

Acquiring Digital Customer Engagement Software

What vendors won't tell you

The directive has descended from the CxO suite—thou shalt digitalize customer engagement, whilst cutting costs, and it all has to happen yesterday!

As an executive in CX, digital transformation, IT, or procurement, you constantly face the challenge of doing the impossible—helping improve or even transform digital customer service and experience, while reducing cost and risk. That is no easy feat—it is like having the cake, eating it, and losing weight, all at the same time. Selecting a solution provider is complicated and challenging—so many choices, vendors that say, “We, too,” and everyone claiming to solve world hunger. How do you pick the right solution provider, succeed in your initiative, and avoid holding the bag, when all is said and done?

Here are some traps to watch out for as you set out to achieve your seemingly impossible mission.

1. Checking the box

It is one thing for someone to say they know how to run, but it's another thing for that person to be Usain Bolt! The same logic applies to product capabilities. Look under the checklist hood and make sure that the vendor offers deep capabilities in digital customer service and engagement. Of course, you may want to make an educated compromise if the vendor shows strength in some areas important to you, even if they are less than the best in a particular domain. One approach you could take, if you are the quantitative type, is to score vendors in

specific criteria, place weights for the criteria, and go with a weighted score to make your decision.

2. “We too” marketing

Thanks to the web, marketing elements such as messaging, collateral, videos, event themes, and content topics are all in the public domain. Many vendors simply cut and paste from others. No wonder your eyes glaze over when you consume all this information, and you have a difficult time figuring out which is real news, and which is fake news.

As an example, when knowledge management vendors say, “We too,” ask if they have deep capabilities for content management, single-sourced omnichannel publishing, guided search, federated search, AI-powered process and conversational guidance, and knowledge analytics. Do they have a proven knowledge and AI methodology for success and at-scale client stories?

3. Blanket will cost extra

As you get into pricing negotiations, check what capabilities are included in the pricing, and which require add-on products and services (and \$\$) from the vendor and its partners. Otherwise, you might get electrocuted by sticker shock!

For example, some vendors may charge extra if you want digital analytics, digital engagement capabilities, case management, knowledge base, mobile support, or visual workflow. Also, watch out for traps such as product rebundling in the contract period, avoidance of contractual SLAs and service credits, capping of service credits, and exorbitant storage costs.

4. Your customer (and poor agent) will connect the dots

One of the biggest problem areas for CX and AX (agent experience) is the disconnected “dots” of capabilities, data, business rules, and content. Customers are forced to repeat information as they go from channel to channel, from one agent to another, or from one session to another, a huge deterrent to good CX. Agents face the same challenge on the other side where they have to navigate an average of 8 to 9 application windows, per Gartner, when the irate customer is on the line, and try to connect the dots on the fly.

It's no wonder CX has been stuck in a sorry plateau (just look at the Forrester CX Index data). Meanwhile, agent churn remains high at 30% to 45% (Source: Quality Assurance and Training Connection), and per Gartner, a whopping 84% of agents think that their desktop tools do not help them resolve customer problems.

As you look for solution alternatives, go with a unified, digital-first omnichannel engagement solution that can connect the dots for the customer, the agent, and your business. Avoid point products as they create silos, while sending CX to new lows!

5. We learn (at your expense)

In McKinsey's latest research in 2018, an overwhelming 84% of over 1,500 respondents said their organizations' digital transformation initiatives have not successfully improved their performance or equipped them to sustain changes in the long term. Lack of inhouse skills is the biggest challenge facing organizations in building and implementing AI solutions, say 54% of respondents in a Gartner survey.

While technology clearly matters, one of the other requirements for success in digital deployments is best practices. How many years of experience does the vendor have in digital engagement? What are their customer success stories? Do they offer proven expertise and transformation services to fill the expertise gap you have in your organization? The last thing you want is having a vendor learn their craft on your dollar, not just dime, given how much you are paying them!

6. We can "scale"

Requirements for enterprise scale and enterprise-class feature requirements are much more exacting than those for a small business deployment. Has the vendor delivered deployments at scale? What is the size of their average deployment and their biggest one?

7. Service credits? Can't hear you

Quote from Gartner: "Standard SLAs usually fall far short of the customer's expectations."

As an enterprise that is committed to 24x7 high-quality customer service, you will be well-served to check how often the vendor curtails or suspends service for scheduled maintenance. What is their SLA? Do they offer an always-on option, where they perform all updates, enhancements, and patches across the cloud stack—infrastructure, platform, and application—without service curtailment or disruption? Do they offer service credits? What is their uptime track record?

8. We will get back to you in two days

Two days is eternity in today's competitive business environment, but unfortunately, that is the response time that you get for a standard support plan with many vendors. Make sure you get 24x7 support and faster response times without having to go premier at the expense of your wallet.

9. ROI is a 5-year plan

According to McKinsey, less than 15% of companies can quantify the impact of their digital initiatives. Beware of providers that can't measure the success of their deployment, and stay away from big iron vendors that promise to solve world hunger in 5 years, while putting your wallet on a radical weight-loss plan!

Take AI to illustrate the point. Gartner says that it takes an average of 4 years for enterprises to get their AI solutions up and running, let alone get ROI from them! Questions to ask: What is the vendor's approach to digital value creation? What is the typical time to value? What ROI can they sign up for? Can they provide client success stories?

10. Yes, we “share” risk

Many solution providers pretend to share risk, but most foist it all on the buyer.

Gartner recommends that companies negotiate deals with IT vendors that start with proofs of concept (POC) and build on them before making a significant investment. Many of our clients across banking and financial services, healthcare, retail, eBusiness, manufacturing, and travel and hospitality have taken advantage of a safe and unique consumption model that we offer. It is a no-charge production pilot with free best practice-guidance to success during the pilot phase and no obligation to buy after the pilot. Most of these companies moved

forward with us beyond the pilot. Beware of risk-sharing pretenders, who have their invoice in your inbox and the billable clock ticking before they even leave your building!

Conclusion

Asking these questions will help you get past the hype and make the right vendor selection for your digital experience initiative.

About eGain

eGain customer engagement solutions deliver digital transformation for leading brands—powered by virtual assistance, AI, knowledge and analytics. Our comprehensive suite of applications help clients deliver memorable, digital-first customer experiences in an omnichannel world. To find out more about eGain, visit <http://www.egain.com>.