



Moving to multichannel – the now of contact centres

Supporting customers solely by phone could be costing you time and money. And it's not always what your customers want either. Call avoidance means finding other ways to communicate, to reduce your costs while increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The role of the contact centre

Contact centres have always played a pivotal role in customer service. So how they operate is central to how organisations deal with today's challenges: maintaining service levels while reducing costs, or delivering service level improvements without significant additional budget.

The need to reduce contact centre costs isn't new, whether this has been achieved by increasing call efficiency, automating calls or even off-shoring the entire operation. However, call management strategies often ignore the analysis of inbound calls to determine why they are occurring and what could be done to reduce volumes, without affecting the ability to serve customers.

It means that contact centre agents are often dealing with calls that could be addressed more effectively and efficiently using alternative online or mobile channels.

To really exploit the value of your contact centre, you should consider looking at these alternative channels – adopting an omnichannel approach to customer service. It helps to improve customer satisfaction and agent morale, and significantly reduces operational costs. It stops your contact centres from being considered a costly overhead.

Meeting customer needs

Improving customer satisfaction has always been a key concern for contact centre managers. Lengthy call waits and the expectations of today's consumer to be able to access information as and when they need it has led to a drop in customer satisfaction. As recently reported by Accenture, 71% of consumers say that valuing their time is the most important thing a company can do to provide good customer service¹. This is demonstrated in the fact that customers will only wait on average 56 seconds before hanging up².

Customers want to be able to use channels that suit them and that will ultimately get them the information they need in a timely manner. HeyWire Business reports that 89% of people feel it is important to have different options such as phone, email, text and chat for customer support. The survey also showed that this would have a direct impact on satisfaction level: 47% of respondents said the ability to communicate by text could improve their overall satisfaction with customer support³.

Contact centres can become a key area of the business in adding value to the customer. And they should. Greater satisfaction leads to greater loyalty, which ultimately leads to increased customer retention.

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Adding value without adding cost

Enabling contact centres to run efficiently adds value to your business, and making the best use of agents' time is key to your success. Customers usually make a phone call to get information that is not readily available elsewhere – not because they want to talk to an agent. Over a quarter of the interactions currently being handled by UK contact centres are either unnecessary or avoidable according to Sabio and the Customer Contact Association⁴. Customers chasing a delivery, clarifying details of communications that have been unclear, or calling back to follow up on an unresolved issue, all result in tying up agents.

The impact of dealing with repetitive and unnecessary calls can lead to disengaged staff and ultimately an increase in staff attrition. Both have a direct impact on customer satisfaction – agents are no longer motivated to engage with customers – and costs, as employee churn increases the number of new staff that have to be hired and trained.

At O₂, we believe organisations should be looking at call avoidance strategies, selecting the right alternative channels for customer enquiries, depending on their content. This helps to reduce support costs but also frees up agents to assist high-value customers. Developing a multichannel approach to customer service enables you to meet the expectations of the digital customer too. A self-service approach, often expressed as the favoured route, allows customers to find information themselves, or to email or text for information rather than picking a phone up to an agent. 53% of consumers aged 18 to 34 would prefer to use electronic media – email, web chat, text or social – instead of the phone for customer support³.

Over the past decade we've seen the majority of the organisations we work with embark on this journey, for example by implementing IVR services within the contact centre that drive customers to look for information online. Much more can be done by implementing simple technology, such as a messaging platform that can be integrated with existing contact centre systems. This allows you to proactively inform and engage customers through SMS, email and in-app push messaging, to further reduce inbound calls to the contact centre.

Adopting a multichannel approach

At O₂, we can help you to reduce the number of inbound calls you receive and improve your customer experience. We work with you to understand the nature of the repeat calls you receive, gathering knowledge on your customer base, and their preferred method of contact.

Using this approach, we've helped customers achieve over a 20% reduction in calls within the first three months, on average, and at the same time improved their customer experience scoring. We achieved these results by delivering messaging solutions that work across multiple channels – SMS, MMS, email, voice and in-app push notifications, as appropriate.

We're already working with over 100 enterprises and public sector organisations, including five of the six high street banks, some of the biggest UK retailers and transport operators, as well as police forces, local authorities and emergency services. We can help our customers send proactive messages to their customers, letting them know their delivery is on its way, reassuring them their breakdown service is around the corner, or letting them know what time the engineer is arriving at their house – all minimising those calls for routine information into the contact centre. Our platforms can also be set up to handle inbound messages too, enabling your customers to rearrange a maintenance visit, for example, to a time that's convenient for them – easier for your customer, and requiring less resource from you.

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Our solutions are highly flexible and scalable: we currently deliver 45 million messages every month. By working with us, you'll join up your digital communication requirements into a single solution. We'll help you embrace new and intuitive ways to communicate with your customers, so you can:

- Enhance efficiency
- Reduce cost
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Reduce customer churn
- Gather insights

Whether you need an automated solution that integrates with your systems, or a self-service tool for contacting your customers as and when you need, we can help.

Contact your Account Manager, visit o2.co.uk/enterprise or contact us on 01235 433 507.

1. Accenture Global Consumer Pulse Survey, 2013
2. Ifbyphone, Benchmarking Analysis, Q1 2013
3. HeyWire Business, Customer Support Preference Study, 2014
4. Sabio and the Customer Contact Association, April 2012