

The Aware Customer Experience



Businesses that develop refined customer “awareness” can reduce churn, boost customer satisfaction and improve profitability

A growing imperative

Recent surveys paint a striking picture of how consumer demand has evolved in recent years. Half of surveyed consumers say they constantly change how they deal with organizations, and more than 80 percent say they’ll buy more from companies that make it easier to do business with them.¹

Such findings should serve as a wake-up call for organizations that still consider the customer experience a cost of doing business rather than a strategic driver of business and shareholder value. Gone are the days when businesses could expect customers to wait patiently for “first in, first out” service — consumers now demand prompt service from well-informed company representatives. Having rapidly adopted smartphones, tablets, chat, texting (SMS), video and social media, consumers also expect businesses to support almost any technology and channel across the enterprise.

In today’s technology-driven markets, an informed business means being aware — having a detailed understanding of who customers are, when and how they have interacted with your organization previously, what products and services they have purchased, what issues they may be encountering, and how and why they might contact you in the future.

How can your organization develop such awareness? In this white paper, we share key principles of the aware customer experience, outline a framework for aware customer experience management, and describe a building block approach to help you get there.

¹“Outside In,” by Harley Manning and Kerry Bodine, Forrester Research, 2012.

In today's technology-driven markets, an informed business means being *aware* — having a detailed understanding of who customers are, when and how they have interacted with your organization previously, what products and services they have purchased, what issues they may be encountering, and how and why they might contact you in the future.



That was then, this is now

According to research from Forrester Research Inc., the 10 top-ranked companies in terms of customer experience drove returns that were more than 20 percent higher on average than the S&P Index.² Clearly, customer experience is directly tied to business performance and revenue, and as the front-line organization for supporting customers, contact centers are far more than a cost of doing business — they are the key to excellent customer experience.

Why, then, do the “first in, first out” practices instituted more than 20 years ago still reign in many customer service organizations? Even as voice remains the predominant method for contact, consumers' expectations continue to change. Yet many businesses have been slow to respond. Customers are demanding near-real-time response, and a growing number (48 percent) now prefer non-voice methods. In fact, nearly half the respondents to an Avaya survey (48 percent) say that within the past year they have used e-mail to interact with a company, and one in five (19 percent and 18 percent, respectively) used Web self-service and Web chat.³

In a world where bring-your-own-device (BYOD) has become the norm both at work and from anywhere consumers happen to be, many users have multiple devices and they expect companies will know them no matter what channel or device they use. So it is increasingly important that organizations raise the bar in terms of the overall customer experience, and increased awareness is a critical enabler.

What is customer experience awareness?

As an extension of “context,” customer experience awareness means better leveraging, in real time, all of the meaningful information available about customers and translating that into a richer and more productive customer experience. Rather than offering customers a generic menu of options or forcing them to endure a generic experience, awareness harnesses the power of one-to-one interaction to anticipate what customers may need and then either directs them to the best resource to meet that need or initiates a pre-emptive action within the company to address the need.

²Ibid.

³Avaya Customer Effort Impact Study, 2013.

Benefits of the aware customer experience

- Grow sales by delivering a unique brand experience that increases loyalty and revenues through highly targeted and personalized cross-sell and up-sell services and support
- Execute on market opportunities faster and more effectively than competitors
- Improve profitability, reduce operating costs and simplify management complexity
- Engage customers over new channels without extensive resource commitments
- Optimize current customer experience solution investments

Awareness can happen in many ways, including:

- Businesses can do a better job of using previous customer interaction data to drive more personalized subsequent interactions.
- Businesses can make their self-service applications more aware, information-driven and personalized so customers spend less time providing information to the system and get answers to their questions or issues faster.
- From a contact center agent perspective, businesses can do a better job of leveraging situational information about customers, agents and the business to match customers to the best people in the enterprise to serve them.

How can companies achieve such awareness? Read on.

The future of customer experience

The process of achieving full customer awareness is a journey that includes a refined technology platform and tools, reengineering of relevant business processes, and changing organizational culture. Over the next three to five years, businesses should focus on three core principles of the “aware” customer experience:

Reaping actionable insight. This involves knowing customers’ preferences, understanding their situations, knowing their value, and using all of this insight to match them with the most appropriate resource to address their requirements. It’s about more than just looking at historical information and measuring what has happened during customer interactions. Actionable insight is really enabled through closed-loop performance management, which involves analysis of available customer experience data from one end of the sales funnel to the other. This approach can provide great insight into reasons why customers choose to buy — or not to buy — from your company, as well as the likelihood of them being a repeat customer.

Creating the 360-degree customer experience. Successful awareness also involves monitoring, anticipating and dynamically managing the customer experience. It includes bringing in the right resource to address the right need at the right time, across the most relevant and preferred device and channel, and providing information that not only informs the current interaction but also suggests the next best action. For example, a company could smoothly



transition and elevate a customer conversation from its initiation point in social media to an SMS text alert or e-mail notification, and on into the contact center via mobile, Web or other channel to enhance the value of the interaction, continue to engage the customer and minimize customer frustration.

Enabling enterprisewide engagement. Putting customers at the heart of their businesses and aligning the right resources, functions and processes will require companies to evolve beyond the silo-centric approach where customer experience is the job of front-line sales and the contact center. Instead, customer experience should be a mindset that encompasses all of a business's functions, people and resources so any or all of these can be brought into the picture collaboratively whenever and wherever they are needed. Only when this occurs will businesses be able to deliver the best possible customer service and link customer experience with other business processes as part of brand awareness.

Overall, businesses need to plan on evolving and integrating their communications, information and processes to adapt in real time so they can proactively manage the customer experience.

The path to awareness

The path to an Aware Customer Experience is a journey, not a one-time action. It takes time to adopt the necessary technologies and accompanying business process changes. While adoption of those is taking place, even newer technologies and channels may be introduced, requiring companies to adapt continually. Depending on where a company starts, migrating from today's

The time is right

Several technology trends are helping reshape the ways businesses manage the customer experience. Mobile and wearable computing, the big data phenomenon, cloud computing, real-time monitoring, advanced analytics and grid computing are coming together at the same time to create a new paradigm — one that enables organizations to achieve a much more intimate level of interaction with existing customers and prospective new customers anywhere and anytime.



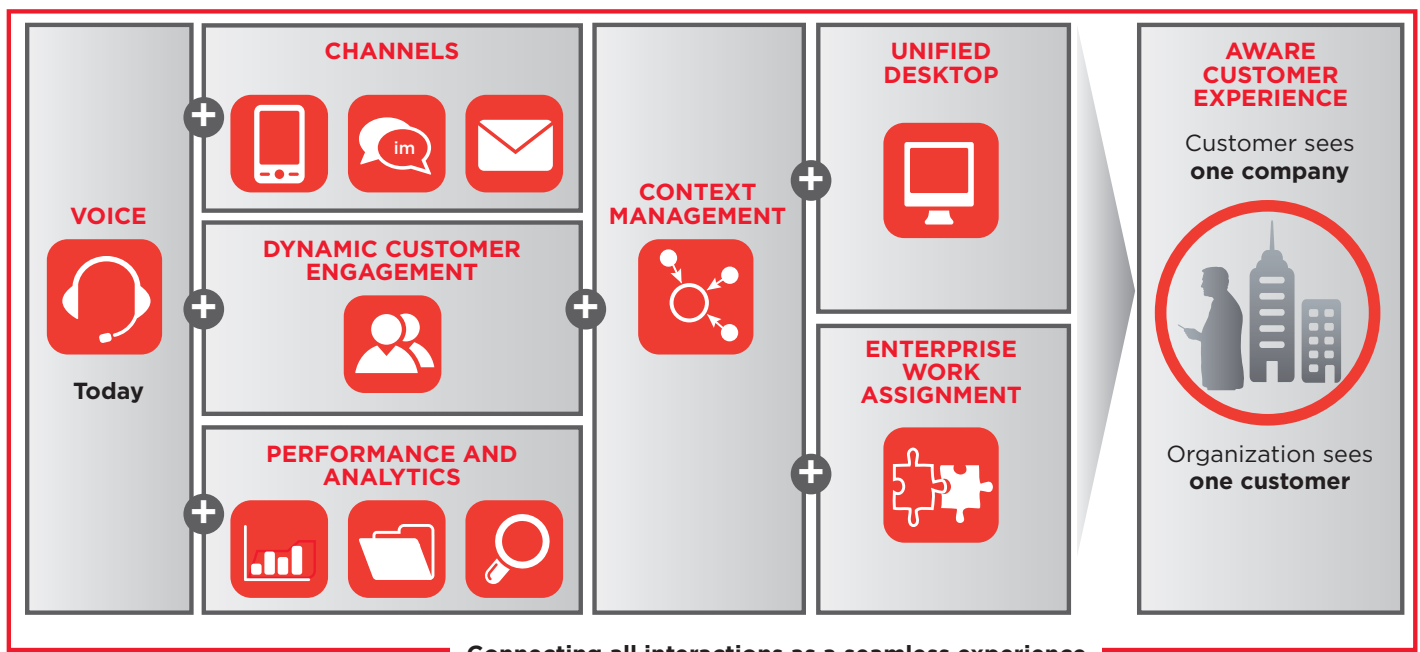
typical call routing capabilities to a more highly aware state will require a thoughtful technology adoption framework (Figure 1), certain platforms and applications, some level of business transformation, and a three-year to five-year road map. The elements of a technology adoption framework include:

- **Channels.** With the rise in consumer demand for multimedia interaction with the business, a great starting point is to add multimedia capabilities to an existing voice-oriented contact center. But be careful that there is awareness of other media channels and that customers enjoy consistent treatment regardless of the channel they choose to communicate.
- **Dynamic customer engagement.** Personalizing each customer's mobile, Web or call experience from the point of self-service through direct interaction with an agent presents the opportunity to improve customer satisfaction and operations efficiency. This type of cross-channel, 360-degree customer experience allows you to accommodate customers regarding channel preference and permit two-way interactions that smoothly transition across devices and touch points while maintaining continuity of a single conversation. In addition, advanced routing capabilities can be used to effectively manage call routing across multiple sites, thereby using resources optimally while adhering to business rules about work distribution and meeting or exceeding customer service level agreements.
- **Performance and analytics.** Forward-looking contact centers are leveraging operational reporting tools to answer the "what" questions required for operating a contact center, and pairing them with analytics solutions that help answer "why" something is happening. Such capabilities are now available to capture and analyze the voice of the customer beyond transaction data (for example, speech analytics and flow analytics) to help companies analyze the customer experience from the customer perspective and use those insights to make faster, more informed decisions that result in reduced customer effort and higher customer satisfaction.
- **Context management.** Context in a customer journey can allow companies to tailor, personalize and pre-empt the customer experience such that customers can be transformed from merely loyal to actual promoters of a brand. Context sources can vary across an enterprise from Web and mobile applications to customer relationship management (CRM) systems and number of contact center applications. This context can be leveraged to personalize self-service, routing and agent treatment in ways that delight the customer. Beyond that, a mechanism can be created to make information accessible and consumable to Web and other self-service applications, agent selection and routing engines,

As these capabilities are deployed and fully integrated, the organization creates an aware customer experience where these interactions really become a more seamless experience. The customer sees one company and the company sees one customer.

- and employees. This involves creating a repository that unifies the collection of and access to all customer interaction data: transactions, e-mails, chat and other types of online tracking done through each customer’s account. This information is very quickly made usable and accessible by matching rules, thus driving a different type of customer experience.
- **Unified desktop.** Using all the information produced by the customer and gathered by the enterprise, the next step is to disseminate that information uniformly to self-service systems and the desktops of personnel tasked with customer interactions. So regardless of the channel, contextual information is available across the enterprise to create a consistent and informed customer experience.
- **Enterprise work assignment.** This innovative technology puts together the now-extensive sets of available customer data to produce a fuller picture of customers, their behaviors and preferences, and whatever issues they may be concerned about. It then supports the most effective real-time routing of customers to the most appropriate agent or other resource within your organization, thus achieving true one-to-one matching between customers and the most qualified resource and, ultimately, elevating customer experience to a new level.

Figure 1. A seamless customer experience



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A better — and better managed — customer experience

The aware customer experience starts with knowing your customer better than your competition does, and delivering a highly personalized experience over the right media at the right time and in the right context. Achieving awareness depends on the ability to master the massive amounts of information being generated within and outside the enterprise. Consider, for example, that a business with 200 contact center agents could generate one million events per day. An enterprise with more than 100,000 agents could easily generate one billion events daily. This doesn't include customer-related events generated by knowledge workers outside the contact center. Businesses require solutions with real-time performance management and analytics tools that turn this flood of data into actionable insights.

Cloud computing and virtualization technologies can support cost-effective development of the aware customer experience by extending the value of existing investments in communications resources. Then, by taking advantage of the emerging analytics and resource-matching innovations, you can be better positioned to “mass personalize” your brand experience in new and differentiated ways.

Bottom line, customers increasingly expect to be able to reach businesses quickly and on their own terms. So monitoring, anticipating and dynamically managing the customer experience will become more and more important in the future. When these things come together, the result is a better — and better managed — customer experience and improved business returns.

Learn more

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