Visualizing the Customer Journey Using Analytics

Optimizing the Customer Experience

White Paper

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Becoming Customer-Focused

In today’s intensely competitive markets, companies must offer a superior customer experience while remaining operationally efficient. Accomplishing this on a continuous basis while remaining within operational guidelines and cost parameters requires rigorous processes and investment in useful tools.

To both attract new customers and retain existing ones, the service those customers receive must match or exceed customers’ expectations. However, our benchmark research on the unified agent desktop for customer service shows that companies encounter a variety of barriers to optimizing the customer experience. The three top-ranked barriers are communication channels managed separately (cited as an issue by 21% of participating organizations), activities not coordinated across lines of business (17%) and the complexity of the agent desktop and the number of systems agents must use to handle interactions (13%).

Our research into cloud-based contact centers provides a picture of the complexity with which these centers must deal; it finds that companies on average support five channels of communication, each with its own features and types of output. The research also shows that interactions are handled by multiple lines of business, each of which typically has unique requirements, processes, systems, data, metrics and expected outcomes. In this environment it is difficult to monitor how well agents perform in handling interactions and to measure the outcomes of those interactions.

Our research into customer relationship maturity shows that very customer-focused organizations use several innovative approaches to assist in overcoming these issues: customer journey maps to plan how
interactions should be handled throughout the customer life cycle, customer personas to define more granular customer segments, and customer feedback to monitor how well processes and staff are meeting customer expectations.

The most popular of these is customer journey maps, which our research shows more than two-thirds (67%) of companies use today to plan how to engage with customers at different touch points, communication channels and times during the customer life cycle. These maps take into consideration, for example, marketing campaigns; sales made through the Web, in a store or by calling the contact center; and assisted or self-service. The maps thus define how companies handle today and in the future expect to handle interactions, customer service processes, personalization of responses and employee training programs and materials required to produce the expected outcomes. However, these maps are complex to produce because they require a great deal of manual effort, cooperation across several lines of business and data from multiple touch points that vary by customer segment and changes during the lifetime of each customer.

On their own, they also are insufficient. For most companies, being able to monitor the outcomes of interactions is a challenge because organizations don’t have a single set of reports and analysis that contains all customer-related information or maps of the actual customer journey; as a result each line of business acts on its own, often different, information. To avoid this situation, the most mature companies dynamically visualize the actual customer journey by capturing data at each touch point, analyzing this to identify how customers interact with the company and presenting this in an easy-to-use format; properly done, this can provide more context to the analysis and identify actions for improvement.
Customer feedback is another source of information about interaction-handling performance, one that three in five organizations identified as important in our research into customer feedback management. The research found that companies collect feedback on average from four different channels in order to assess the success of interactions and the customer experience at different points in the journey. The most commonly used sources of feedback are conventional text-based surveys, while advanced organizations use emerging techniques such as automated analysis of calls as well as new channels to collect feedback such as social media, mobile apps and text messages.

Analytics Sharpens the Focus

Today’s demanding customers expect prompt, personalized service delivered through whatever channel they use. To begin to meet these expectations companies need to produce an up-to-date view of customer interactions and how well agents are handling them. Historically this has been a challenge because of the large volumes and many forms of data produced by interactions, which include transactional data managed by applications such as CRM and ERP, voice recordings collected during one-on-one conversations, data from point-of-sale devices in retail outlets and branch offices, and text-based data collected as notes from calls, letters, email surveys, Web and instant messages, text messages and even social media interactions.

One important form of data is direct feedback from customers, which according to our customer feedback research is collected using surveys (via email, online, and by phone) in more than half of organizations, by analyzing call recordings (38%), and by analyzing various customer messages in unstructured text form like social media (28%). As with interaction data overall, analyzing customer feedback has been difficult
because of the volumes of data involved and the different formats of the data.

New analytic tools can help organizations analyze customer information more effectively and thus adopt more innovative approaches. In the past, analytics tools have been somewhat generic, often available as the result of enterprise technology deployments such as business intelligence, and many were designed to process only structured transactional data; such tools cannot apply analytics to text or speech. Another drawback is that these general-purpose systems aren’t designed to focus on specific business initiatives, and so the dashboards and reports they produce aren’t likely to be helpful in providing information useful for addressing specific business issues or improving competitive positioning in rapidly changing markets.

Today’s more sophisticated analytics tools work on multiple data sources, including both structured and unstructured data, offer a broad range of capabilities, and are customizable to individual user and business requirements. For a complete view of interaction-handling, companies should use those sorts of analytics tools to gain more and deeper insights and use these to improve the outcome of interactions and the customer experience. Some new tools also make it possible to apply predictive analytics, which can show potential variations in customer actions and thus in the customer journey.

Today most companies don’t make full use of journey maps, which are produced through a process that involves representatives from multiple lines of business (typically marketing, sales, customer service and the contact center) discussing how interactions should be handled and documenting this in the form of annotated process flow diagrams. To derive a real, actionable understanding of the customer journey, though, companies need to analyze each interaction, understand the business outcome at each touch point and map how customers move
from one touch point to another across channels to achieve their objectives.

Organizations must take account of every channel and the technology or person handling each interaction and place all of them in the context of the customer’s journey. Analytics applied to business transactions (such as orders and service cases), to individual interactions (including phone calls, email, text messages, chat scripts and social media posts) and across the array of all interactions (such as movement from email to phone call to chat to social media) can help the organization’s stakeholders to visualize the actual customer journey, both overall by customer segment and by the individual customer. And being able to visualize it is the key to being able to act on it.

In the past companies typically divided their customer base into segments using information derived from their CRM system. Most have made segmentation the responsibility of the marketing function, which uses it mainly to create distribution lists for campaigns. In order for an organization to prepare to satisfy today’s more demanding customer expectations, we suggest as a best practice creating more granular customer segments that are based on information produced by applying customer-related analytics using all sources of customer data. Truly effective segmentation requires using not only core customer demographic and business-related data (such as responses to marketing campaigns, sales) but also information on customers’ needs and preferences derived from sources such as social media and other nontransactional systems.

It thus is clear that to gain the fullest insights from customer feedback, the best practice is to deploy analytics systems that can process unstructured as well as structured data. Used in combination with interaction-handling analytics, the tools can help align the customer experience to customer expectations. Note, though, that with so many channels of communication in use, utilizing all sources of
customer data will require processing volumes of data sufficiently large as to be classified as big data. This adds to the challenge, as companies need systems designed to process big data so efficiently that when necessary the results can be delivered while an interaction is taking place, which means in real or close to real time. Also, users need the outputs to be readily available in forms that match individual requirements.

Benefits of an Analytics-Driven Approach

By investing in customer analytics, companies can transform their customer information and, our research shows, increase customer satisfaction. Using analytics tools rather than a manual process, organizations can derive information from volumes of big data, making it more detailed and insightful as well as easier to use. Such systems also automate processing, making the information available sooner and increasing its reliability. The analytics can be configured to produce standardized reports and analysis across the organization yet can be customized to suit the needs of individual users. Most important of all, they will contain information sufficiently granular to support consistent customer-related decisions and actions.

The analysis produced by such systems can provide actionable information otherwise not available. It can help identify areas for improvement in a range of areas, such as reducing inbound call volumes, modifying interaction-handling processes to produce better outcomes, focusing training and coaching of agents, product ideas, marketing messages, sales effectiveness, customer service and the customer journey, compliance with regulations and fraud detection. Users can analyze the journey overall to show the flow of interactions and trends and patterns, and show by the customer and the touch point the contexts of particular interactions, their outcomes and the root causes.
of issues that occur. A best practice here is to apply the analysis to unite previously disconnected processes such as call avoidance, compliance and cross-selling.

Our research into customer analytics shows that these analysis and integration capabilities match what organizations want. Applied properly, such big data analytics can guide decision-making to increase customer satisfaction and thus improve the customer experience; these are the most important factors in the process of deciding whether to invest in analytics.

**Next Steps for Improvement**

To improve the customer journey and experience, companies should create and use journey visualization to understand how customers interact today and anticipate how they will in the future. Organizations should also evaluate and invest in analytic tools that can assess the full range of data about customers and interactions. Given the volume and velocity of data involved, this is likely to require adopting big data analytics techniques.

Analytics can provide the ability to visualize the actual customer journey and thus identify areas for improvement in the customer experience. This essential knowledge can guide organizations to make changes in people, processes, information and technology to match future customer experiences with expectations and to optimize the outcomes of those interactions. As a best practice companies should focus on all business activities that impact the customer journey, the customer experience and the business outcomes of those interactions.
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