Manage the Relationship, Not the Contact

Strategic Data Visibility Is Key to Customer Experience Interactions

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A Distorted and Incomplete View of the Customer Experience

Managing customer interactions has become more complex at every stage. Customers have more channels for access and needs that are distorted by the pandemic, the economy, supply chain issues and other concerns. Better self-service capabilities have, ironically, increased the complexity of interactions that agents must address.

An avalanche of new technology for CX interaction management is now available, well ahead of a general understanding among users of how it is helpful, and ahead of their ability to operationalize it with best practices, sound metrics and an understanding of the total cost of ownership/return on investment benefits. Ventana Research asserts that by 2024, three-quarters of organizations will try to apply revenue-centric metrics to contact center operations on top of existing activity- and efficiency-centric measures, to better understand how service operations contribute to profitability. This is likely to spur the use of more wide-ranging customer analytics.

For most organizations, the metrics used to define and determine success are siloed and mismatched to task. They are typically measured in real time, meaning asynchronous tasks may be missed. Contact centers count activities related to costs, but do not relate that data to revenue or outcomes. Marketers track engagement and qualified leads, and sales teams track revenue. But is anyone pulling this data together to determine where opportunities lie in the customer life cycle? Or identifying common situations and actions that contribute to customer retention and upselling? Many important and potentially revenue-generating processes go under-analyzed and even unidentified.

Contact Center
Market Assertion

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Managing the customer experience is about identifying moments of opportunity or leverage so an organization knows which buttons to push or levers to pull to engage customers. Information about customer experiences and satisfaction is most often derived from contact-related surveys that tell a partial or incomplete story. Without the data from all involved parties, an organization is left making process and business decisions based on a subset of interactions. These decisions may send organizations down the wrong path, leading to missed opportunities, or worse, alienating swaths of the customer base. How well is an organization managing customer relationships if it is not actually talking to customers in a way that captures all facets of their interactions?

CX Leadership Requires Strategic Visibility

The job of a chief customer officer is to synthesize the goals and processes from all areas within the organization that touch the customer into a unified strategy with defined goals. Good CX leads to opportunities, revenue, longevity and value. Organizations need a strategy for defining and achieving organizational CX that starts with managing the life cycle from end to end.

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At the same time, there is an onslaught of data to manage and maximize. Having data is not the problem. Rather, the collected data lacks context. For example, what is the relationship between the leads that a marketing department generates and the ability of the sales team to convert them? Or the connection between service incidents and sales and marketing efforts? Or the impact of product design?

Data does not automatically tell an organization what action to take. Lots of organizations have enough data to create a picture of what happened and what is happening. But they do not have the context, tools and expertise to know how to turn that data into action that supports a goal.

Strategic visibility is more than access to data. It is produced by data, put in context and filtered through an analytic framework that connects activities at different life cycle stages. Organizations need a data strategy that includes collection, accuracy, enrichment and distribution, and a way to turn that data into models for customer behavior. Even better, that activation could be automated and cross all departments that support customer engagement. For example, an organization can use CX data to bring awareness of fraud to a compliance department or use field service insights to support product development efforts.

CX Is Not Just a Concern for the Contact Center

Because the contact center soaks up so much cost and resources, it is seen as the focus of the customer relationship. But a majority of interactions now have at least some digital component, even if it ultimately lands in a voice call with an agent. Organizations must start thinking of voice as just one of many potential digital communication channels. Customers are now accustomed to—and expect—access to organizations via chat, email, websites and social media.

There are many direct touch points outside the contact center that may never be captured by an organization's customer support infrastructure. This includes marketing outreach—such as promotional emails—and pre-support self-service for customers using search engines or

social media. Together, these touch points form an organization's connection to its customers.

But the customer relationship itself is a complex set of rules that guide an organization's behavior towards the customer based on value, segmentation, situational urgency and long-term planning. The contact center is the place where much of the relationship is executed upon, but it is not the place to make organizational policy for customer relationship management.

A holistic, whole-organization approach to the relationship is what allows an organization to have enough visibility into the customer to identify—or create—moments of influence or leverage. Only analytics supplemented by artificial intelligence (AI) can provide the means to act effectively once an organization has identified those moments. And only a cross-departmental data-gathering strategy can measure the impact of those acts and ensure growth in the relationship and in customer value.

AI Shines a Light on the Blind Spots

AI-based customer service provides accurate insights into customer behavior and allows an organization to better intuit what customers need and want. There is a difference between AI in applications like chatbots, which are quick and convenient self-service tools, and AI platforms, where benefits are spread widely across the enterprise. AI-based platforms—specifically those related to CX management—allow an organization to analyze, address and predict outcomes by bringing together and utilizing the full scope of customer interactions more efficiently. Putting AI at the base of the tech stack—in the underlying platform that supports multiple enterprise applications like enterprise resource planning, customer relationship management, back office, marketing, service and sales—ensures that an organization is analyzing relevant data wherever it may be hiding.

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Different groups across an organization manage elements of the CX, but they are not communicating or using the same tools, creating blind spots. AI improves communication between these different groups by facilitating knowledge sharing. AI makes visible the interactions that do not go through the call center and unearths insights inside data sources that go unused, especially unstructured sources like voice recordings. It pairs with workflow and process automation to knit together siloed data sources and operational departments.

Analyzing a large amount of compiled data quickly and efficiently enables organizations to get an accurate, real-time read on customer sentiment, detect emotions and predict buying or churn behavior. With accurate data comes more accurate predictions for market changes and future trends. Our Analytics and Data Benchmark Research found that organizations ranked improved efficiency (70%), improved communication and knowledge sharing (56%), improved CX satisfaction (39%) and more consistent and available data across the enterprise (32%) among the top five benefits of using AI/ML.

Benefits of using AI/ML
Improvements ranked among the top five

Process efficiency	70%
Communication and knowledge sharing	56%
CX and satisfaction	39%
Management and business alignment	37%
Consistent and available data	32%

Source: Ventana Research
Analytics and Data Benchmark Research
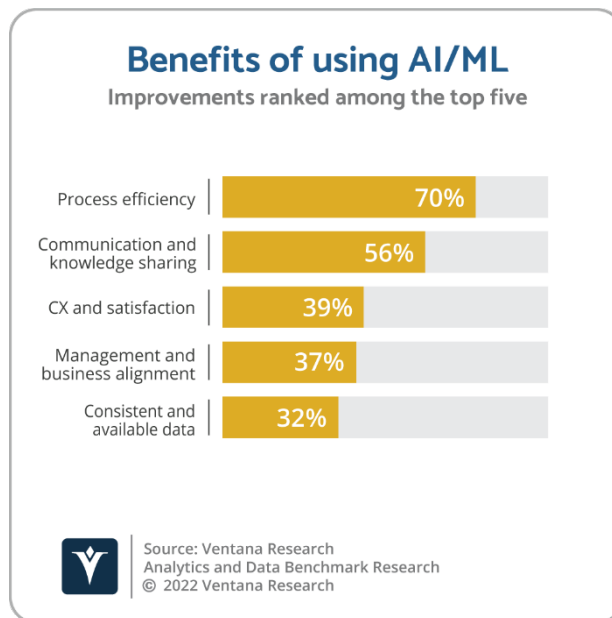© 2022 Ventana Research

What This Means in the Real World

Organizations must identify all existing touch points and teams that have input into the customer relationship. Some of these touch points are not going to be obvious. Customers can circumvent existing processes by going around official support channels; calling out companies on social is a typical example.

Clear goals and success definitions need to be established for each customer-related function, and each team's metrics need to be harmonized with the others to roll up to a clear, simple set of organizational key performance indicators related to customers. The only way to make this work is to implement a broad-based analytic framework that is purpose-built for CX analysis. Existing business intelligence software is either too complex, too IT-centric or too far away from the problem to be useful in this context. The application should be connected to CX analytics, but will not be the main tool used for that purpose.

Change starts at the top. CX leadership must enforce an all-organization approach to building relationships through relevant engagement, and select team leads who buy into the premise that the reason to aim for good CX is not just to be altruists, but to achieve long-lasting, revenue-generating relationships that encourage customers to be advocates and long-term buyers. When organizations have a chain of experience within the customer journey, they have a better sense of what customers are likely to do, what buttons to push and how to grow TCO/ROI.

CCOs must stop fixating on the contact and start managing the relationship. That way, the organization can derive the most value from longer-lasting, more satisfying customer engagements.

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