

# Optimising contact centres to enrich customer experience



Customer satisfaction is always a priority for any business that wants to be successful. Exceptional and differentiated service is created when organisations adopt a customer centric perspective; by understanding the point of view of a customer and then designing the organisational processes, systems and the people to deliver that. A contact centre is an example of a customer strategy developed by organisations to interact with customers to gain competitive advantage. It serves as the primary touch point between organisations and their customers. These direct, two-way conversations are critical in delivering outstanding customer experience, retaining customers, improving the organisation's brand image and even generating incremental revenue.

Contact centres are classified based on the size and magnitude of a company's operations e.g. virtual contact centres typically operated by people working from home, medium sized and large contact centres that cater to several clients, and also have expanded operations such as handling domestic and international calls. Other classifications are based on mode of communication. In this age of the internet, agents not only make or receive telephone calls but use online platforms such as real-time chats on company websites, or email communication. Generally, there is a shift in the nature of contacts adopted by contact centres as

a means of communicating with the public i.e. use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter e.t.c. This trend can be seen with some of the big companies in Kenya with large customer base especially in telecommunication, banking and energy sectors. This is due to the increased number of people on social media platforms, making it necessary for communication. Despite the shift, the contact centre is still the preferred method of interaction for most complex customer interactions. A survey done by KPMG on top 10 customer interaction methods, revealed that 79% of the customers prefer phone conversation as a way to interact with contact centres.

Different organisations therefore choose to either have an in-house or an outsourced contact centre depending on various factors like cost effectiveness, focus on productivity, risk management etc. While having an in-house contact centre allows direct supervision and dedicated attention to customers and reduces the risk of data exposure by a third party, the cost of running it and maintaining the technology and infrastructure is quite expensive. On the other hand, an outsourced centre allows the business to concentrate on core activities, leading to improved productivity and saves on costs related to infrastructure and staff. However, the organisation has less supervisory control over issues like quality and there is no loyalty towards promoting the brand.

Whether an organisation chooses to have an in-house or outsourced contact centre, the focus of the contact centre should be on achieving customer satisfaction and the organisation's goals. This calls for aligning the contact centre strategy with the business strategy, having effective systems, processes and procedures, motivating and equipping people with the right skills and attitude to deliver the service levels that customers expect. Customers only call the contact centre with complex queries that they are not able to resolve through other channels and so they expect their problems to be resolved at first point of contact. They want to speak to someone who is really knowledgeable because more often than not, they would prefer to "self-serve".



This means that contact centres must adjust their operations to meet these changing requirements to deliver a personalised, high quality customer experience and therefore business knowledge is required to respond to this complexity. The contact centre agents need to be connected to the business and have authority and room to make decisions. If you have worked in a call centre, then you know that observing a “customer service script” is important. All you have to do is remember some simple rules and commit to the script e.g. introduce yourself and ask the customer’s name and take their details. At the end of the week a Quality Analyst listens to the recordings and appraises the agent as per the “script”.

So, who takes responsibility for resolving customer complaints? Responsiveness to customer needs should be more than a positive script. The ideal customer experience needs to be aligned to the strategic objectives of the business. There is also need to establish proper linking mechanisms between the customer service agents and technical staff to ensure access to real time, on-demand technical solutions that are responsive to customer issues. In order to achieve this, specific performance metrics focused on quality and customer experience; and service level agreements (SLAs) should be enforced and integrated across the company. Only when this is clearly articulated, then the employees will understand how they directly contribute to the business success and what is expected of them. This means, having a robust performance management process in order to influence business outcomes.

Employers also need to invest in training the agents on product and services, business process and procedures in order for them to perform effectively in their roles and represent the brand authoritatively. The agents also need to have the right attitude to impact positively on productivity, problem-solving and quality of delivery. Customers will choose to or not to buy from you depending on the quality of customer experience they have. Does your contact centre have the right process, systems and people to help you deal with the increased market competition and customer volatility? This is the time for businesses to transform the way they are interacting with customers to gain competitive advantage.

**Hilda Amahundu is a Manager, Management Consulting at KPMG Advisory Services Limited (hamahundu@kpmg.co.ke ). The views expressed herein are personal and do not necessarily represent the views of KPMG.**

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