

CONTACT CENTER AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TECHNOLOGY TRENDS IN 2017

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Few areas in business are as dynamic as customer experience and contact center. In addition to using existing technologies, practitioners in these fields can choose from a variety of new technologies to help them do their jobs. This document highlights the top technology trends that will influence the priorities, of contact center, and customer experience executives, in 2017.



Determining which technologies are best designed to help companies thrive in a changing market is essential to maximize returns.

Determining the right technologies to invest in is no easy task in today's marketplace.

There are simply too many technologies available for a contact center or customer experience (CX) executive to choose from. As technology buyers make purchase or upgrade decisions, it's vital that they determine their specific needs and upcoming changes in the marketplace to choose the right solutions. This should be a two-pronged approach:

First, companies must identify the key measures indicating success in attaining strategic priorities in their business plan. For some companies, these measures might include growth in market share and an increase in customer spend. For others, it might include maximizing existing client spend and reducing service costs. Assessing the potential impact of new technologies helps companies better anticipate achieving success through the use of specific technologies. It's also helpful to do this exercise for existing technologies, as it helps gauge if the company is seeing expected returns. It can also prompt new ways to make better use of these technologies – or spur investment in new ones.

The second 'prong,' when making the right technology purchase (or upgrade decision), must be in determining the underlying market trends. (Specifically, identifying which technologies are

best designed to help companies thrive in a changing market.) Below is a list of four technologies that Aberdeen anticipates will influence contact center and CX activities throughout 2017.

Top Trends of 2017

Machine learning & artificial intelligence (AI): Findings from Aberdeen's May 2016 [*CEM Executive's Agenda 2016: Aligning the Business Around the Customer*](#) study shows that 58% of businesses use at least eight channels to interact with customers. The increased use of connected devices, such as connected cars and machines, means that the volume of data companies capture will grow exponentially. This means that businesses must seek ways to regularly (and rapidly) analyze this data to make timely business decisions.

Machine learning allows organizations to reduce reliance on data scientists to analyze vast amounts of information, and enable line-of-business employees (such as sales, marketing, and contact center executives) with relevant insights needed to do their jobs. AI boosts these capabilities by utilizing computers to support making business decisions.

By using AI, companies can analyze complex sets of data to make business decisions. In the short-term, use of AI will prove particularly beneficial for making decisions on simpler tasks, such as customer routing in the contact center. As the technology capabilities of AI become more complex, companies will find more innovative ways to use them, such as managing the customer journey in an automated fashion. Humans will only be involved in conversations requiring a personal touch, or reasoning capabilities.

One of the arguments against the use of AI, is that it will result in companies eliminating jobs. While this might be true in some instances, at least in the short-term, AI will help businesses empower their employees to their jobs more efficiently. It's important for companies to communicate these benefits clearly to

What is Machine Learning & AI?

For the purposes of this research, Aberdeen makes the following definitions:

Machine learning: A technology capability designed to learn specific insights through analysis of data without being programmed.

AI: A technology capability that can analyze and interpret complex sets of data. It uses this data to mimic human learning and decision-making capabilities.

their employees, ensuring that adoption and use of AI will achieve greater returns from investing in this technology.

Chat bots: This technology is one that was covered in Aberdeen's February 2016 [*Self-Service: Maximize Business Results by Helping Customers Help Themselves*](#) study. Chat bots (also referred to as 'bots') are virtual contact center agents helping customers address their needs.

Bots can be used for a variety of purposes, from allowing clients to check their account balances, to making a service appointment – all without the need to call a contact center. Overall, their use allows companies to reduce labor costs, as they won't need agents to do the jobs that can be done by bots. For customers, it provides them with a conversational approach to service (see the next trend below) – hence reducing the need to call a support number and wait for an agent. Instead, customers can message the bots to seek help when it's convenient.

It's important to note that bots often work best when handling simple support requests. When customers contact a business for support on a complex issue, it's best to route them to a live agent. If the customer initially contacts a bot, such routing can be enabled through 'click-to-call' or 'click-to-chat' options.

Conversational commerce: This refers to companies introducing a new approach to their CX program. Traditionally, many companies use an 'interaction-based' approach. This means that a company stakeholder interacts with a current or potential customer, based on either party initiating the conversation, with a clear start and end for each interaction. Conversational commerce on the other hand, offers a more 'relationship-based' approach where conversations are not limited to a specific time period, and can take place over time. This period is based on customer preferences, such as when the client wants to interact with the business – not the other way around.

Bots often work best when they're handling simple support requests. Complex ones should best be handled through agents.

Conversational commerce helps companies transform customer conversations through a relationship-based approach.

Let's further clarify how conversational commerce works with an example. A customer might call the contact center of a telecommunications services provider to request support for a service outage. This would then require the customer to stay on the phone to get connected to the right agent, explain their issue and wait until it's resolved. This represents a typical customer 'interaction.' On the other hand, if the company provides conversational commerce capabilities, such as text messaging, it would allow the customer to contact the business this way to request support. But, unlike a phone interaction (where the customer needs to stay on the line), the client can respond back to the business at a preferred time. This reduces the customer's effort, and provides greater control to the clients on managing the timeline of communications.

Knowledge management: One of the most common mistakes companies make, when building and managing a customer experience program, is assuming that processes and technologies alone are responsible for influencing customer behavior and sentiment. While they certainly have a role, businesses often ignore the vital role employees play in influencing customer experience results.

If employees can't access the right data to do their jobs, or are not provided with the right tools, this means that customers might receive a poor experience. This is indeed validated by findings in Aberdeen's August 2016 [*Customer Centricity: Knowledge is Power in the Age of the Customers*](#) study. Data in this research shows that on average, employees spend 15% of their time seeking relevant data needed to do their jobs. This is due to employees needing to browse at least three different applications until they find the right content. In a contact center, for example, this would mean that an agent might need to browse the CRM system, ERP, and in-house data repository until finding the right knowledgebase article needed to help a client.

Instead, top performing companies realize the business benefits of empowering their employees with the right knowledge at the right time. Increasingly, they are also looking to incorporate knowledge management systems within their technology toolbox. If your employees struggle with getting to the right information, then we highly recommend looking into a knowledge management platform – supported with a strong search capability – to help employees easily find the insights needed to help customers.

Author: Omer Minkara, VP & Principal Analyst, Contact Center & Customer Experience Management



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