

The power of personalisation in customer service

 By Wynand Smit

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Recently I came across a radio interview with a “personal branding specialist”. Addressing the listeners, the guest spoke of the importance of clearly defining “who you are”, “what you stand for” and “what makes you stand out” on social media in order to attract commercial sponsors with “like-minded” values and interests.



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This, in itself, is nothing new, but it does demonstrate how personal brands, with the aid of social media, have migrated from the domain of distant celebrities to occupying the minds of everyday people.

As a society, we are more aware of our self-image than we have ever been, and the pressure to “stand out” or project a favourable public image is paralysing for some people. Just ask Facebook, who are genuinely concerned about the level of original engagement on the platform and are using built-in applications such as “memories” to evoke a sense of nostalgia and promote personal engagement again.

And it is this social backdrop that we, as businesses, operate in. Our customers are heavily focused on being recognised as individuals – both socially and when they engage with businesses – yet we are often so focused on efficiency that we have almost lost our ability to understand and interact with our customers in a more human, personal way.

I see this often in the contact centre environment. The contact centre, by its very nature, is designed to service large volumes of customers in the most efficient and cost-effective way. However, finding the right balance between automation and personalisation can be challenging. Customers expect slick customer service, but also want to be recognised as individuals and expect businesses to act and respond according to their specific needs.

Listen and learn

There is a wealth of customer profile and interaction information available in company databases across multiple contact channels, and this is where the power lies.

Any customer who has been involved with your company for a while believes that the history of your relationship should be recorded somewhere. They don't know how or where, but they expect you to know that they have been with you for five years, for example, and that they have bought specific products regularly every two months.

Connecting and integrating this data into existing systems and processes, and enabling customer service agents to access this information is the first step towards providing a more personalised service: "It's good to hear from you again, Mr X, I hope you've been happy with your products since we last spoke to you in April?"

Thereafter, it comes down to using this data intelligently – analysing patterns, trends, and deriving insights that can be fed back into the business and used to drive personalisation in a meaningful way.

Wash, rinse, repeat

You should also be able to assist your customer without them having to repeat themselves when they engage with customer service, making it an easier, more seamless customer journey.

Repetition also works against the commonly-held belief that businesses should immediately know who their customers are, even at the first point of contact: if a customer has a store card only, why shouldn't they be directly routed to the retail department instead of wasting time navigating other lengthy menus that are largely irrelevant?

Similarly, if it's picked up that a customer has contacted a contact centre multiple times within a short time frame, why not automatically route the potentially unhappy customer to the best performing agent who is well placed to resolve the query the most efficiently?

I have only mentioned a few examples here – there are so many ways to improve service efficiency without compromising on personalisation. Acknowledging and treating your customers as individuals should be at the heart of your customer service and customer experience strategy. After all, who wants to be "just another number"?

ABOUT WYNAND SMIT

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