Cost-Effective Ways to Deliver Multichannel Customer Service

Your customers are multichannel—they expect multichannel customer service as a rule rather than as a “nice to have.” So, how can companies provide service experiences that are cost-effective, compelling, and unified across touchpoints? Based on our experience with successful implementations in blue-chip companies worldwide, we recommend the following five steps for success.

1. **Identify channel preferences by lifecycle**
   A well-informed business is a thriving business. With simple analytic tools, as well as primary and secondary research, you can determine how your customers want to interact with you based on where they are in their research-buy-use-love lifecycle. This insight allows you to deliver service through the right interaction channels, while avoiding those that do not make business sense. For instance, if your target customers prefer to use web self-service for most customer service needs, it would not make sense to focus on agent-assisted phone support as the primary interaction channel. It’s more expensive and your customers don’t want it!

2. **Use a robust framework for “right-channeling”**
   “Right-channeling” is a cost-effective approach to multichannel customer service. It relies on factors like customer preferences, economic value to the business, the lifecycle stage, nature of the question, and the customer’s emotional state for channel and service decisions. Right-channeling ensures the delivery of just the right service levels through the right touchpoint at the right time, while curbing costs.

   For example, a business might choose to offer cobrowsing help to high-value customers, when they are filling out a form or shopping online. Social customers with high influence might be offered an immediate one-on-one web chat with an agent. On the other hand, customers with common queries might be prompted to use self-service with the option of escalating seamlessly to agent-assisted service. The key to delivering friction-free multichannel experiences is the integration of content, context, and process across all communication channels—traditional, social, and mobile—using a “hub” approach, explained in Step 3.

3. **Go with a hub**
   While businesses are starting to break down interaction silos, the state of multichannel service leaves much to be desired. In fact, leading North American companies posted their worst performance in
multichannel customer service, compared with any other aspect of service, according to an eGain mystery-shopping research study.

Context retention and service consistency are key challenges in multichannel customer sales and service. Implementing a Customer Engagement Hub (CEH) enables businesses to address these issues by consolidating all customer interactions, knowledge, rules, workflow, and analytics on a common platform. This approach, originally advocated by Gartner, enables contact centers to always move multi-step, multichannel interactions forward without asking customers to repeat context or offering suggestions that have not worked. This vastly improves the customer experience, boosts contact center productivity, and reduces costs. Additionally, the hub ensures that answers and processes are consistent across all channels.

As consumers adopt and discard channels and touchpoints at warp speed, how can the business respond? Again, CEH is the answer; it enables businesses to simply plug in new channels in a unified manner, including high-visibility ones like online forums and social, where businesses can ill-afford silos. The hub also simplifies cross-channel administration and enterprise integration, reducing TCO.

4. Hub applies to knowledge, too
Just like context silos, knowledge silos kill contact center productivity and frustrate customers. Leveraging a common multichannel content base drives down knowledge maintenance costs and enhances customer and agent experience. Moreover, providing multiple search methods (e.g. FAQs, keyword, metadata and natural language search, topic tree browse, guided help, avatar self-service, etc.) improves user adoption and unleashes content ROI across self-service and the contact center.

5. Take self-service to the next level
You can take a big bite out of your costs and provide great customer experiences with knowledge-powered self-service. Beyond common search methods, case-based reasoning (CBR) guides self-service (and agent-assisted service) to answers with human-like intelligence ensuring that business-to-customer conversations won’t get stuck in dead-ends. CBR also excels at guiding users to decisions and through processes to achieve transformational results for the business and the customer. Self-service can also be complemented with peer-to-peer service in online forums and social networks. Again, it is important to treat self-service and peer-to-peer service as an integral part of the CEH for cost savings and customer experience.

About eGain
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