



LEADING STRATEGIES

Changing Channels

Comcast's Jennifer Labs says flexibility is key to staying tuned in to customers.

BY AARON LAZENBY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF FUSCO/GETTY IMAGES



■ The days of simply calling the cable company are over. And it's **Jennifer Labs'** job to understand what's next.

According to Labs, vice president of customer service strategy and operations in the Customer Experience group at Comcast, customers are just as likely to e-mail, text, or connect via social channels. And they are not just looking for support for the cable box for their TV. "Customers want their content wherever and whenever they want it, on the platform or device of their choice," she says.

That means Labs' team has to be smart about strategy—providing answers and support that consider the many (and still evolving) needs of Comcast's customers. "We constantly are asking

ourselves whether a particular solution makes sense for a consumer to access directly, or does it make more sense for just internal use?" she asks. "What platforms do we have to develop for—and for what devices? What are the right channels? These days, it's never as simple as saying, 'I want to launch X by Y date.'"

Here, Labs talks to *Profit* about how her team connects with what customers want, why it pays to keep employees engaged, and how Comcast uses Oracle technology to solve problems and drive innovation.

PROFIT: How does Comcast's customer experience philosophy differ from other companies?

LABS: When I think back about our industry and the way it's changed, Comcast specifically has evolved from a more traditional cable operation to become a leading technology company. That really is exciting for us, and a reflection of that growth is

Jennifer Labs, Vice President of Customer Service Strategy and Operations, Customer Experience Group, Comcast

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the creation of our Customer Experience team a few years ago, dedicated to supporting the evolving needs of our customers. The solutions we are creating leverage science and technology—including automation wherever possible—to provide our customers choice and control.

Our charter is to deliver the best experience every time for our customers. To that end, we believe that you can’t have a great customer experience without a great employee experience. Our employees are the face of Comcast, and they need the right tools and answers at their fingertips to provide a great customer experience. The more we invest in our employee solutions, the better we can influence the customer experience.

PROFIT: How do you create great customer care when both technology and customer expectations are rapidly evolving?

LABS: We really look at future trends to understand how to build solutions for how the world is today and where we think it will be going tomorrow. That way, we are not always replacing and updating our products and putting a lot of change through our call centers. Our focus is on building solutions that are flexible and adaptable so that we are ready for what’s next.

Our teams spend a lot of time talking directly with our customers one-on-one. And we spend a lot of time in our field organizations and call centers with our customer care representatives to get a feel for what’s going on right now. They have so many ideas, and we bring forward the ones that will be revolutionary in this space.

Part of our strategy is to manage our internal customer care applications as products and apply product development management principles, including engaging user interface designers and performing usability research and testing. All kinds of practices that you would normally just hear about in external consumer-facing product development, we’ve applied internally as well.

PROFIT: What products has Comcast created for customers, to respond to the changing landscape?

LABS: One of the biggest changes over the last couple of years is customer expectation around self-service options. Now, when we launch a capability internally, we think carefully about what pieces make sense for customers to try for themselves. Our customers have told us they want the choice of self-service, and we also know that their time is at a premium, so we are mindful of that in our solution designs.

Earlier this year, we launched our My Account app, which allows customers to pay bills and check the status of an appointment. It also introduces some basic troubleshooting on their smartphones.

So if a customer has an issue with their set-top box, for example, they can do some preliminary troubleshooting themselves. If they hit a place where they say, “OK, now I need more support,” then they can request a callback from a service representative or send us a tweet on Twitter.

On the consumer products side, we have launched X1, our cloud-based entertainment operating system. It is a really revolutionary user interface that brings together the mobile and TV viewing experience. This platform allows for more personalization—and because it is completely cloud-based, we’re able to make enhancements and introduce new features much faster.

PROFIT: How does your team work with the IT team to address customer demand?

LABS: In some organizations, there is a strict line between the business and technology teams. In my experience, that doesn’t work for most—at least not for long. At Comcast, we interact frequently with our product groups, finding out what they are working on so we can align our roadmaps. We collaborate with our development teams because there are good ideas on both sides. We need to hear from each other to deliver what our customers want.

For example, whenever Comcast prepares to launch a new customer-facing product, our Customer Experience team takes the customer’s perspective to ensure we design the best customer experience. Taking this step ensures that we continue to put our focus on serving our customers—and the employees who support them.

PROFIT: How did Comcast first start working with Oracle?

LABS: We started using Oracle Knowledge Management to support the foundational applications that we wanted to provide internally. We needed to build something that we could use to keep information consistent across our multiple channels. Oracle Knowledge Management enabled us to share content and troubleshooting processes across those channels.

We use the Information Manager feature of Oracle Knowledge Management to manage all the content that we publish internally, such as answers to frequently asked questions. We also extended that solution to our Comcast.com channel for help and to support content for our customers to use directly. This enables our agents to share content via e-mail directly with our customers and provides us a lot of reporting and statistics, such as which of our support articles is getting the most views or the most feedback.

The other part of the product that we use is the AnswerFlow feature, which is a new application for guided troubleshooting and answer delivery. With

SNAPSHOT

COMCAST

comcast.com

Headquarters:Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania**Industry:**Technology and
entertainment**Employees:**

83,000

Revenue:US\$41.8 billion
in 2013**Oracle products:**Oracle Knowledge
Management, Oracle
Database, Oracle
WebLogic Server
11g, Oracle Business
Intelligence Enterprise
Edition, Oracle Data
Integrator

JENNIFER LABSVice President
of Customer
Service Strategy
and Operations,
Customer Experience,
Comcast Cable**Length of tenure:**

Eight years

Education:BA in interdisciplinary
studies:communications,
psychology, and
Spanish, University
of Arizona; MBA in
marketing, San Diego
State University**Personal quote/
mantra:**"We can't solve
problems using the
same kind of thinking
we used when we
created them."

—Albert Einstein



this application, we can literally track back to the process step and understand where an agent or customer abandoned the flow to try something else. We can also start to correlate what the customer-facing employee is doing within the application with the end-to-end customer experience.

PROFIT: How do you use this information to provide better support?

LABS: This application allows us more sophistication around intelligence and automation than we've ever had. We can use that correlated information we received about calls and customer satisfaction to understand which of our process flows are most effective for the first time a customer calls. We can also see which processes we need to take back to our technology teams for work. It helps us provide more direction to our customer-facing employees about next steps. We can also automate certain steps in the process flows, saving time and improving the experience for our customers and employees. This is a great example of where we are leveraging both science and technology to create smarter solutions.

PROFIT: You partnered with Accenture for this implementation. How did that come about?

LABS: Accenture has been a valued partner over the last several years in our journey to improve our internal tools and applications. They have primarily supported us around project management and deployment activities. Our vision was to have a knowledgebase that every Comcast employee could access, and Accenture helped us to execute our solution.

Additionally, our Accenture lead had exten-

sive knowledge around the Information Manager feature. His team helped us set up our governance structure and made sure that we correctly converted all of our content into the new knowledge-base. We wanted to get the most out of the Oracle Knowledge Management product, and his experience was a rare find.

PROFIT: How do you see these investments helping Comcast stay competitive in the future?

LABS: We are in the information age after all, and what digital allows us is easy access to information "on demand." Consumers and employees want on-demand access—what I need, when I need it, how I want it, where I want it, and more.

Keeping up with these demands means we have to be highly structured around governance yet also agile enough to keep up with the expectations of our consumers and employees. Building solutions with a strategic mind-set toward what our customers and employees need now, as well as what their needs will be next, also improves our time to market. Driving innovation while maintaining flexibility—that balance is the key to delivering the best solutions for both our customers and employees in our dynamic environment. □

Aaron Lazenby is editor in chief of Profit.

ACTION ITEM

Scan to learn more about the Oracle solutions featured in this story.