



Best Practices
for
Optimizing
Multichannel Support

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6 Best Practices for Optimizing Multichannel Support

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Productivity Report

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6 BEST PRACTICES FOR OPTIMIZING MULTICHANNEL SUPPORT

Gone are the days when companies can dictate how and when a customer will connect with them for support. With so many potential avenues, contact centers are potentially impairing their customer satisfaction by only offering one or two channels.

In the second quarter of 2013, the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) polled contact center professionals through the “How Can Emerging Channels be Leveraged to Improve Customer Experience?” survey. The 361 respondents – a mixture of call center executives, directors and managers – offered a compelling picture of how emerging channels such as social media, mobile, and advanced self-service could improve overall customer satisfaction (CSAT), first contact resolution (FCR) and customer engagement.

The results, published in ICMI's July 2013 “Extreme Engagement in the Multichannel Contact Center: Leveraging the Emerging Channels Research Report and Best Practices Guide” helps contact center executives understand how to use emerging channels in their own organizations.

“The fact that many service providers are uncertain how mobile, social and self-service channels are impacting the customer experience is not surprising,” says Loyd Olson, Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing for USAN. “In working with contact centers that have fully adopted these newer channels, we have learned that it is often the methods used during implementation that contribute to this uncertainty.”

ICMI's “Six Best Practices for Optimizing Multichannel Support” strive to help contact center leaders make the right decisions to successfully accelerate any combination of multichannel support, most notably self-service, mobile, and social media engagement.

BEST PRACTICE 1: PROVIDE COMMUNICATION CHANNEL OPTIONS

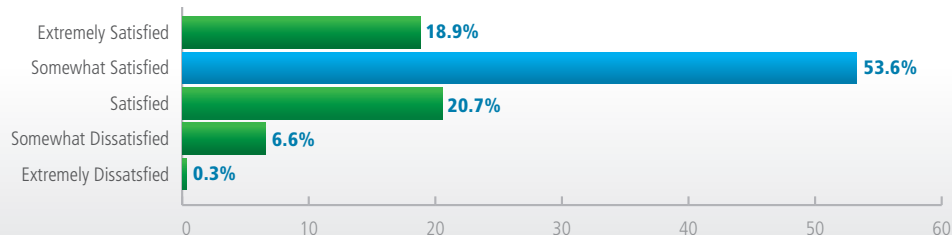
Today's consumers walk around with small powerful computers in their hands and have grown accustomed to having several channels to engage with the world. Whether it's through SMS, chat, email, social media, a self-service mobile app, or by actually using their phones to interact with an automated IVR or a live phone agent, they have come to expect numerous points of contact with customer service.

When survey respondents were asked to rank in order how they as customers preferred to contact a business, not surprisingly, speaking directly to a phone agent was the most popular (38%) top choice. However, over half of the survey respondents preferred another means of primary contact, including self-service on a website (28.1%), chatting directly with an agent (9%), by email (8.1%), through an automated IVR (7.5%) and self-service through their mobile device (6.9%). Clearly these emerging channels for contact centers can no longer be dismissed as novelties.

Rank in order from 1 to 8 (1 being the MOST preferred, and 8 the least), of how YOU as a customer prefer to contact a business for customer service.								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Directly to a phone agent	38.0%	18.6%	12.3%	9.3%	6.0%	6.3%	5.4%	4.2%
Self-service on a website	28.1%	17.4%	11.7%	12.0%	8.1%	5.1%	5.7%	12.0%
Directly to a chat agent	9.0%	15.3%	24.9%	17.1%	15.3%	8.7%	7.8%	2.1%
By an email	8.1%	17.1%	19.8%	18.0%	14.1%	13.5%	6.0%	3.6%
Through an automated IVR	7.5%	15.6%	11.4%	12.6%	17.7%	9.9%	9.9%	15.6%
Self-service from your mobile device	6.9%	11.4%	10.5%	10.2%	10.8%	13.2%	20.1%	17.1%
Via social media	1.5%	2.1%	5.1%	9.9%	11.7%	18.9%	21.6%	29.3%
Through a text message	0.9%	2.7%	4.5%	11.1%	16.5%	24.6%	23.7%	16.2%

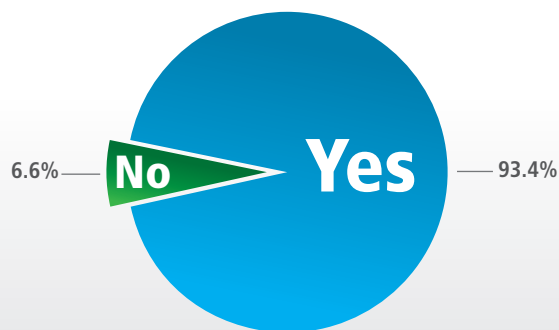
But do communication channel options and personal preference affect a customer's overall satisfaction, and more importantly, customer retention? Overwhelmingly, even when survey respondents reported receiving good service, if they did not have their ideal choice of contact, they were only somewhat satisfied most (53.6%) of the time. That signals a lack of loyalty and possible customer attrition.

If you are not offered the customer service channel you prefer, BUT still receive good service, how satisfied are YOU as a customer?



The vast majority of (93.4%) of survey respondents would themselves be more satisfied if they were able to connect with the organization in their favored method, be it social media, phone, live chats or some other manner.

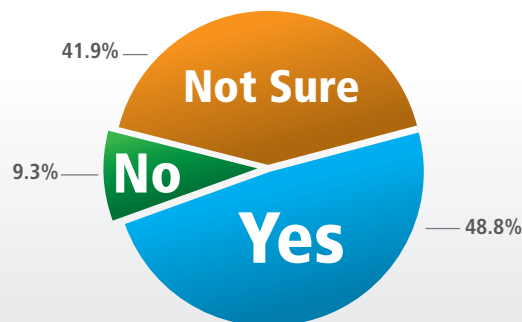
Would you be MORE satisfied if you were offered your channel preference?



"Customers don't think about it much when the channels are there—but they notice when they're not," says Brad Cleveland, Senior Advisor and former CEO of ICMI.

Most worrisome to contact center executives, almost half of the survey respondents (48.8%) would jump to a competitor if all variables were the same and the competitor offered customer service through their preferred channel. In fact, customer loyalty only mattered to about one in 10 correspondents who answered they would not switch to another provider solely because of channels offered.

Would you be willing to move to a competitor for a product or service if all other things were equal, AND you were offered customer service through your preferred channel?



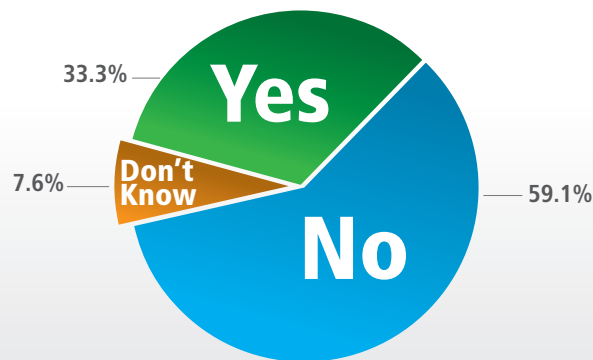
BEST PRACTICE 2: DELIVER UNIFIED TOOLS AND PROCESSES

As contact centers make inroads with delivering new channels, the customer experience should consistently remain optimal. If a customer is accustomed to world-class service from phone agents but their request through the mobile application isn't addressed with the same speed, customer satisfaction can plummet. World-class organizations balance multichannels seamlessly while exceeding customer expectations.

"They'll quickly learn if service is better in one channel versus another, leading to channel switching, duplicate work and parallel efforts. But where service is consistent, they begin to think far less about the channel they are using," says Cleveland.

Contact centers can maintain high levels of response time and issue tracking through unified agent desktop platforms. At this time though, only a third of the survey respondents reported that their contact center agents used one unified desktop platform to handle all customer service channels.

Do your contact center agents use ONE unified desktop platform to handle ALL customer service channels?

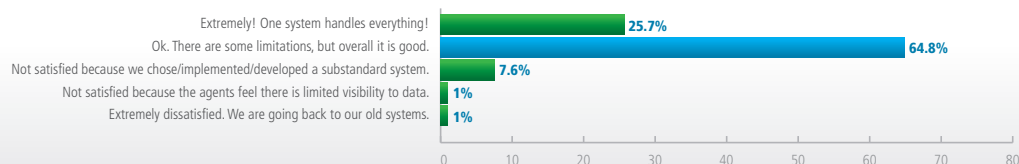


Of the 59.1% that said their agents toggle between multiple applications, the average number is five systems, with 20% of contact centers requiring 7 or more applications at once.

The survey respondents who implemented a unified agent desktop system did so primarily to increase FCR (49.1%), speed the response rate for customers (40.7%), as well as improve the overall agent experience (44.4%).

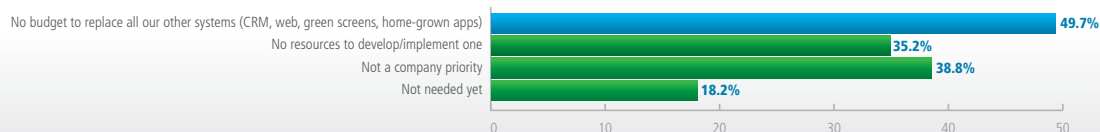
Generally, agents are pleased with the move to a unified agent desktop system – less than 10% of the respondents felt that the change had negative repercussions. More than a quarter of the respondents were extremely happy with the migration, and the majority (64.7%) stated that the unified agent desktop system was good overall, even with some current limitations.

How satisfied are your agents with the Unified Agent Desktop System?



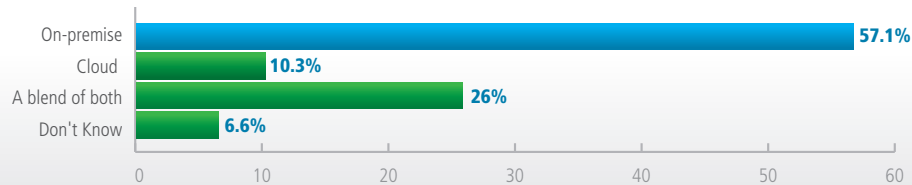
For contact centers that have yet to deploy a unified agent desktop system, 49.7% were limited by operating budgets and 38.8% reported that they were limited by alignment with company priorities.

Why do you NOT have a unified agent desktop to handle all customer service channels?



Delivering a unified experience would be more elegant if the contact center infrastructure were entirely cloud-based, but a totally on-premise infrastructure is still the standard operating procedure for over half (57.1%) of the survey participants. Cloud infrastructure is making in-roads, however, with 10% of respondents already 'in-the-cloud', and a quarter of respondents indicating that they had a blend of both cloud and premise.

What infrastructure is your contact center built upon?



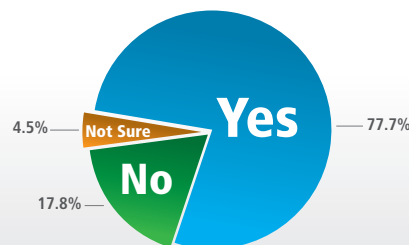
With much on-premise equipment beginning to age and falter, CIOs and contact center executives need to make potential investment in new support equipment or begin integrating more cloud-based technology, in order to support ICMI's best practices.

BEST PRACTICE 3: UPHOLD A STRATEGY OF MONITORING AND ENGAGEMENT

It may initially appear daunting to integrate the new emerging channels into the already crowded contact center, but leaders can reduce that concern by utilizing well-established processes and practices.

A great place to start is with the customer experience program, as over three-quarters of survey participants already have a formal customer experience program, QA process, or other such initiative in place.

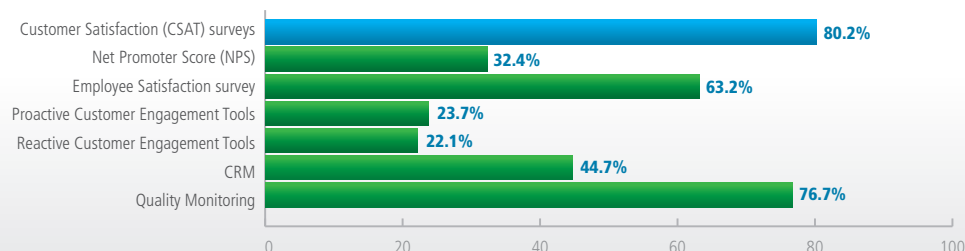
Does your contact center have a customer experience program, QA process, or utilize customer experience initiative(s)?



"The well-worn practices of monitoring, coaching and quality improvement for traditional channels should also be an inherent part of managing newer channels," says Cleveland. "We've found that the majority of quality criteria apply across channels—you don't have to reinvent the wheel."

Since the preponderance of respondents already have many of the necessary monitoring systems in place, the measurement and subsequent customer engagement can be replicated. Most report having customer satisfaction (CSAT) surveys (80.2%) and quality monitoring (76.7%), while a substantial number also conduct employee satisfaction surveys (63.2%). Customer relationship management (CRM) is used by 44.7% of the community, with 32.4% measuring satisfaction through Net Promoter Scores (NPS) and a lesser number by customer engagement tools – both proactive (23.7%) and reactive (22.1%).

Which customer experience initiative(s) does your contact center currently have in place?



"It's all about the measurement. We really encourage people not to focus so much on the emerging channels actually decreasing other channel volume or deflecting that volume," says ICMI Content Director, Sarah Stealey Reed. "It should be about improving the customer experience and improving the response time to the customer. If you can get to a customer faster and better and hit that first contact resolution, that's where you're going to find ROI."

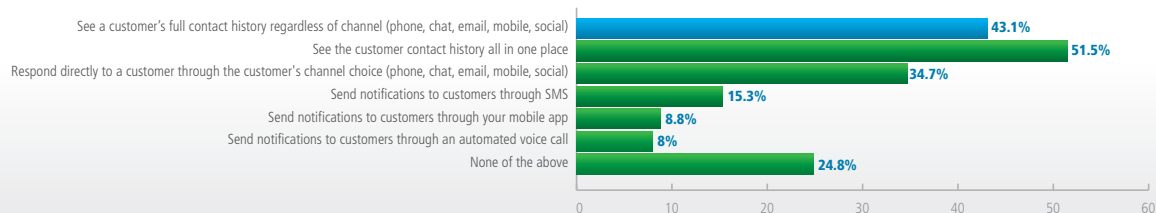
BEST PRACTICE 4: ESTABLISH DIRECT LINKS AND EASY TRANSITIONS

Sometimes a customer's initial channel choice is not the best one, and they need to be transitioned gracefully into another. In other cases, it may mean that they need to be escalated to a live agent for more complex issues.

Therefore, it's very important, no matter what the channel, for a customer to be able to seamlessly transition elsewhere, when needed. This is, again, where a unified desktop system can come into play as it allows agents to also move interactions effortlessly from one channel to another, as they have the customer's entire history and communication context available to them.

Right now though, only half of survey respondents had a technology suite that allowed agents to see the customer's full contact history all in one place and just 43.1% could see a customer's full contact history regardless of channel.

Does your current technology suite (CRM, green screens, web, homegrown apps) allow your contact center agents to...

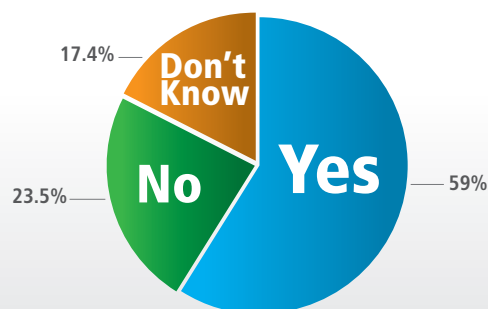


According to Olson from USAN, "Many businesses deploy a new channel with the controlling logic and data trapped within silos, creating expensive challenges with flexibility and extensibility. Multiple, individually managed channels create a management burden that will only become more complex, and provide a fractured view of the customer and their experience, which will have a negative impact on brand reputation and loyalty."

BEST PRACTICE 5: ENCOURAGE ACCESS TO INTERACTIVE SELF-SERVICE

Customers today are much more interactive and tech-intuitive. They have come to appreciate knowledgebases and are often willing to self-triage answers to their problems, before moving to other channels. When asked if they would lose customers if their self-service options were limited to static FAQs, 59% of survey respondents answered in the affirmative.

Do you feel you will lose customers if your **Self-Service** options are limited to static FAQs?



Self-service not only helps the customer, but the contact center as well. The majority of survey participants (56.5%) felt that self-service would increase deflection rate or lower volume to other channels.

"There's some guidance for how you can use different channels to encourage self-service," says Stealey Reed. "If someone brings a technical issue onto Facebook for example, you can give them the answer and also paste the corresponding link to the knowledgebase. You thereby teach them how to fix the issue themselves next time, while also teaching everyone else who reads the post."

Over 80% of ICMI survey respondents indicated that self-service was a necessary channel to engage their customers, and most (67.2%) felt it was mutually beneficial for both the company as well as the customers. As such, the overwhelming majority of respondents have already deployed tools like IVRs to route callers to the appropriate live agent (57.5%) and offer other self-service navigation methods (48.6%).

Video, virtual assistants/bots, automated text and SMS notifications are making headway in the contact center universe, but survey respondents are a tad reluctant to take the plunge, citing the ever-expanding technology and the potential for greater improvements on the horizon. Only about a third of the respondents planned on introducing video, SMS notifications or virtual assistant self-service options in the next 12 months.

BEST PRACTICE 6: CREATE CONNECTIONS TO A LIVE AGENT

While ICMI's survey demonstrated that emerging channels could no longer be swept aside as novelties, live agents will still be crucial for complex and nuanced questions that would stump even the most sophisticated IVR or self-service knowledgebase. Instead of replacing human interactions, survey respondents overwhelmingly saw mobile, social and self-service as leading points of contact that would direct escalations to a live agent. Respondents primarily cited mobile and social as trigger points (65.4% and 61.5%, respectively) while 54.1% felt that self-service was also directing customers to live agents.

Which emerging channels direct escalations and more complex questions over to traditional channels?

Mobile	65.4%
Social	61.5%
Self-Service	54.1%

While rudimentary tasks can best be handled through automation, live agents are crucial human elements to serve as transition points or when dealing with unhappy CSAT survey customers.

"No matter how sophisticated and prevalent your channel options, customers will still need to reach agents at times," says Cleveland. "It may seem counterintuitive, but easy access to agents builds confidence in and more use of self-service capabilities."

Not only does access to a live agent improve that immediate customer experience, but it also positively impacts the perceived significance of the agent. When agents are used less for the mundane and simple, and more for the complex and higher-value, they feel more impactful to the organization. That translates easily into agent happiness, which ultimately impacts customer engagement.

CONCLUSION

STAY ON TOP OF EMERGING CHANNELS OR RISK CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

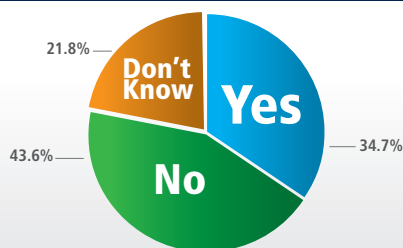
Just as consumers have many channel options for customer support, they also have many brand options as customers. With the adoption of social media and mobile apps, organizations are feeling less loyalty from their customer base. In fact, only 25.2% of companies currently feel that their customers are extremely engaged with their brand.

Only **25%** of companies feel their customers are extremely engaged with their brand

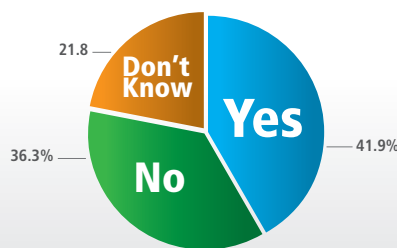
While traditional points of contact will never be eliminated, contact center executives are finding that the integration of emerging channels increases the likelihood of extreme customer engagement, while also delivering maximum ROI and happier agents.

The keys to success, however, hinge upon a defined engagement strategy and unified channels, while maintaining the same levels of superior service that customers have come to expect. Since the preponderance of survey respondents say that their customers would be more satisfied if they were offered their channel choice for support, it is a risky proposition to ignore mobile, social and self-service options for customer service. A large margin of survey participants truly believe that they will lose customers if they do not support customer service through social (34.7%), mobile (41.9%) and advanced self-service (59.0%).

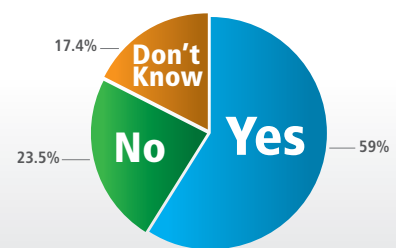
Do you feel you will lose customers without **Social Media** customer service options?



Do you feel you will lose customers without **Mobile** customer service options?



Do you feel you will lose customers if your **Self-Service** options are limited to static FAQs?



The benefits of multichannel are certainly there! The ICMI "Six Best Practices for Optimizing Multichannel Customer Support" help guide contact centers to the upper echelons of world-class support and brand fulfillment, thereby turning customer engagement into extreme engagement.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

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ABOUT ICMI

The International Customer Management Institute (ICMI), is the leading global provider of comprehensive resources for customer management professionals—from frontline agents to executives—who wish to improve contact center operations, empower contact center employees and enhance customer loyalty. ICMI's experienced and dedicated team of industry insiders, analysts and consultants are committed to providing uncompromised objectivity and results-oriented vision through the organization's respected lineup of professional services including training and certification, consulting, events and informational resources. Founded in 1985, ICMI continues to serve as one of the most established and respected organizations in the call center industry.

ABOUT USAN

USAN helps companies profitably engage customers and deliver amazing cross-channel experiences with the industry's best cloud, premise and hybrid multi-channel customer engagement solution. From traditional telephone interactions to the web, social media and everything between, USAN's portfolio of call center products gives users infinite flexibility in the way they engage customers across channels. In addition to campaign management, back-office integration, and business process automation, USAN's offerings include Hosted IVR, ACD, and Dialers built upon a fifth-generation carrier-grade infrastructure that delivers "five nines" of availability and proven scalability.

Learn more at www.usan.com

