

Social media may boost customer service

Communication methods may be changing, but the basics of customer service remain the same and, armed with a wealth of new information, contact centres are poised to redefine service standards in the coming years.



Deon Scheepers, regional business development manager of Interactive Intelligence Africa, says contact centres will undoubtedly continue to play a pivotal role within the social media landscape.

"The biggest mistake companies can make is to separate their social media communications from their contact centre, as the two are inextricably linked, both forming a critical element of a company's customer service offering.

"Contact centres have been forced to evolve over the years to cater for a growing variety of media channels: first the fax, then e-mail, then SMS and now social media. It is all part of this evolution," he says.

"The key to providing excellent customer services lies in maintaining a holistic, single view of the customer and understanding their preferred points of contact and means of interaction with the company.

"By separating social media from the existing contact centre, a company's ability to deal effectively with customer queries will be undeniably compromised," says Scheepers.

He says while a dedicated pool of agents can be assigned to manage social media queries, it is vital that a single system be used to monitor and manage all interaction channels. In so doing, a company can maintain an over-arching view of their customer base, and ensure efficiency irrespective of the channel used.

While the expectations of the social media audience are certainly changing, with a greater emphasis on immediacy, the basic principles of customer service still apply, and the contact centre is best equipped to deal with this.

"While social media offers customers a new and more immediate platform through which to have their queries handled, it is not an effective replacement for human interaction.

"It can certainly help to alleviate call volume, particularly when it comes to minor issues, but when it comes to more important customer queries - particularly those that require the exchange of personal information - customers feel more comfortable dealing with a live agent. So telephonic queries still account for between 80% and 90% of contact centre interactions," says Scheepers.

Preferred methods

Paul Fick, managing director at Jasco Enterprise, says the use of social media and the fact that many economically active people use it as their preferred method of communication is also driving growth in the contact centre industry.

"As a result, we are seeing the integration of social media into the contact centre rising," says Fick.

He adds that markets often dictate the frequency of upgrades and investment in call centre technology.

Social media, for example, will drive the investment in multichannel technology, allowing contact centres to communicate with their clients, suppliers, debtors and creditors via their preferred method of communication.

Says Fick: "The goal of being more proactive also compels companies to invest in their contact centres as this provides them with a competitive edge and results in higher sales, reduced debtors days and overall better service.

"Therefore, it is important for companies to invest in upgrading their contact centre technology and meet trends and preferences of their markets."

He says hosted solutions with contact centres as a service deliver an attractive alternative that assists in reducing the capital investment. For example, a hosted service is the model where the one company owns the infrastructure, technology and equipment at the client's site and bills the client for the service on a monthly basis.

This can be taken one step further where the hosted service provider owns the equipment off-site and offers this service to many customers as a shared hosted service that is cloud-based.

"With this scenario, the customer benefits from a 'pay-as-you-use' model. These models do not require a major capital outlay and ensure the end user customer has access to the latest software versions and technology without the investment that goes hand-in-hand with owning the infrastructure," says Fick.

"This puts leading technology into the hands of the customer which can result in a world-class contact centre but does not guarantee a world-class service. What the contact centre does with the technology, their processes and understanding of their market makes all the difference," he says.

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