Ask Affy

Need advice? Ask Affy!

Q

I'm hearing more and more about collaborative technologies actively being used in Contact Centres.   Can you please give me advice on how to get started?
Signed, "Feeling Overwhelmed"

A

There is no doubt that our world has changed and the evolution of Contact Centres to *Interaction Centres* is a hot topic in our industry. Client demand for a seamless, multi-channel experience is rising and we need to step up to meet new needs.

Just think about it – we have not yet mastered the many challenges with the phone channel and now we must move quickly to figure out how to provide exceptional service through new communication channels. One thing we know for sure...we can't afford to drag our feet – it is important to be informed, and decide how collaborative technologies best fit in your organization. This is the new frontier in service delivery ... and for some companies it is already their reality.

To properly answer your question, I have solicited some assistance from Janice Wagner, an industry expert in this field and my business partner, Bruce Simpson. Below is a slice of content from a paper that they recently wrote about collaborative technologies. Email Janice or SwitchGear if you would like the whole paper.

So let's be clear on our definition of collaborative technologies. In a nutshell, they are tools and processes that increase the abilities of both individuals and organizations to acquire, share, and apply knowledge remotely. Examples include Chat, Co-browsing, Click to call, instant messaging, Video calls, Web conferencing and Screen sharing to mention a few applications.

Here is an example of how these technologies can be used to better service customers.
A customer signs-on to your website using a tablet at their local Starbuck's to research a product or service; after a few moments an avatar appears, asking if they need any additional information and offers to open a chat session. The customer may even be sent a promotional offer, personalized based your knowledge of their preferences... so far nothing out of the ordinary.

...but wait....the customer's questions get a little more difficult and they want to start a VOIP conversation with the SAME person they have been chatting online with or perhaps open up a video-conference with the SAME person ... Now the game has changed.

... then the discussion gets more complicated and the CSR needs to add a specialist to the conversation by phone or even video-conference to complete the inquiry or sale.

Wow is right! So how do you begin to wade through this complexity? Many start with a pilot first using these leading practices:

Determine what success looks like – This needs to be decided BEFORE the pilot starts. Baseline metrics, targets, and comparative data to a control group should be identified and mechanisms should be in place to track the customer experience.

Assess impacts to the rest of your Contact Centre – These new technologies will impact the rest of your Contact Centre. Brainstorm what those impacts might be and plan accordingly for them. Your customer experience must remain the priority and disruption must be kept to a minimum.

Are all of your processes ready for automation? – If certain workflows are currently flawed, automating them will only make them worse. Your options are to correct the existing process before attempting to convert it to a collaborative solution OR choose not to include certain services in your pilot.

Start simply – Chat and click to call are easier to build and today will reach the broadest audience.

Choose wisely – Match the collaborative technology to the complexity of required response. If the question is simple, then chat works well. If the question is complex, co-browsing and sharing screens will enhance the customer experience as it provides clarity faster than a phone call alone.

Plan for the future – Collaboration can change many aspects of your operations...if you plan ahead, you'll be ready for it. Here are some key areas to consider before you move into production mode: update your hiring profile, redefine the content of training, install consistent support with a responsive IT department, etc.

As collaborative technologies are somewhat unchartered territory, the best approach to getting started is similar to starting a new business - start small...fail fast...and learn early. The "Test and Learn" approach is definitely the way to go. You don't necessarily have to have all the answers before you start... just try a few things in a safe environment and be

nimble. Be prepared to make rapid adjustments to your approach as your test results dictate.

I hope I have reduced your anxiety about taking the next few steps! Good luck!

Afshan Kinder

Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world". This resonates for me in the work I do and hopefully for the people I touch. Looking back at 20 years of running operations, there was always this excitement to initiate change, create innovative strategies, and build agile teams who can execute.

What has me jump out of bed in the morning (somewhere in the world!) is working with fast paced companies with complex problems to solve. Proudest moments? In the mid-1990's, we were voted Canada's #1 customer service centre at Sprint Canada at a time when we could barely catch our breath during double digit growth. Then more fun at ING DIRECT hitting Top Box customer satisfaction 6 years in a row. This Daniel Pink quote feels right on: "Meaningful achievement depends on lifting one's sights and pushing toward the horizon."I live in Toronto, Canada with my husband, two children & two bossy cats.

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