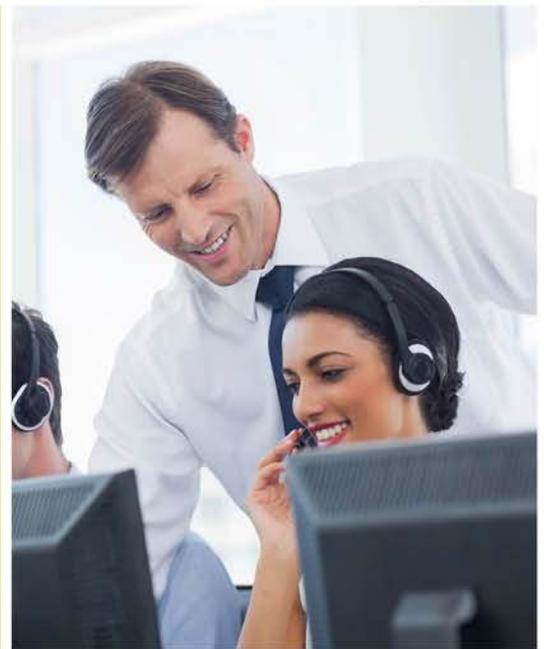# Omni-Channel Contact Centers Are Required in the Digital Era

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Introduction

Omni-channel contact centers are the engagement hubs for enterprises. The mission of these departments is to deliver great service to customers and prospects, a job that is becoming continuously harder as expectations grow. A recent focus for contact centers is to provide an outstanding and personalized experience in each customer's channel of choice. To deliver this superior level of service, companies need omni-channel contact centers that use analytics to identify and determine the "right" way to handle every transaction.

Great Service is the Mission

To deliver on the essential enterprise objective of great service for every customer, contact centers require a great deal of technology. Companies may have many sites with thousands of agents, dozens of technical support personnel in a help desk, or at-home advisors dispersed across the country or world. They need intelligent and advanced systems and applications to receive and route customer inquiries or requests to the appropriate solution or system to handle the interaction properly. And while cost should not be the deciding factor in contact center investment decisions, it is a criterion that must be taken into consideration, as these are people-intensive departments whose mission is to enhance the company's brand and improve its bottom line.

The contact centers of old primarily answered customer questions and sold products and services in the voice channel. The future generation of omni-channel contact centers will be required to provide the infrastructure necessary to deliver a great journey via many channels, throughout the customer lifecycle.

Omni-Channel Contact Centers Are the Future of Servicing

Enterprises need service, sales and support organizations designed for the digital age. The core technology in these departments should be an omni-channel contact center. This new generation of contact center infrastructure is designed to support customers in their channel of choice and to provide a seamless experience and track customers and their activities as they traverse various channels. These solutions should be built to work as hybrid models where some contact center systems are on-premise and others are in the cloud.

The concept of an omni-channel contact center is simple – transactions in all channels are delivered to one system that is smart enough to figure out who is reaching out to the organization and the best way to handle each contact. Organizations have found that building an omni-channel servicing environment is difficult and costly because the operational aspects of this necessary business transformation have proven to be quite challenging.

How an Omni-Channel Contact Center Works

Figure 1 depicts an omni-channel contact center. Here is how it works:

1. The contact center infrastructure, also known as the automatic contact distributor (ACD), receives, interactions from many channels, including calls, faxes, emails, co-browse, short message service (SMS), instant messaging (IM), social media, videos, etc.

2. The ACD uses a variety of technologies and applications to determine the appropriate treatment for every interaction. This means that within nanoseconds, the ACD identifies the customer (and possibly prospect), calculates their value to the organization, and checks to see if this is a new or ongoing interaction.

3. The ACD identifies the reason for the interaction by accessing data from the carrier network, customer relationship management (CRM) system, sales, collections or other servicing application, and then determines the best approach for delivering a personalized and outstanding experience. Based on pre-defined rules (and in the future, artificial intelligence/self-learning technology), the ACD identifies the most appropriate agent or system to handle each interaction.

4. After the match is made, the ACD intelligently routes and queues the interaction to the selected end point, system or person.

5. ACDs track and record every interaction for legal and compliance purposes, which means they need technology that can differentiate between the portions of interactions that can be recorded and the components that must be masked or removed for security and regulatory reasons.

6. The ACD creates a repository of data reflecting everything the customer/prospect did during their interaction. (i.e., it tracks the customer journey through the service organization).

7. The ACD shares this data with a variety of operational and analytical solutions, including:

   - Contact center: CRM, recording, quality assurance, workforce management, speech and text analytics, customer journey analytics, surveying/voice of the customer, contact center performance management

   - Sales and marketing: sales management, salesforce automation, campaign management, maketing automation, marketing analytics, etc.

- Enterprise: security and risk management

8. The internal systems use the data to identify opportunities to enhance relationships and increase revenue, improve the customer experience, decrease operating costs, reduce risk, and identify customer and market trends.

Figure 1: Omni-Channel Contact Center
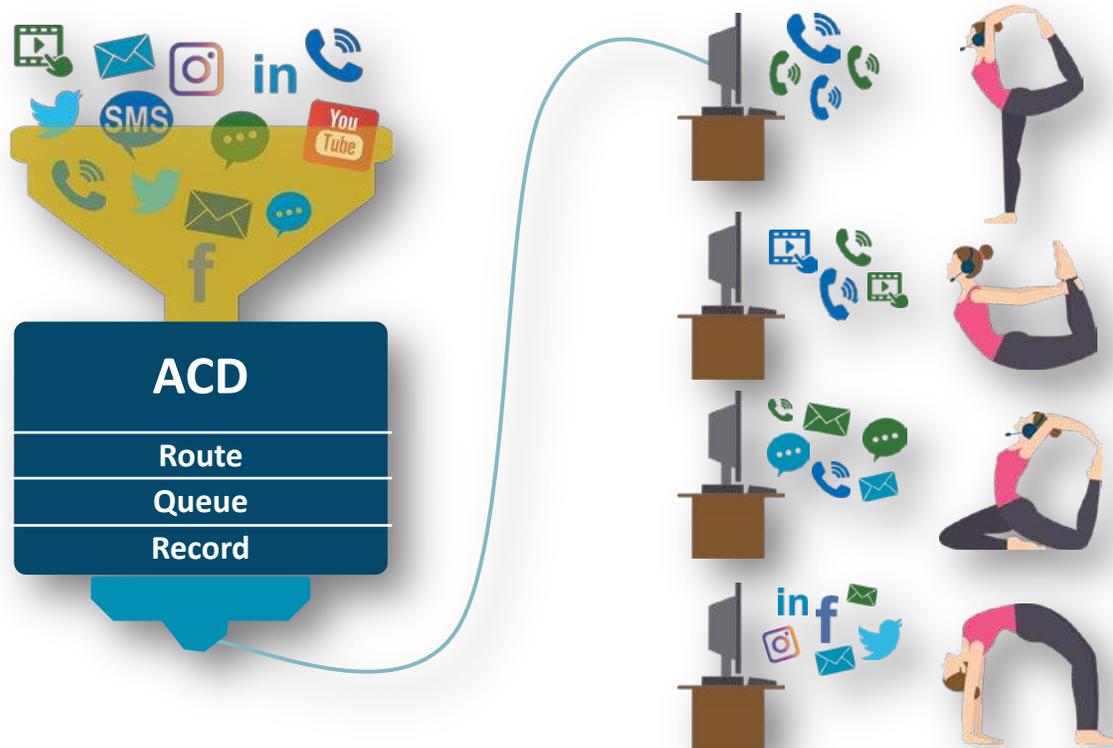
Source: DMG Consulting LLC, February 2017

Great Service Requires Great Employees

Enterprises need to make it easy for their customers and prospects to transact business with them. It's time for companies to break down servicing silos so that they can meet their customers' needs cost effectively. To do this, enterprises require flexible and skilled employees who are trained to handle a variety of activities in each customer's channel of choice.

Staffing is the biggest challenge in building an omni-channel contact center. Companies need to update their recruiting, hiring, compensation, on-boarding, training and retention practices in order to create an effective service organization. Companies must adopt flexible approaches to scheduling that

empower their employees to self-manage. They also need to invest in practices and systems that help them develop an engaged workforce that is comfortable in an omni-channel world.

Top Servicing Channels

Customers and prospects interact in their preferred channels, and expect businesses to be there for them. This presents a challenge because channel preferences change based on the vertical, activity and sensitivity of the issue. DMG recently conducted a worldwide benchmark study of multi-generational consumer channel preferences and found that most people prefer to use a self-service solution, but if they do not get the information or answer they need during the first attempt, they will call. These findings are striking because Millennials, members of a younger generation that is quite familiar with many communication options, are quicker to call than Boomers.

Another factor to consider when deciding which channels to support is the business activity. For technical questions, self-service, email and texting are the preferred channels. When it comes to retail banking, the top choice is self-service, followed by the phone. But, when something goes wrong or an issue is time-sensitive, people prefer pick up the phone and call. This is why it's essential for companies to use omni-channel contact centers where all interactions are centralized and treated with a common set of business rules and the servicing systems are fully integrated for all channels.

Omni vs. Multi-Channel

While the words "omni" and "multi' mean the same thing and are essentially interchangeable, this is not the case for contact centers. The concept of multi-channel contact centers has been around since 1997, when email started to be used for customer inquiries. Twenty years ago email inquiries were handled separately from phone calls. Email response management solutions (ERMs) were developed and were referred to as ACDs for handling email. However, this approach meant that every time a new servicing channel was introduced, a separate servicing application had to be implemented and staffed to support it. Making matters more confusing, each of the servicing systems operates independently of the others, so actions taken and documented in one solution were not reflected in the others. This placed a major burden on customers, who had to repeat themselves each time they moved to a new channel, which is a major source of dissatisfaction, in addition to being costly for companies. This approach continued for two decades because companies were hesitant to change their core servicing infrastructure – their ACD, CRM and workforce optimization (WFO) solutions. But as infrastructure has moved to the cloud and companies had to replace their systems, they are transitioning to a new generation of omni-channel servicing applications. Facilitating this industry

transformation is a new generation of omni-channel ACDs, CRM and WFO solutions that have been designed to support a variety of channels on a centralized basis.

Transitioning to an Omni-Channel Contact Center

It's a major undertaking to migrate from providing silo'ed support to an omni-channel environment, whether a company is adding new channels or consolidating the handling of various media. Enterprises undergoing this business transformation must replace their processes along with their systems, and need employees who are more flexible and comfortable in a dynamic service organization or contact center where the channel they are working in can change with each interaction. Below are best practices to facilitate a successful transition to omni-channel contact centers.

1. Draft an omni-channel servicing strategy and socialize it throughout your organization.

2. Identify which channels your customers and prospects prefer – likely phone, email, texting and possibly others. Financial services organization must also support fax, due to dated regulations, and retailers need to support SMS.

3. Analyze your current servicing systems and decide if they can be upgraded or need to be replaced. If the systems are more than 5 years old, it's a good practice to evaluate the new capabilities in the market, as a lot has changed in the last few years.

4. If you decide to replace servicing systems, prepare a plan to prioritize investments. DMG recommends replacing your contact center infrastructure (ACD), along with recording and workforce management, as a first step. You will also need to invest in a new CRM or servicing application. All of these solutions must be omni-channel-capable.

5. Before implementing the new solutions, review and revamp all self-service applications, specifically, the IVR and website. (In the past 5 years there has been great innovation in self-service technology and practices; companies should take advantage of these improvements to enhance system usability and improve customer satisfaction while reducing operating costs.)

6. Update all department policies and procedures to take advantage of the benefits of omni-channel servicing. This includes revamping how each business issue is resolved, quality assurance, scheduling, hiring, onboarding and more.

7. Update training programs, incorporating the new omni-channel practices.

8. Work with the human resource department to draft new job descriptions, and to upgrade job classifications to accommodate the new class of omni-channel agents.

9. Retrain and/or hire staff who thrive in a fast-paced omni-channel environment.

There are many more issues that need to be addressed when building an omni-channel environment, but these steps will help you to get started in changing your servicing strategy, practices, systems and resources.

Final Thoughts

Companies that want to thrive in the digital era must transform their service culture and organization to omni-channel contact or engagement centers. They need to re-imagine every aspect of the service experience, and make the investments and changes that will enable them to deliver a personalized experience in each customer's channel of choice. As is always the case in contact centers, technology is the mission-critical enabler, but it comes down to building a culture dedicated to service excellence and staffing the department with engaged employees who thrive in omni-channel environments.

This white paper is the first in a series intended to help companies of all sizes build successful omni-channel contact centers. The next white paper will address *What End Users Want Most from a Cloud-Based Contact Center Infrastructure Vendor.*

About Serenova

Serenova simplifies every aspect of the customer experience, from front office to back, to make life easier for you, your customers and your employees. The world's most passionate, customer-focused brands achieve brighter interactions, deeper insights, and more meaningful outcomes with Serenova's always-on, highly secure, true multi-tenant and instantly scalable Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) platform, CxEngage. Headquartered in Austin, Texas, Serenova has operations in California, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia/New Zealand. Learn more at www.serenova.com. For live updates follow @serenovashine.

About DMG Consulting LLC

DMG Consulting LLC is a leading independent research, advisory and consulting firm specializing in contact centers, back-office and real-time analytics. DMG provides insight and strategic guidance and tactical advice to end users, vendors and the financial community. Each year, DMG devotes more than 10,000 hours to producing primary research on IT sectors, including workforce optimization (quality management/liability recording), workforce management, performance management, speech analytics, desktop analytics, text analytics, customer journey analytics, surveying/voice of the customer, voice biometrics, cloud-based contact center infrastructure, dialing, interactive voice response systems and proactive customer care. Our actionable solutions are proven to deliver a lasting competitive advantage, and often pay for themselves in as little as three months. Learn more at www.dmgconsult.com.

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