from both inbound and outbound interactions.

Onshore and @home

With the adoption of offshoring slowing, many organizations find onshore strategies and especially @home programs (i.e., remote agents working from their home offices) growing rapidly in the U.S. @home and hosted contact centers are a growth area within the contact center industry, presenting a new and potentially powerful means to ramp up or down and to avoid investments in new infrastructure or technology.

Contact center metrics are evolving

Average Handle Time (AHT), while an important metric for efficiencies, may not be an effective indicator of overall center performance. Many leaders focus on First Call Resolution (FCR) and customer satisfaction, net promoter or customer effort as the most important metrics to understand performance within their organizations. However, is FCR really FCR when a frustrated client calls your contact center due to bad experiences with your web or mobile options? In finding the right metric for overall center performance, it's essential to integrate channel experiences to avoid client frustration.

Customer analytics

One of the biggest opportunities and most daunting challenges is high-quality, sophisticated customer analytics. Most leaders wish to advance their capabilities in these areas, but very few felt that they were doing it well. Some of the obstacles included not having the right skills to optimize analytics capabilities and a lack of focus or understanding amongst the C-suite of the value of analytics. Most leaders feel that analytics had profound opportunities to drive revenue and loyalty if deployed correctly. Also, workforce analytics is considered an important topic as firms seek to optimize their agent workforces and matching capabilities.

These issues and opportunities are at the height of the contact center leaders' minds, certainly taking the spotlight away from many of the day-to-day challenges such as managing resources, costs, capacities, skills, and market changes that all adept contact center managers must excel at. This list handily characterizes the hot issues affecting those in the industry, but more importantly, it lends valuable insight into what will likely be the agenda for the world's contact center leaders in the years to come.

It's clear to us that we are all entering a new phase in the customer journey!

For more information

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