

## THE FUTURE of CONTACT CENTRES

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In just a few years, the global call centre or contact centre industry will be 50 years old. It will be half a century since the first true Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) was deployed in the Continental Airlines call centre in Houston, Texas, giving birth to a vast, global industry employing millions, and handling many billions of customer interactions every year; and still growing.

There are many highly sophisticated contact centres in operation throughout the world, utilising a raft of leading-edge technologies to enable rapidly maturing customer experience strategies. In many of these organisations, the tactics, techniques and operational disciplines are now well matured. They have embraced many of the Cx enablers such as analytical tools, artificial intelligence, machine learning, knowledge management and 'The Cloud'. They have the experience, the skills and the budgets to do so.

At the other end of the scale, in many developing regions, call centres and contact centres are only now becoming an integral part of the business landscape. Sadly, in many of these regions there is a critical shortage of real contact centre skills and experience, both at an operational level, and even more concerning, in the boardroom.

In the absence of real knowledge, many organisations continue to make irrational and misinformed decisions relating to the establishment and operation of new call centres or contact centres. In some cases, these costly mistakes are the consequence of naivety or pure ignorance. In other cases, the procurement of inappropriate technologies put into the hands of inexperienced and untrained managers and call centre staff, is often due to pressure and 'over-sell and overf-promise' by equally over-zealous vendors.

How can organisations ensure that their contact centres are effective, efficient, and 'future proof'?

First, it is wise to look backwards, to learn from the past; to leverage the learnings, the accumulated knowledge and the experience of others; the skills that can be harnessed to provide Cx planners and decision-makers with the massive advantage and benefits of hindsight. This knowledge is today freely available from the likes of a myriad of websites, newsletters, blogs, books, consultancies and professional associations.

Once equipped with the applicable knowledge relating to customer experience, call centres and contact centres, executives will need both vision and foresight to ensure that their respective organisations adopt sound, well-documented customer-centric strategies, and that these are inculcated and adopted throughout the organisation. Only then will the organisation be in a position to consider and make far-reaching decisions about the most appropriate technologies and operational practices for the contact centre or customer interaction. It is also of vital importance to take into consideration the realities of the rapidly-changing business and customer service environment

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## 5 Ways to Future-Proof your Contact Centre<sup>1</sup>

### 1: Understand your Customers & their Behaviours

Customers are demanding more, expecting more and are becoming more intolerant of service failures. They are often better informed, aware of their provider options, of their rights and of their ability to easily move from one provider to another. To win and retain loyalty in today's environment requires focussed investments in customer-centric business processes, systems and well-trained staff.

### 2: Understand the Realities of Omnichannel Technologies

In the past, the telephone, fax, eMail and in some instances, SMS messaging were generally treated as clearly divided or 'siloes' communication channels. These interactions were largely routed and processed by specifically skilled teams or agents, or worse still, into totally separate business units, with little regard for providing standardised levels of service to customers across all of these channels.

Today's customer expects 'all-in-one-call' (or all-in-one interaction), regardless of his or her preferred communication channel. And customers will definitely 'channel hop', often within minutes, and more often than not, about the same query or issue.

In planning and deploying a contact centre that will serve the organisation's needs well into the future, decision-makers need to plan for a true, integrated omnichannel technology platform. They will need to avoid the pitfalls of a last-generation solutions, typically requiring 'bolt-on' functionality or enhancements. Integration of disparate contact centre components or options is time-consuming, costly and a hinderance to operational efficiency and effectiveness in terms of customer experience.

### 3: Pay Close Attention to Employee Experience

The contact centre is the shop-window and the front door to the organisation. It's rapidly becoming the primary 'touch point' between the organisations' product or service offerings and the new well-informed, fickle and demanding customer. Contact centre agents are no longer merely low-earning 'call-takers'; they are your true brand ambassadors and they should be treated as such. Their job is often monotonous. They tend to be micro-managed. It can be an incredibly stressful working environment.

Consider what needs to be done to ensure that your contact centre staff are comfortable, motivated, empathetic and passionate about their role in supporting and delivering the organisation's customer experience vision.

### 4: Ensure that Business Processes Support the Cx Vision

The hall-mark of a truly well-run, efficient and effective customer interaction centre or contact centre, is that its business processes have been designed and documented from a truly customer-centric and empathetic view-point. They didn't 'just happen'. And they are definitely not 'anecdotal'; in other words, processes that people 'just know about'. Good Cx processes are processes by design, not by happenstance.

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<sup>1</sup> Credits: Reference is made in this article to "5 Things you should do right now to future-proof your contact centre", published as a blog by ZaiLab at [www.zailab.com](http://www.zailab.com)

## 5: Plan for the Modern Interaction Centre

Today, large numbers of customers already channel-hop, engaging with organisations from multiple angles around a single issue. The astute organisation will embrace this reality within the framework of the fully integrated, omnichannel customer engagement model.

To be effective, a customer engagement center must provide a seamless, consistent customer experience across every touchpoint. This necessarily means the experience within the enterprise must be as seamless and consistent.

It has become a strategic imperative for most organizations to deploy true CRM: a real-time single view of the customer, including all historical transaction and interaction data across all channels and devices.

Going forward, intelligent skills and resource-based routing systems that remember their customers will be critical to delivering the ultimate experience. Understanding the customer's intent and steering them to the most appropriate resource will be fundamental. Interaction analytics, machine learning and artificial intelligence are the keys to getting this all right.

*“Men, horses and cannon are useful in battle,  
but strategy and planning win wars”*

**Napoleon Bonaparte**

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