Enhancing Customer Engagement

WRITTEN BY: BROOKE LYNCH

Featuring Insights From:

Richard Dumas

Vice President of Product Marketing

Five9

Razi Sharbaan II

Associate Director, Consumer Care and After Sales

BISSELL Homecare, INC.

Andrea Brown

Director of Workforce and Program Management

Teladoc Health

Enhancing Customer Engagement

Engaging customers is no easy feat today. Individuals now interact across different channels with new expectations unique to their own personal experience. While one customer may only engage on one go-to channel, others work across different outlets and piece together a particular journey that works best for them.

This has been a trend for some time, but the pandemic incited a shift in expectations and demand for individual support on every channel. Digital transformation efforts have fundamentally changed the way customers engage and we continue to see a push toward innovation in the CX space.

Because of this, companies must build out support options that cater to all customers to ensure consistency and satisfaction at every point throughout the experience.

To engage customers in 2022, organizations must personalize interactions, improve the customer journey and simplify the agent experience for streamlined support. With these priorities top of mind, companies can deliver intuitive and unique experiences fit for the modern customer.

This report will cover the importance of customer engagement and highlight solutions to effectively support and connect with today's customers. It will also discuss the most prominent challenges contact center executives are seeing and touch on how companies can leverage AI to eliminate pain points for more seamless service experiences that exceed expectations.

A Look at Engagement on Every Channel

Before we look to improve customer engagement, we must understand the reasons customers choose to use certain channels. Without full knowledge of why customers interact on each channel and what their priorities are, companies will never be able to facilitate a seamless and intuitive journey across these evolving touchpoints.

However, it seems as though organizations are not fully aware of the perception customers have about service options. While customers are certainly excited by digital channels, CCW Digital research found that only 3% feel that self-service options are wholly sufficient for resolving an issue. Further, they rated chatbots as one of the least dependable channels, with only 15% of customers marking them as trustworthy.

When breaking down these remarkably low confidence scores, it seems as though customers are interested in the idea of engaging digitally but aren't receiving the support they are used to on traditional channels. While it sounds great to have your problem solved with a few clicks or an exchange of messages, this level of support may not be accessible yet.

According to Five9, only 10% of customers are fully resolving their issues through self-service. This means that the majority of customers utilizing self-service are simply using it as a starting point to engage on a number of other channels. With that logic, what is the incentive to use self-service at all?

To enhance customer engagement, companies must work to integrate features and improvements that create a more level playing field across all channels. When customers choose to engage in chat, they should be receiving the same level of quality and care as an interaction on the phone. Ensuring customers have the autonomy to engage in a way that feels intuitive to them and highlights the unique features of each channel should be the overarching goal.

"Most companies invest heavily in self-service, but customers don't find the experience engaging. It is critical to identify and remove touchpoints that lead to frustration and create clear conversational designs that provide self-service when customers want it and live agent assistance when they need it. Making the self-service experience more conversational and eliminating frustrating touch tone menus is important. Equally important is providing a smooth transition to a human being who is prepared to continue the conversation and resolve the problem. - **Richard Dumas, Vice President of Product Marketing, Five9**

Challenging the Speed of Innovation

Innovative experiences are now the norm. Customers expect interactions akin to Amazon with streamlined, on-demand support. And, when considering the rise in highly sophisticated CX-focused brands, these expectations don't feel outlandish. When met with slow or disconnected support, we are often quick to think — what's wrong here?

And this expectation for innovation has, at times, set unrealistic expectations. It drives customers to assume the best when entering into every new interaction, increasing disappointment when they are actually met with lesser service experiences.

But, this level of innovation is realistically not as easy to achieve as customers might think. In a study from 2020, Five9 surveyed IT decision makers about their challenges for implementing automation. Their responses highlight three leading barriers: cost, reliance on professional services projects and time to develop.

AI technology requires continuous training to interpret and learn from data effectively. When companies rely on development teams, the time it takes to develop, test and deploy a new feature or product is often out of their control. This increases the amount of time it takes to improve interactions and facilitate the level of experiences customers are now looking for.

To achieve the seamlessness and ease of use we now expect, companies must implement technology that can be quickly deployed for continuous improvement. Sophisticated AI is no longer a nice to have, but a requirement for innovative and streamlined support.

"For AI to be useful, it must be practical. Great technology that's too difficult to deploy will never reach your workforce and will never improve your service experience. To deploy AI that amplifies the abilities of humans in the contact center, a new generation of tools is required. Businesses can't wait months for development teams to build and train the AI that will assist their customers and employees." - **Richard Dumas, Vice President of Product Marketing, Five9**

Agents are Burnt Out: How do We Fix It?

From the customer's perspective, it seems like agents are doing an OK job. According to CCW Digital research, some of the most common pain points in the past year were long wait times, repetitive questions, frequent transfers and limited support hours. On top of that, only 14% of customers said they feel most of their brand experiences are personalized. While customers assume agents are doing their best, it does not make any of these pain points any less frustrating.

From the agent's perspective, however, these points of friction can often be blamed on inefficiencies within the contact center itself. Long wait times may be linked to difficult self-service options, repetitive questions aren't due to inattention, but a lack of contextual information and frequent transfers signal a problem with the IVR.

Bad experiences should not fall on the agent's shoulders in 2022, they are often a reflection of dated or disconnected technology and inefficient workflows. Further, whether customers know the cause or not, this frustration toward the agent is causing high levels of burnout and attrition.

By disregarding technology, organizations are literally diminishing experiences for both the agent and customer as they perpetuate a cycle of turnover in the contact center. To improve, companies must leverage technology that can help agents deliver better experiences and eliminate the chronic points of friction throughout their workflows.

"As contact volume increases, so do the challenges in delivering great customer experiences. Businesses are realizing that they can't simply hire their way out of the problem which is leading them to invest in AI that automates tasks and augments agents' abilities. Not only does this help to reduce the cost of providing service, but it also improves agent satisfaction and retention. According to a recent Metrigy study, customer satisfaction increases by 26% when agent turnover rates are less than 15% per year." - **Richard Dumas, Vice President of Product Marketing, Five9**

Enhancing Customer Engagement for the Modern Customer

To effectively engage customers, companies must facilitate experiences that align with their underlying needs. By following the customers lead, organizations can map out journeys that meet evolving expectations and fit customers' individual lifestyles. Here we outline solutions to help companies facilitate truly engaging experiences and support agents as they work to exceed modern customer expectations.

Balancing Technology with Agent Priorities

To ensure customers are receiving a consistent, personalized and seamless experience at every turn, companies must leverage AI technology. When engaging digitally, customers want interactions that feel relevant and tailored to their needs. But, with disconnected and dated technology, this level of experience is almost impossible to facilitate. With AI, companies can consistently train, develop and improve their technology to meet customer needs over the long-term.

Collaborative intelligence can assist companies in achieving this reality. By pairing humans and AI effectively, companies can enhance experiences in a way that aligns with the agents priorities while remaining entirely relevant and seamless for the customer. Collaborative intelligence harnesses the unique strengths of humans: creativity, empathy and emotional intelligence and embraces the benefits of technology's speed and accuracy.

To act on the values of collaborative intelligence, companies must implement sophisticated AI technology. With the resources to actively build, train and optimize AI, employees can ensure that all experiences, from in-person to digital, are individual and effortless. Once the technology is consistently updated and enhanced, it will work to amplify the abilities of agents and allow them to perform to their full potential. And with a more active and empowered workforce, companies can rely on their front line to engage customers in a meaningful way.

"We believe that companies will see the biggest performance gains when humans and machines collaborate and complement each other's capabilities. To help businesses move beyond simple, siloed automation and harness this 'collaborative intelligence,' Five9 is delivering solutions that make AI persistent throughout the customer and agent experience, along with tools that make it easier for contact center teams to build, deploy, train and derive insights from the AI." - **Richard Dumas, Vice President of Product Marketing, Five9**

With better trained and optimized AI technology, companies can also build more meaningful self-service experiences. Companies can build and train language models to understand customers and better communicate on digital channels. When customers want low-touch seamless support they can trust that intelligent virtual agents and chatbots will meet their needs in a meaningful and human way. Further, companies can increase confidence in self-service, creating a more positive experience for customers and positioning it as a key tool for seamless and intuitive resolutions.

"Five9 has made AI and automation our North Star," Razi says. "Our customers are receiving answers in a natural, conversational way without speaking to a live agent. It's allowed us to scale our service without compromising quality." - **Razi Sharbaan II, Associate Director Consumer Care and After Sales, BISSELL**

Understand What Customers are Saying to Generate Value

To engage customers, companies must understand their deeper intentions. If companies want to consistently improve, they must be able to analyze and interpret what customers are saying at every unique touchpoint to identify pain points and measure successes at a more granular level.

Speech analytics can help organizations seamlessly recognize and track customer sentiment across all channels and curate insights based on the customers own words. When using analytics tools, companies can identify AI-generated insights that can help better identify opportunities to automate workflows and remove points of friction across the journey. These tools can also drive continuous improvement initiatives. As we see customer expectations change, companies must be equipped to consistently track, analyze and interpret their interactions for broader trend recognition.

With a greater picture of the 'why' behind certain metrics like long handle times or transfer rates, companies can ensure they are automating and investing in the most critical areas for improvement. Additionally, companies can integrate workflow improvements that allow for a more seamless experience for the agent. For example, If a company is measuring a certain point of friction across all interactions, even with their most capable agents, it might be a reflection of an operations process. Being able to instantly recognize the issue and proactively implement a solution will ensure experiences are always improving, no matter the circumstances.

"The lack of conversation insights that provides visibility into contact center trends and top agent and customer intents is another challenge area. AI-generated insights – through tools such as speech analytics - pave the way for smoother customer experiences and help identify opportunities to automate workflows and remove customer journey pain points. This can also help contact center managers understand the root cause of longer handle times or decreases in automation rates."
- **Richard Dumas, Vice President of Product Marketing, Five9**

Leverage Agent Assist for Success in Every Interaction

To ensure agents are prepared to engage customers, we must equip them with the necessary tools and resources to succeed. As we see customer expectations continually rise, we cannot just trust that our agents are ready to deliver these heightened experiences — we must work to empower them with intelligence, insight and technology.

Agent assist tools can give agents that extra level of confidence required to take on complex interactions. These tools give agents real-time guidance as they are interacting with a customer, ensuring they have access to contextual history, relevant content and next-best action recommendations on-demand.

Additionally, features like real-time transcription frees agents up to focus on the customer's concern instead of taking notes. These tools ensure consistent and accurate call descriptions that sync with CRM systems for easy access. With these tedious tasks handled, agents can spend more time building their expertise, learning about customer needs and working to optimize experiences.

As we continue to see attrition and disengagement complicate the contact center environment, companies must prioritize resources like agent assist to guarantee that they are doing all they can to make the employee experience more seamless. And companies will ultimately reap the benefits, as more than half of brands note that they measured improvements in CSAT scores when pairing AI-technology with live agents.

"Artificial intelligence (AI) is making agents' jobs easier and more meaningful. Technologies like Agent Assist harnesses the power of AI, machine language, and natural language processing to provide real-time intelligence and automation to help agents be more effective and productive. Empowered by relevant information and the next-best-action guidance, agents can focus on the customer to deliver a more personalized experience. At the core, it creates collaborative intelligence by combining the unique skills of people and smart machines, where both augment each other's capabilities." – **Richard Dumas, Vice President of Product Marketing, Five9**

"One of the results we have seen since implementing Agent Assist is increased quality scores, because agents have that information right at their fingertips. They do not feel overwhelmed and don't need to search through the repository to find information. Feedback we have from our older agents is they wish we had Agent Assist sooner when they see how beneficial it is to our newer agents." – **Andrea Brown, Director of Workforce and Program Management, Teladoc Health**

About the Author

Brooke Lynch, Analyst & Staff Writer, Customer Management Practice

Brooke Lynch is an analyst and staff writer for CCW Digital. With a background in television news and production, she's worked across industries covering B2B marketing, procurement and finance events.

Her current work highlights challenges and opportunities for customer experience and contact center leaders, with a recent focus on e-commerce, retail, and technology

Meet Our Analysts

Brian Cantor

Principal Analyst & CCW Digital Director

Michael DeJager

Principal Analyst & Head of Product Development

Nadia Chaity

Senior Analyst, CCO Series

Sandy Ko

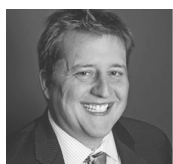Senior Analyst

Amanda Caparelli

Analyst

Get Involved

Ben McClymont

Business Development Director

E: Ben.McClymont@customermanagementpractice.com

P: 212 885 2662

Simon Copcutt

Head of Strategic Accounts

E: Simon.Copcutt@customermanagementpractice.com

P: 212 885 2771