Automation of CX is the only way to grow your business

By Kevin South   21 Aug 2019

Doing more with less. Working in an agile way. These phrases are typically mentioned when describing essential components of doing business in the digital age.

Kevin South, Head of Digital & CX at Seacom

Emerging technologies like cloud, robotics and AI are key enablers of this process, helping companies operate more efficiently and competitively. But as digital migration shows dividends, how do you cope with a growing customer base without losing your massively advantageous leanness? The answer is automation.

Customers want more without paying more

Today's customers demand more in every department. This is true, whether talking about individual consumers or business-to-business dealings. Contemporary global-orientated marketplaces are fiercely competitive and much of the power in a business relationship has shifted to the customer, who typically pick and choose from a wide variety of providers.

With that in mind, it makes sense for an organisation to focus on satisfying customer wants and expectations. In a well-quoted global study, 75% of companies from multiple industries identified improving their customer experience as a primary innovation objective. This priority has been mirrored in several other recent studies, with 58% of high-earning companies stating in 2018 that deepening customer relationships was their biggest marketing objective for the coming year.

As for what customers expect, in the always-connected, rapid-paced digital era, they value similarly "always-on" response from businesses, frictionless interaction and personalisation. In short, anything that wastes their precious time or treats them as a number, as opposed to a person, is out and will drive them away from the offending company.

At the same time, while demand from end-users has increased, the cost of traditional customer service has jumped with no real increase in revenue. Customers expect an A-grade experience without paying more, which is a common problem facing the South African telecoms sector. Among mobile providers especially, income is flat. This situation not only prevents investment in next-generation infrastructure like 5G but also fails to justify the cost of hiring more staff to effectively serve customers. The result is a vicious circle that hinders organisational growth.

There is a cost-effective solution though: digital technologies and, particularly, the strategic integration of automation into a company's customer-facing channels.

Automation keeps companies agile and customers happy

There's no question that today's cloud-based digital technologies support business success in part by helping companies provide their customers with a more satisfying experience. This is accomplished in a budget-friendly way that doesn't bloat support staff numbers nor impedes operational leanness.

For example, chatbots help fewer call centre agents field more enquiries, handling the most perfunctory queries before handing over the call to the most suitable agent. Information gathered during the initial AI encounter can be passed on to the human agent, ensuring they are primed for the next step of the conversation while preventing the customer from irritatingly having to repeat themselves.

With machine learning becoming more sophisticated and powerful on the back of cloud computing's evolution, systems can also be set up for automatic data analysis that results in pertinent, personalised and potentially near-instantaneous recommendations for the end-user. Increasingly, through the Internet of Things sensors in products, communications may become more proactive, such as advising when a home appliance or piece of hardware is experiencing errors.

It's no surprise that tech giants like Google, Microsoft and Apple have moved customer support away from human agents to increasingly humanlike virtual assistants and a multitude of self-support programs, help topics and online categories to guide users to a solution. Amazon is somewhat different from its digital-services counterparts because the nature of their business is the physical shipment of via staff-filled fulfilment centres.

However, if you look at these examples the message is clear - the only way to handle a large customer base, and scale in today's business ecosystem is with the use of technology.

Self-service takes hold in South African ICT

What is lost in always having a warm body to contact is made up in instant gratification – another key desire of contemporary consumers. Although US-centred, and in need of a revisit, studies have shown that 57% of customers think customer support should be the same on weekends as weekdays. At the same time, 53% of consumers expect a response to a question on social media within an hour.

Self-service options, like those implemented by Google, are one way around this. South Africa has a strong app culture already, allowing customers to manage their experience and needs as necessary, whenever that may be. No more weekday 8-to-5 limitations. And although not new to the local ICT sphere – many consumer-facing ISPs already have apps that put control of their service in their customers' hands – the solution is evolving to create a more rewarding and relevant customer experience in the greater industry, as well as greater efficiency for its organisations.

The mark of a new-age telco, much like any new-age business, will be the degree that makes digital transformation, and its related innovations, a key part of its operational strategy.

Account managers are always likely to provide that extra human touch. But as customer bases change and grow, digital tools like automating software, in conjunction with external partnerships, will allow companies to maintain (or improve) responsiveness while limiting their core size.

In terms of ICT, expect that even enterprise-level customers will soon be able to manage their bespoke, multi-site products through a single portal, adding products, upgrading services, handling billing and so on. Customers enjoy greater visibility into a company's services and are empowered to tailor-make solutions for themselves as they see fit.

Automating software, used with existing client services, has advantages for both customer and the company. Most importantly, it's a direction worth exploring and investing in now. Providing a consistent, high-quality and, most importantly, satisfying user experience will earn loyalty from customers and reassert an organisation's relevance in a fast-changing, hyper-competitive environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin South, head of digital and CX at Seacom

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com