



Can efficiencies be customer-led?

A paper for CCA Industry Council

CCA INDUSTRY COUNCIL

CCA Industry Council drives the industry’s research agenda by interacting to ensure research approach, debate and output provides the pathway for the future in terms of new thinking and strategies from across all sectors.

An initial meeting was held where 30 leading players from industry debated ‘Changing the Rules’. From this debate it is clear a need has been established to create ‘Beyond Operational Efficiency’ – a new vision for how customer contact centres should be repositioned within organisation, placing the customer at the heart of the business.

Industry Council consists of an exclusive group of representatives from leading organisations who are committed to providing this input whilst themselves benefiting from a unique package of leading edge research, networking, government influencing opportunities and profile within industry as ‘Leaders of the Future’.

Industry Council will have global impact and members of the group have been invited to join the CCA Standard Council who will oversee the launch of the new revised CCA Standard® to the international market during 2006-2007.

Expert academic and private sector facilitators will draw on leading edge debate and invite participation from other recognised research houses and agencies to engage with Industry Council to ensure the group deliver leading edge analysis.

As the independent professional body, CCA partner with leading organisations and groups to access relevant research and information for the development of the Industry Council. CCA’s vision is for contact centres to be repositioned within organisations to reflect the increasing complexity and competitor challenges arising from the dominance of this channel.

CCA are indebted to the efforts of the Foundation Partner Group who have formed the backbone of activity in taking forward the development of the CCA Standard® and creating the vision for CCA Industry Council. These organisations across all sectors, both public and private, each have a significant impact on the contact centre market-place.

FOUNDATION PARTNERS



Foreword from Rob Pike, Chair of CCA Industry Council



In an age when there is a multitude of options available to customers on where and how they get the products/services they require at the right time in their life cycle, delivering a great customer experience becomes ever more challenging.

Customer dissatisfaction has wide implications. It creates a vicious circle of dissatisfaction, impacting the staff who engage with those customers, and the shareholders who invest in the business. Offering superb customer service grants an enormous competitive advantage to a company - but how do you do this efficiently and cost-effectively? Many organisations are driven by cost savings with the ultimate risk of losing customers - a position which no organisation can afford to find itself in today. Investing in the right processes, technologies and people and actually doing what customers want instead of what we think they want leads to satisfied customers, and ideally loyal and engaged customers who then become advocates.

This is the third in a series of research papers exploring the changing face of customer contact and examines how listening to customers and responding appropriately to their needs can result in operational efficiencies.

We are indebted to the work of CCA Foundation Partners who have been the catalyst of CCA's evolution to Customer Contact Association in 2006. Their dedication has helped create CCA's Industry Council, a unique think-tank which is challenged with finding solutions to ensure that the customer is placed at the heart of an organisation's operations.

We would like to extend our grateful thanks to CCA's Research Council for providing very insightful findings into this critical issue.

Rob Pike
Chair, CCA Industry Council

A call for efficiency through usability: and standardisation?

Prepared by Marcus Hickman, Henley Centre Headlight Vision



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Feeling frustration towards customers in the contact environment is understandable. They call at the busiest times, don't read documentation properly and get confused about straightforward processes. Worse, they cost organisations time and money, particularly in their constant cry to "just let me speak to someone". No wonder we demand efficiency and promote self-service technologies such as the internet, iDTV, IVR, scanners and ATMs.

The contact centre industry can seem schizophrenic about self-service technology. Some introduce it and blithely claim in their Boardroom presentation that it will be 'better for customers', making it easier and quicker for people to interact. These people forget the conversations in the pub where people commonly bemoan IVR or inefficient kiosks, but feel sure that the cost benefits will be overwhelming. Others fear that self-service will damage the customer experience and see its introduction as a triumph for the "bean-counters". They worry about lower customer satisfaction, lost loyalty and revenue and long-term brand damage.

Are self-service technologies, which do offer cost benefits, fundamentally unfriendly to customers? The answer is clearly no. ATM, Internet, IVR, iDTV, SMS, kiosks and self-scanners have some fantastic executions and facilitate life in a world of increased time and energy pressures. Over 90% use the phone to call organisations; more than 80% have mobile phones and use ATMs; 60% have access to the internet and almost as many have digital TV. Across the hundreds of thousands of applications of these technologies in the UK, organisations experience difficulties with these technologies far too often. Most often this is because deployment has rarely been customer led and has not focused on improving *usability* over time. Additionally, *standardisation* of interfaces is too often ignored.

Where are the inefficiencies?

At Henley Centre HeadlightVision we are constantly researching the views of consumers over time. What are some of the common comments?

Call identification queues

- Different formats for account details across different businesses.

IVR systems

- 'Too many options'
- 'Not the option that I want'
- Long-winded IVR wording or not allowing 'short-cutting'
- No instructions how to escape IVR
- Repeating personal information again and again
- 'Dead end options' or calls which are terminated by the system
- Voice recognition that doesn't work.

Internet

- Slow sites
- Poor navigation
- Requirements for additional download software
- No contact or help numbers
- Online forms which are not standardised (e.g. different date formats)
- Online forms which 'fail' or require multiple entry
- Re-entry of personal details
- Unclear confirmations.

ATMs

- Out of service
- Poor security as a result of positioning
- Complex paying-in procedures.

Interactive Digital TV

- Slow return path
- Cumbersome data entry
- Limited range of services.

These inefficiencies could be seen as minor. However, multiplied across many interactions with many businesses, the frustrations with self-service technologies are magnified. Most of us deal with upwards of 50 organisations each year – local government, central government, the NHS, supermarket, banks & financial services providers, car dealers, travel & transport companies, local companies – to name just a few categories. Many of us use a multi-channel approach across the range of these organisations, resulting in tens of passwords.

Some 39 million adults in the UK called a contact centre in the last 3 months 78% of consumers who made a call to a business in the last four weeks agreed that “they have to wait longer than ever to get their calls answered”.

Over 15 million people in the UK now make regular purchases over the internet, while the ATM is truly ubiquitous. With the SMS banking taking off and applications like gaming and payment of the London congestion charge, the mobile phone is becoming a more popular channel.

Understanding the impact of inefficiencies

Consumers complain of time pressure – nearly 60% say they never have enough time to get things done. Energy, or lack of it, is equally important to the 52% of people who say they’re “too tired in the evening to do anything”. While the industry often incorrectly assumes that people don’t want to contact organisations (it is satisfying to ‘sort out your admin’ or enquire of a new product or service or even to make a complaint), when they do, it needs to be a satisfactory experience.

The impact of poor usability and inconsistency in the deployment of self-service technology is potentially found in three areas:

- Impaired customer satisfaction – leading to negative word of mouth and challenging customer loyalty
- Sub-optimal revenue generation – through lost sales. Our work for BT Major Customers in 2005 showed that one travel agent was losing over £10m a year due to poor call handling
- Brand damage – not necessarily with short time impact, but a longer term factor which can damage the ability to recruit and retain customers.

Focusing on usability

The deployment of self-service technology can be improved, to reduce related inefficiencies. British Airways self-service check-in is an example of a well-

deployed technology. Real attention has been paid over the years to improving the usability of interaction through on-going testing. Responding to customer feedback means that self-service check-in is a dynamic tool which has evolved and improved.

Equally, Easy Jet's website is fast and intuitive. Rather than putting hurdles between the customer and the goal of getting a price quickly, or making comparisons between flights. Rather than a traditional sales approach (once you've got the customer in, keep them!), the web site enables consumers to choose and decide quickly.

Although often cited, Amazon's intuitive approach to recommendations and quick payment system is a world away from many other 'clunky' websites.

In the case of IVR, BT's 150 service is much improved while still offering a range of complex options through the system. Beginning with a clear 'tree rather than forest', consumers can opt to be called back and information is communicated quickly and simply. The option to divert to a human agent is available.

All of these examples reek of a consistent approach to usability and a feedback loop which ensures the gradual improvement of the interface. Usability testing doesn't need to be expensive - it requires researching users in context to understand reactions and perceptions of the interface in an environment which drives rigour, e.g. qualitative and ethnographic research.

Why are many organisations reluctant to address the issue of improving usability? Many are happy with the significant gains which come for deploying self-service technology in comparison to human interaction. These benefits tend to be cost driven and there is too little awareness of the negative impacts of a poor interface. These often impact in the longer term, while the cost benefits are more immediately apparent to managers.

Standardisation: A way forward?

Should the industry consider standardisation of interfaces to improve both the experience for consumers and the efficiency of organisations? In the past, as many products have evolved over time, standardisation has occurred, whether by election or force.

In the car industry, a range of instruments controls and dashboard configurations have existed but these have increasingly converged around a more uniform approach. In IT for all those who complain about the dominance of Microsoft, there are others who commend the ubiquity of its software making it easier for people to interact. The positioning of hot and cold taps, or the structure of books and reports help consumers to deal with the unfamiliar.

Could a more standardised approach to the interfaces of the internet, SMS, IVR and contact centre be beneficial for both consumers and organisations alike? Already, it could be argued that ATMs are reasonably standardised and certainly there are a limited number of variations. But there are hundreds of variations of contact centre and IVR interactions. From organisations that require you to enter account details to those who are happy with a name and address. IVR systems that need the use of the hash key, to those that can accept the human voice and would never expect a customer to verbalise "hash". Or internet banking sites which require a password with alpha-numeric which differs from that for the telephone banking and ATM service. Given the range of interactions consumers have - many with

upwards of 50 different organisations a year - a more standardised usability experience could be valuable particularly within internet and IVR channels.

Is it achievable? It is certainly not mandatable and would have to be voluntary. But if contact centre executives are truly motivated by efficiency then an industry task force to address the issue of usability and standardisation may well establish some quick wins for organisations.

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Cost: Members - £150
Non-Members - £200



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