



4 Ways To Raise The Bar On Contact Center Performance

When it comes to discussing the importance of the customer experience, contact center leaders generally have their heads in the clouds. When it comes to actually managing the performance of their contact centers, these leaders typically set the bar too low.

It is time to escape this reality. It is time to build a contact center operation that truly rises to the highest customer experience standard.

This ideal customer contact environment does not simply address customer complaints or process transactions. It instead fosters meaningful, nuanced, personalized connections with customers without compromising internal efficiency. It, in fact, recognizes that *efficient* operations and *effective* customer experiences often go hand-in-hand.

The customer contact community spent decades working to escape the “cost center” stigma. It built many cases in support of firmer buy-in from the executive rank. This brief will ensure those ambitions and efforts were worthwhile.

It will reveal factors that undermine contact center performance, before sharing strategies for reaching new operational heights. It will close with case examples of organizations leveraging their contact centers to achieve legitimate customer centricity.

Contact Center Performance: The Common Mistakes

In prioritizing the digital transformation, committing to reducing customer effort, demanding better first contact resolution, and acknowledging key sources of agent frustration, customer contact leaders demonstrate an awareness of the landscape. They know what opportunities exist, and they recognize where they are struggling.

Many, unfortunately, make mistakes when trying to approach these issues. These common mistakes place bottlenecks on contact center performance.

Ignoring Issue Context

Different customers want different things. Different issues warrant different things. Dismissing this reality, many organizations aim to deliver a “one size fits all” experience.

They may train on process and product, but they rarely prepare agents to adapt to specific customers. They focus on broad metrics like average handle time and first contact resolution rather than diving deep into customer intent and sentiment. They deploy stock security measures, forgetting that some issues warrant higher levels of authentication and others do not require any additional questioning.

In addition to yielding generic, impersonal experiences for customers, the “one size fits all” approach is bad from an operational standpoint. If the organization does not understand the specific context and needs behind each interaction, it cannot optimally allocate its resources. “High-value” agents will end up spending time on transactional interactions, and vice versa, creating costly inefficiencies.

Neglecting The Journey

“What happens if a customer is on an online chat and is told that they can solve a problem by contacting this department at some phone number and they will take care of it?” wonders Matthew Schuster of Eastern Account System. “The customer then rates that chat as a great experience. Now they call that other department and are told that they can’t help them and that the information they received from the chat was incorrect. The agent on that call may have been nice and empathetic, but now the customer is less than thrilled overall.”

For all the talk about customer journeys and the omnichannel revolution, customer contact management tends to be very fragmented. Organizations focus on whether specific touch points or processes technically performed their job, without considering how they fit into – and affect – the overall journey.

In Schuster’s example, the contact center may blame the voice agent for the bad experience even though the real culprit is the ineffective chat channel that could neither solve the problem nor communicate accurate information. The organization, in turn, gets an inaccurate view of contact center performance and the wrong idea about how to drive improvement. Performance suffers.

Dismissing The Importance of Technology, Frontline Agents

“Digital is for low-touch, voice is for high-touch.” “Frontline agents are for handling basic support issues; specialists are for complex matters.” Common within the customer contact space, these statements paint a reductive portrait





Contact Center Performance: The Improvement Opportunities

The bad news: the common contact center mistakes are creating frustration, inefficiency and dissatisfaction.

The good news: customer contact leaders can easily avoid these mistakes. More importantly, they can take steps to actually derive new value from their operation. They will turn the idea of a “customer-centric contact center” from an idealistic pipe dream into a statement of unexaggerated reality.

Establish A *Versatile* Contact Center Vision

A clear vision is the key to raising customer contact performance standard. When an organization establishes clear goals for the contact center, it will optimize the entire customer experience journey, make better technology decisions, select better partners, and choose more effective metrics.

While this vision needs to be cohesive and clear, it cannot be impossibly rigid. The marketplace is constantly changing, and new channels and technologies are constantly emerging. Individual customers, moreover, have different preferences for different interactions.

The best vision is therefore predicated on versatility. The organization maintains a broad sense of what it wants to achieve – greater customer loyalty, as an example – and then empowers its stakeholders to adapt to specific scenarios. They are just as capable of serving customers who want a speedy interaction as they are those who want deep conversations and detailed guidance.

Develop A Robust Voice of The Customer Strategy

“A customer may interact with your company multiple times in a day, week, month or year,” notes Schuster. “How do you capture that total customer journey?”

Context of the entire journey is a prerequisite for understanding customer intent, identifying performance gaps, and tailoring the experience. A robust, omnichannel approach to the voice of the customer empowers organizations to acquire this insight.

Through a combination of strategic surveys, interaction analytics, consumption analysis, and social media monitoring, organizations can gain a complete, journey-wide view of their experiences. They will understand which aspects of the journey create the most customer frustration. They will also understand how contact center performance and customer sentiment differ across the spectrum of channels and interaction types.

To jumpstart or strengthen the analysis, organizations can partner with organizations who have existing voice of the customer tools or access to industry-wide data for benchmarking purposes.

Emphasize The Right Kind of Specialization

In the interest of reducing customer effort and maximizing first contact resolution, savvy contact centers try not to be restrictive about “who can handle what.” They do not necessarily subscribe to a traditional view of specialization.

They do, however, understand the importance of tailoring the customer experience to specific needs.

They recognize and accommodate inherent differences in channels. They prepare agents and systems to adapt to specific issue context and specific customer preference. They identify opportunities in which “upsell” efforts make particular sense. They exercise best practices for security, privacy and compliance in suitable situations.

Not simply a determinant in how they interact with customers, this “specialization” also applies to how they select technologies and partners. Finance or healthcare companies, as an example, will select chatbot and SMS technologies that meet their unique regulatory needs.

Companies will meanwhile select outsourcers based on specific expertise and experience. Rather than simply contracting based on headcount, they will consider factors like industry experience, channel support (hiring an outsourced social media team, as an example), and preparation for complexity.

Build For Empowerment

Per CCW Digital’s research, “improving digital capabilities” is the #1 priority for 2019. In the interest of better honoring customer preference and improving efficiency, organizations will make good on that commitment. They will additionally deploy bots that solve real, specific tasks.

Through stronger training, they will also empower frontline agents to handle a greater array of issues. When frontline agents can handle complex issues and tailor their support to specific customer needs, they will drive increases in CSAT and FCR.

Not simply about strengthening the frontline, empowerment also involves ensuring Tier-3 experts have proper customer service skills. These experts should not simply have knowledge; they should be able to communicate it in a customer-friendly manner.

The idea of empowering the frontline may seem intimidating to leadership, but there are ways to manage the situation. For starters, building a firm security protocol will ensure the frontline agent can win the customer’s trust earlier in the call.

Savvy organizations, additionally, build a transparent contact center framework. They ensure leaders have real-time insight into how agents (whether in-house or frontline) are performing.

“Our technologies allow our clients to have complete transparency into our center,” says Schuster regarding his firm’s commitment to transparency. “In addition, we can connect to any platform or tool they are using to measure their customers’ experience.”



Turning Great Ideas Into Real Value

On paper, it is hard to argue that establishing a clear contact center vision, focusing on specialization, better harnessing the power of customer intelligence and fostering operational empowerment will remedy lingering contact center issues.

Does this theoretically sound approach hold up in practice? The answer is a resounding yes.

By partnering with Eastern Accounts to adopt some or all of the four steps, organizations have radically improved their customer contact operations. They have not simply set a higher bar for the customer

experience but made good on their promise to create more value for customers, employees, executives and other stakeholders.

About Eastern Account System

Eastern Account System is a full service premier BPO organization that offers omnichannel contact solutions for companies of all sizes in many industries. Utilizing cutting edge technologies paired with highly trained employees, Eastern helps achieve desired results while providing world class customer experiences for their clients. With vast experience in customer care, collections, billing, and sales, Eastern will design a customer contact solution for your organization. Reach out to us today at info@easternaccounts.com to schedule a consultation.

Challenge

A leading telecommunications company is looking to increase contact with customers that are in jeopardy of going delinquent and potentially having services shut off.

In the past, the company simply blanketed these customers with phone calls over a set period of time. However, as more customers prefer to communicate in different ways, there is a need to design a more efficient, complete contact solution.

Solution

Using Eastern, the company was able to design a more efficient and customer friendly way of contacting its customers. Eastern uses a combination of TCPA-compliant phone dialing and SMS messaging that allows for chat functions. This allows Eastern to reach out to customers via both call and text. Eastern can then build a database of the customers' preferred contact method and times based on past history and then choose to contact them that way next time. Furthermore, using a contactability score on the phone numbers assigned helped to determine which customers actually answer their phones.

Outcome

The company was able to achieve a significantly higher response rate and ultimately save more customers from going delinquent. Furthermore, it was able to increase the customer experience by reducing the number of calls made and contacting customers via their preferred channel.

Challenge

A leading Cable provider is looking to increase the FCR and customer experience on delinquent customers calling in to its operation. This "inbound collections department" was only trained to discuss the balance and work on a solution to bring the customer current. This usually resulted in the customer needing to be transferred to after the balance was discussed to either right size the customer or handle any other issues.

Solution

Eastern was able to work with the company and design a training program to up-skill the agents to handle basic functions of some of the other departments. Agents were trained in basic customer care/billing functions, tech support, and retention. This allowed these agents to speak confidently to customers about billing issues, perform basic troubleshooting, or apply small credits where needed.

Outcome

Eastern was able to significantly increase CX scores, including FCR, by being able to handle more than just one function in each department. Handle times had a slight increase, but the cost savings in additional transfers to other departments far outweighed it.