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SALES • MARKETING • CUSTOMER SERVICE

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

OUR 15TH ANNUAL RECOGNITION OF INNOVATION AND SUCCESS IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

2018 CRM SERVICE AWARDS

Contents

Vol. 22, No. 3

COVER STORY

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Customer service today is far different than it was 15 years ago when CRM magazine rolled out its first Service Leader Awards. The number of channels, the amount of customer data, the degree of personalization, and the opportunities for self-service are far greater than ever before. Still, the one thing that hasn't changed is the need for companies and their customers to stay in contact, and our 2018 Service Award winners are helping them do just that in exemplary ways. Whether they've been in business for decades or are just starting out, this year's winners continue to demonstrate that there is no shortage of innovation in the contact center space. We honor not just the vendors of the technology that has reshaped the contact center over the past decade and a half, but also some of the companies that have put those technologies to good use.

Because We Thought You Should Know

Although there is some debate as to its true origins, the phrase "knowledge is power" is most often attributed to 16th-century English philosopher and statesman Sir Francis Bacon, although it appeared in his work *Meditationes Sacrae* in Latin ("*ipsa scientia potestas est*") and translates more accurately as "knowledge itself is power."

The immense power that knowledge brings comes when we have a closer grasp of the truth and the reality of the world in which we live. Knowledge is power because it helps us to think for ourselves. When we know all of the relevant facts about a given subject, we are better able to make our own judgments and decisions, without having to rely on others to tell us what to think. That is power.

That's just as true in business as it is in life. To keep customers coming back, businesses today need to know as much as they can about them—their demographics, their buying patterns, their preferences, and their past interactions. Basically, companies need to know what customers are doing, why they are doing it, what motivates them, and how they feel about their products and services.

Much of that knowledge can be found in the typical contact center interaction, though harnessing it is not always easy. As companies struggle today to keep track of their customer interactions, contact center analytics is perhaps one of the most versatile and potentially valuable, though still largely underused, tools they can have at their disposal.

Contact center analytics has been gaining traction in the modern customer service landscape, and that is why we decided to add it as a category in this, our 15th annual installment of the *CRM* Customer Service Leader Awards. Our goal in adding analytics as a category was to help you make sense of the market and the vendor landscape, so we did our usual due diligence and followed up with the top analysts and consultants in the field to get their insights—to tap into their knowledge, if you will.

So just how significant is the market for contact center analytics technology? Research firm MarketsandMarkets currently values the segment at $709.5 million worldwide and projects it to more than double, reaching about $1.5 billion in 2022, growing at a compound annual rate of 15.9 percent. That's still only a small portion of the total contact center software market, which the same firm valued at $13.3 billion last year and projects to reach $29.1 billion by 2022, but it is quite robust nonetheless. After all, a billion and a half dollars isn't exactly pocket change.

A major factor driving the growth of contact center software, MarketsandMarkets maintains, is the need for companies to deliver enhanced experiences to customers through multiple channels, including voice, video, web, chat, email, and social media. The only way for companies to make sense of all of that information is with contact center analytics, which today includes so much more than the basic speech analytics engines that have been in use for decades to pull apart phone conversations. Modern contact center analytics also includes text analytics, desktop analytics, sentiment analysis, social media analytics, predictive and prescriptive analytics, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and a whole lot more.

But while you're investigating contact center analytics and the other eight contact center technologies that we highlight in this month's awards issue, it's also important that you don't focus too much on the data itself; keep your eyes on all of the other things that go with it. Not all customers are comfortable with the amount of information companies have about them, and their trust in these companies to keep that information secure and off "the dark web" is diminishing as identity fraud and data breaches become more common. The article "Companies Face a Consumer Trust Crisis" (page 17) stresses the importance of companies not only doing more to secure the mountains of customer data that they've gathered and analyzed, but being transparent with how they obtained it and what they intend to do with it.

And in their ultimate quest for more knowledge and the power it brings, companies also need to be mindful of yet another age-old adage: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," to quote 19th-century English historian, politician, and writer Lord John Dalberg-Acton.

Leonard Klie
Editor
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> TO KEEP CUSTOMERS COMING BACK, BUSINESSES TODAY NEED TO KNOW AS MUCH AS THEY CAN ABOUT THEM.

conga®

Conga + Salesforce = An End-to-End Sales Cycle Solution

Sales is a tough gig. Sales pros already face an uphill battle in trying to stand out in a noisy, competitive landscape and trying to demonstrate surplus value to satisfy the evolving demands of today's buyer.

Yet despite the inherent challenges of the profession, many organizations still use tools and processes that make the job even tougher. While platforms like Salesforce have replaced spreadsheets or less sophisticated systems and have dramatically simplified how they manage prospect and customer data, many other critical elements of the sales cycle are still governed by manual processes and disparate systems.

Essential tasks like pipeline projections, proposal and quote generation, and contract negotiation and signatures are largely still done by hand and use a number of systems or tools to do so. So, for example, even a simple update to a proposal or contract has to be made multiple times across several different systems, opening the door for inconsistencies and data errors that can derail sales efforts.

MANUAL PROCESSES AND POOR DATA QUALITY KILL SALES EFFORTS

Sales teams are increasingly recognizing the need for deeper insights into their opportunities, more stringent data governance for greater accuracy, and more efficient processes for addressing prospect needs faster and more thoroughly. In particular, they want to all work from a single source of truth—updated opportunities records within Salesforce—and be able to quickly generate a quote, proposal, contract, or other correspondence with just a few clicks and follow it through to signature and execution.

But for many sales teams, this just isn't possible. They're often working from outdated information in Salesforce because the effort to update each record manually after every task or activity is tedious, time-consuming, and takes

them away from actually selling. And creating correspondence and documents usually involves taking that potentially inaccurate information from Salesforce (or other sources), copying and pasting it to populate documents and emails, which takes even more time away from selling.

In fact, these activities cost the average sales rep as much as two-thirds of his or her day and reduce job efficiency by nearly 20%. In response, many sales orgs are looking outside their standard Salesforce instance to recapture some of that productivity and bolster their sales efforts and with more than 3,000 apps in the Salesforce AppExchange, they have plenty of options.

However, buying new apps to support pipeline reporting, document generation, redlining, and signatures to bolt onto Salesforce can be a dicey proposition. Not only do interoperability concerns mean you'll have to get IT involved to make sure everything is properly configured, but you'll also need to train your entire staff to use each app and adapt your standard workflows accordingly so that they all make sense. Even then, you run the risk of salespeople going off script and employing their own processes because they're not comfortable with or hesitant to change the way they've been working for years.

A NEW APPROACH WITH END-TO-END SOLUTIONS

Fortunately, there's a new—and better—option for sales teams looking to gain insight, speed, and efficiency without completely changing the way they operate. Conga, the leading app developer for Salesforce users, has created a comprehensive suite of intelligent automation (machine learning + automation) software that eliminates many of the most time-consuming aspects of the sales cycle, improves data integrity and accuracy, and shorten sales cycles by up to 50%, according to current users.

Designed specifically with the Salesforce experience in mind, Conga works seamlessly within a Salesforce ecosystem to create an end-to-end solution that enables stronger pipeline management, improved data governance, effortless document generation, and real-time negotiation—all without having to reconfigure your existing sales processes or learn new systems.

Conga automates the most critical elements of the sales process by:

- Compiling data from Salesforce and third-party sources for a 360-degree view of opportunities and more comprehensive account planning
- Providing a library of smart templates for creating custom branded documents such as quotes, proposals, contracts, and addendums that pull information automatically from Salesforce to ensure accuracy and brand consistency
- Enabling online redlining and contract negotiation for faster consensus building and deal closing
- Integrating digital signatures to put the finishing touches on a new business agreement faster
- Updating every activity directly in Salesforce, complete with a fully auditable digital paper trail to maintain visibility, data currency, and compliance with both organizational policy and relevant industry or government regulations.

Combining Conga with Salesforce allows sales reps to spend less time on remedial, repetitive tasks and more time focusing on what they do best—selling and building new relationships. Intelligent automation solutions are the missing link between the sales team you have now and the one you've always dreamed of building. ∎

To learn more about how automation solutions can shorten your sales cycles and position your team for future success, visit **getconga.com** or contact us at **info@getconga.com** for more information.

destination CRM.com VIEWPOINTS

Read the following exclusive essays at www.destinationCRM.com

5 (More) CRM Myths—Busted
As the industry continues to change (quickly), we need to debunk some new myths—ones that can often be traced to outdated ideas about CRM.
LARRY AUGUSTIN, CEO, SUGARCRM

5 Ways Running Marketing Operations Is Like Running a Marathon
Just as efficiency is critical to race preparation, efficient marketing operations are vital for modern marketers, who are tasked with more responsibilities than ever before.
ANJALI YAKKUNDI, PRODUCT MARKETING DIRECTOR, APRIMO

3 Steps to Kick Off Your Customer Journey Initiative
It seems like a daunting project, but getting started is easier than marketers may think. Here's how.
SOPHIE SLOWE, VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGY, KITEWHEEL

Before Choosing an Email Management Vendor, Ask the Right Questions
The onus is on companies to determine whether a cloud-based template management platform is up to the task. Here are the questions that the product, marketing, and tech teams need to ask.
MATT HARRIS, COFOUNDER AND CEO, SENDWITHUS

4 Clear Benefits of a Strong Data Governance Policy
All parts of your business understand the importance of data, so now everyone— from IT to sales and marketing to customer service—should take responsibility for it.
KEVIN MCGIRL, PRESIDENT, SALES-I

Use Social, Collaborative Tools to Reinvigorate Your Sales Team
Building trust, teamwork, and a strong training foundation are among the ways enterprise collaboration and crowdsourcing can position your sales team, and your company, for success.
BRIAN ANDERSON, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, POPIN

4 Steps to Nailing Customer Retention
Holding on to happy, loyal customers is a lot less expensive than trying to acquire new ones. Here's how online retailers can keep theirs around for the long haul.
CASEY GANNON, VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, SHOPGATE

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CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

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CustomerService

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Get your team obsessed with service.

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WFO Solutions Must Be Rebuilt From the Ground Up

A truly multitenant architecture—supporting cloud, on-premises, and hybrid solutions—is becoming a necessity

WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION suites continue to evolve to keep pace with the needs of the market, and today that means innovations intended to align WFO suites with the ongoing digital transformation occurring in enterprises of all sizes. What vendors are discovering is this: Architecture matters.

Most WFO suites on the market have been cobbled together through acquisitions and partnerships, and vendors have not made the changes necessary to have a single and standard administration environment or to enable the flow of data between modules. It's time for vendors to undertake a total rewrite of what are now 20- to 30-year-old architectures. This is a necessity in the era of agile development and especially for vendors that want to deliver a truly multitenant architecture to support public, private, and hybrid cloud deployment options.

FLEXIBLE DEPLOYMENT MODELS ARE A MUST

Most WFO solutions are now available in the cloud, although buyers should be aware that the path to the cloud varies among providers. For their part, WFO vendors should offer solutions for both public and private clouds as well as on premises. Companies might want to have a private cloud with just their own solutions, or realize the cost benefits from using a public cloud model.

In any case, WFO vendors need to rebuild their architecture from the ground up to take advantage of recent technological innovations for databases and integrations and make use of the many performance and reliability tools available from public cloud vendors such as Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Microsoft Azure. An even bigger challenge is the need to support different deployment models for the various modules in their WFO suites and allow customers to transition easily from one approach to another.

> A NEW ARCHITECTURE MAKES IT EASIER FOR WFO VENDORS TO QUICKLY ADD FUNCTIONALITY TO THEIR SUITES.

BUILDING ENTERPRISE WFO SUITES

For most of the past 30-plus years, WFO applications were intended for contact centers. Staff optimization is no longer an issue limited to contact centers; it's a primary goal for most enterprises. Enterprises are looking for systems and best practices to help them improve the performance of all of their units, including their branches and back-office departments. They need solutions built to address the diverse needs of these departments, not retrofitted contact center modules. WFO vendors are starting to address these needs, and DMG expects to see continued innovation aimed at incorporating tools to handle the diverse and growing WFO needs of the broader enterprise. A new architecture can help in this regard, making it easier for WFO vendors to quickly add functionality to their suites. It also greatly reduces the cost of making system enhancements, which is important for WFO vendors' ongoing viability and profitability.

EXPANDING THE PURPOSE OF WFO SUITES

As noted, WFO suites can help companies of all kinds, not just contact centers, optimize, analyze, and engage employees and customers. But vendors are not stopping there. The most recent innovation has been adding robotics to WFO solutions, bringing the vendors full circle to their original mission of optimization. The difference is that robotics can automate tasks and improve productivity and quality across suites while analyzing and engaging employees and customers at the same time.

These are good signs, because for the WFO sector to survive and thrive, it must transform. And the process is already under way. There is a great deal of work to do, and there is a lot at stake. WFO functionality is as essential as ever; most organizations recognize the need for these tools. The WFO vendors that will lead the market into the future are those that reinvent themselves and their solutions, starting with a new architecture that positions them to respond quickly to changing market needs. DMG expects to see major developments in the WFO sector during the next five years. Each vendor controls its own destiny, and it's up to each of them to move ahead with the changes necessary to ensure the industry's continued viability. Ⓡ

Donna Fluss is president of DMG Consulting. For more than two decades she has helped emerging and established companies develop and deliver outstanding customer experiences. A recognized visionary author and speaker, Fluss drives strategic transformation and innovation throughout the service industry. She provides strategic and practical counsel for enterprises, solution providers, and the investment community.
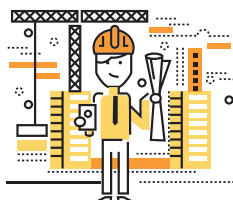
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT:
CRUCIAL FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE SUCCESS

Providing answers to customer questions quickly and correctly has been crucial for good customer service for as long as there have been customers. The advancement of the discipline of knowledge management (KM) was completely transformative to the importance of customer service in business strategy today.

In the following special report, two of the foremost pioneers of KM as a crucial enabling technology for customer service give you their recommendations for fast-tracking KM initiatives and a preview of the next transformational period in KM's development—the deployment of artificial intelligence.

Bob Fernekees
VP/Group Publisher, CRM Media
Information Today, Inc.

VERINT®

Ten Reasons to Fast-Track Your Knowledge Management Program

Knowledge management has been used in customer service for decades, but the changing demands of today's contact center have only heightened the need. Following are 10 reasons knowledge management is a crucial component in today's customer service environments:

1. Channel Proliferation – As customers communicate with organizations on a growing number of channels, it's critical to supply a single source of the truth, so employees can provide consistent answers to customer questions across phone, email, chat, SMS and social media. Having a central knowledge base accessible across channels eliminates silos of information that can lead to different answers for the same question.

2. Self-Service – The majority of customers prefer to find answers to questions on their own. Since there is no employee involved in these transactions to provide answers, an easy-to-navigate knowledge base is essential to give customers a place to search for answers on their computers or mobile devices.

3. Issue Complexity – One side effect of the popularity of self-service is that the issues that do arrive in the contact center tend to be the most difficult and complex. Because of this, agents are unlikely to know the answers and will rely heavily on a knowledge base to find information. A knowledge base can contain literally millions of articles, across a wide variety of topics. Even if an agent has never taken a certain type of call, he/she can resolve the issue with confidence.

4. Trusted Content – Social content from forums and online communities can be a plentiful source of useful information, but customers can never be sure if the information is accurate. By promoting social content into a structured knowledge base, customers can trust that the information is accurate and up to date.

5. Millennial Workforce – As the contact center workforce is increasingly composed of millennials, the tools and tactics to make them successful must also evolve. This younger workforce is accustomed to looking up information rather than memorizing, and will rely heavily on a knowledge base to find answers for customers.

6. Pace of Change – When issues arise, up-to-date information is paramount. Weather issues, communication outages and software bugs can all generate an influx of calls demanding answers with the very latest information. A knowledge base gives employees a place to find the most current information on a frequently changing situation.

7. Speed of Answer – Everyone is looking for shorter handle time. Customers are happy to get answers quickly, and organizations get the cost savings they require. However, shorter handle times are only valuable when the call is still resolved with complete, accurate information. A knowledge base provides a quick way to get reliable answers to even the most complex questions.

8. Any Agent, Any Call – Specialized agents can cause frustration and inefficiency as customers get transferred from employee to employee to get an answer. When each agent can access the full breadth of information in a central knowledge base, there is less need to specialize agents for tier one calls. Transfers can be reduced, resulting in happier customers and a more efficient contact center.

9. Employee Engagement – It's important to provide the tools for employees to feel engaged, do their jobs well, and feel confident and motivated in their work. A comprehensive knowledge base is a very useful tool that empowers employees and enables them to answer a broad range of customer questions, even on topics they may not have encountered before.

10. Employee Turnover – Employee turnover can be extremely costly. Each time a new employee is onboarded, weeks of time are spent training him/her on the vast array of information required to help customers. A knowledge base that contains the information needed to answer customer questions can significantly reduce training time, allowing trainers to focus on soft skills and customer engagement.

Providing top-notch customer service isn't easy, but with a tool such as knowledge management, you can empower your customers and employees with the information they need, when they need it. Since customer service issues will only grow in both number and complexity, *now* is the time to ensure your customer service operation is equipped with a knowledge management system. ■

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The Transformational Value of Knowledge Management and AI for Contact Centers

What is the secret to customer loyalty? The answer straight from ~50,000 consumers, per a massive survey conducted by Corporate Executive Board, was: Make it easy to get service.

In order to find the recipe for "ease," Forrester Consulting asked 5,000 consumers (on our behalf) about their biggest hurdles to getting customer service. The answers (by far) were lack of contact center agent knowledge and inconsistency of answers across touchpoints, followed by the inability of websites to deliver answers. With a common "knowledge and intelligence" theme running across the pain points, the panacea is clearly a unified omnichannel knowledge management (KM) system, infused with AI.

Done right, KM and AI can transform contact centers. Here are sample metrics and real-world examples from our Global 2000 clientele.

FIRST-CONTACT RESOLUTION (FCR)

FCR is an important customer-focused contact center metric that significantly reduces customer effort. While FAQs, search, and topic-tree browsing help with simple queries, more sophisticated technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) can help resolve issues of medium to high complexity at the very first contact. When a premier telco client made it mandatory for agents to use eGain's AI and knowledge solution to solve customer problems, FCR improved by 23% and NPS by 20% across 10,000 agents and 550 retail stores.

AVERAGE HANDLE TIME

(AHT) As you know, AHT without FCR increases customer effort and defection. Happily, KM, when done right, can transform both of these seemingly conflicting metrics. A premier banking client reduced AHT by 67% while improving FCR by 36% by leveraging eGain AI to guide customers to answers. In fact, advisors in its contact center used the same technology to guide customers through processes such as account opening and other banking transactions while complying with industry regulations!

ANNUAL TRAINING HOURS (ATH)

How do you reduce training needs without compromising service quality? Again, KM delivers the answer. A global banking client soared to #1 in customer service NPS and reduce training time by 50%, even as it expanded to 11 countries with mostly novice agents in its workforce! With the same technology, a telco reduced induction training time by 43% and time-to-competency by half. Note that reducing the need for training also cuts shrinkage, which is the amount of time lost due to agents' breaks at work, sick time, training time, holidays, etc.

CALL/EMAIL/CHAT DEFLECTION

One of the popular metrics for measuring digital self-service effectiveness is the number of deflections from agent-assisted channels. Using contextual self-service, with robust KM as its backbone, a media and legal services giant deflected 70% of requests for email and chat customer service.

PRODUCT RETURNS/EXCHANGES

No-charge product returns or exchanges has become standard policy in many branded manufacturing firms, retailers, and telecoms due to customer expectations and competitive pressures. Called No Fault Found (NFF), many of these returns and exchanges are unwarranted where the products were not defective but the contact center could not solve the customer's problem. NFF costs organizations tens millions of dollars each year, but here's the good news: KM and AI can address this issue head on--one of our large telco clients has reduced unwarranted handset exchanges by 38% while improving FCR by 19% and call quality by 23% in its contact center.

DISPATCH AVOIDANCE RATE

Depending on the industry, each truck roll or engineer callout for issue resolution can cost from a couple of hundred to a few thousand dollars. With omnichannel AI deployed in the contact center and on the website, a water utilities client saved ~$5M per year by reducing unnecessary engineer callouts, while improving FCR by 30%!

Some technologies improve customer service on the margins, some enable incremental improvement, but only a handful actually transform it— Knowledge management, infused with AI, clearly falls into the last category. ∎

About eGain

eGain customer engagement solutions power digital transformation for leading brands. Our top-rated cloud applications for social, mobile, web, and contact centers help clients deliver connected customer journeys in an omnichannel world. To learn more about us, visit **www.eGain.com**.

There's a Consumer Trust Crisis.
Smart Firms Will Shape CX to Address It

*Being transparent and offering authentic experiences
can help companies break through the murk*

AROUND the world, customer experience (CX) quality has largely stalled. Forrester Research's 2017 Customer Experience Index for U.S. brands revealed a CX leadership gap—not a single company emerged this year as the benchmark for "excellent" CX. In fact, CX quality worsened across the board.

The CX Index reveals troubling results:

• **Losses were broader and deeper than gains.** Twice as many companies sank as rose: Of 314 brands in the CX Index, 49 lost points and only 24 gained points. Overall, companies that worsened lost an average of five points.

• **Excellent scores disappeared, while the number of poor scores increased.** The number of companies in the excellent category fell to zero, and the percentage of companies with poor scores rose from 20 percent to 23 percent.

• **Elite brands' scores stayed flat—again.** The top 5 percent of companies across all industries are considered "elite brands." Of these 18 elite brands, 16 showed no statistically significant score change.

• **Nearly all industry front runners dropped points as their CX improvement stagnated.** Seven of 21 industries had new top brands, but none of the seven were catapulted by major gains. In fact, in four industries, the previous highest-scoring brand sank; the new leader merely remained flat.

So why this stagnation? Multiple data sources show that customer confidence is up, spending is up, and expectations are rising as consumers interact with brands more than ever. But the data also shows that trust in companies has dropped precipitously.

Four factors have sparked this collapse in trust: (1) more frequent and extreme misleading or false statements from politicians and executives; (2) stealth propagandists planting false claims that millions of consumers propagate; (3) the power of platforms like Facebook, Google, and Twitter to speed up and scale up the spread of falsehoods; and (4) the belated and (so far) weak response of these tech giants in acknowledging and remedying their role in dispersing disinformation.

The best companies will address the trust crisis head on in 2018 by responding in the following ways:

Companies that own their values will break away from those that merely borrow them. Consumers expect companies to demonstrate authenticity, transparency, and accountability. Those that deliver CX rooted in core values will draw customers; on the other hand, those that borrow their values and stage their superficial experiences will continue to be called out for all to see across social media.

Smart companies will deepen customer understanding beyond the low-hanging fruit. While 88 percent of companies now use journey mapping and other methods to find and fix glaring problems, many run into large-scale impediments. CX pros at leading firms will move beyond ad hoc initiatives, probe deeper into root causes, and work to instill the discipline required for outcomes to scale and last.

B2B firms will move from "just selling" to customer success management (CSM). A shift in B2B CX is taking place as firms strive for loyalty by delivering effective, reliable, and trustworthy experiences. CSM practitioners earn trust by strengthening CX management practices to ensure that promises made to clients in the presale period don't fall into a post-sale transition gap. A growing number of B2B companies will start to see CX as no longer merely a nice-to-have but as an absolute survival skill—and the pathway to growth will come through CSM.

Companies will increasingly serve distinct communities rather than the mass market. Jack-of-all-trade brands slipped across the board in our CX Index this year—an indication that businesses struggle more and more to be everything to everyone in the age of the customer. We see specialty brands continuing to raise the bar as new CX leaders emerge by serving narrower sets of customers more deeply.

Consumer trust and CX go hand in hand. As companies recognize the urgency behind rectifying the trust crisis, leaders will rise based on how they respond. The most progressive companies will seize the opportunity to build trust with their customers through authentic brand-rooted experiences. The chance for companies to capture market share by delivering breakaway CX is there for the taking. For companies that engender trust, the customer advocacy and revenue gains will be theirs to reap. ℞

Ryan Hart is a principal analyst at Forrester Research serving customer experience professionals. He focuses on customer-centric service design, mobility, experience creation, localization, branding, organizational transformation, and digital engagement principles.

> CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IS UP, BUT TRUST IN COMPANIES HAS DROPPED PRECIPITOUSLY.

CONFERENCE AT-A-GLANCE

Time		
8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	**REGISTRATION & CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**	

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. — **WELCOME & OPENING KEYNOTE** ■ *Grand South/Central* ■ **Designing Customer Experiences That Matter to a New Generation of Accidental Narcissists** ■ Brian Solis, Altimeter Group

10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. — **KEYNOTE** ■ *Grand South/Central* ■ **Could Millennials Be Your Contact Center's Secret Weapon?** ■ Allyson Boudousquie ■ *sponsored by* CONVERGYS

10:15 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. — **COFFEE BREAK**

TRACK A ■ Strategic Planning ■ *Congressional A*	**TRACK B** ■ Future of Marketing ■ *Congressional B*
10:45 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. — **A101** ■ **Proving the Productivity Impact of CRM** Rebecca Wettemann, Nucleus Research	**B101** ■ **Digital Transformation: Myths & Realities** Ginger Conlon, MKTG insight
11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. — **A102** ■ **Top Tips for Selecting a CRM Solution** Chris Caputo, CATIC	**B102** ■ **The Post-Digital Persona & the New Reality of Marketing** Esteban Kolsky, ThinkJar

12:45 p.m. – 1:45 p.m. — **KEYNOTE LUNCH** ■ *Grand South/Central* ■ **From Onboarding to 'Onbotting': How Different Is a Bot From an Employee?** ■ *Tobias Goebel* ■ *sponsored by* aspect

TRACK A ■ Strategic Planning ■ *Congressional A*	**TRACK B** ■ Future of Marketing ■ *Congressional B*
2:00 p.m. – 2:45 p.m. — **A103** ■ **The Future of CX: Infinite Ambient Orchestration** R "Ray" Wang, Constellation Research	**B103** ■ **The Power of Personalization** Brian Border, Shutterfly
3:00 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. — **SOLUTION SESSIONS** ■ X2CRM	**SOLUTION SESSIONS**
4:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m. — **A104** ■ **Successfully Converting CRM to CEM** Thomas Wieberneit, aheadCRM	**B104** ■ **Blockchain & the CMO: The Next Era of Marketing** Jeremy Epstein, Never Stop Marketing

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. — customer solutions eXpo **GRAND OPENING RECEPTION**

Time		
8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.	**CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**	

8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. — **SD1** ■ *Congressional A&B* ■ **Breakfast With the Influencers Panel** ■ MODERATOR: Paul Greenberg, The 56 Group

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. — **KEYNOTE** ■ *Grand South/Central* ■ **How Artificial Intelligence is Changing the Contact Center** ■ Pasquale DeMaio, Amazon Connec, AWS

10:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. — **BREAK IN THE** customer solutions eXpo

TRACK A ■ Breakout Trends ■ *Congressional A*	**TRACK B** ■ Customer Engagement ■ *Congressional B*
10:45 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. — **A201** ■ **Customer Engagement in the Voice-First Era** Brent Leary, CRM Essentials	**B201** ■ **Reality Isn't What It Used to Be & Neither Is CRM** Kenny Lauer, Rival Theory
11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. — **A202** ■ **The Intelligent Assistance Landscape: Bots, Virtual Agents, & Intelligent Assistants** Dan Miller, Opus Research	**B202** ■ **Organizational Transformation Toward Customer Engagement** Monique Jansen, Buljan & Partners Consulting

12:45 p.m. – 1:45 p.m. — **KEYNOTE LUNCH** ■ *Grand South/Central* ■ **Voice & AI: Bringing Digital Transformation to the Massess** ■ *Allyson Boudousquie* ■ *sponsored by* CONVERGYS

2:00 p.m. – 2:45 p.m. — **A203** ■ **Best Practices for CRM Buy-In** Danny Estrada, E Squared	**B203** ■ **Creating Super Fans in the NBA** Peter Sorckoff, Rakanter
3:00 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. — **SOLUTION SESSIONS** ■ SAP Hybris	**SOLUTION SESSIONS**

3:45 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. — **BREAK IN THE** customer solutions eXpo

4:30 p.m. – 5:15 p.m. — **A204** ■ **People-Centered Internet: It's About Time** Mei Lin Fung & David Bray, People Centered Internet	**B204** ■ **The Nitty Gritty of Customer Engagement: How to Actually Do It** Paul Greenberg, The 56 Group

5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. — **NETWORKING RECEPTION**

Time		
8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.	**CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**	

TRACK A ■ *Congressional A*	**TRACK B** ■ *Congressional B*
9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. — **A301** ■ **Geek Nerd Suit: The Keys to Customer-Centricity Success** Brooke Niemiec, Elicit	**B301** ■ **Authenticity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence** Samantha Stone, Marketing Advisory Network
10:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. — **A302** ■ **Customer Data Platforms for Business Marketing** David Raab, Customer Data Platform Institute	**B302** ■ **Optimizing Personalized Customer Email Messaging** Camilla Lorentzen, KERN, Ksenia Algunova, DIRECTTV NOW, AT&T, Joseph Shannon, American Express

10:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. — **BREAK IN THE** customer solutions eXpo

11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. — **CLOSING KEYNOTE PANEL** ■ *Congressional A* ■ **How Professional Sports Teams Are Leveraging Customer Engagement to Create Fans for Life** ■ Paul Greenberg & Brent Leary

12:30 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. — **LAST CHANCE TO VISIT THE** customer solutions eXpo

1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. — **W1** ■ **Creating a Customer Journey Map** ■ *Meeting Room 9* | **W2** ■ **Planning for CRM Success** ■ *Meeting Room 8*

CRM | 2018
evolution | conference & exhibition

TRACK C ▪ CRM Bootcamp ▪ *Congressional C*

C101 ▪ **Executive Bootcamp, Part 1**
Barton Goldenberg, ISM, Inc.

C102 ▪ **Executive Bootcamp, Part 2**
Barton Goldenberg, ISM, Inc

TRACK C ▪ Sales ▪ *Congressional C*

C103 ▪ **Who's Coaching This Sales Coach?**
Barry Trailer, Sales Mastery

C104 ▪ **Crush Your Pipeline: AI-Enhanced Sales**
Michael Fauscette, G2 Crowd

TUESDAY, APRIL 10

TRACK C ▪ Expert Perspectives ▪ *Congressional C*

C201 ▪ **How SMBs Are Using Technology to Keep Up With Today's Customers** Laurie McCabe, SMB Group

C202 ▪ **Which Technology Will Be Most Disruptive to CRM by 2020? The Vendors Weigh In Panel** Brent Leary, CRM Essentials

C203 ▪ **From Operations to Intelligence: The Continued Evolution of Marketing, Sales, & Customer Technologies** Anand Thaker, IntelliPhi

C204 ▪ **Talent & Organizational Design Considerations for the Engagement Economy**
Bruce Culbert & Debbie Qaqish, The Pedowitz Group

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11

TRACK C ▪ *Congressional C*

C301 ▪ **What You Need to Know About GDPR If You Do Business in Europe** Brent Leary, CRM Essentials

C302 ▪ **Secrets of CRM Success: Going Beyond Technology to Maximize Results With People & Process** Christina Fritsch, CLIENTSFirst Consulting

W3 ▪ **Using Automation to Create Ultra-Personalized Experiences** ▪ *Meeting Room 2*

POSTCONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

WEDNESDAY ▪ 1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

W1 ▪ Creating a Customer Journey Map ▪
Meeting Room 9

Geoff Ables, *Managing Partner, C5 Insight*

One of the top reasons that customer care processes fail is a lack of alignment with the customer's preferred process, and a one-size-fits-all approach. Do you know your customers well enough to know how to design a process that delights them at every step of the process? Join your peers in this workshop as you learn how to understand customer personas and create journey maps to drive more effective customer service, including how to the following: Listen to your customers so they can tell you what their journey looks like; identify what customer personas look like and how they will affect your process and technology decisions; discover the starting point for persona definitions—and how to strategically expand from there; and define a journey map as the foundation of customer experience management processes.

W2 ▪ Planning for CRM Success ▪ *Meeting Room 8*

Rick McCutcheon, *Dynamics CRM MVP, RA McCutcheon Consulting*

Customer relationship management is the business philosophy that lets you know your customers better, share information more thoroughly, and interact more completely. In business this can only be achieved through the integration of people, business processes, and the use of CRM and related technologies. This is a non-technical session designed for business professionals to learn how to plan and implement successful CRM strategies.

W3 ▪ Using Automation to Create Ultra-Personalized Experiences ▪ *Meeting Room 2*

Tyler Garns, *Founder & CEO, Box Out Marketing*

Most marketers are using marketing automation to "spray and pray." They're blasting messages to the masses with decreasing effectiveness. When it doesn't work, they increase the frequency, urgency, and scarcity. All of this turns off customers. When utilized correctly, marketing automation can actually create deeper, more meaningful interactions and relationships that produce more value over time. Garns shows attendees real case scenarios of how effective automation can be utilized to serve customers better and sell more.

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Three Events, One Location!

The ways in which our customers communicate is ever-evolving and encompass a variety of channels—social, mobile, phone, web, email, etc. To go above and beyond with your customer service engagement, it is important to have a wide range of information in order to master each of these channels.

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Identifying personal traits
Reaching a wider IVR user population
Determining if your speech application needs improvement
Extending traditional telephones to behave more like smartphones

To find out more about either of these conferences, visit SpeechTEK.com or SmartCustomerService.com/2018

Keynotes

MONDAY

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Designing Customer Experiences That Matter to a New Generation of Accidental Narcissists

Brian Solis, Principal Analyst, Altimeter, a Prophet Company

10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

Could Millennials Be Your Contact Center's Secret Weapon? *sponsored by* CONVERGYS

Allyson Boudousquie, VP, Market & Product Strategy, Convergys

12:45 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.
KEYNOTE LUNCH *sponsored by* aspect

From Onboarding to 'Onbotting': How Different Is a Bot From an Employee?

Tobias Goebel, Senior Director, Emerging Technologies, Product Management and Marketing, Aspect Software, Inc.

TUESDAY

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

How Artificial Intelligence Is Changing the Contact Center

Pasquale DeMaio, GM, Amazon Connect, AWS

12:45 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.
KEYNOTE LUNCH *sponsored by* CONVERGYS

Voice & AI: Bringing Digital Transformation to the Masses

Allyson Boudousquie, VP, Market & Product Strategy, Convergys

WEDNESDAY

11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

How Professional Sports Teams Are Leveraging Customer Engagement to Create Fans for Life

MODERATORS: *Paul Greenberg,* President, The 56 Group, LLC, & *Brent Leary,* Managing Partner, CRM Essentials

CUSTOMER SOLUTIONS EXPO

Combining the CRM Evolution, SpeechTEK, and Smart Customer Service showcases, this central gathering place features the leading sales, marketing, customer service, and speech recognition solutions. It is the perfect opportunity to meet with C-level executives, industry pioneers, and the technology gurus who help you do your job better. Admission to the expo is free with the purchase of any conference pass or just $95 for Expo-Only access *(when purchased by the March 9 early-bird deadline).*

EXPO HOURS

Monday, April 9
5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Grand Opening Reception

Tuesday, April 10
10:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 11
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

CONNECT!

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In Customer Service, Being Nice Only Goes So Far

Problem solving, rather than relational work, yields higher customer satisfaction

Contrary to popular belief, when customer service representatives smile, apologize, empathize, and repeat positive phrases during interactions with customers, the results are not always positive, according to research conducted at the Robert J. Trulaske Sr. College of Business at the University of Missouri.

Activities like smiling and apologizing, which are considered relational behaviors, actually had a negative impact on customer satisfaction, the research found. These activities do nothing to help customers resolve the issues at hand, and, in fact, when agents engage in them repeatedly, customers begin to question their focus and ability to solve the problem.

Such activities are OK at the beginning of the conversation, when agents need to find out about and understand customers' concerns, but at some point the agents' efforts need to shift toward actually solving the problem. "Customers penalize front-line agents who engage in continued relational work during the middle and end of the interaction by discounting their perceived competence," explains Detelina Marinova, a marketing professor at the University of Missouri and the primary researcher.

Even at the beginning of the conversation, expressing empathy and apologizing should be kept to a minimum; listening

> Even at the beginning of the conversation, expressing empathy and apologizing should be kept to a minimum.

to comprehend the individual nature of the customer problem should be prioritized, she says.

"Our research shows that front-line employees' overreliance on relational work and positive affect backfires and diminishes the efficacy of solving work during problem-solving interactions," Marinova says. "Front-line employees are better served by focusing on solving work as the problem-solving interaction unfolds, even if recovery is not feasible."

And even when agents do get to work on solving customer issues, the positive influence of those efforts on overall customer satisfaction are lessened when

agents spend more time than necessary on relational work, the research also finds.

In conducting the research, Marinova and her team first looked at video footage from about 100 customer interactions filmed for the reality television series *Airline*. The researchers examined

the words, phrases, behaviors, and nonverbal gestures used by airport employees and measured the customer responses based on their facial expressions and other nonverbal cues.

"We examined front-line problem solving in real time during ongoing, face-to-face interactions, in which solutions get developed and negotiated under time pressure—not business as usual [or] straightfoward customer service," Marinova points out.

According to the professor, most of the prior research into this subject did not examine the dynamic nature of customer interactions but instead evaluated consumer responses before and after the interaction through surveys. That prior research led many to conclude that the use of relational behaviors during interactions was a good thing, and thus agents were trained to engage in such behaviors during their interactions with customers.

Today's agents would be better served by being trained in creative problem-solving skills, including the ability to produce multiple solution options, according to Marinova. The "competent and creative" production of multiple solution options that are "meaningful and relevant" to the customer should be prioritized, she says.

As an added bonus, when given a choice of solutions, customers reward problem-solving competence because it "gives them a sense of control over a difficult situation," Marinova points out. For this reason, she advises that companies give customers control in the final phase of the interaction so that they can choose from different solution options and avoid providing a false sense of choice by offering poor solution options. —*Sam Del Rowe*

Customers Come with Baggage

Pre-interaction factors significantly affect customers' perceptions of service interactions

When consumers contact customer service, more than half (53 percent) of their perceptions of the outcome is determined by factors that happened prior to that interaction, according to research from CEB, which was acquired by Gartner last year. That means that only 47 percent of any customer interaction is shaped by what agents actually say or do during their time with the customer.

These pre-interaction factors include customers' perceptions of the company's service capabilities, their perceived value to the company, the consistency of the information they received about their issues, their enjoyment in contacting the service organization, the value they've received from the company's products or services, and previous contacts they've had about the same issue. According to the research, all of these fall under the umbrella of "customer baggage," which CEB defines as "a customer's past experiences, perceptions, or facts that occurred before the interaction."

When Gartner and CEB started looking at those variables, the analysts discovered that most involved three main things: past experiences both with the company and with other companies; perceptions about the company and its customer service; and information that the customer had going into the interaction, according to Lara Ponomareff, marketing practice leader at Gartner. "We started to think of [these things] as baggage that customers bring in with them, that the company doesn't even know about, that color their interactions," she says.

The research also found that nearly all customers carry at least one type of baggage into any customer service interaction. More specifically, 63.5 percent of customers have had previous contacts about the same issue, less than half—43.4

When baggage is handled, customer satisfaction improves by 48 percent.

percent—perceive that they are valuable to the company, 35 percent believe that they have received extremely low value from the company's products or services, 32.3 percent have a poor perception of the company's service capabilities, and 22.2 percent have received inconsistent information about their issue. Overall, 92 percent of customers reported having baggage, with just 8 percent saying that they do not have baggage.

As companies look to respond to this trend, the research found that tackling customer baggage head-on during interactions results in positive outcome gains, both immediately and in the future: When baggage is handled, customer satisfaction improves by 48 percent and customers' perceived effort in their next interactions decreases by 14 percent.

The problem is, though, that most companies and their customer service agents would prefer to completely avoid the customer baggage issue altogether, to pretend that it doesn't exist, "because nobody wants to walk into something that they feel would be kind of a contentious situation," Ponomareff explains. "I'd rather just ignore all of that…and hope that they just don't explode at me."

But that would be the wrong approach to take: Agents who actually "almost run at the baggage, who understood the customer's situation, who actually took questions about what they've done in the past, who basically took [the customer's] larger relationship with the company into consideration…are more successful with customers," Ponomareff points out. "Customers really respond well to it. Reps who say that they handle customer baggage say that calls go a lot smoother, they actually avoid negative situations, and customers appreciate it."

And while companies really can't control what customers bring with them to interactions, they can take steps to address this baggage, according to Ponomareff.

First, companies should use call listening or quality assurance methods to help identify the agents who handle customer baggage better than others. "I guarantee that in almost every service organization there's a handful, hopefully more than a handful, of reps who are handling customer baggage," Ponomareff maintains. Companies need to tap into those agents for say-this-instead-of-that advice that they can pass on to their peers who are less adept at handling baggage.

The second step is to highlight and input customer baggage for the future, leveraging existing technology to highlight and record it for use by other agents encountering similar situations down the road.

The third step is to think about the coaching, training, and measurement systems that are in place and making sure that those align as well, Ponomareff says. —*Sam Del Rowe*

Companies Face a Consumer Trust Crisis

As identity fraud hits an all-time high, the burden is shifting to companies to protect customer data

Identity fraud is definitely on the rise in the United States, and consumers are losing trust in companies as a result, according to Javelin Strategy & Research's "2018 Identity Fraud Study" released in early February.

The number of identity fraud victims in the United States reached 16.7 million in 2017, representing 6.6 percent of all consumers. Those numbers reflect an 8 percent increase in the past year, affecting roughly 1 million more victims than in 2016. That is a record high since Javelin began tracking identity fraud in 2003.

The study also found that despite industry efforts to prevent identity fraud, fraudsters successfully adapted to net 1.3 million more victims in 2017, while the amount stolen reached $16.8 billion.

Last year also saw a notable change in how fraud is being committed. While credit card accounts remained the most prevalent targets, fraudsters increasingly opened new intermediary accounts, such as those offered by PayPal, and other internet accounts with e-commerce merchants like Amazon. Although not as easily monetized by themselves, these types of accounts can be used to help fraudsters transfer funds from the existing accounts of their victims. In 2017, 1.5 million people were victims of this type of fraud, up 200 percent from the previous high.

Part of the reason for the prevalence of identity fraud, according to Linda Sherry, director of national priorities at Consumer Action, is that Americans' privacy rights are dictated by "a spotty patchwork of federal and state laws that are inadequate to ensure that consumers are protected and have a say as to what's done with their personal information." These include specific rules or laws about credit-related data, under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), medical data under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and children's data under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).

And as the number of identity fraud cases increases, so too does the number of corporate data breaches. The Javelin research found that nearly a third (30 percent) of all U.S. consumers were notified of breaches in 2017, up from 12 percent in 2016. For the first time ever, Social Security numbers (35 percent) were compromised more than credit card numbers (30 percent) in breaches.

"2017 was a runaway year for fraudsters, and with the amount of valid information they have on consumers, their attacks are just getting more complex," says Al Pascual, senior vice president, research director, and head of fraud and security at Javelin Strategy & Research. "Fraudsters are growing more sophisticated in response to industry's efforts to implement better security."

While the losses by themselves are staggering, an equally troubling trend is the loss of trust that consumers have turned toward companies. Consumers are now shifting the perceived responsibility for preventing fraud from themselves to other entities, such as their financial institutions or the companies storing their data.

The proportion of consumers who are concerned about fraud rose from 51 percent in 2016 to 69 percent in 2017. Meanwhile, 63 percent of consumers are highly concerned about the threat of breaches, with many unsure that they can effectively protect themselves.

Cynicism about breach notifications also rose dramatically, with 64 percent of breach victims indicating they believe the breach notifications do little to help protect them and are principally about

> "Fraudsters are growing more sophisticated in response to industry's efforts to implement better security."

Fast Facts & Figures

//////////////////////////////

42

The percentage of **U.S. small businesses with mobile apps**. That percentage is **unchanged** from last year, despite the fact that **25 percent** of the small businesses that didn't have mobile apps in 2017 said they **planned to build** them by the end of the year.

23

The percentage of **small businesses** that say they **plan to build** mobile apps by the end of **2018**.

55

The percentage of **Millennial-owned** small businesses that currently have mobile apps.

42

The percentage of **Generation-Xer-owned** small businesses with mobile apps.

13

The percentage of **Baby-Boomer-owned** small businesses with mobile apps.

28

The percentage of small businesses that say they primarily built their mobile apps to **attract new customers**.

SOURCE: CLUTCH'S "2018 SMALL BUSINESS SURVEY" REPORT

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providing legal cover for the companies whose files were compromised.

Consumer Action's Sherry hopes that when the European Union's new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) goes into effect next month, U.S. consumers might see some ripple effect from companies' push toward compliance. "It's unlikely that global corporations will create country-specific systems for data protection, retention, correction, and deletion rights—making it possible for the strong EU rules to become the default for consumers in the United States and other countries," she says.

"As global firms adapt to the EU's data protection law, we're hopeful that all consumers will benefit from stricter data security and gain a reasonable measure of control over their personal information that so many others prosper from the EU's strong regulation," Sherry says. —*Leonard Klie*

Personalization Efforts Suffer from Data Issues

While identity theft is definitely on the rise, consumer awareness of the risk has seen a comparable increase, and companies' attempts at personalization might be the ultimate victims.

Consumers crave more personalized and uniquely targeted shopping experiences, research firm Accenture noted in its recent "Global Consumer Pulse" report, but more than 49 percent of consumers are now concerned about personal data privacy as they subscribe to intelligent services designed to understand and anticipate their needs. Only 40 percent of U.S. consumers would provide personal data to companies online in exchange for more tailored experiences, and only 37 percent would allow it to be collected by smart devices, the research found.

Beyond the data protection issue, another big contributor to consumer hesitation to share personal information with smart devices is the creepiness factor. Nearly half (48 percent) of U.S. consumers told Accenture that they would use smart reordering services, where intelligent sensors in the home can detect when certain products are running low and automatically place orders to replenish them, and another 35 percent use smart assistants, like Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant. While 89 percent of consumers who use smart sensors and personal assistants are satisfied with the service, 40 percent admit to feeling a bit creeped out by technology's ability to interpret and proactively respond to their needs. Forty-three percent fear that these services—and, by extension, the companies that provide these services—will come to know too much about them and their families.

But regardless of how companies obtain customer information, a full 92 percent of U.S. consumers, and 87 percent of consumers worldwide, believe it is extremely important for companies to safeguard their information. Additionally, 66 percent of U.S. consumers and 58 percent of the world population want companies to earn their trust by being more transparent about how their personal information is being used.

"Digital trust will become increasingly challenging for companies to achieve as they look to capture new categories of customer data, such as biometric, geolocation, and even genomic data in their drive for greater relevance," said Kevin Quiring, managing director of Accenture Strategy and lead for advanced customer strategy North America, in the report. "Customer concerns will inevitably rise, so it's critical that companies have strong data security and privacy measures in place, they give consumers full control over their data, and are transparent with how they use it."

Transparency with regard to data usage, Quiring said, demonstrates responsible stewardship and ethics. —*L.K.*

The *Geek, Nerd, Suit* Approach to Customer-Centricity

Achieving customer-centricity requires a partnership between IT, analysts, and business strategists

Business leaders often lose sight of the customer by focusing on data, complex analytics, or high-level strategizing. This is the premise of *Geek, Nerd, Suit: Breaking Down Walls, Unifying Teams, and Creating Cutting-Edge Customer-Centricity*, a book co-authored by three executives at Elicit, a marketing and advertising solutions provider. The authors, Brooke Niemiec, chief marketing officer, Chuck Densinger, chief operations officer, and Mason Thelen, CEO, assert that organizations can achieve customer-centricity via a partnership between IT (geeks), analytics (nerds), and business strategists (suits). Associate Editor Sam Del Rowe spoke with Niemiec to learn more.

CRM magazine: How do you define customer-centricity? What are its key aspects?

Brooke Niemiec: A commonly (or perhaps, overly) used definition of customer-centricity is "putting the customer at the center of decision-making." While this is obviously a good sentiment, true customer-centricity is more technical than that. It starts with knowledge about customers: what they are doing, why they are doing it, how they feel about your brand, and what motivates them. The second, and often more difficult to master, component of customer-centricity is actually using that insight to make customer experiences better in a way that aligns with priority business objectives

How do you define each of the three elements (geek, nerd, and suit)? And why these three elements?

Geek, nerd, and suit represent data, insight, and strategy. Geeks are the technologists who manage the technology and data flows that occur with every customer interaction. Nerds are the data scientists whose analytical prowess develops a deep and meaningful understanding of customer behaviors and attitudes. Suits are the strategists and experience designers who ultimately put that technology and data to good use. These three aspects were at the core of every major successful customer-related initiative. You need the infrastructure to house customer data, you need the development of insight to make sense of all of that data, and you need a team empowered to act on that data to deliver better experiences.

You write that companies need to establish partnerships between the three. Why, and how can they begin that process?

If you have any combination less than the three, you end up with some humorous and very common situations:
- geeks-only—amazing, but lonely technology;
- nerds-only—complex models without impact;
- suits-only—unfulfilled dreams;
- geeks and nerds—solid models on the shelf;
- nerds and suits—active decision-making without data; and
- geeks and suits—active decision-making with raw data.

The good news is that these three functions are almost always interacting with each other in some way already, but they have different approaches to problem-solving. The first step is to get them speaking the same language, the language of "customer." The second step is ensuring that big customer initiatives include a leader from each functional area. For example, it might be common for an IT group to own the selection and implementation of a new campaign management solution. However, the success of that tool depends critically on having a source of customer analytics and segmentation that will be used for targeting. It also depends on business owners communicating how they expect to use the solution. The key is to make sure that all three stakeholders are involved up front.

What kind of research did you do for this book?

The initial source of our contributing research was our collective personal experiences with a variety of companies across multiple industries and levels of customer relationship sophistication. We saw what worked and felt the pain of what didn't firsthand, both as members and consultants.

We also felt that it was important to validate those hypotheses outside of our networks. We spent a lot of time reading articles about companies that were being praised for their great customer experiences or their smart application of customer data. Wherever we saw an example of a company that seemed to have things figured out, we dug in to understand what they attributed as the source of that success. We also shared content, stories, and drafts of the book with mentors, business executives, writers, professors, industry influencers, friends, and family.

What relevant pain points did you identify?

We narrowed it down to 15, including poor access to customer data, outdated technology, a reliance on averages, a belief that we are representative of our own customers, and lack of testing what actually makes a difference. Even the 15 most-common barriers to customer-centricity can be summarized in one problem: disjointed, awkward, and frustrating customer experiences driven by siloed teams, bad technology, weak or nonexistent customer insight, and the lack of a true customer owner.
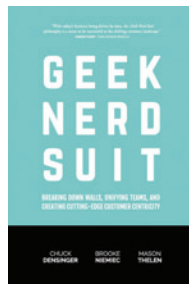
2018 CRM SERVICE AWARDS

Customer service today is far different than it was 15 years ago when *CRM* magazine rolled out its first Service Leader Awards. The number of channels available for customers to contact companies is far greater; companies are able to respond far more quickly and efficiently, and with immense personalization; customers are in a far better position to help themselves; and the amount of data that companies can take away from any support or service interaction has grown exponentially. Still, the one thing that hasn't changed is the need for companies and their customers to stay in contact, and our 2018 Service Award winners are helping them do just that in exemplary fashion. Whether they've been in business for decades or are just starting out, this year's winners continue to demonstrate that there is no shortage of innovation in the contact center space. In the pages that follow, we honor not just the vendors of the technology that has reshaped the contact center over the past decade and a half, but also some of the companies that have put those technologies to good use.

2018 CRM SERVICE AWARDS

SERVICE LEADERS

After a busy 2016 that saw a number of big-ticket acquisitions, last year was comparatively quiet on the transaction front. But the pace of technological advancement remained steady, as the continued growth of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and cloud computing means that contact center applications are smarter, faster, and better able to help customers help themselves.

But the trend toward self-service, in the form of chatbots and intelligent virtual assistants armed with natural language understanding, does not figure to diminish the role of human agents, who are now freed up to handle knottier problems, often working alongside their automated colleagues. Their joint efforts are increasingly aided by more sophisticated analytics, a reality marked by the debut of the Contact Center Analytics category this year. Read on to see our 2018 Service Leader Award honorees in that and eight other categories.

		REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE
CUSTOMER CASE MANAGEMENT	Microsoft Dynamics CRM				
	Oracle				
	Pegasystems				
	Salesforce.com				
	Zendesk				
CONTACT CENTER INFRASTRUCTURE	Aspect Software				
	Cisco Systems				
	Five9				
	Genesys				
	NICE inContact				
INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE	Aspect Software				
	Cisco Systems				
	Genesys				
	NICE inContact				
	Verint Systems (Contact Solutions)				
WEB SUPPORT	Microsoft				
	Nuance Communications				
	Oracle				
	Salesforce.com				
	Zendesk				
WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION	Aspect Software				
	Calabrio				
	Genesys				
	NICE				
	Verint Systems				
CONTACT CENTER SEARCH	Coveo				
	IBM Watson				
	Oracle				
	Salesforce.com				
	Verint Systems (Kana)				
ENTERPRISE FEEDBACK MANAGEMENT	MaritzCX				
	Medallia				
	Qualtrics				
	SurveyMonkey				
	Verint Systems (Vovici)				
CONTACT CENTER ANALYTICS	Aspect Software				
	Calabrio				
	Genesys				
	NICE				
	Verint Systems				

		REPUTATION FOR BREADTH OF SERVICES	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST
CONTACT CENTER OUTSOURCING	Alorica				
	Sitel				
	Sykes Enterprises				
	Teleperformance				
	TTEC Holdings				

CATEGORIES AND CRITERIA *CRM* magazine's annual Service Leader Awards names one winner and four leaders (listed alphabetically) in each of nine categories, using a proprietary selection formula. The overall award rating is based on a composite score of company revenue and analyst ratings for deployment costs, customer satisfaction, depth of functionality (or breadth of services, in the case of outsourcing), and company direction. (These ratings are based on a five-point scale, with 5 being the highest.) In addition, each category cites one "one to watch"—companies deemed worth tracking for their potential to appear on that leaderboard in the future.

The chart above collects winners and leaders across all nine categories. The category winners are the nine names highlighted in red type.

CUSTOMER CASE MANAGEMENT

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
Microsoft Dynamics CRM					Financial Services, Government, Retail
Oracle					Financial Services, Manufacturing, Retail
Pegasystems					Financial Services, Healthcare, Insurance
Salesforce.com					Financial Services, Healthcare, Technology
Zendesk					Government, Retail, Technology

THE MARKET

With customer case management becoming more important than ever, competition in this category is increasingly tight. A recent *Harvard Business Review* study showed that when companies respond to consumers' reviews online, even if they're negative, their reputation improves. When *HBR* analyzed TripAdvisor's reviews, for example, it found that one-third of hotels increased their ratings by at least half a star within six months of their first management response. But can companies scale these crucial responses and effectively manage customers' other issues, regardless of their preferred channel? Today the answer is yes, thanks to artificial intelligence, automation, and other new-age technology from the players in this space.

THE LEADERS

With its powerful Service Cloud, **Oracle** continues to be a viable leader this year, though it earned a slightly lower score for depth of functionality than it did last year—3.9 versus 4.1. It's all relative, however; while Oracle customers continue to praise its depth of functionality, its case management offering is simply not as robust as Microsoft's, Kana's, or Pegasystems', according to Kate Leggett, vice president and principal analyst at Forrester Research. Customers are also holding Oracle to the integration promises it has made in recent years, and for the time being, "integrations are not sufficiently broad nor deep within Oracle's CX portfolio," Leggett adds.

Last year's One to Watch, **Pegasystems** makes it onto our leaderboard this year, largely due to a solid 4.1 score in depth of functionality. "Pega has very strong business process and case management capabilities, which are used to orchestrate the end-to-end customer journey in real-time across communication channels, with predictive analytics for next-best-action capabilities," according to Leggett. Overall, the company is "always a leader in process-oriented CRM," adds John Ragsdale, vice president of technology and social research at the Technology Services Industry Association.

Salesforce.com continues to shine as a "customer company," Leggett says, though it was unable to defend last year's title as the category winner, as Salesforce's lofty price tag kept it from the top spot. Nevertheless, the Salesforce Service Cloud is maturing, and with a score of 4.3 for company direction, it has a promising future. "The product is bolstered by strong system integrator relationships, a large developer network, and a very broad marketplace via its AppExchange, all of which increase its market penetration," Leggett says.

Zendesk makes it onto the leaderboard once more this year, earning an impressive 4.2 in company direction and a 4.1 in customer satisfaction. "Zendesk offers an excellent interface that users love, and its customer success team is invested in achieving customer outcomes," Ragsdale, says. Plus, its affordability—the company earned a 4.3 in cost—makes it appealing for companies of all sizes. "Zendesk's straightforward case management is suitable for mid-market companies or enterprises with simple processes," Leggett explains.

THE WINNER

Microsoft emerges as our winner this year, improving its scores in all but one category. The company received strong scores in depth of functionality and company direction (both 4.0) as well as cost (4.1). Its Dynamics 365 solution is only getting stronger as Microsoft bolsters it with artificial intelligence and conversational tools. "This is just the beginning of a complete new journey of building AI-first business applications," CEO Satya Nadella said at Microsoft's 2017 Envision/Ignite user conference. "We're really looking forward to the next year, where we take this module and scale it out in your businesses and learn from it and have it go to all the other areas of your operations." Microsoft's customer satisfaction score of 3.6 could use improvement, but the company is on the right track. "Microsoft is increasingly seeing adoption by larger companies and rapidly expanding its ecosystem," Ragsdale says.

ONE TO WATCH

Verint Systems (Kana) slips off the leaderboard this year, largely due to a disappointing 3.3 in customer satisfaction. Its outdated user experience is a problem, says Mike Fauscette, chief research office at G2 Crowd. And, though Verint has what Leggett calls "a strong product," she says one of its biggest problems is a fairly limited systems integrator network and a lower profile. Nevertheless, Verint has its strengths; it is "great at multichannel [customer case management] with embedded knowledge," according to Ragsdale. —*Maria Minsker*

CONTACT CENTER INFRASTRUCTURE

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
Aspect Software					Financial Services, Healthcare, Telecommunications
Cisco Systems					Financial Services, Healthcare, Retail
Five9					Business Process Outsourcing, Education, Technology,
Genesys					Financial Services, Healthcare, Telecommunications
NICE inContact					Financial Services, Government, Retail

THE MARKET

While many trends are shaping the contact center infrastructure industry, none has been as disruptive as the shift to the cloud. Some analysts estimate the number of cloud vendors at about 150, all vying for a piece of a very lucrative market valued at more than $2.8 billion. And though that $2.8 billion represents only 11.4 percent of total contact center seats worldwide, analysts project that the cloud market will grow at greater than 20 percent per year for the next three to five years.

Nevertheless, the market for on-premises contact center systems recovered slightly in 2017, fueled by growth in some sectors—including interaction recording—and by slowing declines in inbound contact routing, outbound dialing, and interactive voice response systems.

Innovation has also been fast and furious in this market, particularly around artificial intelligence, machine learning, natural language, analytics, and data security. Customers, meanwhile, are pressing vendors for suites of integrated products from a single source; cradle-to-grave integrated reporting and analytics; and easier system management.

THE LEADERS

Aspect Software has a very functional set of infrastructure offerings, as evidenced by its 4.1 score in that area. "Aspect is always a good choice. It's proven, reliable, and delivers an infrastructure that buyers can depend on," says Paul Stockford, president and chief analyst at Saddletree Research. The company, though, has a bit of an identity problem, according to Sheila McGee-Smith, president of McGee-Smith Analytics. "With three different solutions in its portfolio, Aspect struggles to get the deserved attention for its multitenant, Amazon Web Services–deployed Via solution" she says. Despite that, the company still scored an impressive 3.9 in company direction.

Cisco Systems, a perennial favorite among analysts, remains a top contender in the space. It scored a 4.1 in depth of functionality, and Stockford says that Cisco "is hard to beat. They own innovation, dependability, and company stability, and their overall contact center strategy is stellar." Though the company fell off a little in many of the other judging criteria, analysts remain optimistic about Cisco's future, particularly as it incorporates technology from its BroadSoft acquisition.

Five9 makes the leaderboard again this year, largely on its category-leading score in company direction (4.3). That direction underwent two key changes this year. The first was an increase in channel coverage, according to McGee-Smith. Secondly, Five9 is "starting to get away from a reputation as a cloud outbound provider," Stockford says, noting that the company also signed some "excellent partnerships" with Microsoft, Genband, OpenMethods, and ServiceNow, among others. Five9 also racked up a 4.1 in cost, tied for the category lead.

Genesys clearly benefited from its 2016 acquisition of Interactive Intelligence, which propelled it to scores of 4.2 in both depth of functionality and company direction. John Ragsdale, vice president of technology and social research at the Technology Services Industry Association, says Interactive Intelligence was "always rated highly by companies for reliability and features and functions." For Genesys, "life is good" and will only get better as it continues development of its Kate artificial intelligence platform in 2018, adds McGee-Smith.

THE WINNER

While many contact center infrastructure vendors made notable acquisitions recently, **NICE** is the clear winner as it builds on its inContact pick-up in mid-2016. Technology gained during that deal led to the company's creation of CXone, a complete solution for omnichannel routing, workforce optimization, analytics, automation, and artificial intelligence, all on an open-cloud foundation. NICE inContact also scored near the top in depth of functionality, company direction, and cost (all 4.1). "Don't blink, or you might miss NICE as it rockets to the top of the market," Stockford says. "A highly innovative cloud platform, clear market vision, and a demonstrated ability to execute—NICE has it all."

ONE TO WATCH

Avaya had a rough start to 2017 following its bankruptcy declaration, but it emerged from Chapter 11 in December with lower debt and $300 million in available cash that allowed it to acquire cloud contact center company Spoken Communications. That deal, McGee-Smith says, "offers great promise, but the real test for Avaya, which went public in a $1 billion initial public offering (IPO) in January, will be whether it can stop customers from being stolen away by other vendors. —*Leonard Klie*

INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
Aspect Software	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Hospitality, Telecommunications
Cisco Systems	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Healthcare, Retail
Genesys	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Healthcare, Telecommunications
NICE inContact	▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	Retail, Healthcare, Education
Verint Systems (Contact Solutions)	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Government, Education, Insurance

THE MARKET

Though the interactive voice response (IVR) systems market is quite mature, it is still on a growth trajectory, largely because of the renewed importance that automation is playing in shaping customer brand experiences and because of the growing number of calls to businesses on mobile devices. Valued by Research and Markets at $3.7 billion in 2017, the category is projected to reach $5.5 billion by 2023, growing at a compounded annual rate of 6.8 percent. Going forward, that growth will be fueled by continued investments in existing equipment and continued migration of IVR technology to the cloud.

THE LEADERS

Aspect Software had strong scores across the board—4.2 in depth of functionality, 4.1 in customer satisfaction, 3.9 in cost, and 3.8 in company direction—further proving its status as a perennial favorite among analysts. It provides "a solid solution from a solid company in perpetual forward motion," says Paul Stockford, president and chief analyst at Saddletree Research. Rebecca Wettemann, vice president at Nucleus Research, offers a different perspective, though, saying the company "has been slow to move to the cloud and offer customers a full solution for multiple contact channels."

With scores of 4.1 in depth of functionality, 3.7 in company direction and customer satisfaction, and 3.5 in cost, **Cisco Systems** continues to impress. Analysts expect its acquisition of artificial intelligence company MindMeld in mid-2017 to bring an increased focus on self-service and possibly to fuel improvements to its Customer Voice Portal. Stockford says that it offers a "competent solution backed by a visionary company" and is "always a solid choice."

NICE has not traditionally played in the IVR space before, but following its late 2016 acquisition of inContact, it not only joins the sector but assumes a leadership role. **NICE inContact** collected scores of 4.2 in company direction and cost, 3.8 in customer satisfaction, and 3.5 in depth of functionality. "Today's customers are typically happy with the IVR offerings from NICE inContact," says Sheila McGee-Smith, founder and president of McGee-Smtih Analytics, who also expects it to expand its capabilities as it "heads into even larger enterprise accounts." Stockford has a similar take, saying that NICE inContact "is on the move in the right direction."

Verint Systems, last year's winner, had another strong performance this time around, earning scores of 4.3 in depth of functionality, 4.5 in company direction, 3.9 in customer satisfaction, and 3.8 in cost. John Ragsdale, vice president of technology and social research at the Technology Services Industry Association, says that it has "great positioning." Stockford notes that "adaptive IVR that impacts the customer experience is revolutionary" and says that the company "truly leads the market with its ability to provide personalized customer service within the context of a multimodal interaction."

THE WINNER

Genesys did not have a less-than-stellar score in any of this year's judging, locking it in as the surefire winner: It posted scores of 4.4 in depth of functionality, 4.2 in company direction and cost, and 4.1 in customer satisfaction. Ragsdale says the company is "always pushing innovation" and "seems to have made the transition to cloud easier than its competitors." McGee-Smith adds that it "has a history of excellence with Genesys Voice Portal" and expects "more of those assets to be made available across the former Interactive Intelligence portfolio in 2018 and beyond." Wettemann notes that the company's "move to the cloud and adjustments in pricing make it easier for customers to buy and pay aligned with their actual usage."

ONE TO WATCH

Last year was a tumultuous one for **Avaya**, which started the year filing for bankruptcy protection, leaving its future in jeopardy. It emerged from Chapter 11 at the end of the year in a solid financial position and even acquired Spoken Communications, but analysts are still cautiously optimistic. The company netted a 4.1 score in depth of functionality, with McGee-Smith saying its Experience Portal "has been a solid product for customers for many years and continues to be an important part of the ongoing Oceana architecture." Wettemann has a different view, saying there are "a lot of Avaya replacements, particularly for customers who want to move to a more cost-effective cloud solution."

—Sam Del Rowe

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
Microsoft	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Retail, Manufacturing
Nuance Communications	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▯	Financial Services, Hospitality, Telecommunications
Oracle	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▯▯	▮▮▮▮▯	Retail, Technology, Telecommunications
Salesforce.com	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▯▯	Financial Services, Healthcare, Technology
Zendesk	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▯	▮▮▮▮▯	Retail, Telecommunications, Travel

THE MARKET

Self-service continues to be the name of the game in web support, and vendors continue to deliver solutions that enable consumers to handle many service issues on their own, without calling for help. Chatbots, virtual assistants, and other artificial intelligence–powered tools are providing companies with automation to scale and streamlined customer service, and their efforts are paying off. More than 80 percent of consumers say businesses are either meeting or exceeding their customer service expectations, according to the 2017 Customer Service Barometer study conducted by American Express, up from 67 percent back in 2014.

THE LEADERS

Nuance Communications is back on the leaderboard thanks to acquiring TouchCommerce in July 2016, which enabled it to build out a full suite of AI-fueled digital solutions. The marriage of TouchCommerce's web-based tools and Nuance's voice and virtual assistant tools "provides a rich offering that covers the breadth of the self-service-to-assisted-service life cycle," says Ian Jacobs, senior analyst at Forrester Research. Nuance also improved its depth of functionality score (3.7). Overall, Nuance has "excellent vision, cutting-edge technologies, and foresight, and provides differentiated experiences that go beyond what traditional CRM vendors offer," says Kate Leggett, vice president and principal analyst at Forrester Research.

Oracle earned its highest mark (4.0) in depth of functionality, which is not surprising since the company has been consistently adding tools and capabilities, "rolling out solid expansions, including a messaging support strategy, a visual engagement play, and a basic virtual agent approach," Jacobs says. Mitch Kramer, senior consultant and senior vice president at the Patricia Seybold Group, notes that "its Customer Portal combines knowledge management, search, communities, and case creation and includes a [natural language]-based virtual agent." Overall, Oracle has embraced cloud computing, making it its primary focus, Kramer says.

Analysts are excited about **Salesforce.com**'s future, awarding it an unmatched 4.6 for company direction. "The expansion of the Lightning Service Console only means good things for Salesforce customers. It is easier to use and helps contact centers get agents to proficiency quickly," Jacobs says. And while its depth of functionality score dipped slightly this year, Salesforce still offers far-reaching capabilities. "Salesforce Communities provides [core support tools] with chat as an add-on. It also enables users to implement configurable components and use visual tools to create and manage their implementations," Kramer explains.

Smaller than the other players, **Zendesk** nevertheless holds its own. It earned a solid 3.9 for company direction thanks to its impressive customer, revenue, and product growth. "More of Zendesk's revenue is coming from larger contact centers. But many of the interesting things Zendesk is doing don't just appeal to enterprises," Jacobs says. The company earned a 3.6 for depth of functionality, with nowhere to go but up—analysts are optimistic about Zendesk's Guide Answer Bot, a preconfigured machine learning virtual agent.

THE WINNER

Winning this category for the third year in a row, **Microsoft** earned a 4.3 in company direction and a 4.1 in customer satisfaction. The analysts are somewhat divided on the extent of Microsoft's web support emphasis. Leggett says that Microsoft is "less focused on web support and more on overall customer service," but John Ragsdale, vice president of technology and social research at the Technology Services Industry Association, argues that the company "has made heavy investments in this area, developing strong social and multichannel options." Nevertheless, its portal provides standard capabilities, including knowledge management, communities, search, case management, and AI add-ons for virtual agents, as well as predictive care, Kramer says, all of which create a wide breadth of solutions for customers.

ONE TO WATCH

Freshworks, which rebranded from Freshdesk in June, had a big year. The company expanded its offering to include marketing, sales, and recruiting management without losing sight of its customer service focus. Though still small and relatively new to the market, its solutions are nevertheless "receiving rave reviews from users," according to Ragsdale. And its cost, for which it earned an outstanding 4.8, is "clear, simple, and combined with smart packaging, which means that Freshdesk offers a real time-to-value ratio," Jacobs says. Its depth of functionality is somewhat limited, but the company still offers fundamental capabilities, such as search, case management, knowledge management, communities, AI, and chatbots powered by machine learning. —*Maria Minsker*

WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
Aspect Software	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Healthcare, Retail
Calabrio	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Government, Insurance
Genesys	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Retail, Telecommunications
NICE	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Healthcare, Telecommunications
Verint Systems	▮▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	▮▮▮▮	Financial Services, Insurance, Telecommunications

THE MARKET

Workforce optimization—which DMG Consulting defines as a set of solutions that comprise at least three of the following complementary applications: workforce management, performance management, speech analytics, text analytics, desktop analytics, enterprise feedback management, e-learning/coaching, gamification, customer journey analytics, and robotic process automation—is undergoing a rapid transformation. Chief among the changes is a movement from suites to full, next-generation platforms, but no less important is the addition of functionalities that can take solutions beyond the contact center into back offices and other business operations. The market has also matured, growth has slowed, and the number of workforce optimization vendors has shrunk due to some very notable acquisitions in the past year or two.

Still, despite all of the turmoil, Research and Markets asserts that companies will need workforce optimization more than ever, and vendors that innovate with new architectures and intelligent automation will be in the best position to succeed.

THE LEADERS

Just two years after declaring bankruptcy, **Aspect Software** "is firmly back on track" with new management that "has crafted a clearer version of where it wants to go in the contact center space," according to Dick Bucci, chief analyst at Pelorus Associates. It also didn't hurt that the company posted strong scores in depth of functionality (4.4) and customer satisfaction (4.0). Aspect "knows how to leverage workforce optimization to the benefit of both employees and customers," adds Paul Stockford, president and chief analyst at Saddletree Research, who adds that the company is made up of "not only pioneers but visionaries and thought leaders."

Calabrio earned high marks in cost (4.1) and customer satisfaction (4.0). It also scored a 3.9 in company direction and a 3.8 in depth of functionality. According to Stockford, the company "is on a rocket ride to the top." Ian Jacobs, senior analyst at Forrester Research, offered a more measured view, saying the company "is still just spreading its wings and has lots of growth potential." Jacobs also expects the company to "land in new customer ecosystems" thanks to several key partnerships that it signed recently.

Genesys posted scores of 3.8 in company direction and customer satisfaction, as well as a 3.7 in cost. And while it has "really stepped up its work on its user interfaces, both in mobile and web," according to Jacobs, other analysts, like Sheila McGee-Smith, founder and president of McGee-Smith Analytics, are anxiously waiting to see how it incorporates its Kate virtual assistant platform into its WFO product. WFO, she adds, has been identified by Genesys as an asset that will be built once and deployed across all three of its larger contact center platforms: PureEngage, PureConnect, and PureCloud.

Last year's winner, **Verint Systems** scored a 4.5 in depth of functionality, a 3.8 in customer satisfaction, and a 3.6 in company direction. "Over the years, Verint has continued to grow both organically and through strategic acquisitions," Bucci says, pointing out that Verint "pioneered the workforce optimization concept in 2005 and has continued to refine the design and add new applications, such as analytics, enterprise voice of the customer, and voice authentication." Stockford agrees, saying that Verint "continues to be the trailblazer and innovator" in WFO and adding that it has "essentially mastered the art of workforce optimization to the benefit of the industry as a whole." He and others expect Verint's acquisition of Next IT in December to lead to even more revolutionary WFO solutions.

THE WINNER

NICE moves into the top spot this year after posting scores of 4.5 in depth of functionality, 4.3 in company direction, and 3.9 in customer satisfaction. According to McGee-Smith, "the addition of workforce optimization to the NICE inContact CXone platform was a great accomplishment in 2017" and "having NICE workforce elements tightly integrated with NICE inContact's cloud contact center application is what many types of customers are looking for." Bucci adds that it "has a complete product line that is well integrated and stands out for its innovative use of advanced analytics technology."

ONE TO WATCH

Once again, **ZOOM International** falls just short of the leaderboard. It posted a 4.1 in customer satisfaction and scores of 3.6 in company direction and cost, but it struggled in depth of functionality (3.2). To its credit, the company "has been successful by basically sticking to the fundamentals, providing a complete suite of reliable, economical, easy-to-use workforce optimization applications backed by outstanding customer care," Bucci says. —*Sam Del Rowe*

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
Coveo	■■■■■	■■■■	■■■■	■■■	Financial Services, Manufacturing, Technology
IBM Watson	■■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■	Financial Services, Retail, Travel
Oracle	■■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■■	Financial Services, Retail, Telecommunications
Salesforce.com	■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■	Financial Services, Healthcare, Retail
Verint Systems (Kana)	■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Financial Services, Insurance, Telecommunications

THE MARKET

Search technologies have typically been used in the contact center to help agents find answers to complex customer queries, and that is still a very valid use case for search. However, continuing emphasis is now being placed on applying the same search technologies to customer self-service applications. In fact, Gartner predicts that by 2020, 85 percent of all customer service interactions will take place without the assistance of a live agent. Companies will need to rely on search more than ever if they want to reduce call volumes and narrow calls down to only those with sufficiently complex issues.

THE LEADERS

With category-leading scores of 4.4 in depth of functionality and 4.1 in customer satisfaction, analysts deemed **Coveo**'s products to be robust enough for most customer service applications. The company also has deep relationships with most CRM and content management vendors, but it continues to struggle with messaging and market position, according to Kate Leggett, a vice president and principal analyst at Forrester Research. "Its renewed focus on internal and external customer service and its new crisp messaging should help out," she says. Coveo also suffers from a size issue, lacking the big name recognition and financial backing of most of its much larger competitors.

IBM Watson, last year's One to Watch, must have given a heavy dose of vitamins to its Watson product because the solution is back on the leaderboard this year. The product, which Leggett credits with having "the most exhaustive search capabilities in the marketplace," is still among the most expensive among all market competitors, which keeps it out of the top spot.

Salesforce.com's organic search capabilities by themselves are very limited, as demonstrated by the company's low score of 3.3 in depth of functionality, but the company more than makes up for that with "strong system integrator relationships, a large developer network, and a very broad marketplace via its App Exchange, all of which increase its market penetration," Leggett maintains. That would account for its category-leading score of 4.3 in company direction. Analysts also expect the Service Cloud product to continue to gain strength as Salesforce continues to endow it with artificial intelligence in the form of its Einstein platform. Like many other vendors in the space, cost (3.2) plagues Salesforce.

Verint Systems (Kana) is more known for its analytics than for its search capabilities, but that is starting to change as it continues to build out its Knowledge Management product. The solution, which Leggett says is "strong," will only continue to improve, particularly as the company brings into its portfolio the artificial intelligence and natural language technology it gained during its December acquisition of Next IT. That, many analysts hope, will allow it to overcome what Leggett sees as a "lower profile compared to other industry stalwarts." With a score of just 3.1 in company direction, the company also needs to work on enlarging its system integrator network, Leggett adds.

THE WINNER

Oracle, on the leaderboard for many years, takes the top spot this year, despite a failure to run away with any of the category leads; its highest scores came in depth of functionality (4.0) and company direction (3.9), which matched its overall score. The company, which John Ragsdale, vice president of technology and social research at the Technology Services Industry Association, says "has a long history of support-centric search," has been receiving a lot more visibility of late, particularly as it moves clients away from Service Cloud and into its newer Knowledge product.

ONE TO WATCH

eGain, on the leaderboard in the past, slips back to the One to Watch position this year, despite a wide lead in cost (3.9). Additionally, its try-before-you-buy approach is resonating with customers, analysts contend, but the company as a whole still has some issues. "They lack innovative strategy and evolve products based on customer need," Leggett says. Still, the company is on solid footing, which makes it noteworthy. "eGain is one of the originals, still thriving as a stand-alone company," Ragsdale says. —*Leonard Klie*

ENTERPRISE FEEDBACK MANAGEMENT

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
MaritzCX	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	Financial Services, Retail, Technology
Medallia	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	Financial Services, Insurance, Travel
Qualtrics	▪▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	Financial Services, Retail, Travel
SurveyMonkey	▪▪▪	▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	Education, Insurance, Technology
Verint Systems (Vovici)	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	▪▪▪	▪▪▪▪	Retail, Technology, Telecommunications

THE MARKET

Originally intended to allow companies to solicit and centrally manage feedback from their customers, enterprise feedback management (EFM) software is having its reach extended beyond basic surveying tools to handle information from multiple channels and modalities and to collect and manage data not just from customers but also from employees, partners, vendors, suppliers, and others. It is also being integrated not just with CRM systems but also with human resources systems and other internal back-office applications. Real-time and predictive analytics are also starting to play an increased role in this market as the window of opportunity to take action shrinks.

But at a time when the competition is but one mouse click away, many companies still have not embraced EFM technology. According to Forrester Research, EFM solutions are still largely underutilized. In fact, less than half of companies (42 percent) are using one or more technologies to support their voice of the customer programs, and less than 20 percent of companies are using EFM to solicit feedback, the research firm discovered.

THE LEADERS

After not making the leaderboard last year, **MaritzCX** returns in 2018; it received a healthy 3.9 in depth of functionality from analysts. Back in 2016, Esteban Kolsky, principal and founder of ThinkJar, said the company had a "good vision" and "good direction," but that its product execution was "faltering a tad" and needed "to be tightened." With a customer satisfaction score of 3.6 this year, up from 2016's 3.4, MaritzCX appears to have listened.

Also back on the leaderboard after a brief absence is **Medallia**, the champ in this category back in 2015. It clearly struggled in the past few years, but not in 2018, earning a 3.8 in depth of functionality and a 3.7 in customer satisfaction. Medallia's implementation and configuration have been complex historically, but the company has doubled down on user experience. With a 3.6 in company direction, analysts are becoming cautiously optimistic about its future.

Our One to Watch last year, **SurveyMonkey** makes it onto the leaderboard this time around. Its affordability earned the company a category-leading 4.5 in cost. "Survey Monkey is still one of the most accessible tools [in this space]," says Rebecca Wettemann, vice president at Nucleus Research. Still small with limited capabilities, SurveyMonkey does have areas that need improvement. The company earned a 3.3 in depth of functionality and company direction—scores that it'll need to raise to stay competitive in this fluid field.

The third comeback story this year belongs to **Verint Systems (Vovici)**, which reprises a leadership role largely on a solid 3.9 in depth of functionality. The company's customer satisfaction score (3.3) leaves room for improvement, but nevertheless, its solutions offer "excellent breadth and depth, and its platform includes strong social capabilities as well," according to John Ragsdale, vice president of technology and social research at the Technology Services Industry Association.

THE WINNER

A newcomer to the leaderboard last year, **Qualtrics** emerges as our winner for the second year in a row. The company received impressive scores of 4.4 in both depth of functionality and company direction, and it brought home a solid 3.8 in customer satisfaction, largely due to its powerful analytics tools. "Qualtrics offers the best embedded analysis capabilities of all the solutions in this category," Wettemann says. However, like many other vendors in this market, Qualtrics needs to focus on cost. The company earned a score of 3.3, which is relatively low compared to the other leaders in this space.

ONE TO WATCH

Slipping off the leaderboard this year, **NICE** is still a worthy competitor in the space. It earned a 3.9 in company direction, but it struggled in other areas. Most notably, its score for depth of functionality fell from 4.0 last year to 3.4, which hurt its performance overall. It did, however, improve its score for cost—last year, the company earned a 2.0, but it received a 3.0 from analysts this year. —*Maria Minsker*

CONTACT CENTER ANALYTICS

	REPUTATION FOR DEPTH OF FUNCTIONALITY	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST FOR SOFTWARE/MAINTENANCE	TOP 3 MARKETS
Aspect Software					Financial Services, Hospitality, Telecommunications
Calabrio					Financial Services, Government, Insurance
Genesys					Financial Services, Retail, Telecommunications
NICE					Financial Services, Healthcare, Telecommunications
Verint Systems					Financial Services, Insurance, Telecommunications

THE MARKET

The contact center analytics market was valued at $709.5 million in 2017 and is expected to reach $1.4 billion by 2022, according to MarketsandMarkets. The analyst firm cites demand for better customer experience management solutions, the proliferation of cloud computing, growing demand for speech and text analytics solutions, and increased compliance requirements as the key drivers of this growth.

Rebecca Wettemann, vice president at Nucleus Research, says that "in general, analytics and [artificial intelligence] will be important differentiators for contact center providers moving forward. The ability to handle full-text analytics and use it to train AI models is particularly interesting."

THE LEADERS

Aspect Software posted scores of 3.6 across the board. Paul Stockford, president and chief analyst at Saddletree Research, says that it offers a "highly reliable solution from a highly reliable, innovative company." Ian Jacobs, senior analyst at Forrester Research, adds that the company "has launched some nice ways to increase access to analytics. Agents, for example, can access speech analytics directly from their dashboard."

Although it struggled in depth of functionality (3.4), **Calabrio** otherwise turned in a strong performance this year, with scores of 4.2 in cost, 4.0 in company direction, and 3.9 in customer satisfaction. Jacobs notes that the company "has some cool analytics tools, including one that predicts customer satisfaction before an interaction occurs," and that "on the total-cost-of-ownership front, Calabrio has a single analytics license: a customer that buys it receives speech, text, and desktop analytics." Stockford says Calabrio offers "an ideal solution for its customer and prospect base, which the company understands extremely well" and also notes that it is "a company on a rapid rise in the right direction."

Genesys had strong scores in cost and company direction, earning marks of 4.0 and 3.8, respectively. It struggled, however, in depth of functionality and customer satisfaction, earning scores of just 3.4 and 3.3. Stockford says the company provides only a "very basic offering." But that is likely to change, with Jacobs noting that "analytics will be one of the linchpins in the company's efforts to expand into marketing and sales use cases."

Verint Systems had a strong showing all around, posting scores of 4.0 in depth of functionality, 3.6 in customer satisfaction and cost, and 3.5 in company direction. According to Stockford, its solution is a "strong contender from a strong company and customer journey visionary." Jacobs adds that the company "has started some creative packaging. For example, its automated quality offering incorporates speech analytics without requiring a full-on speech analytics deployment."

THE WINNER

NICE posted a category-leading 4.4 in depth of functionality. It also earned scores of 3.8 in company direction, 3.6 in cost, and 3.5 in customer satisfaction. Stockford calls it "the gold standard in the analytics market segment," where it "is almost untouchable." Its products, he adds, "are sophisticated and highly capable," giving special credit to those it gained during its early 2016 acquisition of Nexidia. Jacobs, meanwhile, says NICE offers a "large range of strong analytics tools, from journey analytics to desktop analytics to speech analytics," and that "the CXone cloud contact center offerings will help expand NICE's addressable market significantly."

ONE TO WATCH

CallMiner earned a 4.1 in cost and had a decent showing across the board, with scores of 3.7 in company direction, 3.6 in depth of functionality, and 3.5 in customer satisfaction. "Although there are many start-ups focusing on analyzing speech and other interactions, CallMiner is the biggest name in the stand-alone analytics world," Jacobs says. "It has a very nice approach to using analytics to drive automated quality programs." Stockford says that it offers a "sturdy solution with an excellent industry reputation." —*Sam Del Rowe*

CONTACT CENTER OUTSOURCING

	REPUTATION FOR BREADTH OF SERVICES	REPUTATION FOR COMPANY DIRECTION	REPUTATION FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	5-YEAR COST	TOP 3 MARKETS
Alorica					Financial Services, Healthcare, Retail
Sitel					Technology, Telecommunications, Financial Services
Sykes Enterprises					Technology, Telecommunications, Financial Services
Teleperformance					Technology, Telecommunications, Financial Services
TTEC Holdings					Financial Services, Healthcare, Retail

THE MARKET

While many expected the return of overseas contact centers to U.S. shores on a massive scale, that hasn't quite happened yet, but other changes in the contract center outsourcing market have been dramatic nonetheless. Service provider consolidation and changing buyer requirements have become commonplace, according to research firm the Everest Group, which also asserts that providers are working to strengthen delivery capabilities beyond scale enhancement and deliver differentiated offerings. Also under way is a shift toward balanced shoring, increased adoption of multichannel solutions, increased emphasis on value-added services, and increased investments in analytics, automation, and cognitive solutions.

These changes are fueling growth across the industry, which is projected to expand at a compounded annual rate of 9 percent through 2022, at which point it will be worth $125.8 billion, according to Technavio.

THE LEADERS

After a brief absence, **Alorica** returns to the leaderboard this year with solid scores in cost (3.8) and customer satisfaction (3.5), though its struggles continue in the breadth of services offered (3.3) and company direction (3.2). The company already handles 600 million consumer interactions per year with 100,000 employees in approximately 140 locations across 16 countries, but analysts expect an even stronger customer response to the Irvine, Calif.–based outsourcer in the future. "As nearshore becomes even more interesting to brands, Alorica's name is increasingly coming up," notes Ian Jacobs, a senior analyst at Forrester Research.

Miami-based **Sitel** posted a 3.7 in the breadth of services offered by its 75,000 employees scattered across more than 150 locations in 25 countries, but otherwise struggled somewhat, earning mediocre scores of 3.4 in company direction and customer satisfaction and a category-low score of 3.2 in cost. Jacobs says that "with its expansion into digital agency and digital marketing terrains, Sitel looks headed toward a broader customer experience management approach where outsourcing is just a piece of the puzzle."

Another Florida-based outsourcer, **Sykes Enterprises**, also returns to the leaderboard this year after a brief absence. The company, which operates 65 locations in 20 countries with a staff of about 55,000, had strong scores in cost (3.8) and customer satisfaction (3.6). And while its score in breadth of services offered was a little less impressive (3.4), customer satisfaction was where it really fell short (a category-low 2.8). Jacobs notes that Sykes is "still chugging along on the digital front, which will be key for any outsourcer's long-term health."

TTEC Holdings (formerly TeleTech) posted a strong score (3.8) in the breadth of services offered by its 49,500 employees across six continents, but the Denver-based company struggled in the other categories. Jacobs notes that "although the name change to TTEC may not help erase the association with traditional outsourcing, the company has made great strides in the digital strategy world. That, more than the name change, will move customers' attitudes."

THE WINNER

After dropping from the winner's spot last year, Paris-based **Teleperformance** reclaims it in this year's balloting. The only foreign company to make the top six, it continues to impress in the breadth of services offered, where it earned a category-leading score of 4.1. That's not surprising since it is also the world's largest outsourcer, with 217,000 employees across 340 contact centers in 74 countries and 160 markets. It also outperformed most competitors in company direction (3.7) and customer satisfaction (3.6). Teleperformance "is on pretty much every short list" and is "still the one to beat, especially for global programs," Jacobs says.

ONE TO WATCH

Last year's winner, Cincinnati-based **Convergys**, drops to the One to Watch spot this year as scores dipped in every criteria but cost. A relative bright spot, besides cost, was its 3.6 score in the breadth of services offered by its 130,000 employees at more than 150 locations in 33 countries. The company, of late, has also placed more of an emphasis on solutions delivery. For example, "a very strong analytics practice augments Convergys's wide reach," Jacobs says. —*Sam Del Rowe*

RISING STARS

This year's crop of Rising Stars, in which we recognize innovators from across the customer service and support industry, show that novel solutions and approaches can come from companies of all sizes and lineages. One of them is among the world's most successful retailers, but this year it put its imprint on contact centers in a big way. Another is a start-up, less than a year old, and is already making a splash with its mobile-based service platform

At any rate, with technologies like mobile apps, virtual assistants, artificial intelligence, and analytics dominating the service landscape, it's no surprise that each of our six Rising Stars put one or more of these tools front and center in their offerings. Customers want to be able to reach out when and where it's convenient, through voice or chat, and expect companies to know them and expect to be understood. These vendors are ready to answer the call.

Amazon's AI Connects with Contact Centers

The cloud-based Connect suite lets companies leverage Alexa's technology

Amazon, the 23-year-old online retail, consumer electronics, and cloud computing giant, is one of the world's biggest and most diversified companies, its success recently earning CEO Jeff Bezos the title of richest person in history. It has pioneered customer service delivery since the beginning, so it seems counterintuitive to call the company a "Rising Star."

The designation is well-earned this year, though, due to the March 2017 launch of Amazon Connect, a suite of cloud-based contact center services. With Connect, Amazon is helping other companies leverage its artificial intelligence (AI) tools to power their own customer service—essentially bringing the abilities of its Alexa intelligent assistant to their contact centers.

"Alexa's ability to learn makes the technology powerful," Cindy Zhou, vice president and principal analyst at Constellation Research, told SmartCustomerService.com at the time of the launch. "The experience is much more than just pressing one for billing or two for tech support. It can be conversational, and more of a give-and-take than what a customer might get from a typical IVR interaction."

Lex is an AI-powered chabot that uses the same underlying technology as Alexa.

Released by Amazon Web Services, the company's cloud computing division, Amazon Connect includes a variety of services and tools: the ability to set up a virtual contact center in minutes, with a self-service graphical interface that helps users design contact flows, manage agents, and track performance metrics; dynamic call routing and real-time historical analysis of calls; and Lex, an AI-powered conversational chatbot that uses the same automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology and natural language understanding (NLU) as Alexa. Amazon first introduced Lex at the close of 2016.

Users also benefit from Connect's ability to integrate with a broad set of other AWS tools and infrastructure—whether recording calls in Amazon Simple Storage Service (Amazon S3) or using Amazon Kinesis to stream contact center metrics to Amazon S3.

Connect integrates with leading CRM, workforce management, analytics, and helpdesk offerings from Appian, Calabrio, Freshdesk, Pindrop, Salesforce.com, SugarCRM, Tableau, Twilio, Zendesk, and Zoho.

And other integrations have followed, with NICE's CXone workforce optimization suite in September, USAN's visual IVR a month later, and DialogTech's call analytics in December.

—*Chris Cronis*

CallDesk Takes Virtual Agents Farther

The application supports natural language and artificial intelligence

Fresh off a $2.5 million funding round that it completed in October, French start-up CallDesk has set its sights on "delivering happiness through customer service." To that end, it offers an intelligent virtual agent that many consider to be significantly different than standard automated answering systems, which for the most part offer a very narrow focus.

CallDesk's product enables companies to deploy voice-enabled virtual assistants that can handle common support calls, but with a unique form of artificial intelligence and natural language processing capable of supporting a much wider range of customer interactions. Rather than just responding to touch commands ("press 1 for…") or processing basic keywords and phrases, the virtual agent actually understands what customers want to achieve during their calls. It can also carry on conversations beyond single exchanges by recalling what was said earlier in the call.

CallDesk can pull additional data from companies' internal systems.

Also unique to the product is a programming interface that can pull additional data from companies' internal systems to move the conversation along.

The ultimate goal of the company, which was founded in 2016 in Paris, is to offer an intelligent virtual agent that handles repetitive calls so that human agents can focus on more high-value interactions with customers. Its other stated aims are to deal with customers quickly, to be cost-effective so that companies can reinvest the money they save into developing a better overall customer experience; and to serve calls from the cloud and integrate seamlessly with the IT infrastructures that companies already have in place.

For now, CallDesk's virtual agent is best suited to appointment taking, plugging into a calendar and handling appointment negotiation in natural language; multifactor authentication by phone numbers, first or last names, postal addresses, or custom IDs; intelligent call routing, information collection, and ticket filling; and order management, including tracking and cancellations.

With the influx of funding it just received, CallDesk plans to add more customization capabilities to its platform so that customers can individualize their virtual agents to perform tasks and fulfill needs unique to their businesses.

—*Sam Del Rowe*

Clarabridge Spans the Customer Feedback Divide

New analytics offerings help companies take action based on voice-of-the-customer insights

The customer experience doesn't stop once a company collects feedback from its clientele. The ability to process that information and transform it into actionable insight is what separates the really successful companies from everyone else, and few companies have been more active on that front than Clarabridge. Last year was a break-out one for the Reston, Va.–based analytics vendor, which was spun out from business intelligence consultancy Claraview in 2006.

Clarabridge's ascendancy began a full year ago with the release of CX Contact Center, a full-service solution for transcribing, aggregating, and analyzing the complete spectrum of voice-of-the-customer data, from voice recordings to chat logs, surveys, agent notes, emails, social interactions, complaint files, and CRM data.

Then in August, Clarabridge introduced Clara, an intelligent agent to help companies dig deeper into basic customer feedback. Clara uses artificial intelligence and natural language processing to identify the topic of and sentiment behind each piece of customer feedback and automatically deliver targeted follow-up questions where appropriate.

> Clara helps companies dig deeper into basic customer feedback.

And because time is critical when feedback comes in through social media, in October Clarabridge improved its CX Social solution with a crisis management component that allows organizations to plan for and react to emergencies across all of their social media accounts at once. Within CX Social, companies can define crises beforehand; then, when one is triggered, agents can respond immediately through a single app that works with all of the major social media networks.

And the company didn't stop there. In November, it updated its customer intelligence platform with features to help users understand how customers are feeling and drill down to root causes. Its latest enhancements can analyze the intended emotion behind emoticons and emojis in customer communications and evaluate sentiment, emotion, and effort, as expressed by customers, and then report on them through the CX Suite.

Clarabridge also released two categorization models to jump-start analysis. The Experience Model gauges experience issues, such as call quality, agent clarity, hold music, and more. The Operations Model uncovers unstructured feedback about first call resolution and the number of transfers. Additionally, Clarabridge added dashboard filters and features to help users share insights. Users can also build their own custom metrics and enhanced data visualizations. *—Leonard Klie*

It's noHolds Barred for Bot Creation

noHold simplifies the process of launching chatbots for businesses

Virtual assistants are supposed to decrease the level of effort by customers and contact center agents to complete basic tasks, but building and deploying them can be a monumental task. Milpitas, Calif.–based noHold is on a crusade to democratize the process with its Albert virtual assistant as the framework.

Albert is the basic element of noHold's SICURA QuickStart platform, which the company launched at the close of 2016. The QuickStart PRO version of the SICURA platform, which came out in February 2017, made Albert available for commercial use. With it, anyone with a basic understanding of Microsoft Word or Google Docs can create chatbots. Albert can be trained with the documents companies use every day, such as product manuals or employee handbooks. Users simply select or create the documents they want to convert, add the appropriate headings, and save them. They then hit the "Teach Albert" button to upload their documents, click the "Launch Albert" button to ensure that the information was captured, and copy the URL that is created to launch the bot and share it with others.

> Anyone with a basic understanding of Microsoft Word or Google Docs can create chatbots.

During the past year noHold also integrated Albert and the SICURA platform with a number of other key business and customer communications systems. In March, it launched a connector to Amazon Alexa, allowing that virtual assistant to communicate with Albert. In July, a new connector integrated SICURA QuickStart with Salesforce.com. More recently, the company released a Google Assistant Action in November. Dubbed Albert AI, it allows Albert to connect to Google Assistant.

Previous integrations have tied Albert and the SICURA platform to Facebook Messenger, ServiceNow's knowledge base, Cisco's Spark and WebEx communications platforms, and about a dozen other systems.

Albert himself also got a makeover, with a number of new features added during the year. Chief among them was an algorithm that allows Albert to analyze entire documents—both headings and content—to determine what the end user is asking, and the ability to create a list of synonyms for business-specific words. Albert also offers a customizable user interface that allows companies to add their own branding, and weekly metrics that relay usage statistics in real time.

Next up for the company, says noHold CEO Diego Ventura, is a conversational interface for databases. Should be a piece of cake if Albert has anything to say about it. *—Sam Del Rowe*

UJET Speeds Customers Through Channels

The start-up is in the fast lane toward true multichannel interactions

Though it shares its name with an electric scooter manufacturer to which it is in no way connected, San Francisco–based start-up UJET is quickly setting out to make a name for itself in the customer service arena. The company, which just earned $45 million in two funding rounds, only launched in May and has already enhanced its mobile smartphone-based customer service platform with 238 features.

UJET's software lets customers reach support agents directly through voice or chat via smartphone app, on the web, or by phone. The platform offers complete native integration in every channel so it can merge seamlessly into most CRM and other back-office systems.

For voice and in-app chat, smart actions blend frictionless conversation with rich interaction, while simultaneously providing agents with valuable customer and account data before they pick up the call so they don't have to ask basic questions. The same platform also provides on-demand, multichannel interaction on websites without the need for separate solutions. Other features include nested menus, an organized dashboard, and the ability to modify the interactive voice response system on the fly as needed.

Smart actions blend frictionless conversation with rich interaction.

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And though data security certification is sometimes not so easy to come by, UJET's software is already certified for compliance with Service Organization Control (SOC) Type 2 and the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Agents using the software can verify the identity of customers with their fingerprints, passcodes, and the Touch ID fingerprint identity sensor and Face ID facial recognition engine that Apple recently launched for its iPhones.

UJET plans on investing the money from the funding rounds into scaling its business and expanding its geographic footprint, with the opening of offices in New York and Europe planned this year.

"From the top companies in our target markets, to highly reputed investors, to some of the best and brightest minds in technology, we have an amazing amount of energy behind us. It's an exciting time for UJET," Anand Janefalkar, founder and CEO of UJET, has said. "We plan to leverage this investment to drive our ambitious growth targets and further invest in developing a world-class platform." It seems the company is well on its way already. —*Sam Del Rowe*

Zendesk Finds Peace in Mobile Motivation

Partnerships bring the Zendesk platform to more devices and apps

Zendesk closed 2017 having made great progress towards its goal of being a $1 billion company in 2020. This past year, the 10-year-old company grew its product line, increased market penetration, and moved upmarket. Last year also marked the first time Zendesk showed positive full-year free cash flow. And it crossed the 100,000-customer milestone; the company now counts 119,000 companies, including Box, Uber, Xerox, Vodafone, and Fossil, as customers. Zendesk also resolved 1.25 billion support tickets in 2017.

A big part of Zendesk's success in 2017 can be traced to a major focus on mobile app development. In April, the company brought its solutions to app development platform Fabric. Zendesk had already integrated with several other mobile solution providers, including Crashlytics and Stripe.

Zendesk also integrated with Dialpad, placing a telephony and call center application inside the Zendesk web application; with Sight-Call, allowing agents to escalate email, calls, chats, or social interactions into video assistance sessions; and with Digital Genius, bringing an element of machine learning and artificial intelligence to customer support.

San Francisco–based Zendesk also earlier this year joined the Shopify Plus Technology Partner Program. And Zendesk was one of the first companies to integrate with the Amazon Connect suite of cloud-based contact center services. In addition, in 2017 it acquired Outbound.io, a provider of tools for messaging customers via text, email, or push notification.

A big part of Zendesk's success in 2017 can be traced to a major focus on mobile app development.

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Zendesk was also quite busy on the home-grown innovation front. In 2017 it introduced Talk Enterprise, Chat Enterprise, Answer Bot, and the Guide knowledge base, all with expanded enterprise and machine learning capabilities. Answer Bot uses machine learning to answer customers' questions with content from the Zendesk Guide knowledge base. Zendesk Talk, which can be embedded in the Zendesk Support ticketing system, offers phone support within multichannel customer journeys. Zendesk Chat Enterprise helps businesses deliver real-time support through websites, mobile apps, and messaging channels.

In addition to his billion-dollar aspirations, chairman and CEO Mikkel Svane has another clear mission for the company: to "rapidly build out our product family and accelerate our promise to deliver a single, seamless customer experience." —*Leonard Klie*

ELITE CUSTOMERS

People nowadays expect more from customer service, but sometimes they need more as well. A case in point is demonstrated by the clients of athenahealth, one of our Elite Customers this year. The ever-increasing size and complexity of the healthcare industry can be daunting to the most savvy of customers, and so the healthcare management provider required—and, in Salesforce.com's Service Cloud Agent Console, found—a tool to help both its agents and customers navigate a fiendishly complicated landscape.

Another honoree, vegan food provider Vega, caters to customers who seek healthy foods but need education on the benefits of plant-based nutrition. It sought to grow its audience on social media, and Conversocial's social engagement platform helped these efforts flower on Instagram.

Often customers just need quick answers, which Elite Customer Boscov's Department Stores noticed its human agents were providing, but at a higher-than-needed cost. Thanks to the deployment of Moxie Software's Concierge suite, with its automated Kbot self-helper, customers could get swift answers to easy questions, and Boscov's could cut costs while growing the business.

Finally, sometimes what customers need most are happier, more productive agents. Online clothing retailer TechStyle Fashion Group has a far-flung staff of agents with many schedules to juggle, but with the help of NICE's workforce management platform, its people operate under a more flexible, adaptable system, one that has increased productivity and efficiency and improved the caller experience.

Congratulations to all of our Elite Customers—and to their customers as well.

Athenahealth Improves Its Prognosis with Salesforce Service Cloud

Service Cloud's Agent Console has streamlined contact center processes for the healthcare management company

The healthcare sector is in a constant state of flux. That evolutionary nature is more apparent today than ever, and athenahealth, which manages medical records, revenue cycles, patient engagement, care coordination, and population health services for hospitals and clinics across the country, is in the thick of it. "We're doing more things for our customers than we were 10 years ago," says Jonathan McDevitt, vice president of operations at the Watertown, Mass.–based firm. Between the company's expanding service portfolio, changes in the healthcare landscape, and a burgeoning customer base, athenahealth's call center agents needed an updated platform to keep pace.

The tool athenahealth had been using proved too complex and inefficient, something McDevitt says was hindering his team's ability to support customers. "You had an interface where agents had to scroll through 200 fields to properly resolve a case," he explains. "There was no way to support the complexities of our business well and to create and simplify pathways that would help navigate that complexity."

The need to streamline the process launched athenahealth on a search that eventually brought it to Salesforce.com's Service Cloud Agent Console.

Further complicating things was the fact that athenahealth stored hundreds of thousands of user profiles, along with their accompanying case histories, in a fairly complex relationship stack on its old systems. "We had to migrate all of that," McDevitt recalls.

> *"It was a huge [project], but the Salesforce construct made it about as simple as you could get given the scope of the task."*

Athenahealth went live on Service-Cloud in June 2015 but was not using it as intended. In February 2016, the company brought Salesforce back to undo the customizations and return the product to its optimal performance. A major facelift took place in December 2016. The data transfer was a big part of the undertaking, McDevitt says, but it was manageable due to Salesforce. "It was a huge [project], but the Salesforce construct made it about as simple as you could get given the scope."

Transitioning to Service Cloud provided an opportunity to format the data more effectively, something McDevitt says was a benefit to his team. "We were able to make some changes to the structure to position us for growth moving forward."

And customers have noticed. Transactional customer satisfaction increased from 85 percent in 2016 to 95 percent.

Other results of athenahealth's move to Service Cloud Agent Console have been just as impressive.

Prior to the implementation, contact center agents touched cases an average of 2.75 times before solving the problem. That number has dropped to 1.1 in just a year. Transfer rates—where agents had to bring someone else into the conversation as part of the support process—also dropped, from 16 to 11 percent. Coupled with the reduction in time and resources to address customer inquiries, the organization's resolve rate on the most complex work jumped during the first year, from 40 percent of cases resolved within 24 hours to 85 percent. "With the Service Cloud knowledge embedded into the Agent Console, the folks helping our customers can quickly and easily deliver the right answers," McDevitt says.

Now that athenahealth has seen the extraordinary utility of the Salesforce community pool, McDevitt says he'd like to expand on the concept. "One thing we're sold on is communities, not only as something we rely on internally but as the customer-facing experience for support at athenahealth."

Athenahealth also plans to tie together its knowledge management and customer support strategies, with an eye toward being proactive and reactive in its approach to customer support. "We feel that's the gateway to do all those things, but it's also the gateway to help us evolve our business."

The organization's customers and its internal employees stand to benefit from the ever-widening knowledge base found in these communities. It's all part of the ongoing improvement efforts athenahealth has built around Service Cloud. As McDevitt puts it, "We have a goal project that we refer to as 'Salesforce optimization,' and it has no end date." —*Julie Knudson*

SINCE IMPLEMENTING SALESFORCE.COM'S SERVICE CLOUD AGENT CONSOLE, ATHENAHEALTH HAS SEEN THE FOLLOWING RESULTS:

- transactional customer satisfaction improve from 85 percent to 95 percent;
- the number of complex cases resolved within 24 hours increase from 40 percent to 85 percent;
- the average case touches reduced from 2.75 to 1.1; and
- transfer rates decrease from 16 percent to 11 percent.

Boscov's Bounces Back with Moxie's Kbot

The department store operator diverts customer service interactions with self-help options

Boscov's Department Stores is a century-old retail chain headquartered in Reading, Pa. The family-owned company operates 50 locations in Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

The company had been offering digital engagement on its e-commerce website through live chat and phone support. But, after reviewing chat and phone transcripts, the company noticed that a large share of the questions agents received were for common and repetitive issues, such as login errors and failed coupon codes. Even though the answers to most of these questions were available through Boscov's online FAQs, many customers were not using them, choosing instead to call or start an online chat session. The company was shouldering increased costs as a result.

Boscov's contact center, which is also located in Reading, is manned by a staff of about 100 agents.

With limited IT and agent resources, Boscov's knew it was time for a more reliable, faster way to solve these potentially sales-killing customer pain points without human assistance. It wanted a solution that could integrate self-service, chat, and email while also guiding customers through their journeys and reducing contact volumes.

> *Customers struggling to pick an item are offered assistance, and delivery details are offered at key struggle points.*

So in March 2017, Boscov's deployed Moxie Software's Concierge digital engagement suite, which initially included email and live chat.

Moxie in September added Kbot, an automated digital engagement and contextual guidance system, to the Concierge suite. Kbot presents snippets of information to consumers during the online purchasing process based on their specific behaviors or page elements that indicate opportunity or struggle.

Prior to implementing Kbot, Boscov's gathered as much information as it could from customers to help identify common struggle points where engagement could be improved. The company examined chat transcripts, talked with its fulfillment team members, and analyzed Bizrate surveys to see where automation could help the most.

Boscov's wanted a proactive digital engagement solution that did not require human assistance but could address those common struggle points, leveraging information elsewhere on the site without demanding resources from the care center, according to Maria Tenreiro, director of Boscov's customer care center.

"Implementation required virtually no intervention from the IT department," she says. "The team in the care center can easily add articles in the knowledge portion of the Moxie platform and create rules in Concierge to trigger offering the articles to customers on the site depending on where they were in the buying journey or what struggle point they encountered."

Now, with Kbot, customers leaving the Boscov's home page are met with a friendly, nonintrusive welcome message. Failed coupon codes are met with automatic assistance to save the sale. Kbot also offers assistance for complex orders requiring multiple pieces to complete a set and can provide upsell offers for new products. Customers struggling to pick an item are offered assistance, and delivery details are offered at key struggle points.

Offering these kinds of proactive, automated engagements has taken pressure off chat and phone agents, letting them focus on high-value engagements.

Four months after deploying Moxie Kbot's contextual guidance, Boscov's saw a 50 percent reduction in chat volume and a 10 percent reduction in phone volume, all while growing the business. The vast majority of digital engagements are now automated, with 89 percent of digital engagements happening via Kbot, and customers can still escalate to agents for more complex issues.

The 24/7 presence of Moxie Concierge at Boscov's digital storefront has also reduced the proportion of customers leaving the site, with a 2 percent reduction in bounce rate year-over-year and 44 percent more revenue coming through Kbot than chat alone.

"While search engines deliver traffic and analytics engines provide insights to customer behavior and struggle, Moxie's Kbot gives companies a new opportunity to guide customers at the moment of struggle, resulting in higher conversion rates," said Nikhil Govindaraj, senior vice president of products at Moxie, in a statement. "Customers are seeking advice, and Kbot enables the business to deliver advice at scale." —*Leonard Klie*

SINCE DEPLOYING MOXIE SOFTWARE'S CONCIERGE DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT SUITE, BOSCOV'S DEPARTMENT STORE HAS SEEN THE FOLLOWING RESULTS:

- a 50 percent reduction in chat volume;
- a 10 percent reduction in phone volume;
- 89 percent of digital engagements happening via Kbot;
- a 2 percent reduction in bounce rate year-over-year; and
- 44 percent more revenue coming through Kbot than chat alone.

TechStyle Gives a NICE Boost to Its Agent and Customer Experience

The online fashion retailer brings efficiency and flexibility to its far-flung workforce, which helps the caller experience as well

TechStyle Fashion Group, based in El Segundo, Calif., is an online subscription-based fashion retailer that, according to its website, has nearly 5 million members and operates in 10 countries. Launched in 2010 as JustFab, TechStyle has brought on or kicked off several brands over the years, including ShoeDazzle, FabKids, and Fabletics, a fitness wear division it started with the actress Kate Hudson.

As a growing company with a far-flung staff, TechStyle faced the challenge of managing its expanding workforce. With some 650 customer-facing agents in such diverse locations as Los Angeles, Barcelona, the Philippines, Mexico, Poland, and Serbia, the company needed a robust solution to help manage and optimize all of those disparate schedules.

"We're a technology company, and we want to stay innovative. We want partners that are innovative as well."

"We had been stuck in an eight-hour-block phase for a couple years," said Shannon Nowell, senior manager of workforce management systems and analytics at TechStyle, in *CRM*'s May 2017 issue. "Our tenured employees were used to that schedule, and it was going to be disruptive for them to get anything different, such as a program of four tens or a flex schedule."

TechStyle sought a workforce management (WFM) system that could handle both employee schedule preferences and expanding business needs, and it also wanted a cloud-based platform that was flexible and adaptive. "We're a technology company, and we want to stay innovative," Nowell told *CRM*. "We want partners that are innovative as well."

It found what it was looking for with NICE's unified cloud WFM platform, which could integrate with the Customer Interaction Cloud solution that TechStyle had already deployed from inContact (which NICE acquired in mid-2016 for $940 million). TechStyle's rollout of NICE took just six weeks and was completed in September 2016.

The integrated systems can track real-time data on agent and call activities and forecast and generate schedules for multiple locations, all of which is leading to smoother operations and a better caller experience. "When we improved the forecast, we scheduled people better, and they were more aligned with our call arrival patterns, which allows for a better member experience," Nowell said.

It's led to more satisfied workers as well. Agents now have more control of their scheduling via NICE's Webstation, a single portal for managing personal-time-off requests, vacation requests, and shift bids. Though attrition rates among agents were already low, according to Nowell, they've gone lower still. "We definitely saw a decrease in attrition when we implemented NICE and began offering those agent empowerment tools," she said. Agent productivity has seen a 25 percent increase.

The NICE platform's modeling functionality, meanwhile, has allowed the team to run various scheduling scenarios to sharpen efficiency, eventually leading to a cut in operating costs of some $700,000, which TechStyle planned to reinvest in its workforce, Nowell said.

The implementation also yielded tangible results on the customer side. Before rolling out the NICE platform, TechStyle's answer rates were 92 percent; after four months with the platform in place, the company's answer rates had ticked up to 97 percent. The company's speed of answer also improved, dropping from a minute and 15 seconds to 30 seconds, Nowell said. And call duration decreased by 38 percent. These improvements all add up to a better customer experience.

TechStyle is considering how to harness NICE's technology to get even more efficient. The vendor's robotic automation capabilities could take over repetitive processes, allowing employees to "be used in more strategic ways," Nowell said. "It's been a great relationship with NICE, and we hope to keep it strong and expand upon it."

AFTER DEPLOYING NICE'S WFM SOLUTION WITH ITS INCONTACT CUSTOMER INTERACTION CLOUD, TECHSTYLE FASHION GROUP SAW THE FOLLOWING RESULTS:

- a $700,000 reduction in operating costs;
- an increase in answer rates from 92 percent to 97 percent;
- a quicker speed of answer, from 1 minute 15 seconds to 30 seconds;
- a 38 percent reduction in call wrap-ups; and
- a 25 percent increase in agent productivity.

Vega Takes Its Cause to Social Media

The provider of plant-based food products turned to Conversocial for help engaging customers on Instagram

Sprouting from the belief that you needn't sacrifice nutrition for convenience, Vega makes certified vegan, gluten-free foods that are free of artificial flavors, colors, and sweeteners and ready for on-the-go consumption. According to its website, Vega's mission includes sharing its passion for clean, plant-based nutrition through education and leading by example; delivering premium, innovative products to its customers; and nurturing a culture of sustainability.

The Canadian company, active since 2001 (and acquired in 2015 by WhiteWave, a maker of plant-based foods and beverages), launched its social customer care team in 2014 to establish a unified view of its social channels and an efficient way to engage with its community. Vega was looking to educate its community about its products and plant-based living via social media, and Instagram proved to be one of its most successful channels for customer engagement.

> *"Because of Conversocial's platform, we are able to have ongoing and meaningful conversations with our community."*

So the team recently turned to Conversocial, which provides cloud-based social customer service solutions, for further help with reaching and engaging customers on Instagram. Among other things, Vega wanted to use Instagram as a way of connecting with customers who would go on to serve as brand ambassadors, and to generally increase positive brand sentiment on the channel.

"From the outset, Vega's main goal was to create a proactive strategy on Instagram to surprise and delight customers, educate our community about our products, [and] provide lifestyle tips and plant-based recipes," says Bridgette Clare, customer experience team lead at Vega. "We strongly believe that social customer engagement is the key to building brand loyalty and fostering meaningful relationships, and we needed a platform that enabled us to have a unified view of our social channels and an efficient way to engage with our community."

Conversocial helped with all of these goals, Clare says. Its solution, which proved seamless for Vega's sales reps and agents and effortless for its customers, enabled Vega to engage with its community of customers on the channel "in the moment and at scale," Clare says. She adds that Conversocial "has been focusing on engaging consumers over social channels before it was popular and understood the value of a solution that was solely dedicated to social customer engagement."

With the belief that "customer service should be effortless," Conversocial's core platform provides a number of capabilities designed to streamline the customer service process. These include automatically threading together public and private messages; routing conversations back to the original agent; and assigning conversations based on agent specialization, triggers, and topics. It also enables collaborative resolution management.

"We believed that Conversocial's values aligned with ours—to provide the best possible service in the most engaging and convenient manner," Clare says.

Conversocial has yielded real results for Vega; after implementing the vendor's platform, Vega was able to deliver 20,195 responses to customers on Instagram, representing a 221 percent increase year-over-year, and establish an average handling time of 1 minute and 17 seconds, representing an 18 percent decrease year-over-year. And thanks to Conversocial, Vega built a 98.5 percent positive brand sentiment on the social media channel.

"Social engagement is about authenticity, and the only way to be human and real with your customers is to find a way to scale meaningful interactions," Clare says. "Because of Conversocial's platform, we are able to have ongoing and meaningful conversations with our community."

Feeding off the success of its initial rollout, Vega added a click-to-chat feature to its consumer phone line, giving consumers the option to shift from phone to Facebook Messenger. "Conversocial, paired with this feature, has given us the ability to keep the conversation going and engage with our consumers in a timely way, exactly where they want to connect with us," Clare says. —*Sam Del Rowe*

AFTER IMPLEMENTING CONVERSOCIAL'S SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM, VEGA WAS ABLE TO:

■ deliver 20,195 responses to customers on Instagram, a 221 percent increase year-over-year;

■ establish an average handling time of 1 minute and 17 seconds, an 18 percent decrease year-over-year; and

■ build a 98.5 percent positive brand sentiment on Instagram.

The CRM Adoption Paradox

CRM systems are stronger and more packed with features than ever, but users aren't always rushing to use them. Here's how one firm changed that.

HERE WE SIT IN 2018 and the buzz around CRM continues to be artificial intelligence (AI) and customer engagement. The platform providers for CRM continue to reach for the stars with innovation that seems groundbreaking and game changing. Yet about half of the organizations using CRM platforms continue to have significant struggles with the buy-in of these very feature-rich and powerful systems. It raises the question of whether the "C" in CRM starts with your external customer, or with your internal one.

To answer the question, we must look at the entire ecosystem of your organization and evaluate the operational structure in combination with the tools you are using to reach your desired goals. Many management teams have their annual strategy retreats and make plans for each year, and then the plans are passed down through the ranks. The problem, though, is that many companies do not calibrate their CRM systems to align with their objectives.

Today's CRM platforms can be powerful tools of collaboration, but too often the way they are implemented makes them overwhelming to users. Even more curious is how companies continue to extend these tools before they have optimized them for their current objectives. Getting lost along the way is the notion of truly connecting with your customers.

It seems simple, but the first step in the process is to translate goals into tactical objectives. Compensation plans are adjusted and numbers are pushed around without getting granular in how outcomes will be achieved. The challenge for those on the front lines is that interpreting how to achieve company goals is often left up to individual managers or the sales and service personnel themselves.

> **TOO OFTEN THE WAY CRM PLATFORMS ARE IMPLEMENTED MAKES THEM OVERWHELMING TO USERS.**

The key to a successful CRM implementation is to take a step back and define each of the constituencies that will be part of reaching your companywide goals. In other words, take a holistic view and look at the connections between internal teams, channel partners, vendors or suppliers, and end customers. None of your goals can be met without understanding the tactics you need to execute to reach the desired results.

Most organizations do not have a structure set up that goes through the process of aligning strategy to tactics. Planning takes place late in the year, and by the time the new year rolls around, people are too busy having sales kickoff meetings. Yet there has been little or no adjustment to your CRM so that achieving those results is simple and process-driven. Therefore, people are using tools that are calibrated for when they were first rolled out and not for the goals you have set for the current year.

After recently helping a professional services organization work through the process of CRM transformation, we established a set of best practices that changed the way people approached their day-to-day execution. The following case study runs through how we were able to turn the corner on low adoption and a negative view of CRM.

Evaluation. First we sat down with management and ran through their strategic plans for the coming year, before ever taking a look at the perceived problems with the CRM platform. Once we understood their goals of increased top-line revenue, we tactically broke them down from a new-customer and an existing-client perspective. At this point we looked at the current CRM system to see how it was being implemented. This process exposed the gap between expectations and system capabilities.

We also interviewed front-line managers and end users to understand both their thoughts about the CRM platform and to document the challenges they faced in using it to reach the goals provided by management. This was eye-opening, because we found many examples where the platform failed to provide relevant data or reporting to make reaching those goals easier.

Planning. To decide whether the organization had the right platform, we needed to work backward from outcomes to tactics to see if the current environment could support our internal customers' goals. More simply put, we were trying to find out what their external customers needed to do more business with the firm. We then took our findings and built use case scenarios that involved assessments of each of the constituent populations.

Finally, we were able to establish how to calibrate the CRM platform for each team to make it more successful and developed plans for changing the organization's approach to the platform that included both structural and procedural enhancements.

Execution. One of the first changes we implemented involved the internal communication stream as it related to CRM. The original approach by management had been to use CRM as a condition of employment; we wanted to change the thinking so that users viewed CRM as mission-critical, and that input from them, the internal "customers," would be vital to its success going forward.

The next step in the process was to streamline and simplify many of the CRM platform's capabilities and processes. The firm had suffered from CRM overload—the company was trying to use so many CRM features that it was like training for a marathon before learning how to walk.

We then took a fresh approach to integrating key data and reporting to illuminate business opportunities and give front-line personnel a better picture of their customer relationships from a purely analytical perspective.

This process involved communicating how the data aligned with management's strategy and how to use the data to generate more business.

Finally, we put in place a feedback mechanism for the purpose of ensuring that day-to-day users and managers were involved in any changes going forward. This mechanism became one of the keys to having people tied into adoption.

Results. The transformation was quite impressive for many reasons. After a six-month period of CRM retooling and retraining, the company saw its revenue goals exceeded in less than six months. More importantly, it was easier for individual contributors to leverage CRM as a strategic business tool. And with the reporting in place, it was much easier to manage the business.

On a less empirical note, the feedback received from customers and internal teams was eye-opening. One manager said that her first action of the day, before opening her email, was to launch CRM; she had previously been one of platform's biggest detractors. And during one of the annual client reviews, a customer that had doubled its revenue from the previous year commented that the firm had become a much more strategic adviser in helping it improve its business results.

The best CRM implementations are set up to make the platforms easy to use, have meaningful data, and support the tactical goals that will help execute your leadership's strategic objectives. CRM platforms should be the operational heartbeat of the firm. In simple terms, if your internal "customers" are happy and successful, it will translate into your actual customers being serviced in a way that will prompt them to do more business with you, which means stronger, more long-term relationships. ℞

> THE BEST CRM IMPLEMENTATIONS ARE EASY TO USE, HAVE MEANINGFUL DATA, AND SUPPORT THE COMPANY'S TACTICAL GOALS.

Danny Estrada is the founder of E Squared, a management consulting firm focused on sales team performance, and has been a CRM practitioner for the past 20 years. As a practice leader, he has guided teams through the implementation and development cycles of more than 500 CRM projects. He is author of the Practical CRM blog (http://blog.practicalcrm.net) and has served as a keynote speaker for companies such as Salesforce, Microsoft, SAP, and Sage, discussing real-world application of CRM concepts. Estrada is also an executive MBA from the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University.

MARSHALL LAGER
APRIL'S CHIEF PSYCHOLOGY OFFICER

Pint of View

Thank You for Your Whatever

Warm feelings help drive satisfying interactions

[Editor's note: This column originally appeared in our March 2016 issue.]

I HAD A SUDDEN INSIGHT recently in the way we think about customer experience, and I want to share it with you. It's a pure coincidence that I was also desperate for a topic this month and I'm writing shortly after Thanksgiving. [Ed note: Lead time alert!] I posit that at its core, good customer experience is based on the feeling of gratitude.

Since this is coming from an epiphany and personal experience, my hypothesis is going to be more philosophy than science. I'm applying introspection to a broad topic, much like Freud did when he came up with his shtick. It worked great for him—dude is still famous 75 years after his death, and he changed the mental health field, even if he was mostly wrong.

Consider this: What are the interactions you remember most as a customer? While it's true we tend to share negative experiences more broadly than positive ones, the times we hold most dear are the ones where someone goes above and beyond the call of duty. When we really don't expect anything good but somebody rocks our socks off, we experience a wave of gratitude. When we expect excellence and still get something beyond our expectations, all we can say is, "Wow, thank you."

Whether it's a doctor making a house call—these are incredibly rare but they do happen—or a shelf monkey finding one more of an out-of-stock item you desperately need, the feeling is overwhelming. We just want to hug that person, shake her hand, give him a tip. This is why gratitude and gratuity look so similar. It even extends to cuisine, as au gratin is French for "Thanks for putting cheese on everything."

It's safe to say that the one phrase most commercial experiences have in common is thank you. I believe it is part of our genes. Humans, as I've said before, are social animals. We are hard-wired to work together, because individually we were no match for other animals or the callous hand of nature. When somebody does something for us, we experience a warm rush, a feeling that what just happened is fundamentally right, and we want to return the favor. This is not true for psychopaths, but they learn that in order to get along in life, they need to at least fake it well. They do. Not me, because I'm not one. No sir, no psychopaths here.

So if a single instance of gratitude stays with us so strongly, what about the establishments we do business with on a regular basis? I don't know about you, but there are a lot of companies I feel attached to but with whom I don't have any particular memory of a big thank-you moment. That's community at work. The businesses we go back to are the ones that have made us grateful several times, in ways strong or weak, so we are drawn to the feeling we get when we're there. It becomes home, a place where we are comfortable because we know we will have thank-you moments.

This is so ingrained into our social character that even when we're not getting good service, we say the same thing. How many times have we uttered a bitter or sarcastic thank-you to somebody who was failing us? It's all we can do in a society that tries to be peaceful and conflict-averse, because otherwise it would be the sound of neck bones snapping while James Earl Jones intones, "Apology accepted, Captain Needa."

It's when we start to take thankfulness for granted that we become more likely to lapse as customers. As with any good feeling from endorphins, repeated stimulus of the gratitude center makes it less sensitive, and greater effort is needed to get the high. This is something for businesses to remember—expressing our gratitude to customers for continuing to come to us is crucial to keeping the cycle going. They come to you and provide you the money to remain profitable, so you'd damn well better thank them and mean it.

Marshall Lager is a senior analyst with Ovum, covering customer engagement and related topics. Let him know what you're thankful for at marshall.lager@ovum.com, or www.twitter.com/Lager.

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