



Can We Make Collections More Personal and More Proactive?

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Biography

John Duffy is the Enterprise Sales Consultant at customer contact technology services specialist, VoiceSage (www.voicesage.com). With over ten years experience in the messaging and communications industry, John has worked for a variety of organizations from start-ups to large telcos across both the public and private sectors.

Driven by a real passion for how communications can improve, augment, and drive business processes, John sees his role as being all about helping customers achieve lower costs and efficiencies and better experiences for the customer.

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Abstract

Research Shows Personalized, Proactive Service Becoming the Standard for Modern Customer Outreach. So how far off are we from top-flight Customer Experience (CX) in the UK when it comes to collections? A recent extensive market analysis exercise carried out by VoiceSage in partnership with the UK Contact Centre Forum examined the mechanics of customer contact as well as the important aspect of personalization, which Gartner identifies as the dominant factor in CX.

Introduction

Collecting money is the end game for collections teams. Credit or goods have been delivered to customers, and if there's trouble with the agreed payment plan, then intervention is necessary. The trick is to do this while offering superior customer experience (CX). That's because providing a great customer experience helps the bottom line, addresses compliance issues, and will almost certainly cement follow on business of some kind.

But how far off from this frictionless service are we in the UK when it comes to collections? A recent extensive market analysis exercise we carried out provides some rich clues. Working in partnership with the UK Contact Centre Forum (<http://uk-ccf.co.uk>) we surveyed¹ 150 contact centre organizations across the private and public sector in the UK. What we discovered: brands are getting more personal (with a lot of that contact happening by phone) – and that collections teams are getting a lot better in terms of mapping the customer journey.



Analysis

Proactive Service is also emerging as a strong force for collections professionals. For instance, one customer services practitioner defined as her biggest 2017 contact centre challenge as being, “Solving a customer problem before they realize they have one.”

The engines of modern customer outreach

In the first part of the research we explored what communication channels are being used where, and the extent to which brands are mapping out and personalizing their customer journeys, as well as how many interactions it takes to resolve issues.

Asked whether these groups report and track customer journeys, the majority (56%) report that they do actively map the customer journey, while a further 20% said that this was a ‘work in progress’. Only 24% said that they did not map journeys – a statistic that suggests the benefits of mapping need to be better communicated.

A key question the research probed was whether agents had access to previous conversations with customers about the same issue, and if so, over which channels. The honest answer is that this still seems to be a common challenge, judging from the responses received – but nonetheless, nearly 56% of the sample said they can give a collections team member ‘immediate access to previous conversations with customers about the same issue and across all channels’, a central plank in any convincing collections CX process.

This datum also shows a high percentage of collections functions in UK contact centres have deployed integrated information and contact routing systems. Another positive is that a further 18% said that they were working on developing these capabilities.

But how ‘personalized’ are these communications? Here, we are thinking about personalized payment plans and special offers as ways to enhance the customer experience. We asked if organizations were able to deliver personalized communications to improve customer experiences, by technology or other means. A high 69% confirmed they do, and a further 21% say that they offer limited forms of it.

Time to get proactive in a debt context

When it came to proactive outreach, 75% are saying that they do proactive outreach to their customers. When asked about the nature of these proactive contacts, the most popular (51%) proved to be rating a product or service and the second (38%) was to remind customers to make payments.

Meanwhile, a large majority (87%) think that Proactive Service will save on inbound contacts to their organizations, potentially equating to millions of pounds saved each year for large customer contacts and their customers.

Cutting inbound traffic is a key goal for many contact centre practitioners, it seems. “Reducing repeat inbound contacts” and “Reducing call volumes and encouraging more self-serve online” were given as priorities by a number of respondents.



How is that proactive work being carried out? Simple. Through the use of technology. As one collections agent told us, “We would not have the capacity to be proactive without automation – for example, email and text reminders for the renewal of services or direct debit payments.”

The research also looked at two emerging Proactive Service channels – SMS and Automated Voice. Over half of respondents (51%) use SMS, while 72% thought the use of text for proactive contact to be either ‘Effective’ or ‘Very Effective’. Meanwhile, the results indicate that 53% of people that don’t currently use SMS thought that, if they did, it would be Effective or Very Effective.

The survey also highlights the expanding role of SMS, in particular with those yet to use proactive (37% compared with 31% for phone and 17% for email). Meanwhile, a very high 71% believe SMS technology means less in-bound calls for their teams, while greater use of SMS plus social media would allow staff to manage more interactions.

Finally, 19% say that they have used Automated Voice, with 58% deciding it was ‘Effective’ in achieving what they wanted. Notably, one respondent said that a proactive service challenge was specifically in linking systems to IVR in order “to deliver information that is personalized to that moment of the customer journey”. This suggests that technology is playing a more pivotal role in helping deliver a better CX experience when it comes to collections. As one practitioner noted, his team’s biggest reach goal was to “align all our communication models to allow for multi interactions at once” – omnichannel, in other words, powered via technology.

An increasing role for technologies like SMS

In conclusion 2017 UKCCF Proactive Customer Service report shows that brands and organizations are making genuine progress mapping out the customer journey. It also revealed that personalized outreach is becoming the norm with the benefits Proactive Service brings for collections.

Finally, it looks like newer technologies like SMS, voice and social media are making inroads, allowing brands to juggle queries more easily and cost effectively and be truly omnichannel.

Reference
¹ http://uk-ccf.co.uk/ukccf-2017-proactive-survey/#sf-{}¹

¹ [http://uk-ccf.co.uk/ukccf-2017-proactive-survey/#sf-{}¹](http://uk-ccf.co.uk/ukccf-2017-proactive-survey/#sf-{})