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Buying Solutions for Your Contact Center:

The Good News, Bad News, and the Bridge to Connect Them

http://www.eudata.com/business-contact-center/

Do not dare use the term "complacency" when it comes to today's customer contact leaders. They understand the reality of competing on the customer experience. They know the stakes of creating more meaningful connections with customers. They recognize the harm of antiquated, disconnected technology.

Collectively, they are ready to take action when it comes to key contact center needs. They are setting urgent investment priorities, and seriously considering all opportunities – strategic and technological – for elevating their operations.

But are they actually taking that action? Are they actually investing as heavily as they should be?

The answer, sadly, is "no." This report explores the scenario.

It begins by exploring some of the top contact center priorities. It subsequently reveals why organizations may not actually be acting on those priorities (and **cost** is not the only reason), before proposing a solution to those challenges.

Urgent Contact Center Priorities

If you ask a contact center executive whether they are considering a theoretically customer-centric initiative, they will almost certainly answer in the affirmative. No one wants to rule out improvements to their contact center operations.

The more important question is whether they plan to take action in the immediate term.

When it comes to several key contact center initiatives, executives very much are demonstrating urgency.

Training – urgent for 60% of contact centers

People are the lifeblood of the contact center. Training, consequently, represents a universal contact center priority.

It carries particular relevance in the status quo given that the engagement landscape is changing. As customers turn to self-service for transactional issues, they will primarily seek agents for complex, nuanced ones. Agents must be trained to resolve these higher-difficulty challenges.

Mindful of these realities, 60% view training as an urgent contact center priority.

Customer feedback tools – urgent for 55% of contact centers

An organization literally cannot be customer-centric without knowing its customers. It should therefore come as no surprise that customer feedback tools represent a paramount contact center investment priority.

Not simply a way to improve the contact center operation, feedback tools also gain valuable data that can inform other parts of the business. Many, in fact, believe data represents the contact center's greatest export.

Workforce management – urgent for 52% of contact centers

Today's agents are managing more complex customer journeys with more opportunities for "pain," inaccuracy, inefficiency and high effort. They are tasked with engaging customers in more meaningful, specific discussion. They are looking to connect with mobile devices from remote locations. They are hoping automation can empower their day-to-day efforts.

These factors result in a dramatically elevated standard for workforce management. No longer a game of scheduling shifts in spreadsheets, workforce management must alleviate all factors that prevent "liquid" agents from delivering efficient, customer-centric experiences when and where they are needed.

To solve this problem, organizations are looking to bolster their workforce management systems.

Live chat – urgent for 51% of contact centers

While some "phone alternatives" will take flight in the next few years, "live chat" very much carries "right here, right now" relevance. Chat is quickly becoming a "standard" customer care channel, and that means organizations *must* offer it as an option.

It also means customers are familiar with the channel and thus likely to have heightened expectations.

Collectively, the two realities explain why live chat constitutes an immediate priority.

Dashboards – urgent for 50% of contact centers

Data is the key to a customer-centric experience. Well, it can be.

Data in raw form does little to empower performance. Systems, agents and leaders ultimately need *actionable* insight. They need clear visibility into the factors that are driving performance. They need clear context for engaging customers *when the interaction begins*.

Dashboards support this storytelling endeavor. They turn the contact center environment from a "system" into a "tool."

4 Problems with Solution Providers

On the one hand, the aforementioned data is extremely promising. Many contact center executives are *urgently* considering a myriad of high-value contact center investments. Whether viewed from the perspective of the customer who will receive a better experience, the contact center that will improve its operation or the vendor that will sell technology, the news is exciting!

On the other hand, there are some clear concerns. Agents are the key to contact center performance, yet only 60% see training as an urgent priority. Literally every business surveyed by CCW identifies customer feedback as important, yet only 55% are prioritizing feedback solutions. Investments to address universal priorities like omnichannel engagement are even less widespread.

That disparity is troubling. Many organizations that *value* technology are not prioritizing it.

Even worse, not every organization that prioritizes technology will actually make meaningful investments.

What prevents contact centers from investing into new contact center technology? The easy, cliché answer involves a combination of "tight budgets," "organizational inertia" or "poor technology framework."

While those internal factors can definitely inhibit investment, some of the biggest challenges come from the external marketplace. Certain vendor strategies and practices complicate the sourcing process for buyers, ironically making contact center purchases harder and less attractive.

There are four key reasons why *vendors* are making sourcing *more difficult* for decision-makers.

Selling About vs. Selling To

Competing for eyeballs on the web or at big trade shows, many contact center vendors aim to *excite* rather than *engage (*or, *impress* rather than *impart*). They make grand statements, leverage clever marketing copy and tout pie-in-the-sky benefits.

While this approach may command superficial attention, it overlooks an important reality: customer centricity is about specificity. Contact center leaders cannot afford to blindly invest in the broad notion of "innovation." They need to know that the solutions they select fit their current projects and operational frameworks – and precisely appease their specific customer, agent and business needs.

Selling Solutions vs. Selling Partnerships

Even if vendors *do* tailor their messaging to specific contact centers, they are not necessarily communicating what really matters. Today's leaders – especially those ventured into uncharted territory like virtual reality, artificial intelligence and biometrics – are not merely looking for solutions. They are looking for partnerships.

They need assurance that they are not going to buy a technology and then be left with a proverbial box on their doorsteps. Many demand a full-fledged partner that can implement the solution, train the staff, "tune" the system and provide guidance over time.

Conventional sales language and marketing copy may illustrate the quality of a solution, but they do not confirm the reliability of the partner.

Technology vs. Contact Center Expertise

Contact centers are spending money on all elements of their operation. Investors are throwing money into solutions related to innovative technology like automation, artificial intelligence, analytics, data security and virtual reality.

Naturally, the two concepts are converging: exciting start-ups are venturing into the contact center space.

The problem is that some of these providers are being driven by *technology savvy* rather than *contact center expertise*. The best contact center technology is not that which is the most technically impressive or exciting; it is that which is most aligned with the needs of customers, agents, supervisors and chief customer officers.

It takes a passion for customers – and customer experience design – to develop that breed of technology. These "contact center experts" absolutely exist within the market, but they are not always easy to find.

Limited Industry Knowledge

All contact centers are not created equal. Due to their function or industry, some will have very specific performance expectations, personnel profiles and compliance issues. Organizations rely on vendors to not only guide them in these areas but develop technology that meets their specific industry needs.

The problem is that so few vendors compellingly demonstrate this industry competency. Whether because they do not want to be mistaken as a "niche" product or because they legitimately do not have industry-centric capabilities, vendors often speak in broad, big picture terminology. They do not inspire confidence in their ability to solve unique industry challenges.

The Power Of The CCW Executive Exchange

The conventional solution process actually creates *problems* for contact center executives. It may generate excitement over particular innovations, but it may not confirm about fitness for specific applications. It may not provide an actionable, valid blueprint for actually making the most of the new technology.

Ultimately, it may not inspire contact center executives to take action. And that is a problem: for as much as they cannot afford to be wrong about the solutions they buy, contact center leaders definitely cannot afford to sit on their hands. The needs are too great and the stakes are too high for indecision to govern the function.

As an overall mission, the CCW team works to sift through this noise. Analyst regularly evaluate the marketplace to identify solution providers that can *drive customer centricity* rather than *sell products really well*. CCW analyzes legitimate vendors on their capabilities, awareness of real marketplace issues, and ability to establish productive, trustworthy partnerships.

This approach helps reduce some of the noise associated with contact center solutions. It does not, however, fully *eliminate* that noise. It does not ultimately guarantee that a specific vendor is perfect for a specific contact center's specific project at a specific time.

Through its 1-on-1 meetings, the Exchange answers that call. These productive conversations bring executive-level vendor leadership face-to-face with executive-level buyers. In doing so, they empower buyers to determine whether they trust the *company* behind the solution. Is this company simply selling us great technology? Or is it going to guide us to a more customer-centric operation?

When a contact center executive can answer those questions in the affirmative, it knows it has found a solution that lives up to the fundamental promise: solving problems.

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The CCW Executive Exchange gathers top-tier Contact Centers Executives from across various industries to discuss how to design and deliver more differentiated and delightful customer experiences, This year, we focus on delivering world-class service with speed and efficiency. We are in the "Age of the Customer". Today's customers are armed with unlimited choices, various channels and demand a high level of customer attention and service. Their increasing expectations have forced organizations to transform and prepare for the CX battlefield by prioritizing the future contact center.
Join our must-attend exchange this August as we take a deep dive with a select group of contact center leaders from the C-suite to discuss strategies to make world-class service a reality.

August 12-14 | Chicago, IL
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