

Generating Revenue in the Contact Center

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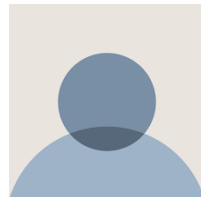
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2020 saw the rise of a new generation of digital-first consumers. While tech-savvy customers have been consistent with their online shopping and mobile ordering, closures of established storefronts and increased safety restrictions brought in a new wave of digital consumers.

Retail eCommerce grew exponentially because of this, bringing in an estimated worldwide total of \$4.28 trillion this past year.

With this staggering growth, customers have clearly acclimated to their current digital routines. As we regain access to in-person experiences, many of these now technologically adept individuals will continue to include these practical and convenient eCommerce solutions even when restrictions are lifted.

As customers depart from the more established retail experience, they have and will continue to form new standards and expectations for an exceptional online experience.

To effectively identify and meet these new standards, companies must work to gain a greater understanding of their customers' intentions throughout their end-to-end journey to offer more proactive and personalized support.

This report will cover some of the most prominent changes we have seen in customer behavior as they adjusted to the virtual environment. Additionally, it will identify solutions that work to enhance the overall experience and generate long-term loyalty, positioning the contact center as the ultimate revenue-generating resource.



How Customer Expectations Evolved in the Digital-First Era

To effectively exceed customers' expectations in the digital-first era, it's important to recognize how customer behavior has evolved in the past year. With customers leveraging technology to satisfy their every need, they have raised their standards for what an excellent experience now looks like. By outlining the most prominent deviations in customer behavior we can begin to redesign the customer journey to support a more effective customer experience that works to transcend expectations.

Agents Adapt to Heightened Customer Demands

As the customer experience evolved, agents were forced to adapt to the heightened demands and rising expectations that emerged from a more streamlined digital experience.

With customers spending more time online, their purchasing habits have decidedly changed. Rather than visit their local storefront, they are now able to compare the quality and price of hundreds of identical products and services instantly online. The entire customer journey is transforming, and [56%](#) of customers are reporting new paths to research and purchase. Purchasing decisions are no longer impulsive; customers are actively questioning and reviewing products in the more curated online environment.

Additionally, with more time being spent researching and analyzing purchases, customers are now focusing decisions on specific attributes of a product or company. They are becoming more value-oriented, with [70%](#) of individuals stating that attributes like sustainability are important when choosing a brand.

Customers are now employing customer service agents to cater to all of their pre-purchasing needs, answering an excess of preliminary and exploratory questions that ultimately place agents in the role of both a sales and support representative.

This requires a heightened level of expertise and access to comprehensive knowledge bases as agents are expected to support a much wider range of personal and complex interactions. However, once granted the proper tools and resources, agents become revenue-generating advisors, offering in-depth product information that support customers' value-oriented mentality.



"While post-transaction support, like order status and return initiation, likely will never subside, CX teams can now take on more of a revenue-generating advisory role, answering product questions or directing customers to better alternatives. In fact, support inquiries were split somewhat evenly across the customer journey during the 2020 holiday season, surprisingly with the least percentage of inquiries coming post-transaction according to Kustomer research." **-Gabe Larsen, VP of Marketing, Kustomer**

Proactive Communication is Expected

Customers are used to at least some level of technical or logistical disturbances in 2021. They understand if a shipment is delayed or service is temporarily down. However, in the digital age, they expect companies to proactively warn them about even their most minor inconveniences.



“One thing is clear across the board: consumers expect retailers to know how they’ve interacted in the past, what issues they’ve encountered, and they want organizations to actively make amends. A whopping 89% of consumers expect companies to proactively follow-up and reach out to them if there is a problem.” **-Brad Birnbaum, Co-Founder and CEO, Kustomer**

After a year of uncertainty, customers expect companies to have high-pressure situations under control and they are no longer as willing to accept apologies after the fact. In actively monitoring and analyzing the most consistent and pressing disruptors, companies can proactively relieve customers of the task of fixing the issue themselves.

Additionally, it benefits the company to provide this kind of active communication — by preemptively warning customers about a potential delay in shipping due to weather or an updated policy that impacts their service, companies avoid an entire influx of concerns by simply informing their customers directly.

However, this method of proactive communication may not be sufficiently utilized or shared by companies today. CCW Digital research found that messaging channels, like SMS and text-based communication, are actually the lowest-ranking channels, with only 19% of customers stating that they are satisfied with the option.

If companies are not leveraging their messaging channels to facilitate proactive responses, they are missing out on a critical opportunity to deliver this urgent information. This medium offers one of the most direct lines of communication with your customer, keeping them informed on all aspects of their purchasing journey.

As companies focus on proactive communication, they reduce unnecessary friction and avoid upsetting customers, decreasing the likelihood of avoidable churn and profit loss. Additionally, with so few companies leveraging this particular messaging strategy, it represents an opportunity to achieve competitive differentiation. In thinking ahead and addressing the most prominent frustrations proactively, companies gain a competitive advantage and the opportunity to acquire an entire influx of new customers.



“Customers expect personalization and proactive engagement because that’s a routine component of much of their experience of social media and retail. Personalization/engagement can, if done well, play a significant role in differentiating one institution from another.” **-Jonathan Grove, Director of Product Design, Nationwide Insurance**

Convenience with a Personal Touch

With the rise of digital came an emphasis on heightened convenience and overall effortlessness. Customers can now get just about anything delivered to their door, they use voice assistants to check their order status and get any of their pressing questions answered without ever having to speak to a human.

However, customers still expect a personal touch even in the era of contactless, low-touchpoint service. This was especially true during the height of the pandemic; with customers using technology as a lifeline during isolating times, they still desired some level of human interaction to offer comprehensive support.



“This shift in consumer expectations may have boiled over in these strange, isolating times, but customer expectations have long been moving in that direction. Customers aren’t satisfied with being treated as ticket #12558369, that needs to be resolved as quickly as possible without any real human emotion or interaction. They want to be treated like a valued customer, with real thoughts, emotions, feedback and values.” **-Brad Birnbaum, Co-Founder and CEO, Kustomer**

CCW research found that most companies saw growth on every channel this past year. While live chat saw the greatest increase in growth for 63% of companies, 46% of organizations saw at least some increase in their live call volumes.

The simultaneous growth on both channels reflects the fact that customers continue to vary the style in which they interact with brands. They are undoubtedly increasing their digital use, but they do not shy away from using live phone channels to receive more direct support.

This varying use demonstrates the need for a more seamless experience across channels. If companies can incorporate elements of an in-person or live interaction on their digital channels, they can support more complex interactions and provide a level of consistency across all of their interactions.

In doing so, companies can support more empathetic and meaningful end-to-end experiences that facilitate long-term customer relationships. With this loyal customer base, companies can finally recognize the revenue potential of the contact center.

How to Engage Customers in the Digital Age

To facilitate more meaningful, long-term customer relationships companies must focus on implementing solutions that offer both valuable and seamless support. With customers relying on agents to support their entire pre and post-purchasing journey, there is a clear opportunity to optimize the customer experience by leveraging critical insight and assistive technology.

By equipping agents to support complex interactions and promote more proactive communication, companies can secure loyal customers that drive bottom-line results and prompt consistent growth in revenue.

Focus on Omnichannel Support

To operate in the digital era, companies must be equipped to support an omnichannel experience. With customers spending more of their personal time validating their purchases with pre-transaction support, they require access to agents who can effectively understand their entire contextual journey.

By focusing on an omnichannel approach, companies can work to better understand their customers' intentions and adapt support as needed.



“Omnichannel support can often seem intimidating to businesses because they think they need separate teams to manage these separate channels through separate systems. Your customer data is powerful, but it often lives in other disparate systems making it a challenge to provide a complete picture of your customers. You need to implement a support solution that unifies that data and makes it easily available and actionable for your support team. And since your omnichannel strategy connects all your channels, data on customer interactions travels with the customer and moves as easily between channels as they do.” -**Gabe Larsen, VP of Marketing, Customer**

As customers continue to utilize different channels, switching between self-service options, live chat, and traditional phone service, it becomes necessary to gain a line of sight into every aspect of the overall journey.

Additionally, when customers increase touchpoints by requesting support pre-transaction, companies must work to identify these moments to piece together a 360-degree view of the customer later on.

To achieve a more seamless approach, companies must implement AI solutions that ensure flawless escalation and increased efficiency. With modern AI technology, customers using a chatbot service can be swiftly routed to the most qualified agent to receive individual support. By pinpointing the exact moment of frustration or inefficiency, AI works to seamlessly adapt to the customers' momentary needs, while providing the agent with the necessary contextual information to adequately handle the case.

Once agents gain access to this in-depth customer insight they can more effectively handle the unique influx of questions and services they are currently expected to provide. Companies can then work to provide a simplified experience as customers effortlessly switch between channels without ever having to repeat their inquiries.

"Having that 360 customer view, it allows the agents in one click to have an understanding of, from the beginning, from that first order that the customers had with us, has there been any pros or cons throughout their journey? When looking at that, it allows the agents to say, 'you've been with us for X amount of time, we can see that you needed your contact lenses now, a month ago, you seem to be running out at this time of the month, why don't we change your plan to this?' and it really helps the agents get a more personalized experience to our customers and it also saves a lot of time which is great for us." **-Ryan Patchitt, Customer Experience Manager at Waldo**

Leverage Personalization

Once agents can effectively handle a more seamless flow of interactions, they can work to provide the more personalized and empathetic version of support customers are currently seeking.

We know customers do not want to be treated like a ticket number; they want agents to consistently recognize them on every platform and actually understand their intentions and goals. Identifying the customer is one thing, but providing meaningful and personalized support at every touchpoint takes a more comprehensive approach.

This level of support requires access to detailed customer data to go beyond simple recognition and support complex, meaningful interactions. Additionally, it demands streamlined back-end processes to allow agents to direct their focus on the most substantial cases.



"There's no need to waste the customer's or agent's time by asking for repeat information. Instead, that information is available at the click of a button, allowing the agent to personalize the customer's experience by giving fine-tuned advice, addressing problems proactively, and suggesting other products or services the customer might enjoy. The result? An efficient but personal interaction that builds a lifelong customer relationship."

-Gabe Larsen, VP of Marketing, Kustomer

To leverage comprehensive customer data, empower agents with AI tools like customizable insight cards that curate the context and tools needed to facilitate an interaction. With this technology, agents can process returns, issue credits, or rebook reservations all in a single platform. This keeps the most critical information in one place, allowing agents to focus on each interaction by avoiding distracting searches and inefficiencies. Additionally, it allows agents to more effectively act in an advisory role, recommending new products and services that may align with their value-driven mentality — increasing potential revenue opportunities.

Initiate Targeted Support

To effectively identify opportunities to deliver proactive communication, companies can not underestimate the value of segmentation and targeted support.

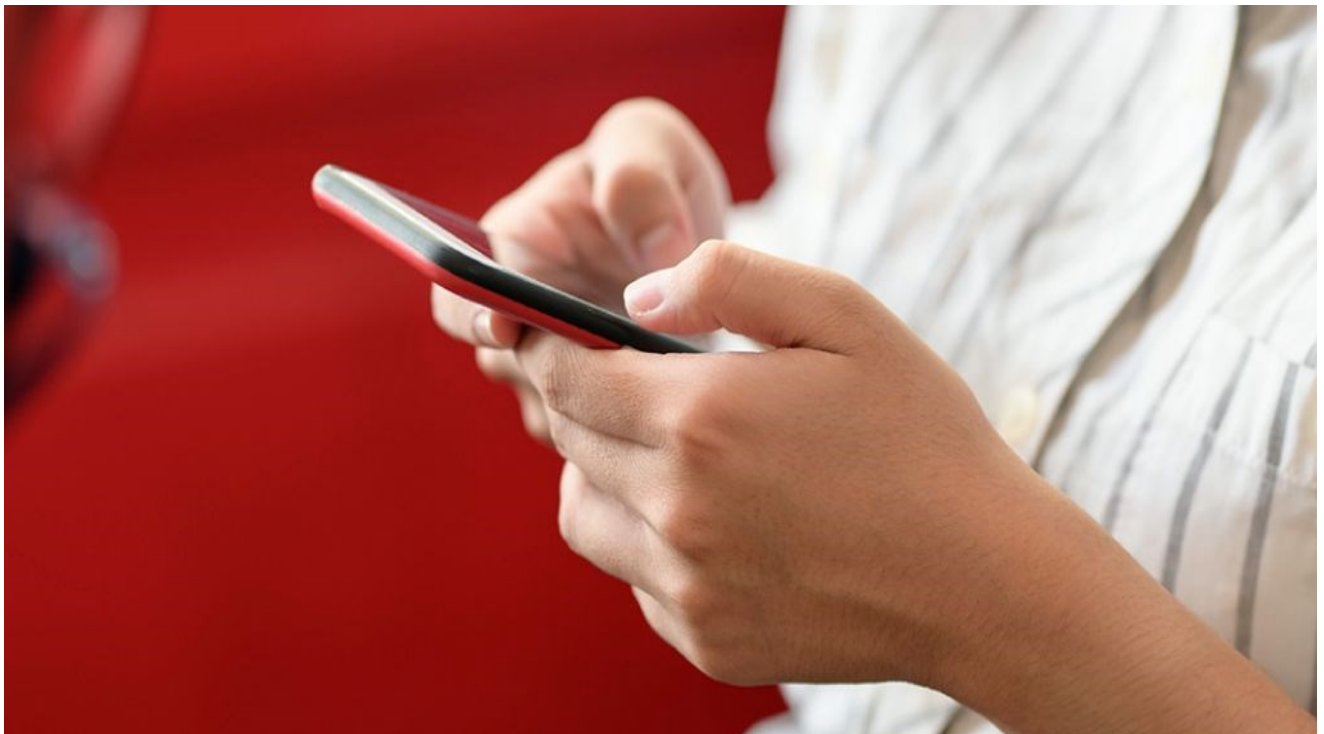
With all of the data organizations currently collect, it becomes easy to lose sight of the potential that currently exists within these high-level insights. This data can be segmented based on unique customer attributes like satisfaction score, location, or order type. Companies can then improve their proactive communication efforts to effectively target impacted individuals and provide immediate feedback.

By segmenting particular groups of customers, companies can implement bulk messaging to send personalized and effective responses. While this is undoubtedly useful during times of unexpected difficulty, like delays caused by bad weather, it can also be an incredibly effective tool to reengage dissatisfied customers. In sending proactive messages like brand-building offers, companies can alleviate the effects of a negative experience to improve satisfaction and retention rates. Once customers are content, companies can work to form long-term relationships, marking the contact center as a leading source of revenue.

Improve Knowledge Bases

To achieve effective and meaningful support, agents must also be relieved of repetitive and low-effort interactions.

As customers' preferences evolved to prioritize convenience, they also at times expect to handle their own inquiries. We outlined the fact that customers effectively choose how and when they want to interact, switching between channels when necessary. To mitigate the effort required to support this flexible approach, companies need to redirect their least complex inquiries so agents can spend valuable time and energy on customers that require the most assistance.

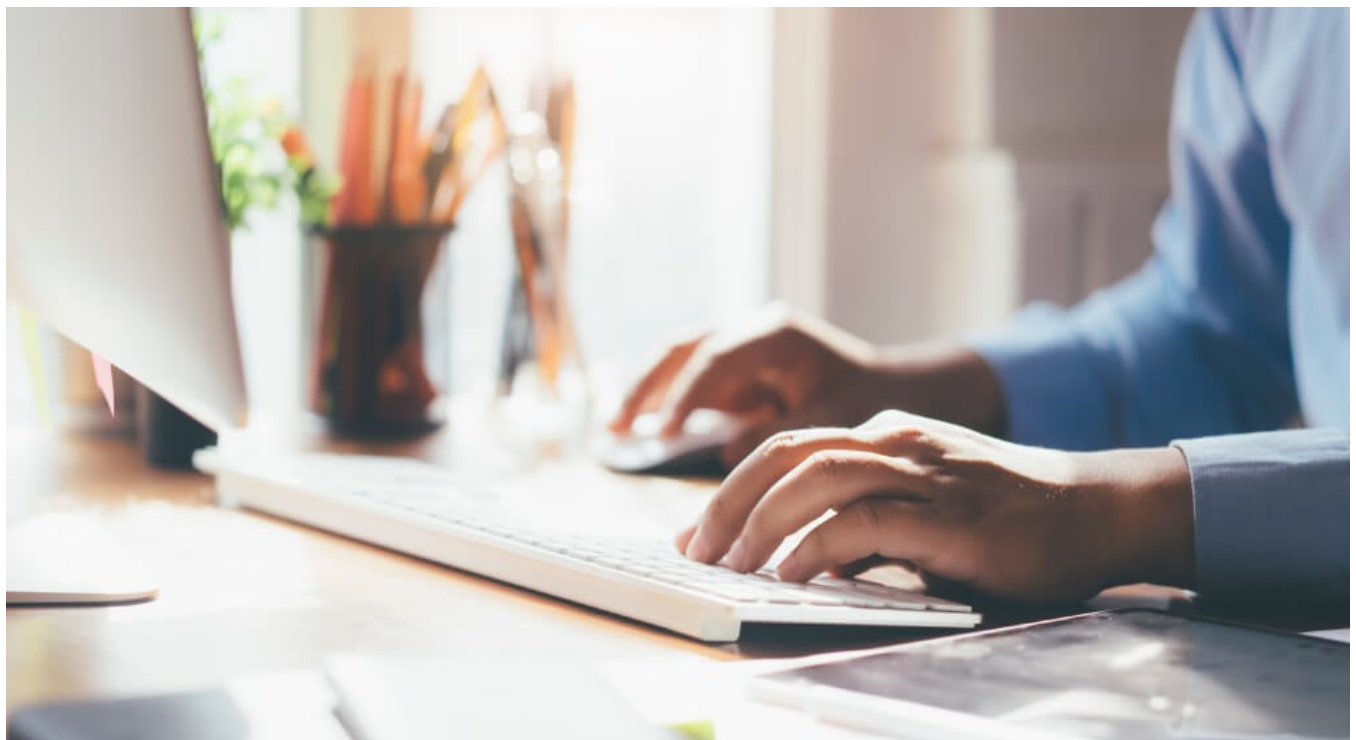


Companies must work to improve their current knowledge bases to enable this level of self-service for customers who are not seeking comprehensive support. CCW research found that 53% of companies note that improving knowledge bases represented their most widespread agent improvement goal.

Additionally, with agents largely focused on more complex cases, they require access to more accurate and intuitive knowledge bases to efficiently locate critical insights. Curating insights from prior successes and leveraging AI to offer predictive intelligence enables agents to successfully handle their more involved case-load.

Knowledge bases are also a critical tool for improving the customer experience as well. However, they should not simply be framed as a means of deflection. Technology can now support a more personalized and accessible knowledge base that reflects your brand's values and visual identity. By designing a knowledge base that customers recognize and align with your brand, companies can achieve a more personal appeal even in their self-service options. Companies can even offer custom content and tutorials that support a more meaningful experience, without ever having to interact with an agent.

Efforts like this create a compelling environment that attracts loyal customers while proving cost-efficient by reducing the overall volume to continually support longer, more complex interactions.



About the Author



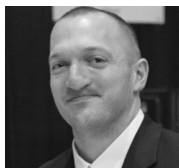
Brooke Lynch, Digital Writer & Analyst, Customer Management Practice

Brooke Lynch is an analyst and staff writer for CCW Digital. With a background in television news and production, she's worked across industries covering B2B marketing, procurement and finance events.

Her current work highlights challenges and opportunities for customer experience and contact center leaders, with a recent focus on e-commerce, retail, and technology.

Brooke studied journalism at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and held positions at Fox Business in Development and as a college associate on Countdown to the Closing Bell.

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