Leveraging Technology To Meet Evolving Customer Expectations
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Exploring Solutions that Fuel Experiences

Technology’s vital role in meeting the changing demands of the modern consumer has long been recognized. Nearly every interaction occurring between a customer and an organization is driven or supported by at least one form of technology – in many cases, multiple platforms converge to support the interaction.

Just like customer expectations, the technologies we use to meet them are evolving at a rapid pace. Understanding the emerging solutions within the Customer Experience technology ecosystem, and the impact they can have on your own efforts to deliver quality customer experiences, is vital to your ability to maintain a competitive edge.

Let’s look at just a few technology innovations and evolutions that have the potential to impact your CX strategy, and key questions to ask when considering them. We could spend days exploring all of the technologies that drive CX, but for brevity we’ll focus on solutions that drive hot-button CX disciplines, including Omni-channel engagement, personalization, customer empowerment and customer engagement/relationship management.

As we explore these technologies, it is important to remember that each one, while powerful in its own right, functions best as part of a larger CX technology ecosystem. Integrations between these technologies and other supporting platforms is vital to their optimal value and impact on your organization and customers. It is also important to remember that truly effective CX strategy takes into account all factors impacting the customer, including, but by no means limited to, technology.

Powerful Omni-Channel Engagement Solutions

The term Omni-channel communications is not a new one to CX leaders. However, the definition of the term, and its practical execution, continue to evolve as customers expect new and more efficient ways to interact with organizations they do business with.

We should also not confuse this term with the more simplistic “multi-channel,” which refers to the raw number of channels, promoting the use of more options for communication. This approach can yield more frustration if the customer cannot seamlessly switch channels and receive a consistent, high quality experience from the brand. The modern customer expects a great deal more than multiple ways to engage with your business. Here are a few technologies that have become increasingly vital to the delivery of seamless omni-channel communications in “The Expectation Economy.”
Channel Optimization Solutions

For many years, the focus on omni-channel engagement strategies lie in their creation and management. Simply offering multiple interaction channels fulfilled many customer expectations. Unfortunately, that’s no longer enough to meet the expectations of customers. Today, each of those channels must be effective in its own right. Interactions requiring multiple channels, such as chat and voice, must be seamless during the transition. No customer wants to have to explain his or her needs more than once.

Technology solutions that support the transition from one channel to the next are increasingly important to the overall delivery of effective engagements. Often, such solutions are integrated into a larger platform, such as your contact center. However, some solutions, like Multichannel Customer Experience Management from Microsoft, may be added to existing engagement environments to streamline interactions.

Questions to ask: Do we understand the unique challenges associated with social media interactions? Do we have the bandwidth and staff to focus on supporting social media interactions?

Social Engagement Solutions

Social media as an interaction tool between customers and businesses is still a relatively new concept in the grander scheme of things. However, as more and more customers come to expect service and support from an organization’s social media, businesses must focus on supporting the channel. Often social dialogue will be the most visible of your customer communications, which reinforces the need to be responsive with consumers. Any point of the customer journey can prompt social usage, which means all departments will need to be able to respond as necessary. Most organizations don’t have the resources to allocate someone from each department solely to social channels, thus the need to have an integrated strategy that utilizes one customer profile to manage all the communication channels. Omni-channel engagement solutions that offer integrated social media interaction management, like PureCloud from Genesys, have evolved to meet the rising popularity of the social channel. When considering social media as a part of your customer engagement options, it is important to remember that timely responsiveness is a basic expectation of the modern consumer. If your brand is going to post and share on social platforms, then you have to be prepared to interact with prospects, customers and influencers as well, and you must do so quickly and effectively.

Questions to ask: Do we possess a thorough understanding of our customers’ expectations from each communication channel? Is the entire organization committed to the challenge of optimizing every channel, regardless of their position or silo?

Chatbots and Artificial Intelligence

Chat-supported interactions have become a staple of many websites, due to its lower cost of service. While chat is an invaluable interaction channel, traditional chat platforms require an agent to field the customer’s questions and provide assistance. Although agents can handle multiple interactions at once, it’s still a resource strain on the organization.

Enter chatbots. Chatbots are computer programs that field interactions through chat windows, messaging apps and even voice channels. Chatbots are often integrated into a wide range of systems, including an organization’s CRM, workforce management and information portals. These integrations allow the chatbot to access a wealth of information, transition an interaction to a human agent, and record customer data, all in the matter of seconds.

As chatbots become more and more sophisticated, they have the potential to streamline interactions and empower customers. When considering the implementation of chatbots into your CX ecosystem, compare the many solutions available on the market to see which one is the best fit. Remember that no chatbot will truly replicate a human interaction – at least not yet – and focus on solutions that provide the guidance your customers most often look for.
Personalization of Individual Interactions and Experiences

Personalized experiences should be a goal for any organization, regardless of their industry and size. However, delivering personalized experiences to every customer is challenging, especially across multiple channels and at varying stages in the customer journey.

The digital transformation has increased the complexity of delivering contextual engagements, but it has also created new opportunities to offer the personalized experiences customers have come to expect.

Questions to ask: Do we have the knowledgebase and bandwidth to support most questions that would be asked via chatbot? Is the rest of our CX technology ecosystem capable of supporting chatbot interactions?

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Voice of the Customer

Gathering customer feedback at regular intervals helps shape the direction of an organization’s CX efforts. Unfortunately, the process of gathering enough measurable feedback data from customers can be challenging. Voice of the Customer (VoC) technology solutions, including survey platforms, reporting programs and real-time SMS systems make this process much easier.

In recent years, VoC solution vendors placed an emphasis on addressing the challenges of monitoring and analyzing cross-channel interactions. Many of the leading VoC solutions make it possible to gather real-time information from each of your interaction channels, then translate that data into usable information. The most innovative solutions intelligently route customer feedback across departments to ensure enterprise-wide access to the data needed to address issues and streamline processes.

Questions to ask: Is your current CRM solution up to the task of housing key data gathered during journey mapping exercises? Is it possible to gain organization-wide buy-in to act on information gathered during journey mapping exercises?

By leveraging these solutions to support a comprehensive Journey Mapping strategy, and effectively utilizing the information gathered during journey mapping exercises, your organization can gain valuable, actionable insight into customer pain points and their needs.

Journey Mapping

Today, more than ever before, customer journeys are as complex and varied as the people undertaking them. Mapping, understanding and streamlining the customer journey remains a focus for many CX leaders. However, where customer journey mapping once was an exercise in simply understanding the ways customers interact with an organization, it is now a tool for significant improvement.

Today’s customer journey mapping solutions offer robust tracking, benchmarking and competitive analysis features to make it easier than ever before to visualize persona-based journeys and use data to identify specific issues that negatively impact those journeys.

With the right VoC technology in place, organizations are able to quickly and effectively gather the feedback needed to measure the effectiveness of interactions and plan future evolutions of processes and strategies. Collecting feedback from the customer base means having organized groups that you can solicit, but this can’t be done as a one-off process. Keeping track of who responded and when they provided information is critical to an ongoing VoC campaign. Only then will you be able to drive a healthy feedback loop in a way that allows application of the details collected.
Questions to ask: Do you know what questions to ask your customers, or what information you hope to gain? Can processes be implemented to act on the feedback you receive from VoC programs?

Digital Experience Management

Content management solutions have been at the forefront of many marketing and customer experience efforts in recent years. Their ability to deliver information to customers where and when a business dictates has made content management solutions a valuable commodity. Unfortunately, these solutions, once viewed as innovative and landscape altering, have quickly begun to fall behind as CX leaders search for fresher and better ways to deliver content AND optimize interactions from a single platform.

Digital Experience, or DX, platforms have become the coveted solution to the challenge of managing content delivery, optimizing interactions and capturing customer data from a single screen. The most innovative DX platforms offer fully integrated content management, deep visitor analysis and proactive issue identification and resolution.

With more and more true digital experience solutions appearing regularly, the shift from simple content management systems to more robust experience-driving platforms is likely to accelerate. The adoption of a DX solution will take some time, but it can open the doors to superior digital experiences for every one of your customers. These new tools take a more holistic approach to DX, understanding that surfacing content in the right ways requires customer information, media understanding, digital asset management (DAM), and customer relationship management – either with one comprehensive tool, or one that easily integrates into an ecosystem.

Questions to ask: Can you continually create new and engaging digital content to support deeper digital interactions? Do you understand your current internal AND external user experiences enough to plan a truly comprehensive digital experience?
Next Generation Self Service and Customer Empowerment

No one likes to wait on hold or in a chat queue for an agent to help them resolve an issue, especially when the issue is relatively simple in nature and easily handled independently. The ability to offer customers multiple communication channels once mitigated the frustration associated with wait times, but that technology advancement seems to have lost much of its shine.

More than ever before, customers expect, and demand, the ability to resolve issues or obtain information without the assistance of another human being. The emergence of self-reliant consumers has left many organizations struggling to provide the proper tools and self-service channels their customers demand.

These technologies are changing the way we empower customers beyond a static FAQ paradigm into a world of truly helpful guided self-service.

Customer Portals

While the idea of a customer access portal is not a new one – for years, businesses have offered online account management sites – more powerful, feature-rich access portals are on the rise. Where once the ability to manage contact information was enough, today, customers expect an access portal to facilitate subscription changes, provide answers and offer guidance on issue resolution.

Creating robust customer access portals that include self-help resources, interactive documentation and automated guidance solutions, such as chatbots, empowers customers and deepens engagements.

When creating a customer portal, user experience is just as important as the rest of your digital presence. Keep the end user in mind throughout the development, maintenance and evolution of your customer access portal, and make sure the technology supporting the portal is up to the task of driving quality interactions. There are many niche portal solutions available that facilitate a specific interaction with customers. Others are more agnostic and can be adapted to incorporate much more than just a single stream of engagement.

IoT Technologies

The astounding advancement of the Internet of Things, or IoT, has opened doors for organizations to provide customers with empowerment tools in their homes and workplaces. While these tools, such as self-diagnosis applications, voice assistants and easy order buttons, are largely driven by underlying technologies, connected devices have a way of empowering customers more than a website, phone call or simple mobile application can achieve.

With a simple voice command, customers can place an order or be connected to an organization for information, advice or even support resolving an issue. This seamless and effortless connection may seem futuristic, but the technology exists and continues to become more and more pervasive.

Many leaders are hesitant to seize the opportunities presented by the IoT without statistical data supporting such an investment. Others, however, have already invested heavily in developing applications, processes and offerings for IoT devices. Regardless of your industry or the size of your organization, the IoT represents a new landscape which should be explored and leveraged to empower customers.

Questions to ask: What information and features do your customers expect from an access portal? Do you currently have the ability to effectively manage an online portal to your customers’ expectations?
Questions to ask: How well do you understand your customers’ current usage of connected devices? Which of your current interaction channels will translate best to IoT solutions?

Support Forums

Online forums offer customers the opportunity to resolve issues either by themselves, or with the assistance of other customers facing same or similar issues. Forums also allow customers to voice their opinions, offer ideas and work together to address issues. Collective support forums are an increasingly popular interaction channel for many customers.

Forum boards allow users to create new topics and solutions as issues emerge. The collective approach to issue resolution is far more efficient at addressing new issues than your team. That isn’t to say that your forum should remain unstaffed – agents should participate in discussions and offer support wherever and whenever possible. In reality, forums are especially effective when actively monitored by agents and supported by dedicated technology platforms. Some forums are limited to registered owners of a product or service, while others are open to the general public.

Integrating your forum platform with other CX technologies, such as CRM or contact center, can create a truly effective engagement and information gathering tool. This integration is actually critical to the long-term health of the forum as well. Being able to tag community answers as new self-service articles or escalate posts into assisted service are examples of the power that integrated forums can provide.

Questions to ask: Which agents will monitor and engage in forum activity? Who will be allowed to participate in the forum?

Customer Engagement/ Customer Relationship Management

Engaging customers and creating deep relationships with them is a key tenant to any CX strategy. To accomplish this lofty goal, it is important to know who and where your customer is, their preferences and much more. Each and every customer touchpoint is an opportunity to capture information that can help build relationships.

Technology solutions are imperative for gathering, maintaining and utilizing this vital customer data to its fullest.

Intelligent CRM

Traditionally, customer relationship management platforms have been leveraged to capture and report customer data during and after interactions. Today’s CRM solutions are far more sophisticated. Modern CRM solutions leverage automation, premonition analytics and artificial intelligence to gather customer data, predict needs and deliver key insights to agents across multiple channels.

This deeper, real-time view of customers makes it easier to understand individual wants and desires and to tailor interactions to meet them. CRM solutions with integrated AI components can also create sophisticated customer models, making it easier to identify lead drop offs, and the best sales channels to use to engage specific leads. This modeling can also be used to create the most effective engagement.
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Windows – when you engage with your customers is almost as important as how you engage with them.

CRM solutions that offer intelligent data gathering and modeling, and the ability to integrate with other CX technologies, have the potential to help your organization truly engage customers and prospects. CRM should be the hub of your entire customer profile, signaling and guiding all other systems and staff across the organization for right-place, right-time interactions.

**Questions to ask:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current CRM utilization and processes? Is it possible to achieve top-down adherence to CRM-related policies and processes?

**Data Management**

Customer data is one of the most valuable commodities for any organization. However, such data is only valuable to an organization if it can be used to attract and retain loyal customers. This is where many businesses fall short. Often, organizations do a fine job of gathering customer data, but fail to use it to its fullest – often because that data is overwhelming, poorly organized, outdated or inaccessible to those who need it most.

Data management solutions address the challenges associated with big data by streamlining its capture, analysis and utilization. This proactive management of customer data makes it possible to create lasting relationships and even address customer needs before they arise.

Data management solutions can improve the quality of your data and business processes. Intelligent data management solutions can automatically eliminate duplicate lead records and evaluate customer information for personalization and marketing efforts.

**Questions to ask:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current data management efforts? What are your short-term and long-term data management goals?

**Loyalty Management**

Customer loyalty is one of the most important measurements of any organization’s CX strategy. To encourage loyalty, many organizations turn to loyalty programs, such as personalized benefits, savings and rewards. However, without the proper technology in place, providing personalized, contextualized retention offers can be difficult.

Effective loyalty management programs have the potential to increase life-time spend, lengthen relationships and create richer, more enjoyable experiences for customers. Loyalty management programs also have the potential to convert negative engagements into relationship-strengthening opportunities. Think of a support call scenario that isn’t going well; if the agent has clear guidance and access to “next-best-offers” authorized by the organization, they are much more likely to be able to turn an unhappy customer into a satisfied one.

Technology platforms that support and automate loyalty programs help organizations increase profits and turn customers into brand advocates. The most effective loyalty management solutions offer a wide range of functionality, including campaign management, customer self-service, transaction history, rewards and redemption management and more.
About Avtex

Avtex is a full-service Customer Experience (CX) consulting and solution provider focused on helping organizations create better experiences for their customers. With an unparalleled breadth of knowledge and experience, and partnerships with leading technology vendors like Microsoft and Genesys, we are uniquely suited to address any CX challenge.

Our portfolio of solutions and services supports our unique approach to Customer Experience, which includes two key phases, CX Transformation and CX Orchestration.

• Our CX Transformation solutions and services aid in the process of defining and improving CX. From Journey Mapping to CX Design Thinking, we provide the support you need to set the foundation for CX success.

• Our CX Orchestration solutions and services enable the realization of your CX strategy through people, processes and technology. From technology implementation to training, we ensure you have the capabilities to execute your CX strategy.