Your customers are omnichannel. Most transactions between them and your business now involve multiple channels and touchpoints. They expect this hopscotch experience to be seamless. So, how can you provide service experiences that are unified, compelling, and cost-effective? Based on our experience with successful implementations in blue-chip companies worldwide, we recommend the following five steps for success.

1. Map customer journeys
   A well-informed business is a thriving business. Knowing who your customers are includes knowing what their journeys look like across the research-buy-use-love lifecycle. Manifest customer segments as personas. For each persona, map the most common journeys, detailing channels and touchpoints preferred for various activities. For instance, a busy working mom’s journey map for buying an insurance plan may involve blogs, social referrals, company website, FAQs, cobrowsing, even video chat and Facebook! Customer journey mapping will help you understand needs and decide which technologies make business sense to implement.

2. Use a robust framework for “right-channeling”
   “Right-channeling” is an intelligent and cost-effective approach to omnichannel customer service. It ensures the delivery of just the right service levels through the right touchpoint at the right time, while curbing costs. For example, a business could offer cobrowsing help to customers making an expensive purchase or filling out a complex web form. Social customers airing sensitive issues in public might be offered an immediate one-on-one chat with an agent. On the other hand, customers with common queries may be prompted to use self-service (always, always with the option of escalating seamlessly to agent-assisted service). The key to delivering friction-free omnichannel 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
   Fragmented service experiences are still the norm. Leading North American companies fared the worst in omnichannel customer service, compared with any other aspect of service, in an eGain mystery-shopping research study. No wonder, according to Gartner, omnichannel consistency was the top CX priority for 2015 for most companies.
Context retention and service consistency are key challenges in omnichannel service. Meet them by implementing a Customer Engagement Hub (CEH) that consolidates customer interactions, knowledge, rules, workflow, and analytics on a common platform. This approach, originally advocated by Gartner, enables contact centers to move multi-step, omnichannel interactions forward without asking customers to repeat context or offering suggestions that have not worked. This improves customer experience, ensures that answers and processes are consistent across channels, boosts contact center productivity, and reduces costs.

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 frustrate customers and kill contact center productivity. A common omnichannel knowledge base drives down 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

Do more with less using 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 customers don'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, while ensuring regulatory and best-practice compliance. Self-service can also be complemented with peer-to-peer service in online forums and social networks. Again, treat every new offering as an integral part of the CEH for cost savings and seamless customer experience.

About eGain

eGain (NASDAQ: EGAN) customer engagement solutions power digital transformation for leading brands. Our top-rated cloud applications for social, mobile, web, and contact centers help clients deliver connected customer journeys in an omnichannel world. To find out more about eGain software, visit http://www.egain.com/products/.