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In this guide we highlight how embracing flexible working can deliver a vastly superior customer experience.

The goal of any contact centre is to ensure customers receive the kind of service that creates, builds and maintains positive relationships. It's widely accepted that organisations must focus on creating an appropriate working environment in order to motivate customer facing employees to perform at their highest level. The link between employee engagement and the customer experience delivered must not be underestimated.

The next generation contact centre is being driven by omni-channel customer interaction and flexible working models. Here we explore how flexible working can transform the customer experience into a dynamic, smart, revenue-generating operation.

1. Attract and retain the best talent.

Traditional working patterns are under pressure. The rise of flexible hours, home working and hot-desking are challenging the typical office environment.

The workforce is driving this change in behaviour. The majority of workers want to break free from the nine to five culture in favour of flexible hours and working locations.

Working from home, or outside of a central office location is a benefit that hasn't been available to most contact centre staff. Accommodating flexible working within the contact centre is critical to retaining and motivating high performance employees.

Many customer service employees put interesting work, flexibility, social life around work and a pleasant workplace as top important factors in a working environment, and they put feeling valued and appreciated before financial reward as factors leading to satisfaction at work.

Organisations continue to struggle to address these key factors. By embracing home and mobile working, many contact centres find they can more easily hire, retain and motivate a talented workforce.

This is particularly helpful for contact centres that require specialist skills, such as technical, medical or legal expertise, and for other businesses looking for cost savings, productivity benefits or to access global talent.

2. Adapt to ebbs and flows.

Balancing customer service levels with available resource is a primary challenge within the contact centre environment.

It's important to have enough agents to handle call volumes, as overstaffing is costly to the organisation. Some ebb and flow in contact volumes is expected and planned for, but it can't always be predicted.

Having the flexibility to rapidly expand and release agent resource is essential in many businesses. Cloud contact centre solutions are particularly well suited to offer this flexibility without hardware or licensing restrictions. Home workers can be ready to go at a moment's notice, ensuring your contact centre can almost instantly respond to peaks in demand in a way that simply wouldn't be possible if they had to travel to a central office.

Staff no longer need to be sat in a fixed contact centre location and this can save potentially thousands per year for every work-at-home employee.

3. Always-on customer service.

The contact centre is usually the primary point of contact for customers. Any break in availability is highly visible and damaging, potentially resulting in permanent loss of business to a competitor.

Single site contact centres that cope well during normal working hours may struggle to offer the same level of service at other times. It can be difficult to access the right skills, especially if an expert is required to work in a fixed office location.

Mobility tools allow customers to get their problems solved at any time without staffing a fixed location 24/7. Using a distributed approach, staff can deliver effective customer service from home or elsewhere using a mobile device. This model allows organisations to spread the workload across on-call employees, for example, by directing technical calls to field engineers during the evening or at weekends.

Allowing contact centre staff to work from home also increases the likelihood that you'll find agents who are willing to work night or split shifts, making it easier to have coverage around the clock and ensuring customers can speak to a live person at any time of the day or night.

Cloud solutions are ideal for highly distributed contact centres. In the event of major incidents that render the office useless, agents can work from another location. In cases where agents are unavailable throughout the incident as well, such as during a natural disaster, staff from other departments and in other locations can be drafted to handle contact centre functions remotely.

4. End the one-size-fits-all customer experience.

The Millennials represents the most tech-savvy customers that businesses have ever had to deal with. They are fast, responsive, social and demanding, forcing contact centres to change the way they approach customer interaction.

These young adults are adept at searching for information online and are as comfortable communicating on Facebook and Twitter as they are on email or the phone. Critically, however, the Millennials must co-exist alongside an established group of older consumers.

This change is driving organisations towards omni-channel interaction. Sophisticated business analytics which operate across all media types are essential to enable better management decisions.

In this environment unified communications plays a critical role, enabling front line staff to communicate with back office specialists to get a customer's question answered in a single interaction wherever possible.

Increasingly, organisations are looking towards cloud contact centre solutions to offer omni-channel interaction to individuals working at any location. Organisations can gain access to the latest contact centre technology without making a significant capital investment in technology or specialist resources.

5. Become a revenue generator.

Historically, inbound and outbound contact centres served two completely different customer bases. Inbound handled incoming sales and support enquiries and outbound operations were primarily limited to telemarketing, collections or market research.

But the line between inbound and outbound is blurring and call blending approaches now allow agents to manage both incoming and outgoing communication.

For the business, it's a strategy that focuses on optimising the performance of the contact centre, positioning it as a highly agile and productive part of the business and supporting the shift from being a cost centre to a revenue generator.

If the right balance is achieved it can make for a highly efficient and effective operation, ensuring that outbound activity is slowed at peak times for incoming calls, then increased as inbound call volumes fall away.

Technology can arm contact centre managers and their teams with the right tools and applications to make the process of making and receiving calls more efficient.

Predictive, preview, progressive and power dialling can help to create a seamless calling experience, alongside dynamic campaign management tools and intuitive call scripting.

Agent skill-sets also need to be considered carefully. Many will have developed specific expertise, for example handling complaints, conducting market research, up-selling new products or resolving issues. An accurate view of where these strengths lie will enable you to use any tools to best effect and make sure you are using the right agents, at the right time, for the most effective outcome.

Summary.

Consumer technologies are transforming customer expectation and changing the way we communicate and work. The impact is greatest within the contact centre environment.

The culmination of omni-channel customer interaction and flexible working enables organisations to embrace these changes by allowing customers to communicate in a media of their choice with highly motivated employees offering exceptional customer service.