

The Social Contact Center: At the Hub of Conversational Commerce

Shoppers and browsers turn to the Web, search engines and social networks for advice and information about goods and services; but the phone (especially mobile) and contact center resources still figure prominently into their conversational path. Leading contact center infrastructure providers enable agents to monitor, analyze and react to input and posts from a number of sources – primarily to gauge intent and engage customers.

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Key Findings:

As the power pendulum swings toward customers and attention gravitates toward collaboration across multiple channels, the contact center is taking on new meaning:

- **The contact center is one of many “touchpoints”** – As individuals move from search and shopping to deciding and transacting, contact center resources (hardware, software, agents, apps and databases) play different roles at each phase.
- **Customers are on a journey from search to transaction** – In different verticals, the phone is the shortest path to point-of-sale; on others, it is an afterthought, but is always an option.
- **Original sites for computer telephony integration (CTI) addresses the social element of business** – In the 1980s, contact centers were the first place where phones and computer terminals came together in real-time on an agent’s desktop. With the rise of “social commerce” they re-establish their centrality.
- **Avoiding false choices** – One online insurance broker in the U.S. famously promises “technology when you want it; people when you don’t,” relegating live agents to the role of second fiddle. This is true customer empowerment, but ignores the fact that human assistance and interaction is very important in Conversational Commerce.
- **Contact centers have been re-architected** – Cisco, Genesys (Alcatel-Lucent Enterprise), RightNow, Interactive Intelligence and others help orchestrate faster response and resolution of issues from both customers and prospects.
- **New entrants add community, Facebook fan pages as a minimum** – Lithium, Salesforce.com, SugarCRM and a handful of others are taking input from individuals and responses from contact center agents into account.
- **The journey starts with listening and analytics** – Good news for Nexidia, Radian6 (Salesforce.com), Callminer, Autonomy, Omniture (Adobe), Nice, Verint, Witness and others.
- **“Big Data” issues loom** – The IT systems behind efficient contact centers span CRM, workforce optimization (WFO), and knowledge management. Each is augmented with metadata that include location, transaction history, payment preferences and privacy restrictions.
- **Overcome tension between contact center metrics and social media objectives** – At this early stage in the development of the social contact center, primary concern circles around not tarnishing the brand, other issues will emerge over time as the technologies for capturing genuine customer sentiment and intent are refined and quality of care takes center stage.

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