STRATEGIES FOR PERFECTING CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

A WHITE PAPER

BACK TO BASICS: UNLOCKING THE VALUE FROM CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

There is plenty of excitement in the communications industry about the new business opportunities that exist based on evolving technology innovation.

However, operators recognize that all the bells and whistles won't matter if there aren't customers to take advantage of them. As a result, many are reevaluating their priorities and taking a closer look at ways to extract more value from their customer interactions.

Focusing on improving customer interactions creates a more proactive, more personal and more productive communications with your customer.

The beauty of this approach is that in doing so, you can also lower costs associated with managing customer interactions.

THE BUSINESS CHALLENGE: DISCONNECTED AND DISPARATE CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

Regardless of industry, many businesses face the same problem. Over the years, different systems have supported different types of customer communications.

BUSINESSES TODAY HAVE AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF DATA ABOUT THEIR CUSTOMERS—BUT DO THEY HAVE A CENTRALIZED APPROACH TO MANAGING CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS?

These systems don't talk to one another, leaving customers at risk of receiving duplicative communications for the same event—or worse yet, no communication at all.

One system may be tied to a company's billing, or ordering engine, triggering a customer notification via email that new services have been order. An IVR system may be responsible for alerting that same customer of a service outage and yet another system in charge of sending out promotions to them.

Without a more thoughtful integration between all these disparate systems, operators run the risk of not only dissatisfying the customer with too many communications but also watering down the message of each interaction.

This eventually leads to interactions becoming less effective and less read by customers.

Aggregating customer data across multiple sources is a critical challenge for many businesses today. If, for example, customer email addresses are stored in multiple databases, which one should be used when?

As more delivery channels exist to deliver content, more database environments are created to understand the customer. These challenges point to the need for a single source of truth.

THE NEED FOR A STREAMLINED APPROACH TO CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

This siloed approach to customer communications had valid reasons at the time: various departments within a company wished to leverage their own technology to be more effective in their efforts to build revenues and customer loyalty—and they often needed to do it fast to address a business problem.

Within many enterprises, this has resulted in:

→ Multiple technology architectures with multiple maintenance issues

→ Functionality where you don't need it—and no functionality where you do

→ The customer is seldom the focus resulting in a diffuse view of preferences

But, as complexity and the number of interactions grows, so too does the need for a new approach.

The answer is a centralized solution that can unify all these disparate systems in a way that is cost-effective and efficient.

CSG'S POINT-OF-VIEW:

Maximizing customer interactions is not a new trend within the industry, yet many operators are still struggling to get the most out of every communication.

They are keenly aware that each individual interaction presents an opportunity to improve the customer experience and further develop the relationship—as well as the bottom line.

As CSPs place more emphasis on achieving higher customer satisfaction, there are five best practices to consider when addressing customer interaction improvements:

1. Understand Customer Preferences.
The old adage holds true, "The customer is king." Despite that mantra, many operators still don't have a good understanding of how customers want to be communicated with based on the communication type. Do they prefer online interactions? Text messages? Print mail? But it's not as simple as making the ask. Many customer systems (billing and CRM, for example) are not capable of being configured or extended to support additional attributes or those tied to customer preferences.

PERFECTING A MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IS KEY TO AN OPERATOR'S LONG-TERM SUCCESS.

CSG'S POINT-OF-VIEW:

ALL TOO OFTEN, BUSINESSES FACE THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNICATING WITH CUSTOMERS WITH MULTIPLE DISPARATE SYSTEMS IN PLACE. CENTRALIZING CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN DELIVERING A MORE UNIFIED, PROACTIVE AND PERSONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

If operators want to improve the overall value of their customer interactions, they need to better understand how, when and what content customers prefer in order to get the most value out of the interaction. That comes with the creation of a single customer profile that stores important customer information in one place, used by all systems across the enterprise.

It's also critical that operators ensure communication preferences are multi-dimensional and take into account family hierarchies, or escalations.

For instance, operators typically have relationships with heads of households as the account holder, but the reality is that within a household many customers exist. As communications channels and interactions become necessary, understanding all preferences within the home become critical.

One child may prefer to be notified via SMS for specific events such as new shows on Nickelodeon for example, while the parent is more concerned with understanding the in-home usage by their children.

The ability to better understand customer pain points and demands gives operators the chance to develop better solutions and services which in turn creates happy, loyal customers.

This kind of proactive approach to customer engagement not only increases customer satisfaction, but also cuts costs.

2. Diversify Communications Channels.
Customer preferences may dictate that operators communicate about billing on one channel and new services on another. Unfortunately, operators often get stuck in the trap of perfecting one channel at the cost of another.

For example, while the email strategy may be very strong, perhaps only a fraction of their customers participate or have a primary email addresses on file. That leaves a number of customers whose communication needs aren't being met and makes them prime candidates for churn.

When evaluating customer interaction strategies, operators need to consider integrating all the key elements of the customer relationship.

To do this effectively, companies must first build a reliable repository of customer contact information.

Incenting customers with discounts or special offers to provide email addresses, a mobile phone number, or suppress paper statements, for example, are more likely to increase customer take rates.

By presenting a full picture of customer interactions and preferences, organizations are better equipped to handle upsell opportunities, mitigate issues and strengthen loyalty.

3. Deploy Interaction Tracking.
As operators adhere to customer preferences and diversify communication channels, it's easy to lose sight of what is being communicated.

To address this growing problem, it is important to intentionally track how effective communications are across each medium.

For example, did the customer receive the message? If so, what was the near-term reaction? Was it a positive experience or did it result in a more expensive interaction later on down the line?

Operators are now using Interaction Tracking as a way to quickly assess the value of an interaction channel and tailor their strategy.

For example, if only 5 percent of customers are opening email messages, but 25 percent are listening to an automated voice call, that information can help an operator assess the value and expected return from moving traffic from the call center to automated platforms.

4. Communicate by Customer Relevance.
Operators are a trusted source of information and often the communication provided is actually opted-in by the customer.

Statistics show that customers are 70-80 percent more likely to open emails and read SMS from operators with which they have relationships.

The key to maintaining this level of engagement is by providing relevant correspondence across these channels. Operators can tailor communications to customer preferences and gain credibility through personalized cross-sell initiatives.

5. Communicate in Real-time.
Operators are also dealing with a real-time world and many campaign management systems are simply not built to deal with large sets of real-time data events.

Providing a message the day after an outage, or a few hours after a prepaid balance has been depreciated is too late for the customer. This is especially relevant in the age of social media.

To avoid such situations, operators need to make a plan for how they will address these types of situations before they reach a breaking point.

ABOUT CSG

CSG simplifies the complexity of business transformation in the digital age for the most respected communications, media and entertainment service providers worldwide. With over 35 years of experience, CSG delivers revenue management, customer experience and digital monetization solutions for every stage of the customer lifecycle. The company is the trusted partner driving digital transformation for leading global brands, including Arrow, AT&T, Bharti Airtel, Charter Communications, Comcast, DISH, Eastlink, iFlix, MTN, TalkTalk, Telefonica, Telstra and Verizon.

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