



## Future Technology: Customer Contact in the years to 2012

A paper for CCA Industry Council



**GALLUP**



**Ipsos MORI**



## CCA INDUSTRY COUNCIL

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

An initial meeting was held when 30 leading players from industry debated ‘Changing the Rules’. From this debate it is clear there is a need 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.

The 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 establishing their profile as ‘Leaders of the Future’.

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 has a partnership 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 Global Standard<sup>®</sup> and creating the vision for CCA Industry Council. These organisations from all sectors, 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



During the past 18 months CCA Industry Council has looked at many key questions facing the contact centre industry. Several topics have been covered, from getting the DNA of the customer into the boardroom, to understanding the impact of automation on the agent. We have carefully considered the impact of change with the able assistance of the Research Council.

For this quarter, we set out to answer the question “is there an iPod equivalent for the customer contact industry?” In doing so, we were conscious that there may not be something as significant as the iPod in customer contact, but an exploration of key technology changes is the first step in understanding how the future might develop.

Our time horizon being the next 3 to 5 years, we wanted to understand what technological developments have the potential to impact end-to-end customer contact. Obvious areas include front-end channel interface, workflow management and scheduling, database management and analysis, networks and virtualisation. We also sought to share learnings about successful deployment of new technology in customer contact and also to remember the changing customer.

The results of our debate and the contributed papers have centred on how people communicate with a company, how they are handled, and followed up by the organisation when the call gets through. The first is all about what external channels of communication the organisation provides and the second is concerned with the quality and level of support provided to agents and web-based processes.

Although we have not (knowingly!) identified the equivalent of the iPod for customer contact, we have established that the future is already here in terms of technology. Advanced contact centres today are using the technologies, such as IM and voice analytics, which the majority will be using in five years time. For the director needing to develop strategy, I’m sure the papers will provide useful guidance and advice.

Once again we are indebted to the work of CCA Foundation Partners who have been the catalyst of CCA’s evolution to become the present day Customer Contact Association. Their dedication has helped create CCA 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 Research Council, which has been strengthened with the addition of Ipsos-MORI and Ventana, for again providing very insightful findings into this critical issue.

**Rob Pike**  
Chair, CCA Industry Council

*Rob is Director of Operations, Ulster Bank Group and European Consumer Finance at the Royal Bank of Scotland*

## Technology Futures: How next-generation web customer service can build brand differentiation

Prepared by Andrew Mennie, eGain



CUSTOMER SERVICE AND  
CONTACT CENTRE SOFTWARE

With more and more customer interactions moving online, innovations in eService or customer service offered through electronic channels can help companies build brand differentiation. Among the technology innovations in this area that are starting to experience broader adoption are the next generation of chat, web cobrowsing and chatbots.

### **Web collaboration:**

Chat and web co-browsing, often called “web collaboration” collectively, have unmatched potential for improving customer service and increasing revenues. Financial services, retail, telecom, and travel companies are early adopters of web collaboration technology. Although a comparatively recent phenomenon, web collaboration is already delivering strategic and operational benefits to organisations in the form of improved customer satisfaction, reduced costs and increased revenues.

#### **The need for web collaboration**

Using web collaboration, enterprises can provide real-time assistance to customers, help them with online purchases and filling in web forms, guide them around the website, and even show them where and how to get self-service.

Studies indicate that customers are more satisfied with chat than with phone (62% versus 46%, according to eMarketer). As a customer service channel, chat has some unique advantages over the phone. It tempers emotions and reduces the likelihood of miscommunication due to accent and cultural differences. Also, the complete interaction is recorded and the transcript can be emailed to the customer. In fact, organisations are also beginning to use web collaboration to increase the efficiency of their phone-based customer service. Cobrowsing speeds up problem resolution over the phone and enables richer customer experience and reduced service costs.

#### **The benefits of next-generation web collaboration**

**Cutting cost:** The cost of chat-based customer interactions can be significantly lower than the phone, especially when the contact centre uses next-generation web collaboration tools that allow agents to engage in multiple concurrent chats with customers. A customer service interaction through the phone typically costs \$33 as compared to \$10 for a chat session (Source: Forrester Research).

Site visits are obviously even more expensive than phone calls. Moreover, web collaboration can be used to coach customers on how to use self-service, driving even more cost savings.

**Enhanced phone agent productivity:** Not only are chat and other real-time web-based interactions less expensive than phone interactions, they also increase the efficiency of phone resolutions by allowing the agent to co-browse with the customer and provide a rich, multimedia interaction for faster resolution.

**Enhanced chat agent productivity:** As mentioned earlier, best-in-class chat solutions facilitate multiple, simultaneous customer interactions. In some organisations, agents handle three or four chat sessions simultaneously, whereas with a phone call, reps can only handle one call at a time. Care must however be taken not to negatively impact the customer experience by making agents handle too many chats at once, especially in the case of complex queries.

**Minimising revenue loss:** Lack of real-time customer service often leads to website abandonment – leaving a form unfilled or abandoning a shopping cart, for example. More than two-thirds of online shoppers abandon ecommerce sites mid-purchase simply because they cannot get answers to a question they may have. Web collaboration ensures that there is real-time help available so customers can complete their purchase transactions.

**Cross-selling:** A common myth about self-service is that it's only for helping customers solve their post-purchase problems, but industry statistics show that cross-selling is most effective when you have just helped a customer successfully with problem resolution. They are receptive to your suggestions at that time because you have earned their trust by helping them.

**Enhancing customer experience:** Web collaboration, when implemented with an integrated multi-channel interaction hub approach, can deliver high quality service and sales assistance that can compare with and even surpass face-to-face interaction. It enables enterprises to provide real-time assistance that is:

- *Consistent:* A common, multi-channel knowledge base enables the contact centre to provide consistent answers and experience across channels and agents.

- *Personalised*: The web collaboration session is tailored according to information available in the customer's profile and interaction history.
- *Immediate*: Customers get help exactly when they need it.
- *Flexible*: Agents have at their disposal a range of technologies to assist customers such as chat, files-sharing, and co-browsing.
- *Archived*: A complete transcript is emailed to the customer, which includes information shared during the interaction.
- *Integrated*: It works seamlessly with other service channels such as phone and email, when implemented with a hub approach. It can also be used to handle self-service escalations.

### **How web collaboration works**

There are numerous service and support scenarios where web collaboration can help organisations serve their customers better and at significantly lower costs.

A financial services customer, for instance, may need assistance while filling out a web form for starting a new account. The customer can initiate a chat session with a service agent, who, if necessary, can use co-browse to look at the form concurrently with the customer and fill in some fields. Best in-class co-browse solutions provide built-in rules and security to prevent the agent from submitting the customer's form or viewing confidential customer information.

Customers may also need help in completing online purchase transactions. With live chat or co-browse, an agent can guide the customer to successful completion of the transaction. Real-time customer service over the web thus enables timely help at the point of purchase and reduces the number of abandoned shopping carts in B2C scenarios as well as the abandonment of the more complex B2B purchase transactions.

In addition to reactive chat (where consumers click to initiate a chat and pose a question for customer service response), there is proactive chat, with exchanges initiated by the company. Proactive chat can be inviting the consumer to engage to help resolve a service query or can be triggered by business rules based on factors like consumers' website behaviour, such as purchase abandonment or time spent on a given page. Proactive chat takes web collaboration out of purely the domain of customer service and into that of sales and marketing.

## Essential steps to web collaboration nirvana

Here we introduce steps of how to use chat and cobrowse to maximise the value of interactions in all phases of the customer life cycle.

### Step 1: Know your playing field

Research is essential in the context of chat and cobrowse initiatives, because a key goal for most such efforts is to provide differentiated service. Critical to chat's success is an understanding of the kinds of queries a company will receive, an understanding of customer needs (and their willingness to use chat), and an understanding of a company's business objectives for the communication tool. To set new standards, you need to know:

- *Current and emerging trends*  
Read about chat and co-browse trends and success stories. Keep in mind though that industry “best practices” may not always translate into “best practices” for your own operation.
- *What your competition is doing*  
You can't beat the competition if you don't know it. Visit their websites and analyse their offerings in chat and co-browse. This exercise gives you the customer's perspective in a way. Note what makes you go “Wow!” and what is annoying. What is your overall impression and what would you like to see done differently?
- *What your customers want*  
Customer-centricity is particularly important in the context of chat and Co-browse initiatives. Instead of thinking of a chat as an expense, look at it as a unique opportunity to delight a customer, and a great chance to advise the customer about your solutions and upsell. Find out interaction channel preferences of your customers and the overall market segment you are targeting. It is also important to note language preferences.

Smart research is a uniquely enabling factor. Not only does it help you define requirements well, it also makes the rest of the deployment easier. You'll find yourself constantly using insights gained at this stage.

**Step 2: Create a road map**

Clarity of purpose, shared goals, and customer-oriented metrics distinguish world-class contact centres. Decide on your organisation's mission and ensure your web collaboration goals match the company's business goals for the next 12 to 24 months.

Businesses can no longer afford to implement interaction channel silos because customers expect to move from one channel to another seamlessly, often in the course of the same interaction. Consider building a customer interaction hub (CIH), which is the most cost-effective way of providing consistent multichannel interactions. In a CIH, resources such as customer information, interaction history, and knowledge are shared by all channels.

**Step 3: Choose the right solution**

David Alger and John Ragsdale of Forrester Research advise, "If chat is an important channel for your support or call centre, look beyond low-cost or free chat tools and consider enterprise level chat products designed specifically for high volume call centres".

Maturity, functionality, multi-language support, integrated view of enterprise knowledge, and capability to support multiple modes of online, real-time service are some critical factors requiring close scrutiny in the selection of a web collaboration solution for enterprises.

A key factor is the ability to handle true web collaboration, real co-navigation, not simply page-pushing so agents can actually see what a customer is doing in real time.

**Step 4: Implementation**

It's a good idea to start with a limited rollout, and expand as you work out the kinks and get your agents trained with the chat and co-browsing tools. You want to provide the best service to your best customers. Some companies offer chat and co-browse only to their most profitable or the most valuable customers, while nudging other customers to use channels like self-service. Others offer it on high-value sections of their websites, i.e. in checkout area of their sites. If you put it immediately on the first page or all over your website, you might get more chat requests than agents can handle at first. Worst would be if you didn't design and scale your

infrastructure to deal with the volume and the service fails. This frustrates your customer *and* your agents.

#### **Step 5: Set up your agents for success**

As chat and co-browse are real time interaction tools, agent effectiveness and productivity are important concerns. Real-time written interactions, often as part of more than one session at a time, make unique demands on agents. The ability to multitask is very important. Agents need to be skilled in the written word, strong typists and essentially specialists in chat.

Here are some other guidelines:

- *Blend with care:* If you plan to blend channels and have agents answer phone calls as well as live chat and co-browse requests, integrate with your CTI system and ACD to extend the phone-routing logic to collaboration channels. If your agents answer chat and phone requests, don't use the multi-chat feature, instead ask them to work on emails or faxes during idle times.
- *Allow transfers and conferences:* Getting the right agent to handle the chat is important. Offer transfer and conferencing capabilities during chat sessions to ensure that the customer's query is resolved efficiently.
- *Use multi-chat, but only up to a point:* Productivity goes up and cost advantages over traditional phone support become more compelling if an agent handles two or more sessions simultaneously. Five seems to be the limit, and three a best practice. As co-browse requires more attention than simple chat, limit simultaneous sessions to two when agents are co-browsing.
- *Arm agents with knowledge:* A good and easy accessible knowledge base can help reduce both training and response times significantly. New hires, with the help of the knowledge base, become effective immediately. Encourage agents to contribute their favourite responses to the knowledge base and set templates. Set up a simple approval workflow to make contributed responses available to other agents. A spelling checker is a must, as is a black-listing capability to prevent

agents from typing certain words. The ability to bookmark pages on your website is also useful.

- *Deflect long-lived, complex interactions to the email channel:* You don't want agents to be stuck in protracted and inefficient chat or co-browsing sessions.

#### **Step 6: Monitor for real-time adjustments**

The memory of a poor customer experience is hard to erase, so monitoring is very critical for all real time interaction channels. Key factors include:

- Make sure your solution has good load-balancing capabilities.
- Provide backup resources for peak times, e.g. provide an overflow chat queue.
- Temporarily divert customers to another channel if customer wait times for chat and co-browse are too high. Encourage customers to first try self-service or email before chatting.
- Restrict chat to premium customers instead of making customers wait.
- Get supervisors to silently monitor chats while they are in progress.
- Email chat transcripts to supervisors for evaluation.

#### **Step 7: Measure, refine, measure**

Treat web collaboration like any other support channel: set goals, define metrics, track, and report on those. Contact centres tend to trip on false metrics by blindly following industry “best practices.” For instance, average chat handle time is a common metric for contact centre efficiency.

However, research has shown that by pushing agents to reduce average handle time will often make them ignore valuable cross-sell and upsell opportunities!

Reinforce customer-centricity with customer-centric metrics. Choose metrics that balance each other. No single metric can completely capture the intent of the business. For example, remember to measure customer satisfaction as you monitor chat volume.

Make sure you are talking to your customers. Surveys and feedback tools should be part of every initiative. Ask for feedback whilst they are actually

online or very shortly after, whilst the brand experience is fresh. Use feedback and trends to improve your self-service offering.

**Step 8: Get the word out**

Once you have ironed out the kinks in the chat service, you should aggressively market the new service channel to increase sales conversion on your website. A differentiated website experience is one of the most important drivers of online customer loyalty.

**Chatbots**

Like web collaboration, chatbots, also called “virtual agents”, “avatars”, “concierges” or “automated chat”, are starting to experience broader adoption. The following section provides best practices in chatbot implementation that maximise the chances of success:

**Step 1:**

Pick the most frequently asked questions to start with, and make sure the chatbot tolerates common spelling and grammatical errors. A best-of-breed chatbot will even go beyond literal meanings of words to understand the true intent of the customer.

**Step 2:**

Make sure customers can easily escalate to agent-assisted service. Be sure to collect enough information using Web forms to route customers to the best rep without annoying them by requiring them to fill out too many fields. Also, email a transcript of the entire chat session to the customer.

**Step 3:**

Give the chatbot a persona that is suitable for the markets served. The chat-bot implementation reinforces the brand personality of the company by leveraging the same persona.

**Step 4:**

Use adaptive content management to sustain the relevance and performance of your content. It enables the bot to give accurate, up-to-date answers, while covering new topics of interest to customers. Always avoid forcing customers to download or install software.

**Step 5:**

Pay attention to usability:

- a. Have the bot consistently (but unobtrusively) available on every page.
- b. Place the bot near the top of the screen, but not at the very top. Customers expect advertisements at the top of the screen.
- c. If the bot has to be invoked with a button, label the button clearly.
- d. Avoid pop-up windows. Consumers don't like interacting with bots if the chat window obscures the web pages they are on.
- e. Make the chat text box large enough to contain a typical query so that users can see all of what they have typed.
- f. If the bot mentions a particular web page, provide a link to that page.

**Step 6:**

Apply human-to-human communication best practices to chat bots. Implement bots that are emotionally intelligent and display empathy through expressions as well as language. Make sure you phrase error messages in such a way that they do not antagonize customers who are already frustrated because they've made "errors"!

**Futures**

Incorporating video into chat sessions is already in development and is predicted to be huge in enhancing the customer's experience. This includes the use of demonstration videos so the customer can visually watch how something is done, for example in technical support. Pre-filmed video clips enable the agent to handle other queries whilst the video is playing, yet be alerted if the video ends or the customer requests interaction or aborts.

Gartner predicts that by 2010, more than 15% of Fortune 1000 companies with a website will use a chatbot for online customer service.

Leading edge companies looking to gain service-based competitive advantage need to offer innovative customer service through chatbots and web collaboration sooner rather than later.

**Andrew Mennie, General Manager and Vice President, EMEA**  
eGain

**About eGain**

eGain is a leading provider of customer service and contact centre software for in-house or on-demand SaaS deployment. For over a decade, the world's largest companies have relied on eGain to transform their traditional call centres, help desks, and web customer service operations into multichannel customer interaction hubs. These hubs enable dramatically improved customer experience, unified multichannel customer service, end-to-end service process efficiencies, and enhanced contact centre performance.

Headquartered in Mountain View, California, eGain has an operating presence in 18 countries. To find out more about eGain, visit [www.eGain.com](http://www.eGain.com) or call the company's offices: London: +44 (0) 1753 464646; Dublin: +353 1 8373085; Netherlands: +31(0) 205708934; Italy: +39 2 46712239 and United States: +1 800 821 4358.

**About eGain Service™**

eGain Service is the industry's most comprehensive customer interaction hub software suite and the first solution to support short message service (SMS) customer service interactions, as well as next-generation web self-service, chat, cobrowsing, email, fax, postal mail, notification management, call tracking and resolution, knowledge management, and service fulfilment.

eGain Service is built on eGain CIH™ Platform, the industry's most integrated and flexible customer interaction hub platform. Based on a 100% J2EE architecture, it includes out-of-the-box integration with leading business applications, content management systems, and call centre infrastructure solutions. With its fine-grained service-oriented architecture (SOA), eGain CIH platform enables rapid development of powerful applications. Additional information on eGain Service can be found at: [http://www.egain.com/products/multichannel\\_service.asp](http://www.egain.com/products/multichannel_service.asp)

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