JANUARY 2021 I QUARTER 1

CX Insight

AN EXECS IN THE KNOW PUBLICATION

Utilizing Change to Achieve Transformation

Take flight toward new possibilities in 2021.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONTACT CENTER AGENT: CHANGING ROLES AND REQUIREMENTS

BPO SITE INSIGHTS: UP AND COMING BPO LOCATIONS AROUND THE GLOBE

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in this issue

New Possibilities Emerge in 2021

Welcome to the January 2021 edition of *CX Insight* magazine, an Execs In The Know publication. This issue marks our second year of publication with a new issue coming out each quarter. In this issue we examine the concept of change, and its impact on the People, Processes, and Technologies that form the foundation of your customer experience (CX) operations and foundational to transformation.

Although 2020 was a year of monumental change, it was also a year that taught us all a little something about what's possible, especially when the going gets tough. Organizations, both big and small, took on challenges once thought insurmountable, oftentimes implementing creative and effective solutions almost overnight. Many companies reconfigured their operations, reinvented their offerings, and fundamentally changed their approach to business.

While things might not have always gone according to plan, more often than not these new changes have been a bridge to greater efficiencies, enhanced value, and improved outcomes.

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the "Big Change," now is a great time to reflect on the hard-fought wins and successes of the past year. But it's also a great time to double down on accomplishing the impossible, approaching every challenge with an innovative spirit, a can-do mindset, and newly found inspiration from the promise of new possibilities. Whether you're looking to discover someplace new, reinvent a role, or tackle an entirely new initiative, this issue of CX Insight magazine is a great place to start. Enjoy!

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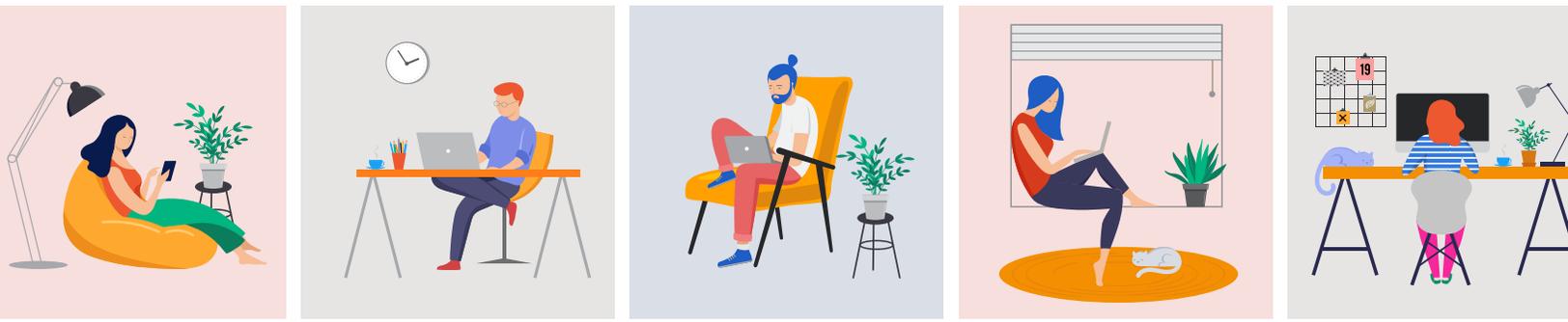
By Execs In The Know

The Evolution of the Contact Center Agent: Changing Roles and Requirements

More than likely, most customer experience (CX) leaders would agree that the role of the contact center agent has changed dramatically. The expectations and responsibilities of agents from even a few short years ago are substantially different when compared to today. This continued evolution of the agent role equates to shifts in how contact centers are managed, perceived, and leveraged within organizations. Therefore, it is important to understand how agent roles are changing and the organizational implications of that shift.

With the rapid pace of change, organizations who understand and proactively respond to this continued evolution will no doubt have a competitive advantage. There are some of the opinion that the role of the agent is becoming less important as technology continues to play a larger role in resolving customer issues, but

the opposite could also be argued as agents play an even more significant role in how brands are perceived. Customer care has long been an important driver in overall customer satisfaction, but even more so in recent years. In fact, **80% of consumers surveyed for the CXMB Series 2020 Consumer Edition[1] said they stopped doing business with brands due to poor customer care**. And when asked which scenario is most appealing if they knew their issue would be resolved, **68% of consumers answered that they would still like to talk to an agent**. While the role of the agent is most definitely changing, it could be argued that it is actually increasing in importance.

This article explores what is driving these changes, some of the specific changes that can be expected, and the implications to organizations in preparing for the future.
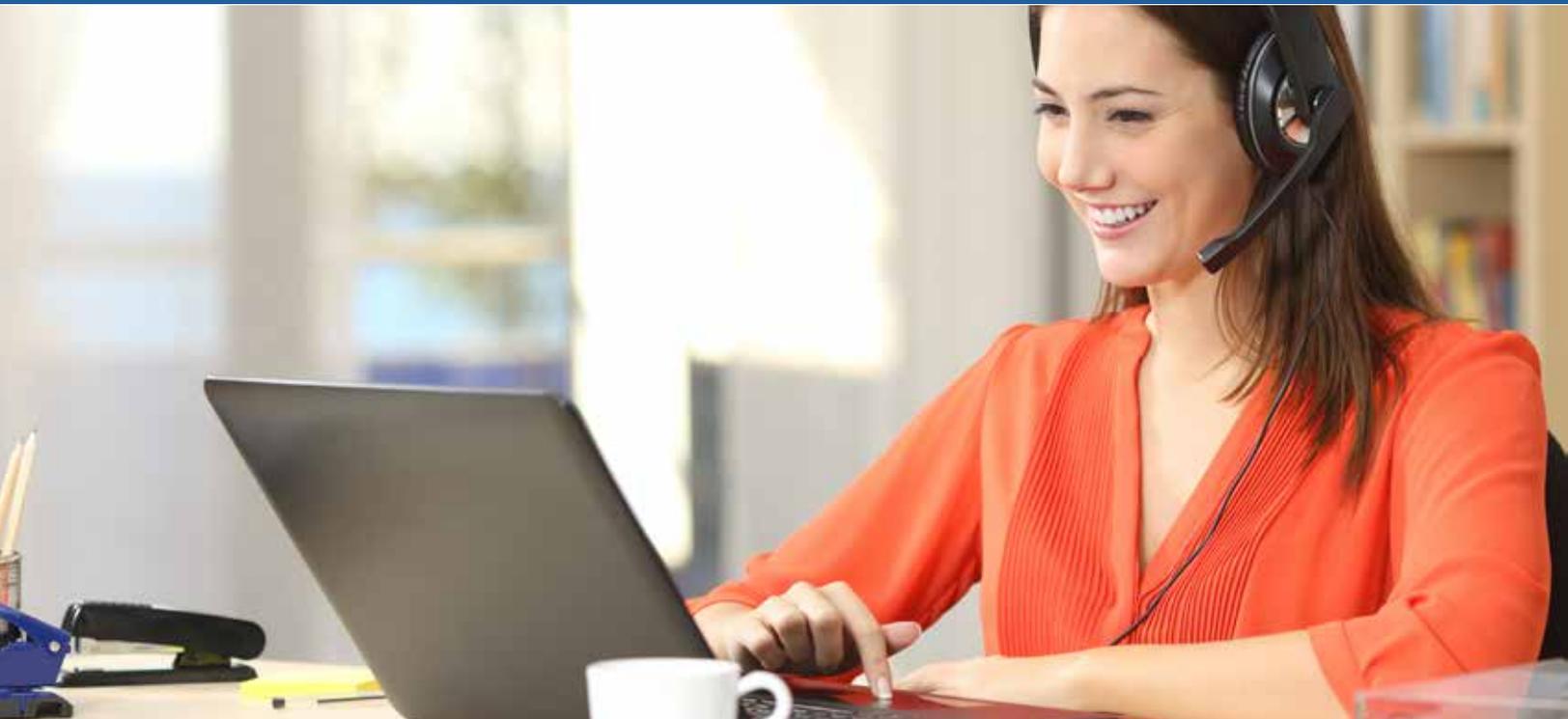
Key Drivers Affecting the Changing Role of the Agent

There are many factors driving the evolution of the agent's role, and there will likely continue to be drivers that no one is able to anticipate. Regardless, it is important to maintain an understanding of what is driving change so organizations can respond and plan. Below are some of the key drivers affecting agents' roles:

- **Technology:** Self-service technology (SST), chatbots, and the growth of Artificial Intelligence (both agent- and customer-facing), to name just a few, are all major drivers of how agent roles are changing. According to the CXMB Series 2020 Consumer Edition, almost **75% of customers surveyed attempted to use SST**, a number which almost doubled from 2019. And **78% surveyed said they interacted with a chatbot**. It goes without saying that as the capabilities of these technologies continue to improve, even more issues that might have been handled previously by agents will be handled (or facilitated) via a SST solution. This will continue to have an impact on the type, and complexity, of the customer issues handled by agents, as

well as the skills required to resolve current and future issues.

- **Channel Availability:** Related to technology is the continued growth and availability of multiple channels. In fact, in CXMB Series research, **71% of consumers surveyed utilized multiple channels to resolve a single customer care issue**. Gone are the days when companies offered one or two resolution channels. This, of course, offers greater flexibility to customers, but also introduces added complexity both to the customer journey and for agents handling customer interactions via multiple channels.

- **Work-At-Home (WAH):** Even prior to the impact of COVID-19, WAH staffing models were becoming more common. When the pandemic struck in early 2020, almost every company was forced into a remote working environment. It is clear that WAH is here to stay for the foreseeable future and will continue to have a direct impact on agents' roles, skills required, experiences, and responsibilities.

- **Customer Expectations:** Put on a customer hat for a moment. It probably goes without

saying that for customers, expectations continue to grow. Expectations are based on the best experience had with any other company, even if not in the same industry as the company currently being dealt with. Customers see what is possible and expect it … every time. Technology is a key component of this, but the direct and personal interaction with an agent is as well. Everyone wants their issue resolved quickly and with minimal effort. Furthermore, everyone wants to be treated as a valued customer.

- **Global Issues:** Obviously, the pandemic in 2020 had ramifications for everyone, including agents. Beyond WAH, the issues surrounding the pandemic put pressure on agents that they have likely never experienced before. While 2021 will hopefully bring some relief to this global issue, it continues to have an impact on consumers, their issues, and their expectations. Agents have had to pivot in how they respond to customers and it will likely have a lasting impact.

Those are just a few of the key factors affecting the evolution of the agent role. Now let's explore the changes that organizations can expect as a result.

How Agents' Roles are Changing

The most obvious change based on these drivers is the complexity of issues handled by agents. As stated above, more routine inquiries and issues will be handled via self-service and other solutions, which means the issues handled by agents will continue to become more complex. A lot has been said about that theory, but what does it really mean, and what are the more specific changes organizations can expect as they think about how these roles are changing?

- **Advanced Problem-Solving Skills:** Although technology (sophisticated knowledgebases, integrated systems, AI, etc.) will theoretically put more information at agents' fingertips, when a customer does reach an agent, more than likely they have a more complicated issue which will require more advanced problem solving and trouble-shooting skills. This, of course, depends on the channel(s), type of transaction, and customer demographic being handled by specific agents, but generally speaking this shift in skills can be expected.
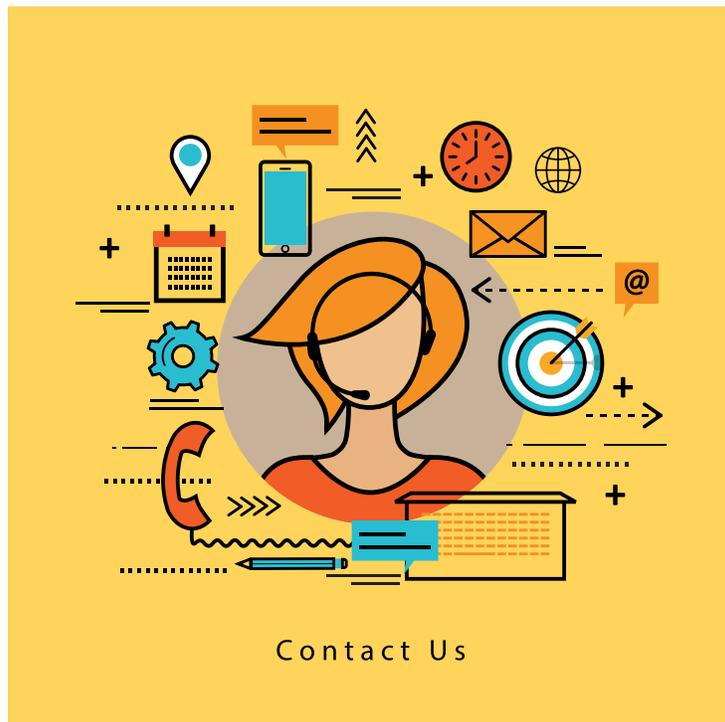
- **Greater Technical and Product Skills:** Due to the potential handling of inquiries related to multiple products and lines of business via multiple systems and channels, many agents will need to be more technically savvy with broader product and process knowledge. In fact, CXMB Series research reveals that **almost 40% of customers who had a negative experience cited lack of product knowledge as a significant factor**. Additionally, with the consistent introduction of new technology into the contact center (e.g., AI, machine learning, chatbots, integrated systems, etc.), continued upskilling to new technology will be required

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and agents will need the ability to learn and adapt quickly as these new technologies come online.

- **Customer Success Focus:** Many organizations are shifting to a "customer success" mindset. This goes beyond solving issues, spilling into helping customers grow by maximizing the value they derive from the products and services they purchase. As the evolution from customer support to customer success continues, the skills and tools required to be a customer advocate is a game changer, especially if they can ultimately increase the company's bottom line and drive customer loyalty.

- **Elevated Communication Skills:** Whether agents are interacting with customers via phone, chat, email, or social media, communication skills are becoming more important than ever. And because these transactions are potentially more complex, scripted responses will likely no longer be acceptable, reliable, or effective. Everyone has experienced interactions where you

know the agent is scripted, and often the responses and solutions are not completely relevant or aligned with the issue at hand. While scripted responses are good for consistency and accuracy, when issues are more complex they typically are not effective. Authentic and more personalized interactions are expected, which requires an altogether different set of skills. This article,[2] which sums this point up well, states: "The ability to operate at the customer's level will become more essential, as will the ability to translate complexity into simplicity."

- **Increased Empathy:** Empathy may sound like an over-used term. For anyone in the CX industry for any length of time, the chances are good that their organization has offered "empathy training" or focused on it as part of quality monitoring. However, with the increased complexity and the current situation with the pandemic and other global issues, never has genuine empathy been more important. By the time a customer reaches an agent, they may have tried to solve their issue through another channel, or they know it is so complicated they need to talk to an agent. Customers expect to be treated with respect and want to feel that an agent has a genuine desire to help. Evidence of this was revealed in results from the CXMB Series 2020 Consumer Edition whereas consumers who had a negative experience with a brand, **the two most frustrating factors were "agents who demonstrated no desire to help" (35%) and "rude agents" (41%).**

- **Flexibility and Empowerment:** Depending on the issue, product, and complexity, agents will need more flexibility and empowerment to effectively solve customer issues. It will be incumbent upon the organization to allow for this, which is discussed below, but agents in these roles will need to have the skills to work within these parameters. In other words, they need to feel comfortable being

more empowered to make decisions that address customers' issues, operating within the guidelines provided.

- **Self-Directed and Motivated:** The pandemic in early 2020 forced organizations to send agents home almost overnight. While this was done out of necessity, working from home is quite different from working in a physical center. Some people thrive in a WAH environment, but others need the structure and direction that working in a physical center offers them. So as WAH continues to be a strategy for most organizations going forward, hiring for this intangible characteristic becomes more important.

This is just a snapshot of how the agents' role is changing and what that means for the agent profile. But what are the implications to organizations beyond a change to job descriptions or hiring requirements?

Implications to Organizations

The evolution of the agent role is just the tip of the iceberg, with far-reaching implications to organizations:

- **Minimum Skills Required and Hiring Processes:** Due to the changes in minimum skills required as described above, it is important to review all current job requirements, hiring processes, and skills verification approaches. For many organizations, minimum skill and knowledge requirements have not been updated to reflect these changes. The change in skill requirements also has an impact on hiring approaches and how each of these skills should be assessed during the recruiting process. Further, minimum skills required should be assessed at least 2X a year, if not quarterly, and based on the current rate of change. Finally, if current agents do not possess required skills, a careful strategy will need to be developed to either upskill or strategically place them where they can be most effective and successful.

- **Salary Implications:** Agents are no longer simply handling transactions but providing solutions. Due to the increase in minimum skills required, it is possible then that it could have an impact on salaries. Organizations should conduct market analysis based on these revised minimum skills and make adjustments from a recruiting, hiring, budgeting, and planning standpoint.

- **Transaction Time:** With more complex issues handled by agents, it is logical to expect these interactions to take more time. This, of course, has an impact to forecasting, staffing, and scheduling, as well as costs. While transaction volume might be less, the time involved may or may not offset that. To ensure customer expectations (as they relate to response time) are met, particularly during peak intervals, the analysis and modeling should be done on a regular basis.

- **Onboarding and Training:** Not only do minimum skills need to be re-assessed, but training is also likely going to look different. It is possible the onboarding and training time will be longer based on the complexity of multiple channels, products, and overall complexity of issues handled. Depending on technology and tools required by agents, there could also be a steeper learning curve. Sentiment analysis tools are growing in popularity and this could mean more personalized training and defined role assignments are an option. The bottom line is that "one size fits all" training may be a thing of the past.

- **Management Skills and Processes:** With WAH, more complex issues, increased expectations, and a general need for elevated skills among agents, the role of the supervisor will change as well. The supervisor profile and the skills required to be effective should be carefully reviewed and updated. Managing a WAH team handling complex issues across multiple channels and via multiple tools adds another

layer of complexity to the supervisor role. Leaders must ensure supervisors have the tools, data, resources, and support they need to effectively manage.

- **Company Policies and Process:** Agents are going to need more flexibility and empowerment to be successful. This means company policies and processes need to be carefully reviewed. Agents and supervisors will need to be more empowered to help solve complex customer issues. Additionally, customers are savvier than ever and their experiences with other brands heavily shape their expectations. This is not to say that organizations should change their policies at the expense of their bottom line, but research indicates that for **customers who had a negative experience, many (33%) cited company policy or process as a key factor**, which almost doubled year over year.

- **New Positions:** There is quite a bit being written about new positions and roles as this evolution continues. For example, "specialist" or "subject matter expert" roles are becoming more common as agents require specific skills and knowledge for individual channels or product lines. Technology evolution may also produce new roles. You may need people to work on chatbot supervision or conversation design, which could very well be a career path for agents. While many may

perceive increased technology as limiting roles for agents, you will likely be able to shift how these resources are utilized, providing more growth and career opportunities for staff.

It is an exciting time for the CX industry. The changing role of the agent is just a glimpse into the future. While agent roles may change and the "contact center" of the future may look quite different, customer care has never been more important to brand perception. Organizations would do well to react to the changes that have already occurred and be proactive in preparing for what is coming. Those that embrace the change and create a plan for evolution will be ahead of the curve and stand out from their competitors. �籤

Sources:

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By Execs In The Know

BPO Site Insights: Up and Coming BPO Locations Around the Globe

The landscape of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry is continuously evolving. India and the Philippines have long been attractive outsourcing destinations for brands, and there is little doubt they will continue to occupy a significant percentage of the BPO sector. The great news for brands is that there are many appealing outsourcing markets, with BPOs expanding their footprint in emerging countries. In this year of change, many companies are revisiting their current strategy and researching potential new markets to service their customers. This article highlights the benefits and challenges of just a few of these BPO markets including **Jamaica**, **Egypt**, **Nicaragua**, and **Guatemala**. It should be noted, that while we are referring to these as "emerging," some of these markets have been offering BPO services for many years and all are at different levels of maturity.

JAMAICA:

Jamaica is perhaps the most mature BPO Caribbean country and continues to grow. The market is valued at approximately $450 million with a population of 2.9 million. The industry employs approximately 26,000 English-speaking call center workers and is expected to grow to 50,000-75,000 by 2023. With this market size, growth, and maturity level, there are many benefits, but also some challenges to keep in mind.

BENEFITS:

- **Government investment and infrastructure** – The Jamaican government recognizes the importance of the BPO industry to their country and continues to support and invest in it. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) [agreed to lend Jamaica US15 million*](), which the country will use to develop a pipeline of BPO talent. This is just one of several programs being implemented to continue to invest in growth and talent development.

*https://nearshoreamericas.com/jamaica-gets-idb-fund-boost-bpo-talent-pool/

- **Proximity to the U.S.** – For U.S. based companies, Jamaica offers a near-shore, convenient location in the Eastern time zone with plenty of flights from major US cities, facilitating ease of management and more involvement as needed.

- **English as official language** – Having a large workforce with English as the official language offers obvious benefits when supporting English-speaking customers. Additionally, it should be noted that other languages are available including Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic, making Jamaica a bilingual option depending on needs.

- **High maturity level** – As stated above, Jamaica's BPO sector has grown quickly (three-fold in the last five years) and is likely the most mature of the Caribbean countries. From a technology, infrastructure and management perspective, this is attractive.

- **Skilled talent pool** – With more than 26,000 active call center employees and 75,000-100,000 expected by end of 2023, BPOs (and their clients) have access to a large workforce. Furthermore, if programs are successful in training and developing talent, the pool will only continue to increase.

- **Cost savings** – It is reported that cost savings can be up to 50% compared to U.S.-based companies, but as noted in the challenges below, these savings may shrink due to rising costs.

CHALLENGES:

- **Workforce supply** – While there is a large talent pool, that pool could reportedly hit a ceiling in the near future. The country is implementing programs to increase talent supply such as offering a degree in BPO management to nurture and develop talent. The country also recognizes that some foundational skills are missing from high school graduates, so the education system needs to ensure the skills and knowledge required in the industry are taught at an earlier age.

- **Rising costs** – Compared to some other countries in the region, costs have risen, and wages have increased, potentially reducing the cost benefits realized in prior years. As Jamaica becomes more saturated, other countries have (or will begin to) compete at lower costs, reducing the cost savings potential.

- **Management skills** – Because of the explosive growth of the BPO industry in the country, the number of managers required has tripled. There is a reported gap in management talent that needs to be addressed, along with the education and training required to address the overall talent pool challenge.

NICAURAGUA

Since first launching in the mid- to late-2000s, Nicaragua is a growing BPO market in Central America, valued at over $150 million with a population of 6.3 million and a labor force of 3.2 million, of which approximately 10,000 are employed by the BPO industry.

BENEFITS:

- **Proximity to the U.S.** – For U.S.-based companies, Nicaragua is a 2.5-hour flight from most southern U.S. cities and is also in Central time zone, facilitating ease of management and oversight.

- **Affinity for the U.S.** – The country has long had economic ties and a cultural affinity with the U.S., making it an attractive option for many BPO companies looking to expand their footprint.

- **Bilingual capabilities** – Spanish is the official language, but English capabilities have been growing. Investment to accelerate capabilities is a constant.

- **Young and educated talent pool** – Seventy-six percent of the labor pool are under 40 years old and digitally/technically savvy.

According to reports, there is a large pool of under-utilized, highly educated people coming out of universities, and highly motivated for a career in the BPO industry.

- **Local leadership** – For many years, sites were managed by expatriates, but now the original agents have been mentored and trained to take the reins. Knowing the local culture, wages, attrition, and trends allows for a much shorter cultural learning curve.

- **Cost savings** – It is reported that cost savings can be up to 40-60% compared to U.S.-based companies.

CHALLENGES:

- **Civil unrest at times** – For example, in 2018, violent protests against the president created a level of unrest and instability that was reportedly the worst it had been in decades. This created issues (both real and perceived) for the BPO industry, specifically with regards to transportation and safety of workers. As with some other countries in Central America, there are travel advisories at times, but that is also the case with many countries from time to time.

- **Experience levels** – While the young age of the workforce has its benefits, there are also

challenges that come with that. As staff are promoted to leadership positions, they have little previous experience in management or in representing brands, so extensive leadership training is required.

- **English and technology education are lagging** – There are reports that English education levels are lagging, so more investment into bilingual programs at schools are needed. Additionally, while customer service skills are a strength, some believe that more technical skills are needed to provide more value to clients.

EGYPT

Egypt has established its position as a popular and fast-growing BPO destination with a projected IT and BPO workforce of 240,000 in 2020. Customer care call center agents are estimated to be approximately 95,000. The International Data Corporation projects that Egypt's information and communication technologies exports, which include BPO and knowledge process outsourcing, will expand to $4.7 billion in 2020. In 2018, Egypt provided BPO services to approximately 100 countries in 20 languages.

BENEFITS:

- **Government investment in telecommunications and technology** - The Egyptian government has invested heavily in upgrading the country's telecommunications network for the implementation of 5G commercial services, resulting in efficient connectivity with more than 60 countries. Government investment has also supported the focus to develop services related to artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things, and big data. For those aggressively pursuing digital transformation, Egypt is an attractive option.

- **Young, educated, and tech savvy talent pool** – It is reported that more than 500,000 students graduate annually from the country's 35 universities and 100 technical institutes, and almost half of these graduates pursue their studies in a field related to the BPO. Government and educational institutes have been focused on creating a sustainable and growing talent pool in information technology, BPO, and knowledge process outsourcing. With a population of 98,000,000 there is little risk in a saturated talent pool.

- **Bilingual capabilities** - Egyptian students are increasingly multilingual with most speaking English and a growing number have skills in French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Arabic.

- **Location** – Egypt is uniquely located between Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. This makes it an appealing location depending on customer location and coverage needs. From an accessibility standpoint, Cairo is much closer to key U.S. and European locations than some competing markets, in some cases by more than 10 hours.

- **Cost savings** – BPOs in Egypt offer up to 40% cost savings compared to U.S. English call centers. Per a recent pricing study (2018) by Ryan Strategic Advisory, Egypt is roughly

on par with India and the Philippines for inbound voice care, while lower than other North African and European nearshore destinations. It also remains notably lower than key demand markets including the U.K. and North America.

CHALLENGES:

- **Location** – While Egypt may be an attractive location for many reasons, it may also represent a challenge depending on specific circumstances. Obviously, it is geographically further from the U.S. than other nearshore options, but closer than other competing offshore options.

- **Transportation infrastructure** – Egypt's transportation infrastructure is a current priority for the government, specifically related to refurbishing roads, ports, and railways. Reportedly, private sector partners are also involved, as outlined in the Transport Master Plan, which details plans for improvement through 2027.

GUATEMALA

Guatemala has a population of 17 million and the largest student population in Central America. The BPO industry employs approximately 42,000 workers and is valued at $700 million.


BENEFITS:

- **Proximity to the U.S.** – For U.S. based companies, Guatemala is a short three-hour flight from many southern U.S. cities and is also in the Central time zone.

- **Affinity for the U.S.** – Similar to Nicaragua, the country has long had economic ties and cultural affinity with the U.S., making it an attractive option for many BPO companies expanding their footprint.

- **Bilingual capabilities** – Neutral accent Spanish and English capabilities, with government and business focus on developing English skills with courses available through private institutions, public universities, and Guatemala Institute for Technical Training.

- **Young and educated talent pool** – With the largest workforce in Central America, 70% of the population are under 30 years old. There are 15 universities with more than 170,000 enrolled students. Call center agents are highly educated and mostly bilingual.

- **Cost savings** – It is reported that cost savings can be up to 50% compared to U.S.-based companies.

CHALLENGES:

- **High crime rates** - Guatemala has one of the highest violent crime rates in Latin America. Some reports indicate that there are issues with police understaffing and corruption, and at times travel advisories exist for travel to the country. But the fact remains that the country is growing in popularity as a desirable market for many BPO companies and one should do their own research as to not rely solely on media reports.

- **English fluency** – Although bilingual, the level of fluency may not be where BPOs might want it. However, as noted above, there is investment and focus on this area
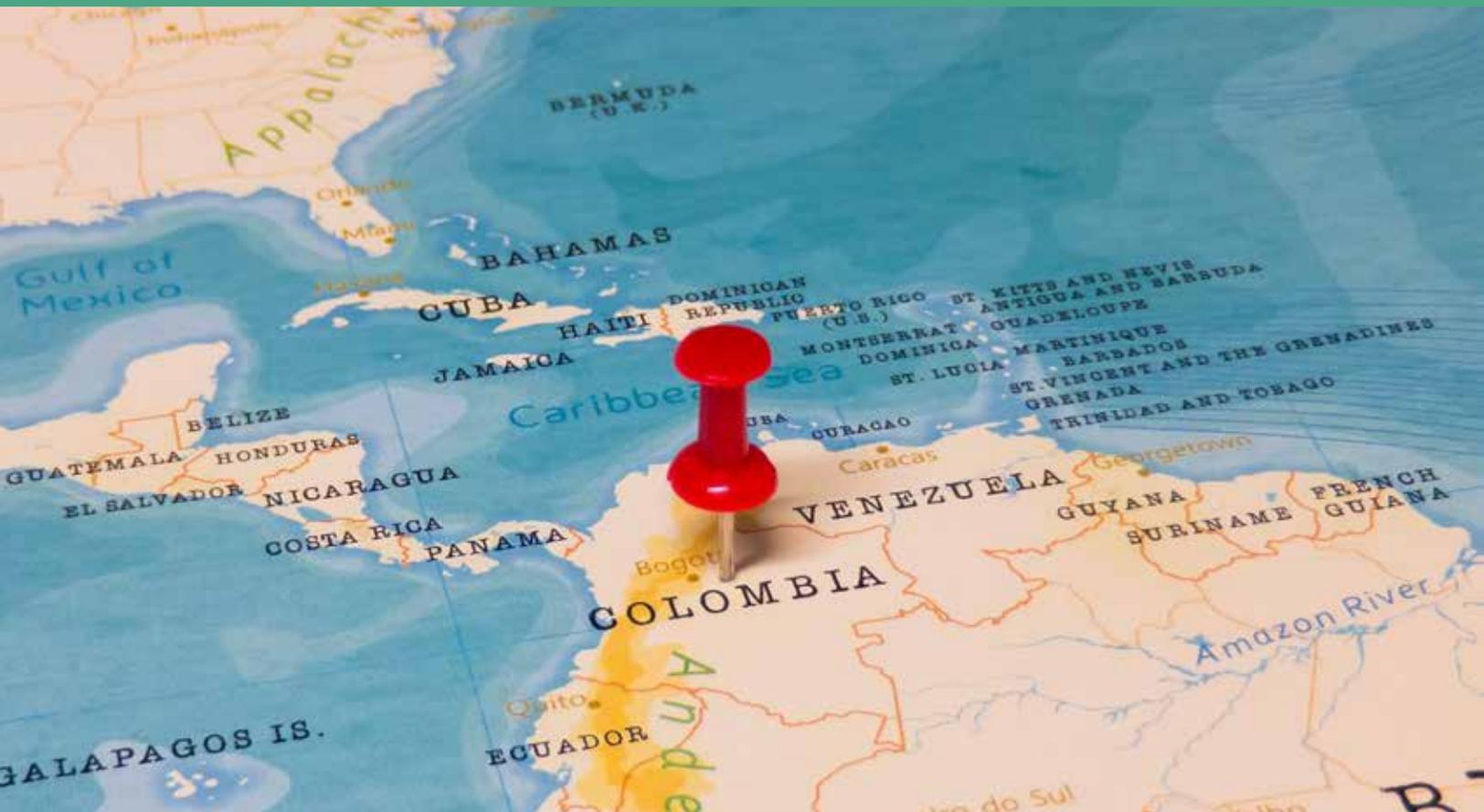
to improve and advance fluency languages. English proficiency may not yet be as high as other regions.

A Good Time to Research Your Options

The Americas, Asia, and Europe all offer unique options for outsourcing needs. This is just a snapshot of a few countries you may be considering, with some commonalities and as well as unique differences. As always, the market you choose to support your business is based on many factors, cost being only one of those. Security/data privacy, technology, work-from-home capabilities, business continuity planning, flexibility, attrition, talent pool, language capabilities, performance, channel support, transportation, safety, and management strengths are all critical factors to consider

in your decision-making process for the market you choose and your specific provider. Additionally, as emerging BPO markets continue to grow in popularity, some challenges exist just as they do in any market, such as risk of labor pool saturation, costs, and travel/in-country safety. But with so many emerging markets, it is a good time to do the research and identify potential opportunities that will best meet your customer experience needs. ✳

Looking for additional BPO site ideas? Check out this recent Execs In The Know blog post with bonus coverage of Colombia.

*https://execsintheknow.com/bpo-site-insights-bonus-coverage-colombia

A Shared Mission to Make a Positive Impact

KIA Online Community Member Spotlight: Paul Brandt   *By Execs In The Know*

Paul Brandt has a powerful vision for what it takes to provide an exceptional customer experience (CX). It starts with creating a superb internal experience – one rooted in both empowerment and accountability. Add to this a purpose-driven culture of empathy, engagement, and attention to detail, and Paul believes an organization has the right foundation to exceed expectations at every touchpoint.

In November, we sat down with Paul to discuss his thoughts on all things CX. A long-time veteran of the CX industry, Paul Brandt's career has stretched across many industries with stops at some of the world's most iconic brands. The conversation touched on a variety of topics including past experiences, the importance of a strong company culture, and Paul's personal motivation, as well as that of his organization.

Currently, Paul serves as the Chief Experience Officer at Loanpal – a purpose-driven financial services company that helps customers achieve a more sustainable lifestyle.

EXECS IN THE KNOW (EITK): Paul, although you are new to Loanpal, you are not new to the role of CX leader. Can you talk about how you first got involved in the industry, your experiences, and how they have shaped your view of what CX success looks like?

PAUL BRANDT: By trade, I started my professional career as a systems engineer, designing and building applications and systems. The key to building a world-class system is to really nail the requirements and use those to build an amazing user experience. I was versed in various technologies and industries, but I became more entrenched in the systems underlying contact center infrastructure … things like telephony, Workforce Management, Knowledge Management, CRM tools, etc.

As I got further along in my career, I became aware of a specific trend. It seemed the primary focus of many organizations was meeting deadlines, and often at any cost. All too often, the deadlines were some arbitrary date, selected with no real sense of planning behind it. Regardless, these arbitrary dates were what drove decisions, like de-scoping requirements, etc. This usually meant that the end product was rolled out with a less-than-stellar user experience, and thus disappointed. Obviously, that was not ideal. So, I started to become more of a vocal advocate for not only better planning, but for ensuring the user experience was protected. This naturally led me into the broader CX world. Fast forward to now, and I'm more passionate about delivering an extraordinary CX than I've ever been!

Looking back, I've been fortunate to be mentored by so many incredible CX leaders and I've learned from all those experiences. What stands out to me is that regardless of the industry or brand, the basis for delivering an extraordinary customer

experience is the same – treat others the way you want to be treated. I truly believe too many companies overthink it and make it much more complicated than it needs to be. We're all customers in our everyday lives and I know how I want myself and my loved ones to be treated, so that should be the foundation for the CX we provide at Loanpal.

EITK: It's clear that finding yourself at a purpose-driven organization is important. Why Loanpal? What is the mission, and why is it important to you?

PAUL BRANDT: I believe climate change is one of the biggest problems facing our planet – if not THE BIGGEST. It literally affects every living organism on Earth. No one is left untouched by its effects. Climate change is the great equalizer. It doesn't care about economic class, race, age, nationality, gender, political affiliation, etc. We are all equally impacted.

The focus for Loanpal is the same as it has always been – to be a provider of solutions to the problem of global warming. One of the ways we do this is by making green technology (like solar power) more accessible to homeowners through innovative financing options. These activities enable us to tackle another serious issue facing the world – the availability of clean drinking water. In partnership with Givepower, (https://givepower.org/) Loanpal is changing lives by bringing access to clean drinking water to several developing regions around the world.

Ultimately, the scope of global climate change requires a set of solutions of equal size. For us, myself included, the next level is to continue to grow and scale so we can be a positive force on a grand scale.

EITK: When it comes to creating an exceptional experience for customers, which ingredients are essential from your perspective? What are some CX "must-haves," and even some CX "nice-to-haves"?

PAUL BRANDT: For those interactions that are person-to-person, it starts with hiring the right people. Having the right attitude and shared

values is so important. We can train anyone from a skills perspective for the tools and systems they'll use, our internal policies and procedures, etc. It's much more difficult to train for attitude.

For person-to-AI interactions, or self-service, it really needs to be easy and human-like. No one likes getting caught in "bot hell" with endless decision trees and circular answers. This also includes having the ability to easily and quickly access a live agent if needed.

I also believe you have to meet the customer on their terms, in their preferred channel. If you have a customer that prefers live chat, but you only offer phone service, then there's a high probability that customer will look for a company that offers their preferred channel.

Finally, I would say prove to your customers that you value them! There are many ways of doing this, but one of the easiest, but often overlooked, ways is by personalizing your interactions with them. If you truly know your customers, then communicate with them on a personal level. No one likes standard form letters that start "Dear Customer." All that does is show me that you don't value me.

EITK: Can you talk a little bit about how this translates into Loanpal's company culture?

PAUL BRANDT: To me, culture is critical. I'm a huge believer that one of the differences between an average, good, and a great company is the underlying culture. From my perspective, this goes back to what we were talking about with regards to the CX – starting with how people are treated. Same goes from a culture perspective. It's the internal shared values of a group, collectively coming together for one mission, one set of goals, and how we treat each other to get there. I think it's absolutely critical to invest in our culture by making sure we're growing our culture the right way and that we're holding each other accountable, including our leadership.

EITK: Can you describe your team structure and how you bring Loanpal culture to a remote workforce?

PAUL BRANDT: My team consists of roughly 100 people and growing. We were very much an office-based organization. Now people are allowed to go in the office if they want to (with some constraints), and we do some in-office onboarding. But the vast majority of my team is working from home.

Going to a Zoom-based, virtual environment was not natural for a lot of our folks. One of the things we tried to do is be very intentional about what folks miss in an office environment. We didn't want to lose the interactions our folks were used to (and liked) at the office, so we made sure to bring these things into our virtual environment. Those human interactions – the "watercooler moments" in the breakroom, the flybys of someone's desk, etc. – are a lot harder to do over Zoom. But some of the things we do is schedule "non-meetings" … things like fun activities and talking about things not necessarily work-related. We have themes as well, maybe a theme where everyone wears a favorite hat, or where everyone brings a favorite mug.

EITK: As someone who believes an extraordinary CX begins with an extraordinary Employee Experience, how does your team go about creating extraordinary experiences for Loanpal employees?

PAUL BRANDT: It goes back to our mission. Loanpal is the leading financial world-positive lender tech company, where we provide financing options for those who dream of living a more sustainable lifestyle. This collective mission of making a positive impact on our planet is shared by all Loanpal team members. It's something we all rally around and it drives everything we do. An example of how this comes to life at Loanpal is that we allow Team Members to participate in treks with the

nonprofit foundation, GivePower. The work they do is really amazing, installing solar and solar-powered clean water systems for communities in need around the world. Employees have helped install these systems all over Africa, Nepal, Haiti, Ecuador, and more. Seeing the difference electricity and clean drinking water make for a community in need is a life changing event.

EITK: This past year saw a deluge of urgent initiatives in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Aside from the obvious shift to work-from-home (WFH), which projects do you think warranted the most urgency, and have had (or will have) the most positive impact on the customer experience?

PAUL BRANDT: You're right on the most obvious being WFH, but I don't think this should be overlooked. Before COVID-19, many companies

were skeptical of going to a WFH environment but have since been forced to go down this path. For us and many others, the shift to WFH has been, by just about every measure, a resounding success. One of the benefits is that it allows companies to expand their talent pool by no longer being tied to a specific geography or office location.

From a CX perspective, it's allowed companies to really shine and show that they are still there to serve their customers. Everyone has been affected, so having that reassurance is something many people need.

This pandemic has also forced many companies to completely re-evaluate internal procedures and think through how to streamline and eliminate unneeded bureaucracy, among other things. In many cases, companies needed to do this to simply survive.

All that said, we have some new and exciting initiatives to announce, but I can't exactly say what those are right now. We're very excited to share these in the first quarter of next year, so stay tuned.

EITK: As a self-proclaimed "CX Junkie," what gets you most excited about this line of work, and what do you look forward to most in your day-to-day?

PAUL BRANDT: It goes back to what we talked about earlier — the human interaction and being empathetic. I love when we're able to solve a complex issue for a customer and you can hear the gratitude in their voice. This give me a great feeling, knowing that we served them and made them feel valued and happy. Those are the feelings I appreciate as a customer, so being able to recreate those feelings really charges me up!

EITK: You have been involved in the EITK community for some time. Not only are you an active contributor to the Know It All (KIA) online community, but you also sit on the EITK Corporate Advisory Board. Can you share what your involvement means to you, and what sort of influence has it had on your approach to CX?

PAUL BRANDT: Yes! I love the EITK KIA community and being able to sit on the board. For me, it's an opportunity to learn and continue to grow. There are so many amazingly smart people to provide help, expert insights, and advice. It's been an immense source of support for me. I know that whenever I'm stuck or need help, I can always lean on the KIA community, or my fellow Corporate Advisory Board members.

> **"I love the EITK KIA community and being able to sit on the board. For me, it's an opportunity to learn and continue to grow. "**
>
> **Paul Brandt, Loanpal**

And I realize we're not quite back there yet, but I should also mention the live events, starting with what are always amazing speakers. They all have such great backgrounds and are so willing to share. Whatever the topic might be, I always learn something of value. But what's also of tremendous value are the small breakout sessions, often about very specific topics. Underlying all this is the energy you find at an EITK event. They are high energy events where everyone shares a common passion — delivering an extraordinary CX. I can't wait to get back soon (fingers crossed).

Thank you to Paul Brandt, Chief Experience Officer at Loanpal, for his leadership, participation, and insights. To connect with Paul, or to participate in the wider conversation, consider joining the Execs In The Know "Know It All" (KIA) Community. The KIA Community is a private, online community designed exclusively for CX Leaders at consumer-facing brands. Come learn, share, network, and engage to innovate. LEARN MORE*.

*https://community.execsintheknow.com/about-kia

Top 5 Customer Experience Trends of 2021

By Lauren Kindzierski of HGS

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the customer experience (CX) industry forever. With rising contact volumes and employee safety of the highest priority, the industry was forced to become a work-at-home (WAH) industry overnight by mobilizing thousands of customer care agents to deliver service from the comfort of their homes in a matter of weeks. Now the real question is: *What happens next?* The answer … no one really knows for sure. However, one thing we do know is that CX professionals are re-prioritizing what is important in 2021. Business continuity, data security, automation, flexible technology, and new business models are at the forefront of everyone's minds.

Here is a breakdown of the top five CX trends you should be thinking about as we move through 2021.

Flexible Working & Hybrid Customer Care Delivery Models

CX professionals and contact center outsourcers around the globe are being forced to rethink their business models. How do we deliver service going forward? Thinking about options such as brick-and-mortar contact centers, WAH, gig economy, or even more attractive, a hybrid model of all three. An example of a hybrid model being tested is built out of smaller Engagement Hubs that look more like collaborative, co-working spaces with a café feel, and less like traditional 500-seat contact centers. The strategy for the Engagement Hub is simple: take advantage of both the benefits of WAH as well as on-site collaboration. Agents can work remotely and then come into the Engagement Hub for collaboration sessions, training, or even when they just need to get out of the house. It's a win-win for businesses and employees. Businesses can take advantage of lower rent payments for smaller spaces, and employees reap the benefits of greater flexibility and, most importantly, less isolation.

The Cognitive Contact Center Movement

As with everything else, COVID-19 has definitely jump-started a movement toward the Cognitive Contact Center. The movement, which is happening in both captive and outsourced centers, is focused on building out a network of bots and brains to quickly deliver the right answer. The movement toward the Cognitive Contact Center starts with designing effortless agent and customer experiences by moving contact center telephony to the cloud, integrating systems, leading with self-service and automation, enabling universal agents, delivering insights, and continuously optimizing to get smarter with every engagement.

The Cognitive Contact Center movement is forcing the CX industry to re-imagine customer experiences and end-to-end customer journeys. The result is a better agent experience that translates into a better and more personalized customer experience. Here's a breakdown on how the Cognitive Contact Center differs from a traditional contact center:

TRADITIONAL CONTACT CENTER

COGNITIVE CONTACT CENTER

**AGENTS NAVIGATE MULTIPLE SYSTEMS.**

Leverages a Cloud Contact Center with all systems integrated, displaying all information on one screen.

AGENTS SEARCH A KNOWLEDGEBASE FOR THE RIGHT ANSWER.

AI will use speech or text to listen to the customer inquiry and serve up the right answer, knowledge base article, or intelligently route to a specific team.

AGENTS VIEW INDIVIDUAL TICKETS – NOT CUSTOMER HISTORY.
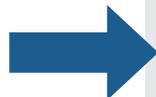
Agents have contextualized views of every customer in one screen which allow for personalization.

AGENTS PROCESSES INCLUDE COPY AND PASTING, MULTIPLE CLICKS, MULTIPLE SYSTEMS, EXTENSIVE TAGGING AND NOTE TAKING.

Intelligent automation will streamline processes, reduce clicks and screen pops, copy/paste, manual tagging, and overall agent effort to reduce inefficiency.

CUSTOMERS NAVIGATE COMPLEX INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE (IVR) TREES, REPEAT THEMSELVES, OR GET TRANSFERRED DUE TO LACK OF AGENT KNOWLEDGE.

AI speech or chatbots make IVR triage simple and conversational for customers. Bots handle the easy inquiries or collect upfront information that gets passed along to agents, so customers don't need to repeat themselves.

CONTACT CENTERS USE OPERATIONAL ANALYTICS TO CAPTURE HISTORICAL PERFORMANCE VIA REPORTS AND DASHBOARDS.

Cognitive Contact Centers use predictive analytics to offer up next-best action or recommendations on each customer record.

DEPLOYS DIFFERENT TIERS OF AGENTS WHO ARE TRAINED ON HOW TO HANDLE ONE SPECIFIC CONTACT TYPES (E.G., SALES, RETENTION, TECH SUPPORT, ETC.) FORCING TRANSFERS TO OCCUR.

Universal or super agents are trained on all contact types and channels thanks to bots and omnichannel cloud telephony platforms helping to reduce volume and making channels easier to toggle between.

Cloud Contact Centers & Omnichannel

Contact centers have evolved over the past 30 years. The era of on-premises telephony systems is coming to an end because of the high upfront cost (capital expenses), and the complexity involved in managing, operating, supporting, and keeping these systems up-to-date. It is also difficult to quickly evolve these systems with the customers changing needs, and when it is possible to change, it ends up being too expensive. These pain points have triggered a massive growth in the movement to cloud contact centers. Everest's Customer Experience Management State of the Market Report 2021 stated, "Cloud infrastructure deployments grew by another 12% in the past year, following a 36.1% uplift between 2018 and 2019. As the momentum continues, cloud-based solutions are forecasted to double from 36.3% to 71.9% in the coming year." Cloud contact center vendors reduce the upfront cost by moving to a monthly cost-per-seat (operating expenses), while eliminating the need for managing onsite servers. In addition, thanks to Application Program Interfaces (APIs), achieving an omnichannel state that also has the benefits of AI chatbots has never been easier.

Work at Home Innovation + Data Security

Unfortunately, there is a greater risk of compromised customer data and security breaches with thousands of agents working remotely from home. However, companies are doubling down on innovation to drive the next evolution of work-at-home data security to mitigate this risk while driving the flexibility and efficiency that remote work offers. Here are a couple of innovations focused on security that exist in the marketplace today:

- Face detection and recognition

- Object detection

- Mobile phone detection

- Unauthorized person detection

In addition, another huge problem that exists is the noise distractions that can happen in the background of an employee working from home, which can include a dog barking, a child crying, street or traffic noise, or even family chatter. To solve this problem, there is an AI-enabled solution from a noise cancelling app called Krisp (https://krisp.ai/) that is able to block out background noise – not only in the agent environment, but in the customer's environment as well.

Lastly, there is the issue of ensuring employee productivity. While working from home has many benefits, contact center leadership does not have the benefit of constant supervision to ensure productivity. To address this issue, innovations include:

- Sleep detection

- Mood and gesture detection

- "Not at desk" detection

Whether or not an organization deploys these innovations depends on what country they are operating in, and the laws and regulations of employee privacy. These tools and innovations, while helpful, could also be deemed as intrusive if not properly deployed. Partnering with your IT and security team to focus on compliance, productivity, and customer data security are going to be critical in 2021 and beyond.

Self-Service & Channel Guidance Approach

Creating an effective customer self-service portal has long been a priority for many companies, but recent events have made it infinitely more imperative. The pandemic and the resulting economic fallout have affected every consumer in some way, creating a host

of reasons why customers might be driven to contact a brand. Perhaps they need to suspend automatic payments, pause a service, or cancel a reservation. These and other urgent customer needs have translated into a staggering spike in volume. According to Nelson Hall, there have been an estimated 30% to 40% more requests (or higher in some cases) for brands in every industry. Most companies are not equipped to deal with such an increase, and especially one that has remained steadily high for a long period of time. The solution many organizations focused on was driving volume to self-service, which has caused an immense focus on the current experience being delivered.

There are many forms of self-service including website FAQs, how-to videos, peer-to-peer

communities, virtual assistants, and more. However, it's not enough to just have these self-service channels available to customers. In order to drive a higher issue resolution rate, CX professionals will need to take a smarter, more strategic self-service approach because 90% of the time, consumers will check a website before calling. A brand's website becomes the starting point for the customer journey. According to Matt Dixon, author of *The Effortless Customer Experience*, "Channel choice was an idea companies invented. Customers don't want choice; they want channel guidance." To Dixon's point, today's customers want customer service to help them get the right answer, fast. It may seem obvious, but it can be challenging to do well.

Designing the web self-service experience around the reasons why customers contact the brand in the first place and driving them to the best channel to resolve their issue is absolutely critical. In some cases, the best channel for resolution may be a virtual assistant or a knowledge base article. And in other really complex cases, it might be a phone number. When guiding customers towards channels, the key focus point for companies will be to reduce customer effort. With wanting the right answers fast, customers also want to expend the least amount of effort. Knowing their channel guidance paths, brands can ensure absolute capability of that channel in being able to solve the particular customer query.

With so much unpredictability happening in the economy, organizations must remain flexible and agile. Today, business success hinges on fast response to global catastrophes, changing market forces, and shifting consumer preferences. Every business decision, technology investment, and strategy you execute in 2021 must be both adaptable and yet innovative. As you re-imagine the agent and customer experiences, think about your approach very carefully and consider ways to reduce risk and cost, but not at the expense of your effortless customer experience.

Lauren Kindzierski
VP of Customer Experience Marketing HGS

Lauren has over 13 years of experience in the customer service industry. Her passion for CX has driven her to develop innovative engagement solutions – including the award-winning HGS EPIC™ social customer care and HGS Text for clients. In 2020, Lauren was recognized by Gulfshore Business as a member of the Top 40 under 40, a special list that highlights a select group of young professionals based in Southwest Florida. In 2016, Lauren received a Silver Stevie Award for Women in Business – Executive of the Year. Lauren holds a Masters degree in Business Administration from Walsh College. To learn more or ask a question, please connect with her on LinkedIn*.

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By Execs In The Know

A Practical Guide to Right-Channeling in 2021

In 2020, most organizations found themselves in a reactive mode out of necessity. Other than the obvious actions organizations were forced to take, like moving almost 100% of staff to a work-at-home (WAH) environment, many organizations also found themselves in the position of "fast-tracking" many strategic initiatives. In fact, survey results from the Customer Experience Management Benchmark (CXMB) Series 2020 Corporate Edition (scheduled for release in February 2021) saw 50% of respondents surveyed indicating their organization had fast-track one or more initiatives. Most notably was the acceleration of digital transformation and channel shifting strategies, with 67% saying they are actively trying to shift traffic to self-service channels.

This probably comes as no surprise and as we now move into 2021. At this moment, right-channeling (versus "channel shifting") is the focus of many organizations, with leaders determining if their current channel strategy best supports their customers. Although 2020 presented many challenges, forward-thinking leaders are pivoting from a reactive to proactive approach, leveraging learnings from 2020 to thoughtfully move to the next phase of their channel strategies.

So, what is right-channeling? It is not simply about contact deflection in the interest of cost savings or as a response to resource constraints. It is not even only about the customer's perception of their channel preference. Right-channeling is about designing service journeys so customers are routed to the channel most likely to provide the best possible engagement, experience, and

resolution. At times, this may even be at odds with the customer's perceived channel preference, so organizations must make it a priority to ensure that customers' experience in the "right channel" far outweigh the perceived benefits of the customer's initial channel preference. And as we all know, customers will not give organizations many chances to get it right, so the foundation and design work is critical with far reaching implications beyond shifting traffic out of necessity. Additionally, 2020 has likely forever shaped how customers interact with brands, so the strategies developed prior to 2020 are likely now obsolete.

This article will provide a roadmap for what should be considered as you continue to pursue right-channeling in your own organization, and the considerations related to people, process, and technology.

First, some important statistics to set the stage:

Source: CXMB Series[1] 2020 Consumer and Corporate Editions
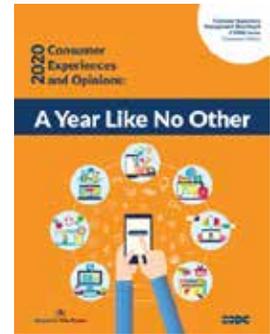
SELF-SERVICE TECHNOLOGY (SST) USE AND EXPERIENCE:

- Over 70% of consumers attempted to use SST in 2020.

- SST first contact resolution was only 52% compared to 74% with human-assisted channels.

- SST top two box customer satisfaction was only 60%.

- Consumers are seven and a half times more satisfied with SST when the issue is resolved.

- Consumers who do not get their issue resolved with SST are 15 times less likely to use it in the future.
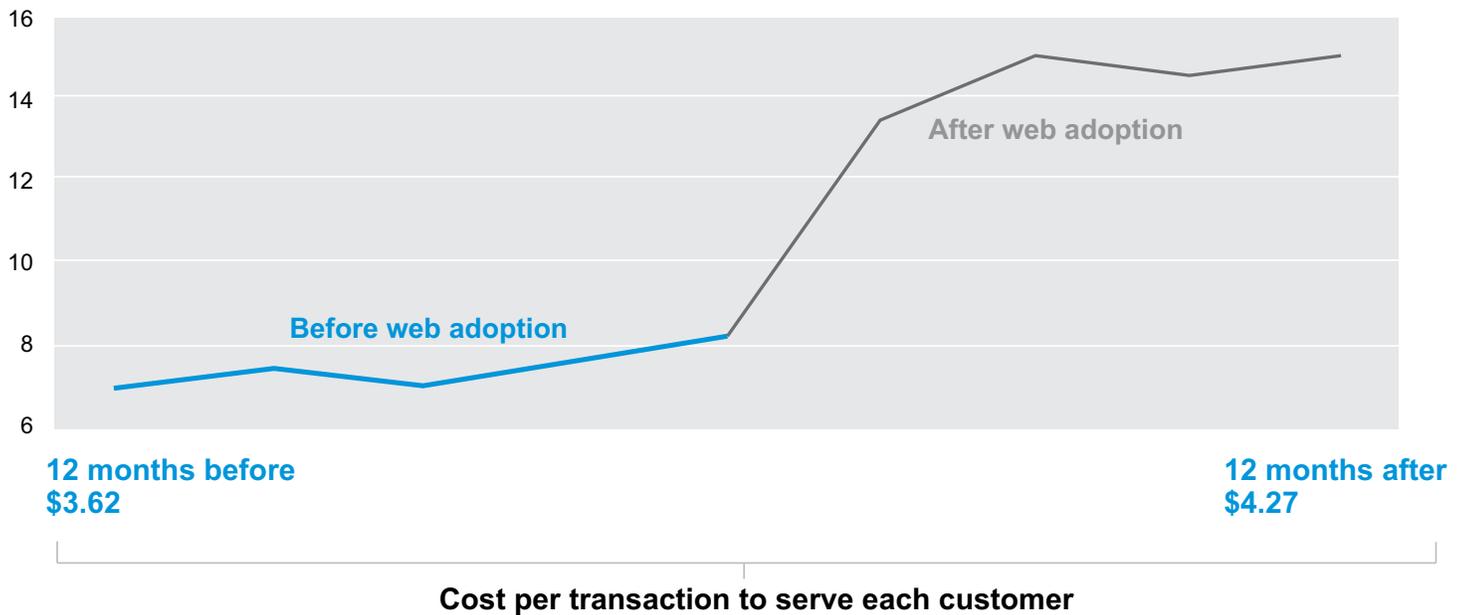
CHATBOT USE AND EXPERIENCE:

- Over 78% of consumers said they interacted with a chatbot.

- Chatbot customer satisfaction is low at only 50%.

MULTI-CHANNEL USE AND EXPERIENCE:

- Over 70% of consumers used multi-channels to solve an issue.

- One out of five consumers who used multi-channels started in SST but only one out of ten were able to resolve their issue with SST (turning to human-assisted when it did not work).

- When forced to use multiple channels, issue resolution is about 30 points worse than when consumers choose, and dissatisfaction is seven times worse.

- Only 10% of companies surveyed believe they do a good job of providing a seamless and easy experience as customers transition between different channels and solutions.

- Over 40% of companies surveyed responded that they have initiatives to create greater consistency across channels and increased ease as they navigate across channels.

The bottom line is that while many initiatives were fast-tracked in 2020 to automate and/or shift traffic to self-service channels, performance and capabilities are still not meeting customer needs in many cases. Additionally, although one of the main objectives is to reduce human-assisted volume, the reality is that poor service design can drive increased contacts, as illustrated in the example on the next page:

Although more consumers attempted to use SST in 2020, **68% say they would still prefer to speak to an agent.** So, as companies look to right-channel and embark on the next stage of their service journey design, it is critical to honestly assess current capabilities, close the gaps, and build the foundational elements that are required. Companies that do not do this run the

Before web adoption

After web adoption

**12 months before
$3.62**

**12 months after
$4.27**

Cost per transaction to serve each customer

McKinsey&Company | **Source: Harvard Business School Research**

risk of damaging the customer's experience to the point where they will be reluctant to utilize the channels that are best suited to resolve their issues.

Critical Components to Right-Channeling

Before we get to the specifics, let's use a home remodel as an example to set the stage. It is quite possible to add on to or renovate a home in a piecemeal fashion, without knowledge or thought given to long term goals like how the homeowners utilize their space, the market (customer) demand, and return-on-investment (ROI). While sometimes successful, often costs exceed budget and the end result does not meet expectations. In short, no one wins, except perhaps the contractor.

While many organizations quickly implemented automated and self-service solutions in 2020 as a direct result (and necessity) of the pandemic,

now is the time to take a step back before investing further in digital transformation and right-channeling efforts. One size does not fit all, and just because you can deflect or automate does not always mean you should, particularly if the experience and resolution capabilities are poor, or your customers are not ready for it. So, like remodeling a home, there are no shortcuts to achieving long-term success and satisfaction.

1) **ESTABLISH AND ALIGN ON OVERALL CORPORATE AND CX DIRECTION.** Senior leaders must all be on the same page with the long-term CX objective, and it must align with the organization's overall corporate direction and mission. All stakeholders must know where the company is headed to ensure service design and channel strategy is aligned with it. If all stakeholders do not know where you are headed, it is difficult to build and execute the plan that will get you there.
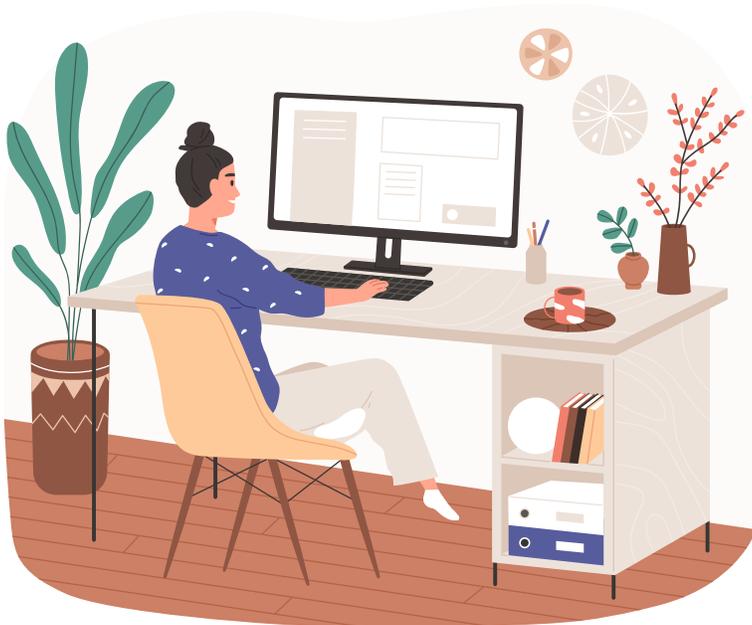
2) **GET SMART(ER) ABOUT YOUR CUSTOMERS.** What you think you knew about your customers at the beginning of 2020 may very well have changed. To design and create service journeys that enable resolution, engagement, and loyalty via the right channels, you must know who your customers are, what they want, and what their digital behavior might look like. This may involve:

   a. **Defining personas and customer segments** – Who are they? What is their level of comfort (and use) with digital channels?

   b. **Interaction types by persona / segment** – Why are they contacting you? What is the level of complexity of their issues and what is the breakdown of those contact types?

   c. **Channel preferences** – Even if your eventual service design might not match to each customer's preference, it is important to understand their current preferences so you can set the right expectations and ultimately deliver greater value. **Eighty-two percent of companies surveyed believe they have a good understanding of which channels customers prefer to use, yet only 37% believe they offer support in preferred channels.** The only way to know this is to ask them directly based on interaction types. It should be noted again that your customers' preferences may be directly influenced by your current channel availability and/or performance. If customers have a bad experience in a channel, they will be reluctant to try it again.

   d. **Experiences** – What is their current level of satisfaction with you by channel and by interaction type?

3) **IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE SERVICE JOURNEYS.** The work needs to be done to identify all service journeys and prioritize those with the greatest impact. This means identifying which journeys are most important related to cost and value to the organization, the complexity involved in improving the journey, performance (volume, satisfaction, and resolution), and how important the journey is to the customer. All service journeys are not created equal, and the ROI to the company and the customer must be carefully considered to determine where to invest resources and budget.

4) **MAP AND DESIGN PRIORITIZED SERVICE JOURNEYS.** Many organizations were forced to implement/expand new technologies and channels in 2020, sooner than perhaps they had planned. It is more important than ever to now take the time to map the journeys prioritized in Step 3, based on and agreed upon direction and a solid understanding of customer personas, preferences, and experiences (Steps 1-2).

a. **Current state mapping** – Before getting to a design phase for the desired state, it is important to understand where you are. Put yourself in the customer's shoes and map their end-to-end experience for each prioritized journey, including their entry point, the resolution point, the ease (or difficulty) navigating across channels, experience with self-help or human assisted channels, consistency of experience and information, and overall effort involved. Where are the gaps? Where can the journey be simplified? Is technology or agent skills/knowledge lacking?

b. **Desired state mapping** – This is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. You have mapped your current state – now where do you want to go? What should your service design look like for each journey and persona, and which channel approach allows you to not only resolve customer issues better and faster, but also create opportunities for you to engage with customers and drive loyalty? According to this article[2] McKinsey & Company, "a best practice is to design primary service journeys for each segment, using contact volume distribution and persona profiles that differentiate by digital behavior to determine engagement strategies and the necessary investments in each channel. For customers who are more tech savvy, the goal might be to promote online self-service and automated tools for basic tasks such as payments and installation updates. For those that require a highly skilled live agent, the right engagement approach can turn a potential issue into an opportunity to strengthen customer relationships."

c. **Examples of questions** you might ask yourself as you are designing these journeys and determining the appropriate channel approach:

i. If a digital or self-help channel is best suited for that journey, how do you ensure the customer reaches that channel first, but also has ability to easily navigate to a live channel if needed?

ii. Can you be proactive, identifying issues before they occur and reach out to customers before they contact you? For example, many retailers are experiencing longer than usual shipping delays. Instead of waiting on customers to reach out for status, they are sending automated texts or emails with regular status updates.

iii. Are there more complex service journeys that require specialized support and therefore need to be routed to a specific team immediately?

iv. Do you have opportunities for personalization depending on the journey? For example, consider a long-term customer who has purchased the same item consistently - perhaps there are opportunities to offer them a discount on their next contact.

v. Perhaps routing based on sentiment analysis is an option, where your technology can identify an upset customer (or key words) quickly and either route to a specific team or provide agents support in how best to help them.

5) **IDENTIFY THE FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS REQUIRED.** To implement your right-channeling approach and service design strategy, more than just channel development is required. You must carefully consider each of the following:

a. **Culture** – Related to Step 1 (aligning on corporate and CX direction), your culture must match your strategy. All levels of the organization must be on the same page and understand the objective.

b. **People** – While your strategy may be focused on automation and digital transformation, you cannot underestimate the "people" side of the strategy. Although you may be shifting interactions to digital channels, your people will play an important role. For example:

i. **Organizational structure** – Many organizations still operate in silos. Leading companies will make a shift to a more holistic approach, with cross-functional teams working in tandem to create and manage CX.

ii. **Agent skills** – As discussed in the McKinsey & Company article referenced earlier, the role of the agent will continue to evolve. As agents handle more complex interactions, the skills required will change. Empathy will be more important than ever, they will need to require even greater problem-solving skills, and will likely need to be more technologically savvy to work with multiple systems and technologies. Additionally, as WAH will likely continue, this implies agents who can work remotely and more independently are needed.

iii. **Management and supervisory skills** – As agent skills evolve, so too will management and supervisor skills. Supervisors must be effective at managing remote agents. They must also be skilled at understanding data and connecting the dots to drive performance.

c. **Process – Underlying operational processes are critical to the success of any service design and channel strategy.**

i. **Measurements and data** – You cannot manage what you do not measure. So, meaningful targets must be established, data must be readily available, and robust analysis consistently conducted. The ability to measure performance at the channel level and end-to-end will be necessary.

ii. **Performance improvement approaches** – A solid approach to identifying performance issues (across channels) and a structured methodology for implementing corrective actions is critical.

iii. **Change management** – With the rate of change only accelerating, a solid change management and communications process is a key component.

iv. **Workforce management** – For human assisted channels, organizations need to recognize that these interactions may take longer to solve. This needs to be considered when staffing and scheduling.

v. **Quality monitoring and coaching** – With staff working at home, the quality process is important, along with effective coaching.

6) **IDENTIFY AND BUILD TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE.** Obviously, technology is a significant driver of any channel strategy, and the return must justify the investment. But assuming you have done the work to identify the right channel strategy to maximize engagement/experience/resolution, these technologies could come into play depending on budget, strategy, and priorities:

a. Omnichannel infrastructure focused on seamless navigation across channels and easily accessible data by agents.

b. New or expanded human-assisted channels, such as chat or mobile.

c. New or expanded SST channels.

d. AI-powered chatbots (agent and customer-facing) – Fifty-seven percent of the organizations surveyed for the CXMB Series 2020 Corporate Edition said they are most invested in chatbots/AI, followed closely by Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

e. Sentiment analysis, which is something that is nice to have depending on strategy.

f. Cloud-based routing.

g. Ability to proactively identify issues and push updates/information.

h. WAH tools and technology like security, remote coaching/training, quality monitoring, and screen capture.

7) **TEST AND REPEAT.** Change is happening at a rapid pace, so organizations need the ability to design and test quickly. Referencing the previously shared [article][2] from McKinsey & Company, "tactics such as design thinking and ideation sessions with customers can structure these interactions; industry best practices show that customer-experience labs, which are built like innovation centers with customers and employees jointly designing journeys, can support the quick implementation and live-testing of prototypes with customers. This rapid, iterative approach can be summed up as, Test, fail, adapt." Regardless of where you are with your testing capabilities, the point is to ensure you have the ability to test before launching at a large scale.

2021 – A Defining Moment in CX

Designing service journeys and right-channeling takes work. The good news is that 2020 should provide organizations with significant learnings and data to innovate, refine, and accelerate. Customers are interacting with brands very differently, and this will have a lasting impact. Although the shift to self-help channels has accelerated for many, the importance of the "human factor" has never been greater. To differentiate as an industry leader in 2021, organizations must take the time to understand where their customers are, identify the pain points and design journeys that lead to fast and frictionless resolutions, while also enabling engagement and personalization.

Sources:

1 https://execsintheknow.com/cxmb-series/

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