16th Annual
Government Contact
Centre Summit 2016

Embracing digitalisation and innovation in contact centre service delivery

In a world increasingly being dominated by digital, today's contact centre professionals have embraced a new customer experience normal. Conversations are no longer limited to the traditional voice channel; instead, customers expect to engage with companies seamlessly across multiple channels like chat, mobile, video and social media.

And as customer expectations continue to be transformed by new technologies, contact centres have begun to recognise customer satisfaction as a critical focus for growth in the future, with many placing emphasis on the importance of creating an omni-channel engagement centre.

Ahead of the Government Contact Centre Summit 2016, we take a look at how five government organisations are evolving their contact centres into interactive engagement centres, and the strategies they are using to create more innovative service offerings for customers.

1. Up-skilling staff at Australia Post

In recent years, Australia Post has seen a major shift in customer behaviour – people and organisations switching from traditional letters in the mail to digital alternatives – which has had a major impact on the financial viability of the business.

To offset these losses, Australia Post is developing its digital environment with a big focus on improving digital services in its customer contact centre.

Like the broader business, the contact centre has undergone a massive transformation in recent years, changing its culture and processes to achieve customer centricity in the digital economy.

Brady Jacobsen, General Manager at Australia Post, shares why up-skilling staff has been an important part of this journey:

"Moving towards online channels is giving customers what they want and it's also providing cost-out opportunities for us. We have found that the enquiries that remain tend to be more complex enquiries. Online is not only changing the channel mix, but the enquiry mix for staff to handle is also changing.

A lot of people, who we have employed over the years, have had to move from being talkers, to typists. This has become a core proficiency – every two to three months we're turning a team of talkers into typists."

“There are some people who are really effective in using typing as their primary engagement method with customers, but there are other people who are finding it a real challenge.

We need people who are digitally savvy, that understand e-commerce, spend time in the digital world and have a strong understanding of the contemporary means in which customers want to engage with our organisation.

This involves helping staff understand emerging and topical digital products (like Uber and Airbnb) to help them understand how digital disruption is transforming customer service, as well as social media training sessions with all staff.

We have also partnered with Hootsuite to provide an amazing learning program for our staff, to give them baseline knowledge about how to use new engagement channels such as Facebook or Twitter.”

2. Creating a Customer Centric Culture at the DHS

Since 2012, the DHS has been expanding its digital services and has also established ‘smart centres,’ which were created to bring their telephony and processing network together to provide more flexible services to the people accessing its services.

Below, Jennifer Teece, General Manager Smart Centres Division at the Department of Human Services (DHS), explores the steps her contact centre is taking to create a customer-centric view of end-to-end services and why creating a customer centric-culture has been essential to driving change.

“It’s been a big cultural change. Moving people away from an environment where they were very clear at a local level about the work they did, what they were accountable for and what portion of the work they were responsible for, has been a challenge. It is about not only transitioning employees, but also the leadership and managers into a world where work is allocated in a central model, not a local model.

Embracing new channels is also about engaging staff and defining ourselves as one smart centre. It requires new ways of thinking about change.

For example, I might say to my managers I am not going to hold them accountable for recruitment or budget, as they are decisions we make centrally. But I will hold them accountable for culture in their site, attendance and performance at those local levels.

It’s been quite an education process – some of our team leaders used to work in an environment where they had the money and decision making rights in relation to recruitment and performance and now these are being moved centrally. We're still on the change management journey and it is about not only looking at performance indicators, but also staff satisfaction, customer satisfaction and the quality of the services being delivered."

3. Putting the customer at the heart of business at Service SA

While the new notion of customer experience is driving contact centre transformation, gold customer service still remains at the heart of contact centres. The only difference is it has now changed from just phone, to incorporate other new channels.

Below, Sue-Ann Charlton Director Service SA, Department of the Premier and Cabinet provides an overview of how Service SA is putting the customer at the heart of their contact centre and the steps they are taking to provide an omni-channel experience for customers.

"The growth of digitalisation has changed the way our contact centre engages with customers and has reduced the number of calls as so much can be done online and customers increasingly look online first. We now take on more of an education role with less-experienced online users to help them access the information they need or perform the transaction they desire.

We have a continuing 'Moving Online' program targeting moving high-volume transactions online. We have also installed self-service kiosks in our centres and staff them with an education officer to assist in migrating customers online and therefore reducing call volumes. We are bringing in WebChat and we are expanding our hours to offer greater access when needed.

As a result of rolling-out these new services with the customer at the heart of our business model, we have reduced 12 FTE this financial year from our frontline and contact centre and reduced wait times in our centres by 37% and on the telephone by 71%.

One challenge we have faced on our journey has been legislative barriers that prevent transactions moving online and agencies who view their transactions as "too complex" to be moved online.

We have overcome this challenge by educating agencies around complexity – our view is that if the ATO can put a tax return online, then we can put their transaction online (we also have a business analyst who works with agencies to re-engineer their processes to be customer centric, so that we are not putting bad processes online).

4. Encouraging smarter interactions with customers at the ATO

Over the past couple of years, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has been rolling-out a number of digital initiatives in their contact centres to improve customer experience and service delivery.

Last year the agency introduced voice biometrics to services in its contact centres, giving repeat customers a faster way of verifying their identity when contacting the ATO. The agency also launched 'Alex' the virtual assistant to expand their WebChat offerings to individuals and sole traders.

And since embracing digital and online in its contact centres, the ATO is realising some pretty impressive results. Shopfront interactions have reduced 15-20% year-on-year over the last 3 years, as improvements in digital services are creating a more convenient service for customers.

Below, Annie Ferguson, Assistant Commissioner, Operational Service Centres at the ATO, explores the types of strategies the ATO is using to encourage smarter interactions with customers and how they are embracing digital channels in their contact centres to drive better service delivery and customer engagement.

"The ATO as part of its Contemporary Digital Services ,program currently has a number of priority pieces of work underway to encourage smarter interactions along the following themes:

- Identity & Security - including Voice Authentication, linking Australian Business Numbers (ABN) to myGov – replacing the majority of AUSkeys
- Online tools and services - including Digital Inbox, mobile apps, ATO online, Digital Business Account
- Progressive accounts - through improvements in myTax to provide more prefill information
- Integration with natural systems - enabling natural business processes to report through Single Touch Payroll
- Support for digital transition - via virtual assistant , web chat, and co-browse capability
- Environmental stabilisation - improving the ATO's digital infrastructure to support more digital applications and offer 24/7 service).

The ATO is putting into place a digital support model (omni-channel) strategy to provide a seamless and integrated client experience, regardless of the channel used. Support for this strategy includes:

- On call support for high complexity queries
- Assisted support (web chat) for medium complexity queries
- Self-assisted support for low complexity queries (assisting clients in finding the right information)

Part of this strategy is to promote to clients, as much as possible, the self-assisted options. This is to significantly reduce the cost of administering the tax system. This strategy is being implemented through:

- Establishing a foundation by implementing 'Alex' the virtual assistant and expanding our web chat offering to individuals and sole traders
- Evolving the experience through the expansion of web chat on myTax to support myTax16, and introducing 'co-browse' for Customer Service Representatives (CSR) and clients to share screens over a web browser
- Optimising the experience by expanding 'Alex' and web chat to cover more topics, and implementing conversation manager that will provide our staff with a picture of all previous client interactions over telephony and web.

With the recent deployment of 'Alex', the ATO has seen 116,000 conversations with a YTD first contact resolution rate of 73.8%. and a YTD deflection rate of 47% (meaning Alex answered the client query without redirecting)

This Tax Time (1 July – 30 October 2016), the ATO will be is using sophisticated analytics and data matching techniques to compare myTax lodgers with their 'nearest neighbour', for example someone with a similar occupation and from a similar suburb.

This will enable myTax lodgers to see what deductions/claims they are making that may be 'outside of the norm'. It is expected this will also drive client queries to the various support options detailed above.

In addition, the ATO will allow lodgers to pre-fill their deductions (captured via myDeductions in the ATO app) straight into their tax return. This information is also able to be accessed by tax agents, allowing all individual clients to fast track their lodgments and reduce 'shoeboxes of receipts'.

We are trialling several initiatives under the "Show me How" theme to engage clients who are reluctant to use, or are unaware of our digital channels. These include transforming the Shopfronts to digital hubs, outreach field services for individuals, tax agents and small businesses, and "pop-up" kiosks in shopping centres."

5. Embracing new technology to drive a new type of customer experience at Townsville City Council

Townsville City Council is one organisation leveraging the opportunities of digital to improve the efficiency and productivity of its contact centre.

Located in one of the fastest growing regions in Queensland, the contact centre has trialled a number of online and digital engagement strategies across their customer service functions over the last two years, which has seen a 25 per cent decline in its overall call centre call volumes, and a 96 per cent customer satisfaction rating.

Below, Megan Leavy, Executive Manager of Customer Service at Townsville City Council, explores the strategies used to successfully digitalise service offerings in her contact centre to deliver a new type of customer experience.

Townsville City Council was one of the first regional areas in Queensland to be selected for the NBN trial and as a result, our council received funding for a programme called 'My Townsville.'

Part of the 'My Townsville' project included providing free Wi-Fi across the city, which in turn has enabled our customers to be more mobile. As a result we're seeing an increase in people accessing our sites and social media channels (like Facebook) through mobile devices. So we're now using Facebook and social media much more to interact with our customers.

As more of our customers are now online or mobile, we were also able to trial two new service offerings in 2014 to reach customers via digital channels as part of the 'My Townsville' programme. These two trials were 'Click to Chat' and video service offerings.

When we initially started the trial for 'Click to Chat' at the beginning of 2014, we predicted it would be mainly useful for customers who were housebound and did not want face-to-face interactions with our team.

However we discovered it is in fact most useful for clients who live overseas, the legal fraternity and for people who are hearing or speech impaired, which were markets we didn't anticipate would take up the new service.

The 'Click to Chat' trial enabled us to find a new way to reach a few of our niche customer markets, and due to its popularity we now have permanent 'Click to Chat' in our contact centre.

However we did not have the same success with video chat trial. The technical aspect was not simple enough for the customer, especially the back-end of the system which they had to install from their end. We had about 15 real chats with real customers within one month, which wasn't enough of an uptake to sustain the service.

Since adopting a focus on online and improving our website, we have seen our web traffic improve by over a million hits a year from 2013 – 2015. We're also centering our marketing campaigns on the web to educate our customers about our new online services. As a result, we've reduced our printing budget by some $500,000 over the past two years to direct our customers online - which is a big cost saving."

"But the core part of our online or web strategy is ensuring we are providing services which are available to our customers when they want to use it. Over the past couple of years we have been examining the types of factors that make our customers interact with us face-to-face versus make a phone call, and then looking for ways to change that process to make it easier for the customer.”

If you’re interested in learning more about how to embrace digitalisation in your contact centre to keep up with changing customer expectations, join contact centre executives and leaders from across Australia at this year’s Government Contact Centre Summit.

For more information visit www.govcc.com.au or call +61 2 9229 1000 or email enquire@iqpc.com.au

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