



5 Tips to Create a Multimedia Contact Center

1. Build upon your current expertise

- Identify your business objectives thoroughly and the benefits to be gained from creating a multimedia contact center. Leverage the years of experience your business and call center have providing customer support. This experience is one of your greatest corporate assets, and critical to creating a successful multimedia contact center. Think of it like this - your multimedia contact center should be a natural extension of what you are already successfully doing today in your call center.
- Understand what will differentiate your products and services. Identify the most effective way to combine your people, your processes and your technology. Embrace the compelling beliefs that you will develop, acknowledge and reward to ensure consistent success.
- Create a cross functional team of shareholders (telecom manager, contact center manager, IT manager, contact center agents, sales manager, service manager, etc.) with an identified leader. Plan your contact flow (telephone calls, e-mails, Web chats and so on) based upon your business requirements and the new capabilities available in your contact center. Validate that your existing call center applications like workforce management, quality monitoring and CRM will continue to integrate with your multimedia solution, and understand how they will need to be modified where applicable.
- Migrate in logical and manageable steps. Rome wasn't built in a day....nor should your multimedia contact center be. You probably don't want to change everything at once. This can be complicated technically, and often times confusing to your customers and your agents. Establish a quick win with a pilot group of customers and agents to test your plans, then advertise your success to shareholders in your organization and to your customers. Ensure that all business and technical critical success factors are managed to deliver your solution quickly. Implement, test and revise your plans as necessary. Remember this...your customers' needs and expectations are dynamic and ever changing, and so should your multimedia contact center strategy. Think of it as a "work in progress" and an ongoing way of doing business.

- Supplement your in-house experts, where necessary, with outside professionals who have the technical knowledge and/or practical experience to anticipate and therefore reduce any implementation risks.

2. Understand your customers' behaviors and expectations

- Take your customer's point of view. What do your various customers expect of you, and how will you support them? How does the tolerance of the same customer change when using different access media? What will keep your customers coming back again and again? Start a dialogue with your customers and keep it going. Remember what you've learned and use it to improve.
- Make sure that doing business with you is as convenient and as effortless as possible. Make it easier for customers to complain and for their problems to be solved. There is nothing more dangerous to a company's long-term welfare than quiet or apathetic customers. Engage them! What you can learn from your unhappy customers and those who have left can be critical knowledge that you can use to predict which customers are more likely to leave, why they leave, and to therefore prevent customer defection.
- Keep learning about your individual customers, their likes, their dislikes, their needs, preferences, their tolerances. Then use this information to customize how you interact with them and to creatively differentiate your offer. When customers tell you what they need, surprise them and respond by tailoring your products and services. This breeds great customer loyalty. Check how well you have done, and keep the learning process going.
- Look at your customer's bigger picture to understand the total profit your company could derive over time. Customers expect to mean much more to you than their last order or their last question or complaint. Remember it costs less to keep customers than to find new ones.
- Recognize that all agents are not created equally. Some interact extremely well on the phone, and others don't. Some write well, and others don't. Consider this - in a multimedia contact center environment, you are now able to leverage an expanded resource pool. Agents or staff who have been unutilized in the past can now be leveraged during peak volumes, and in ways that are appropriate based on their individual and unique strengths, skills, abilities and requirements. And now you can measure and manage it all.

3. Provide your customers with seamless service anytime, anywhere and anyway

- Offer your customers options for contacting you – the phone, fax, e-mail, the Web, personal digital assistant, mobile phone and so on. Remember, the same customer may choose to contact you in different ways at different times.
- Unify all media plus self-service with agent-assisted service to provide the consistent, seamless experience customers expect. Customers don't want to hear "I can't take care of that" or "I don't have access to that information." Integrate front and back office applications so agents have the right tools at their fingertips at the time of the interaction.
- Resolve or fulfill a customer's request the first time he contacts you. Customers expect the person with whom they are interacting to be able to make decisions and solve problems immediately. If your agents can't do this, it will irritate your customers rather than endear them. Research shows that customers whose issues have been satisfactorily resolved are more loyal than those who have never had a problem. Design your self-service and agent-assisted applications to make it easy for customers and employees to quickly resolve problems.
- Empower your employees to configure products and services on the fly. Take advantage of technology to do this during self-service interactions.

4. Make your business decisions first, then enable them with technology

- Connect your customers with the best person to handle the contact the first time. Give whoever receives the contact the right tools, the right information and the right level of authority. Assure you have a dynamic and reliable infrastructure that can make this happen today and going forward.
- Make your self-service options friendly, easy to use, quick to access and unique to each customer. You can do this via basic IVR using touch tone, advanced speech recognition, or via the Web. Take advantage of being able to track and interpret customer actions to uncover more effective ways to do business with your customers.
- Balance the needs and expectations of your customers with your own for business efficiency to maximize effectiveness. Automation for efficiency's sake may mean things are done faster but not necessarily better. Focus your employees where it will have the most impact on customer retention and profit.

5. Measure and manage your contact center effectively

- Set clear service objectives that reflect the wide ranging needs, expectations and tolerances of different customers using a variety of media. Identify the metrics necessary to understand how well you are doing from an internal and operational perspective, as well as from your customers' perspectives. Ensure an information gap doesn't develop – customer expectations can change rapidly.
- Maximize your multimedia contact center performance. Remember, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it; and if you can't manage it, you certainly can't improve upon it. Actively measure business and system performance, as well as customer perception, to assure you meet or exceed your goals and objectives. Employ continuous feedback models to constantly improve your operations.
- Distribute critical customer and competitive information to sales and marketing teams plus other relevant groups throughout your business. This valuable intelligence is what enables your organization, above all others, to keep pace with the changing needs of your customers and create an ongoing and unrivaled competitive advantage.

By: Susan Ruiz and Betsy Wood, Marketing Managers