

White Paper

Improve Your Multichannel Agility: Seven Best Practices You Need To Know

In this position paper, TeleTech examines the seven best practices for deploying agile channeling platforms

- Build a world-class service experience within each channel
 - Staff each channel with front-line employees with skill sets suited to that channel
 - Link information and service tools seamlessly from one channel to the next
- Develop logical channel routing based on a customer's preferences and needs
 - Don't forget the 'invisible channel'
- Include the segmentation perspective in multichannel architecture
 - Track the effectiveness of the multichannel service experience over time and ensure continual optimization of the multichannel experience

Executive Overview

MULTICHANNEL CUSTOMER SERVICE HAS LONG BEEN A TOP INVESTMENT PRIORITY FOR FORTUNE 500 ORGANIZATIONS, as companies have committed billions of dollars over the past ten years in chasing the appealing ROI of multichannel operations. But with a decade of investment, deployment, and monitoring work under their belts, those organizations have little to show for their dollars and time. In a recent Forrester Research study of multichannel service, one-third of Fortune 500 companies were judged to be 'very poor' in multichannel contact management. Another third were graded merely 'OK,' and the final third were 'good.' None received a grade of 'very good.'

These findings undercut most leading organizations' current drive to be perceived as moving at the speed of the customer and underscore the 'siloed' nature of current multichannel customer interaction strategy. While any one channel might have the correct platform and service design in place, the action of changing channels – the true multichannel experience – is poor, in large part because the individual service channels have not been designed to work together in a cohesive whole. Customers are forced to provide the same information over and over again as they change channels, and the original issue is rarely handed off from one channel to the next in a way that signals that progress is being made. Worse yet, high-value customers experience the same pain that a casual customer does, since individual interaction systems often do not hand off account value data as customers cross channels. These are not true multichannel service architectures. At best, they are separate channels, built in isolation and usable one at a time. Companies still using these outdated service platforms are not prepared to handle the coming surge in multichannel demand that analysts forecast for the coming decade – with email, Web interaction, mobile application usage, social media all broadly expected to see surges in demand from 2012 onward in a recent Aberdeen study of future multichannel trends.

Consumer Behavior Trends Demand Agile Channeling

The fundamental change that has driven this differentiation is the blurring of lines between interaction channels for many consumers. The explosive growth of smartphones, SMS text usage, and social media access have all changed the landscape of customer interaction forever. Consider that ownership of smartphones among consumers in G8 nations quadrupled from 8 percent in 2009 to 32 percent in 2010 – one of the fastest uptake rates for a new technology in the history of consumer electronics. The messaging, chat, mobile browsing, and app-based

Ownership of smartphones has one of the fastest uptake rates for a new technology in the history of consumer electronics

capabilities of smartphones has freed customers from the real-time environment of the traditional contact center; now, a customer can describe his or her needs via SMS message, app-based trouble ticket, or email as completely as through a telephone call. Moreover, the hectic schedules of modern consumers mandate that a company be able to react and adapt to customer needs. An interaction that might begin as a phone call will often end up as a Live chat or a posting in a social community. Some industry analysts have taken to assigning a new name to this system of fast-reacting channel-changing: agile channeling.

The agile channeling concept reverses the traditional multichannel architecture of offering monolithic interaction experiences – a chat remains in a chat room, a live-agent telephone call remains in the contact center, etc. – in favor of a flexible framework that the customer can control. The customer's information and issue details are available to any agent working in any channel, and can be picked up, moved forward toward resolution, and documented seamlessly from anywhere in the customer interaction environment. Customers can insert information into that environment through any channel, too, and receive communication back on an equally flexible basis. A customer could conceivably open a problem ticket through an SMS text on his or her way to work and receive a reply by email, launch a live chat, or lodge a complaint on a Facebook page and receive a telephone call in response. Agile channeling follows the customer – through his or her day and across channels as needed – rather than the other way around.

Agile Channeling Reduces Costs and Improves Productivity

When agile channeling is put into action, the results are breathtaking. When Aberdeen Group looked at the leaders in advanced multichannel service, they found that best-in-class architectures do more than improve customer satisfaction; they reduce costs and boost productivity, too.

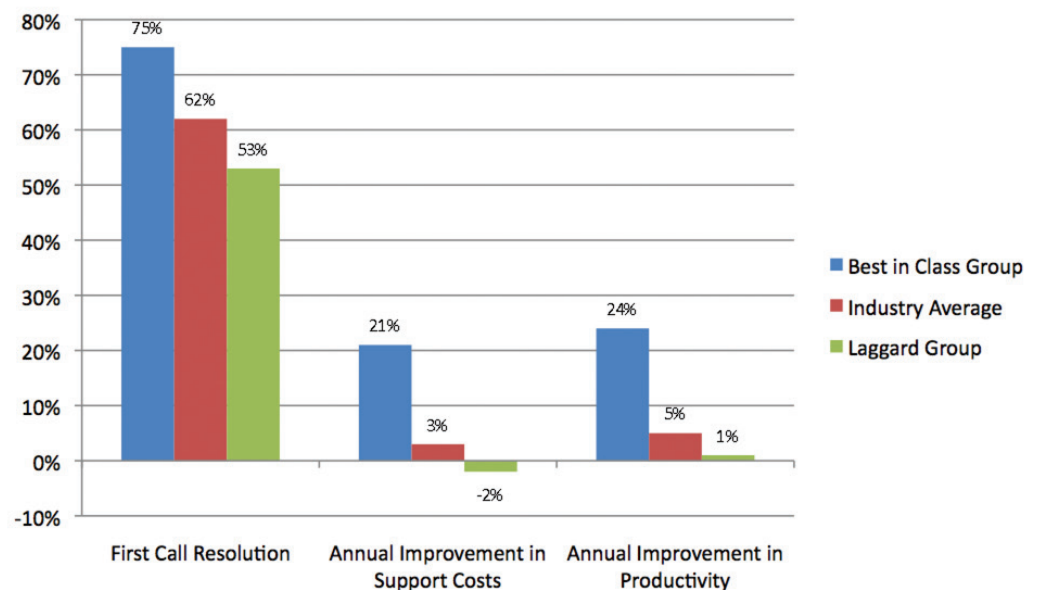


Figure 1. Differential performance of leaders, average firms, and laggards in multichannel. Source: Aberdeen Research.

Best-in-class architectures do more than improve customer satisfaction; they reduce costs and boost productivity, too.

The impact of a best-in-class multichannel architecture ripples outward from traditional customer service metrics, through support cost economics, and straight to the bottom line. Best-in-class performers are able to trim their support costs an average of 21 percent over a twelve-month period, while laggard firms' support costs actually increased by 2 percent. At the same time, support productivity skyrocketed over the same period of time.

Seven Best Practices for Deploying Agile Channeling Platforms

Leaders in multichannel service – companies such as Netflix, Amazon, USAA, Dell, and Overstock.com- have all addressed seven issues in developing and deploying successful agile channeling platforms. The best practices involved in doing so include:

Build a world-class service experience within each channel.

It goes without saying that any multichannel service strategy begins with selecting and deploying proven technologies and agent tools within each channel. However, a surprising proportion of successful companies are using outdated chat, email, and SMS technologies, and an even larger proportion have not yet linked their social media CRM or knowledge management strategies to their multichannel service environments. The goal of this task is to allow interactions to progress to resolution at the fastest rate possible for a given service metric within every channel available to the consumer. Agents hampered by obsolete technologies, knowledge content, or workflow management tools will be unable to meet those metrics – which can lead to burnout, attrition, and a poor customer experience, which has dramatic consequences on a company's brand and customer loyalty.

Staff each channel with front-line employees with skill sets suited to that channel.

It is a common misconception that a customer service associate can be moved from channel to channel without crosstraining or skill development. Customers working in an email service environment generally need to be more empowered to act creatively on the customer's behalf; those working in chat must be aware of the lack of voice context for comments and communicate clearly and without room for tonal ambiguity. Often, multichannel associates are also tasked with managing simultaneous interactions, sometimes on two different channels. Training and protocol development are key components to channel staffing, too; Aberdeen found that 60 percent of leading organizations provide agents with detailed escalation maps, compared with 17 percent of trailing firms. Ensuring that every channel in a multichannel service environment has the right staff - with the right training and support tools for that channel's interaction type - is crucial to long-term success and customer satisfaction.

Link information and service tools seamlessly from one channel to the next.

The ideal multichannel experience would enable any customer to enter the interaction management environment from any point, confident that his or her identifying data and issue details would be propagated to every other channel as the customer moves between them. So a conversation begun in chat could move seamlessly into a phone conversation, be escalated or moved to a more relevant department, and concluded via an email exchange without the

customer ever needing to re-enter identifying information or re-explain the issue. The fact that this is so rare in the multichannel domain is mute testimony to the ‘data chasms’ that currently exist between siloed interaction channels.

Develop logical channel routing based on a customer’s preferences and needs.

Good multichannel strategies enable the customer to choose the form of interaction. Exceptional multichannel strategies track customer interaction histories and offer that experience proactively: “in the past, I see you’re often pressed for time and would prefer to provide basic problem information and have the issue worked at our end with an email explanation and a summary sent by SMS. Is that still your preference, or would you prefer something different today?” Leading-edge contact routing engines can identify the presence of a customer anywhere on the interaction grid and push that preference question to the customer regardless of channel. They also offer online issue tracking for customer tickets not resolved during the initial contact. A recent Detecon study on the future of customer service agreed that customer service must be oriented to the needs and wants of individual customer aspects if companies are to prevail in their competitive environments. Fully 93 percent agreed that leading-edge customer service in the future will be strongly characterized by individualization and personalization

Don’t forget the ‘invisible channel..’

Not all channels in a multichannel strategy look alike - and it’s crucial to the success of a multichannel strategy to integrate nontraditional channels such as social media and self-help. Social media is often overlooked or siloed into its own operational unit, since it does not technically involve a customer directly contacting a company for service. That’s a mistake. Social media can trigger just as many value-creating customer interactions as ‘traditional’ channels like chat and email – but ensuring that the right real-time monitoring and intercept tools are in place can be a daunting challenge for many organizations. Robust self-help tools are in place at twice as many leading firms (49%) as laggards (24%) in Aberdeen’s study, demonstrating the importance of this often-overlooked channel. Properly implemented, self-help can become the most cost-efficient customer support channel of all - but self-service tools also require rich user experience design and rigorous long-term usage tracking to ensure quality and consistency of message. Designing both of these channels as part of a larger multichannel strategy is an important step in optimizing the customer care process.

Include the segmentation perspective in multichannel architecture.

Customer account value is another important component in multichannel service environment design. When customers encounter hold queues as they migrate from channel to channel, the individual hold times may be insignificant, but they can add up quickly – two minutes for chat, two minutes for live agent, two minutes for escalation, et cetera, quickly turn into a long interaction. By moving high-value customers to the front of each queue, and conveying that information clearly (“we’re expediting your request based on your exceptional account history, Mr. Jones”), companies can clearly communicate the importance of customer loyalty – and the rewards for it. Leading companies in the Aberdeen study provided their agents with significantly more information on customers’ past purchase history and account value during multichannel interactions. Eighty-six percent of leading-edge company agents, for example,

Best-in-class performers are able to trim their support costs an average of 21 percent

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have visibility on the customer's complete service history, compared with 69 percent of other firms. Utilizing more segmentation data in both the routing engine and the agent work desk provides the opportunity to reward loyal customers and offer more targeted upselling and cross-selling offers at the same time.

Track the effectiveness of the multichannel service experience over time and ensure continual optimization of the multichannel experience.

Customer satisfaction data can be a powerful tool for process monitoring and improvement within the context of a multichannel service environment. When customer satisfaction levels are below the environmental average in a specific channel, chances are good that the cross-channel systems in place to support migration into and out of that channel are not operating at optimal efficiency. Maintaining a close watch over the performance of each channel, both within that channel and as contacts migrate into and out of it, will ensure that your organization offers a seamless, high-quality customer interaction experience at every point on the multichannel interaction 'grid'.

Conclusion

When your organization is ready to move to an 'agile channeling' architecture, your choice of vendor is a critical task. As a pioneer in exceptional multichannel service, TeleTech can address each of these seven key criteria, with a broad suite of proven tools and technologies that support a worldwide population of highly-trained multichannel customer interaction associates. TeleTech technology, processes, and human capital power cutting-edge multichannel customer service systems for clients in vertical markets including financial services, travel and hospitality, healthcare, retail, communications, and technology. TeleTech has deep experience in designing and deploying multichannel solutions that work for your customers. Get started with an agile channeling solution for your company today by contacting a TeleTech account executive at 1.800.TELETECH.

About TeleTech

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