

The Agent Experience

Embrace a Smarter and More Modern Desktop



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The Emerging Age of the Agent Experience

The quality of the customer experience is a competitive differentiator for most organizations. Our research confirms this, finding that improving the customer experience is a top priority for 82 percent of organizations looking to improve the way they handle customer interactions. As a result, organizations today are making significant investments in the digital transformation of their contact centers and the improvement of the customer experience these centers provide.

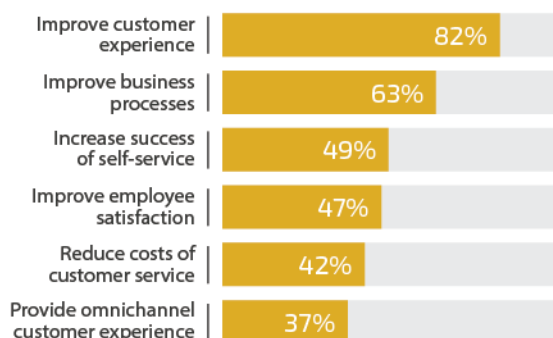
In this regard, a new awareness is emerging that the quality of the customer service agent experience matters. When this agent experience is hindered by the tools the agent uses, the experience provided to the customers agents interact with will suffer. Thus, optimizing the agent experience is a critical step in the delivery of a superior customer experience.

The agent experience is impacted by a number of factors in the work environment, among them the tools the agent uses to work with customers and resolve their issues. Key among those tools is the agent desktop, which is the digital center of interactions with customers and the gateway that provides access to the individual applications the agent needs to deliver service.

The desktop supports direct dialogue with customers. It provides the agent with visibility into and information about all the interactions that have made up the customer journey and is therefore essential for effective dialogue with the customer. And it allows agents to monitor and assist intelligent virtual agents. When properly utilized, the desktop acts as the hub that provides fast, easy access to all applications the agent needs to serve customers.

Priorities for Improving Interactions

Most focus on customer experience



Source: Ventana Research Next-Generation Contact Center in the Cloud Benchmark Research
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Challenges in Today's Agent Experience

In the same way that organizations have focused on optimizing the customer experience by using a tool known as the voice of the customer to gain feedback and understand customer sentiment, they are beginning to look at the value of an analogous tool, the voice of the agent, to help optimize the agent experience. Addressing the voice of the agent includes listening to the challenges the agent him- or



herself identifies and the needs that agent reports instead of just focusing on targeted efficiency coaching.

Elevating agent concerns to the same level of importance as customer concerns can accomplish a number of important goals. It can demonstrate to agents that the organization cares about their challenges and needs. It can enable the organization to target specific issues impacting the comfort, satisfaction and efficiency of subsets of agents, down to the individual. And when agents' feedback relates to the tools they use, improving those tools can help improve agent recruiting, motivation and retention, which in turn improves the customer experience.

Agents' ability to provide good personalized experiences to customers often is hampered by technological limitations. Legacy agent desktop and CRM systems are still in use at many organizations, and this creates challenges for today's contact centers. Modern desktops should provide a single point of access to the several applications used in interactions with the customer, but in most cases agents need to use many

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applications with the agent desktop to resolve customer issues. A modern agent desktop must unify an array of disparate sets of data to sufficiently empower the agents to be responsive to customer needs, but in many instances the desktop can be missing the information necessary to effectively interact with the customer. Most egregiously, there often is a lack of immediately available information about the customer's previous interactions with the organization.

There's ample evidence that limited agent visibility into the history of interactions can result in customer frustration and dissatisfaction. This

constraint reduces responsiveness and the ability to personalize agent-customer interactions. A primary cause of limited visibility is the lack of a modern agent desktop that integrates all relevant information, collaboration and applications.

Empower the Agent Experience

When seeking to optimize the customer experience, organizations have traditionally focused on metrics related to interaction durations or transaction outcomes rather than metrics related to the customer's experience. The historical focus on average handling time (AHT) and first call resolution (FCR) have led to management efforts that push agents to operate quickly and handle more interactions, and it has encouraged coaching



focused on how to improve agent operations within the parameters of bad agent desktop technology.

The adequacy of the data available within the agent desktop has a direct impact on the agent's experience, as does the actual design and usability of the desktop. Clumsy and cluttered desktops can be improved by deploying modern web- and cloud-based applications and adopting a unified desktop approach. Modern-generation agent desktops can be individually configured to match the particular skills and experience of the agents using the system. For example, an inbound interaction can be routed to an agent who has the appropriate skills to respond to the known issue and who is provided with the relevant customer information so there isn't a need to search across systems while assisting the customer. In fact, agent desktops that are "intelligent" will anticipate what the customer might need and prompt the agent using predictive intelligence and machine learning technology.

When the agent desktop is optimally configured and provides rapid access to all needed information, it simplifies the agent's work and so improves that experience. Modern agent desktops can connect to information sources from across the organization and

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Providing agents with the tools they need to improve the customer experience can in turn help improve the agent experience.

provide dynamically generated information and potential responses derived from the context of interaction. The desktops can also automatically channel the agent response to the customer's preferred mode of interaction and provide visibility to the customer journey touchpoints across connection channels. When the agent desktop rests on a unified customer data platform, it can quickly provide the contextual information an agent needs to personalize the interaction with the customer.

Providing agents with the tools they need to improve the customer experience can improve the

agent experience. Agents who feel empowered by their tools rather than at odds with their technology are more likely to deliver a better customer experience and will experience less frustration, fatigue and burnout. Furthermore, modern systems can provide performance analytics to deliver up-to-date information to the agent on his or her performance and suggest areas for improvement.

A next-generation agent desktop can increase agent efficiency and productivity with improved responsiveness to the customer, and indeed our research finds that almost half (44%) of organizations are planning to implement a unified agent desktop that provides these benefits. The benefits come largely because of the more comprehensive



availability of customer information augmented through artificial intelligence (AI) techniques that identify and provide information that may be relevant to the customer interaction. Agents are also able to provide more personalized experiences to the customer since the agent has immediate access to all relevant customer information, including the customer journey touchpoints.

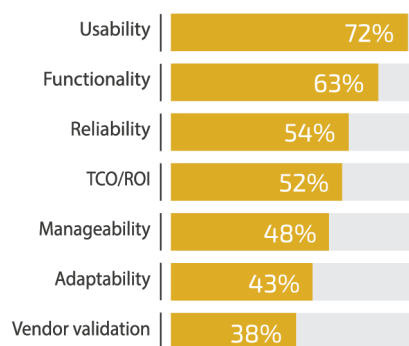
Effective Selection of Agent Desktops

When selecting agent desktop software, take time to understand what evaluation categories should be used and how they should be prioritized. The user experience as agents work with the desktop must be included as a critical category for evaluation; our research finds that 72 percent of organizations indicate usability is a key criterion when assessing contact center technology.

The desktop must provide appropriate levels of manageability to assist administrators, managers and the agents themselves. Prioritize adaptability to and compatibility with the contact center's existing applications and systems. To achieve the most important benefits of a new agent desktop, this compatibility must include the ability to interface with the unified communication platforms used across the customer service channels.

Key Criteria for Contact Center Technology

Usability the top consideration



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Seek a desktop that can track customer journey touchpoints and provide this information to the agents quickly and easily. Ensure that the agent desktop is able to adapt to a specific agent's skills and focus areas to optimize agent response to specific client issues. The desktop must be extensible so that future functionality can be quickly and easily added, and it must be simple to use and navigate during customer interactions so that agents can be highly responsive.

Next Steps for Agent Experience

Any initiative to address the quality of agents' work experience must begin with assessing their current experience to determine challenges and establish priorities. Our research finds that fewer than one-third (31%) of organizations say their agents are fully satisfied with their jobs. Work to understand the factors that contribute to this agent dissatisfaction by undertaking an examination of the varieties of the agent experience at



your organization. Ensure that the feedback from the voice of the agent is being collected to enable an understanding of their needs and the identification of the challenges they face as they seek to provide a positive customer experience. Assemble a community of agents to provide guidance on their needs and challenges. And of course, explore what is possible with modern, easily managed cloud computing and agent desktop environments.

Build a business case for improving the agent experience by changing the agent desktop environment. Assess the return of doing so, being sure to factor in the value that would be realized in agent retention and motivation by making their work experience simpler and more rewarding. Seek out technology designed to optimize the agent experience by identifying specific use cases that describe the experience agents have using the agent desktop. Purpose-built agent desktop technology can have a significant impact on agent operations, and thus in turn, on the customer experience.



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