The Building Blocks of a Mobile-Friendly Omni-Channel Customer Experience

Mobile Drives Omni-Channel Strategies

The shift in who controls the customer-company relationship has not just begun, it's nearly over. With the global proliferation and increased application of smartphones, the rapid acceptance and rise of the sharing economy, and the pervasive connectedness resulting from advancements in mobile networks and cloud infrastructure, consumers have more power in how they want to engage with the companies they do business with. With this control, and access to more channels and flexibility, today's empowered consumers have higher expectations for service than most companies are aware of or provide. Consumers don't just hope for omni-channel customer service, where a conversation starts in one channel and seamlessly transitions to another, they expect it. In fact, in a recent Aspect Omnibus survey, 91 percent of consumers said they should be able to pick up where they left off when contacting customer service.

Unfortunately, most companies have created their mobile strategies in isolation, separate from the contact center. This means when a customer using a mobile app decides they want to engage a customer service agent, there is no clear path into the contact center other than leaving the channel (in this case a mobile app) and starting a separate conversation. This approach not only creates disrupted experiences and prolongs issue resolution, but also frustrates customers.

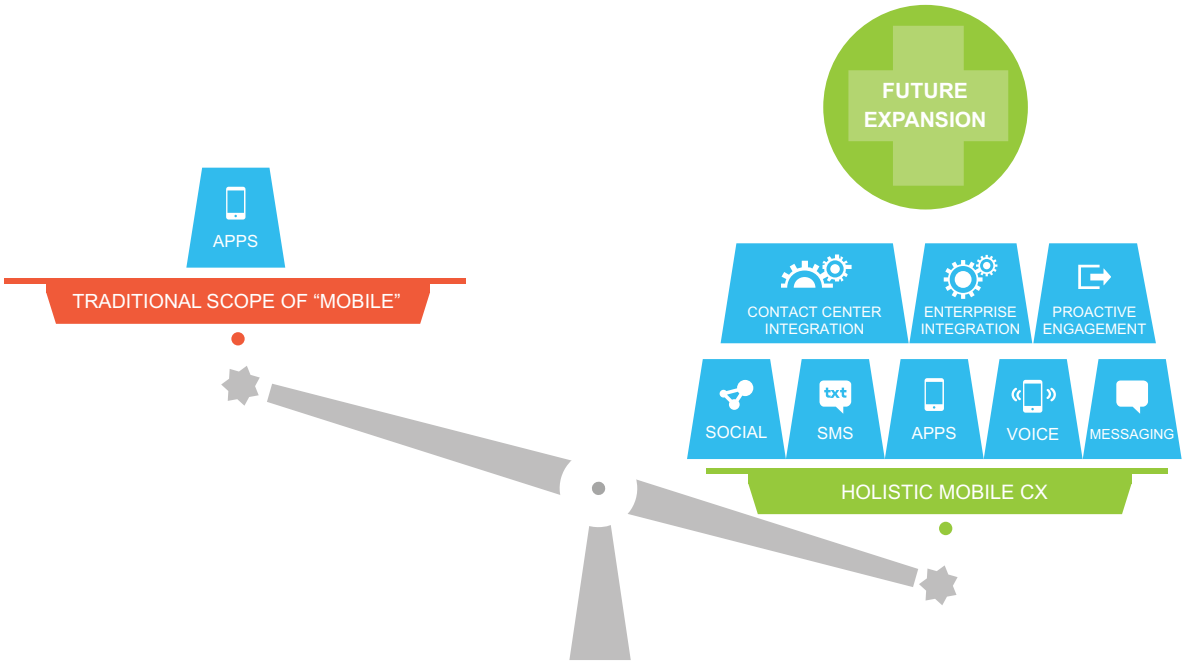
Due to the increase in smartphone usage, companies have experienced success with their mobile marketing strategies. Some companies are beginning to recognize customer service opportunities as well. In fact, in 2013, one in two companies reported having a mobile-accessible customer care program [1]. It's no surprise then that mobile web and mobile native applications represent two of the top three channels that companies are trying to increase their customer service adoption of in 2015 [2].

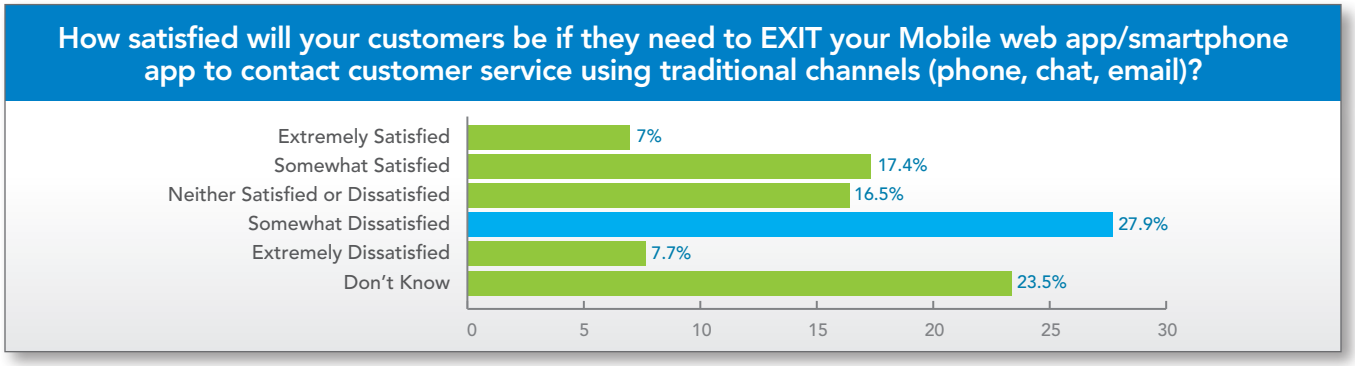
The Broken Mobile Customer Experience

Expectations for mobile and the customer experience are high but many of today's standard customer service practices have actually become obstacles for companies trying to meet those consumer expectations. The first obstacle is often created before the application is even developed. Many businesses rely on their incumbent IT vendor and/or dedicated mobile app development shop – neither of which is likely to have contact center experience or understanding of the customer journey – to build a customer service mobile

app. According to ICMI's [3] report on mobile customer service strategy, companies are confused about who to turn to for building a reliable mobile customer care solution: "Contact centers seem willing to experiment with mobile support technology if given the necessary budgets and resources, but are often unsure where to find trustworthy recommendations. When asked 'What additional technology do you need to add, plan to add, or are investigating as part of your Mobile Customer Service Strategy?' an alarming number said they weren't sure, didn't know, or needed advice. It is clear that guidance is necessary in this area."

To further complicate the move to mobile, many contact centers have built mobile customer care apps in silos with no integration with their customer care infrastructure. This repeats some of the same mistakes that were made in the early days of IVR: a customer calls in, provides qualifying information, gets connected to an agent and is asked to repeat themselves. In this case, a customer seeking help in a rich environment is forced to leave that environment and move to another channel, leaving the context of what happened in the app - and quite often their patience - behind. This process is frustrating to customers and is a drain on contact center resources as it increases the likelihood of customers "zeroing out" to an agent, which in turn increases call duration and misrouting.





CMI - A Mobile Customer Service Strategy: Research Paper and Best Practices Guide

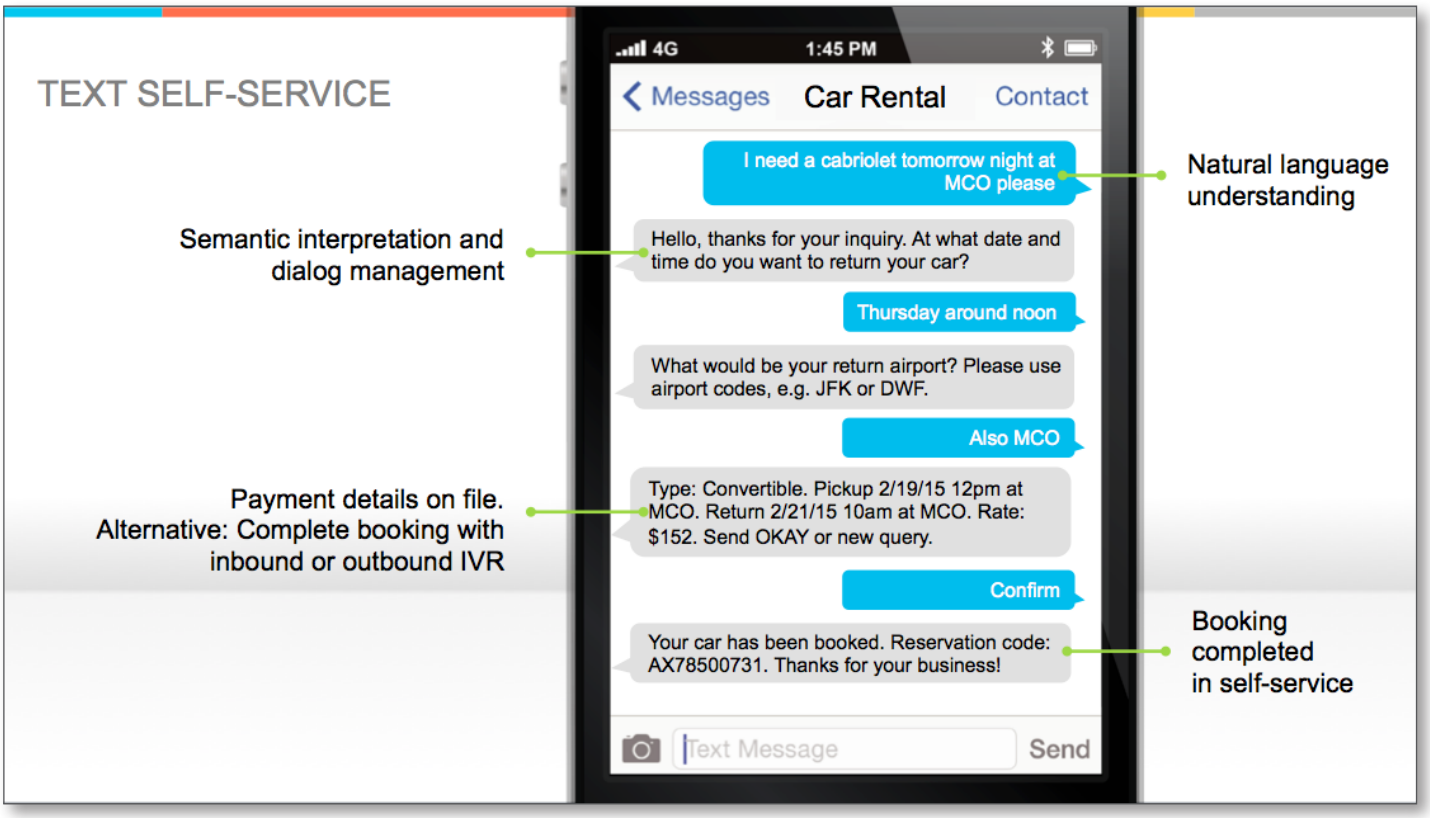
The Role of Mobile in the Omni-Channel Customer Experience

While there are obstacles to overcome when building a customer-focused mobile experience, many best practices can be accomplished without significant technology implementations.

Design for Experience Continuity

For companies to reap the benefits of mobile, they should design a mobile strategy within the context of the contact center and with an omni-channel customer experience in mind. The mistake many companies make is thinking mobile is another channel to add to their multi-channel mix. Smartphones are a platform supporting multiple methods of communication, and each supported channel (social, phone, SMS, email) has its own benefits and reasons to exist. In fact, voice calls are one of the last things people use their phones for.

- **SMS** allows concise, to-the-point communication. It can handle simple questions and short interactions very well. It also gets the most immediate attention. According to an August 2014 MobileMarketingWatch article, 99 percent of all SMS messages are opened, making it a true real-time communication channel. SMS can be used for self-service – enabling customers to interact with an app using natural language or a menu structure (similar to an IVR).



- **Chat** (web chat, IM) is similar in nature to SMS in that it is a channel typically used purely for textual communication. But chat doesn't have the length restrictions of SMS and therefore works best for longer dialogs and more complex issues. Plus it can be launched and utilized right from a browser.
- **Social networks**, specifically Twitter, are also textual but add a social component to the mix. Messages exchanged here are visible to the public unless Direct Messaging is used or messages are carried over to a private channel. Social networks are therefore popular for peer-to-peer service (asking friends or other customers for help), as well as for the dreaded public complaint.
- **Email** is still a popular medium for sending complaints in which the customer wants to elaborate on an issue, or when they need to attach images or files with their inquiry.
- **Calls** (including video calls) are increasingly becoming a customer's "last resort" as most issues can nowadays be resolved through self-service. But when all other channels fail to resolve an issue, customers switch to the good old voice channel to discuss matters "in person," with an agent, who is more and more considered a subject matter expert.
- **Mobile native or web apps** are a pure self-service channel and all of the other channels mentioned here can originate from apps like these.

Considering that 99 percent of contact centers use two or more channels for customer engagement [2], integration of mobile must happen from the beginning and allow customers to switch between channels without losing context. The concept of *Experience Continuity* ensures that customers will never be forced to repeat themselves when switching channels or going from self-service to live service because the context of their interactions follows along with them. By using external data stores accessible through Web Services APIs, e.g. using Amazon Cognito, so-called *context cookies* of the customer journey can easily be tracked across channels and touch points. This technology ultimately enables experience continuity.

Incorporating mobile into the overall customer experience strategy does not have to be a daunting task. Embedding a widget into an existing mobile app to deliver text chats or phone calls into your contact center can be done using existing channels and without impacting current operations or infrastructure. Companies can also easily add a callback option in their app versus simply listing phone numbers that will force the customer to close the app and reconnect another way.

Bridge Self-Service and Agent-Assisted Service

The desire to get immediate answers to questions or to get help in a situation where a phone conversation is not ideal drives many consumers to mobile for self-service. But getting omni-channel right is about more than channel integration; it also requires that self-service and agent-assisted service experiences are seamless. Agents should have access to data regarding the self-service activities the customer has already attempted. A customer in a rich environment, such as a mobile app, should not have to leave that environment, switch to the phone channel and then repeat information to an agent that they already provided in the app.

"Self-service is another use case that mobile customer care users keenly focus on to strengthen customer experience results. While 75% of these businesses enable their clients with self-service native applications to address their needs through mobile devices, only 59% of businesses without a formal program to incorporate mobile within their CEM programs have this capability."

- Aberdeen "Multi-Channel Contact Center: Establishing the Tie Between Mobile and the Customer Experience"

As an example, imagine an automatic SMS message sent to a customer to inform them about a delay to their flight. The customer is able to use self-service to change to another flight but when they ask to upgrade to business class, business rules might determine that they be directed via SMS to live chat for seating and pricing options. At this point it is crucial to not force the customer on a different channel, unless they have asked for it. Self-service can and should enable seamless handover to live service with an agent while staying on the same channel.

Engage Proactively

Consumers today enjoy being notified proactively with important information, whether it's the status of an order, a change in services they are receiving or an actionable reminder (confirm an appointment, order a prescription). They also want updates to be communicated via the channel of their choice: SMS, Twitter direct message (DM), email, USSD message, mobile app push notification, phone call, etc.

Engaging proactively will only become more prominent as the Internet of Things takes off. With more and more devices connected to the internet, customers will expect manufacturers to be aware of any issues with a product, whether it is a home thermostat, a vehicle or a refrigerator, and be able to communicate with them next steps for issue resolution.

Rather than treating outbound communication as a one-way street, natural language understanding and advanced dialog technology today allows turning the outbound notification or reminder into a two-way interactive dialog with the customer. In addition, you can link to a "disposable app", a mobile-optimized Web app, sent to the customer as a short URL embedded in the text message. These apps don't require a prior download, allow richer interaction than what SMS or other purely textual channels can provide, and can be secured using HTTPS.

Omni-channel and Mobile Pay Off for Contact Centers

Mobile plays a large role in the empowerment of consumers in their relationship with the companies they do business with. With always-on, always-connected devices at their fingertips consumers expect to be able to reach brands at all hours of the day and night. While the majority of companies recognize the value of omni-channel service, far too many have mobile experiences separate from the contact center. The benefits of a well-designed customer care program extend to consumers as well as brands.

According to Aberdeen's December 2014 report "The Business Benefits of Mobile Customer Engagement," contact centers that implement mobile programs with best-in-class practices can expect to see higher customer retention rates, higher agent utilization rates, higher customer satisfaction rates, and greater agent productivity.

CONTACT CENTERS USING MOBILE TOUCH-POINTS OUTPERFORM THOSE THAT DON'T

Year-Over-Year Performance Change (n=407)	Mobile Customer Engagement Users	Non-Users
Agent utilization rate	30.4%	2.6%
Number of quality SLA's met	6.4%	5.2%
Agent productivity	6.1%	3.8%
Decrease in average handle time	4.5%	3.7%

Companies using mobile for customer care outpaced those without mobile customer care in change of annual company revenue, YOY change in first contact resolution rates, and YOY change non-compliance frequency. In addition, failure in omni-channel customer care is an expense that many companies cannot afford. 75 percent of consumers move to another channel when online customer service fails, and according to Forrester's 2014 report "Connect The Dots Between Customer Self-Service And Contact Centers," unnecessary service costs to online retailers due to channel escalation are $22 million on average.

The good news for contact centers is that implementing a mobile customer care program that meets these standards does not have to be daunting; a best-in-class program can be accomplished using existing contact center technology in most companies.

Sources

1. *Minkara, Omer, "Mobile Customer Care: It's More Than Hype," Aberdeen, February 2014.*
2. *"Flash Forward: 2015 Customer Engagement Channels Adoption," Aberdeen, 2015.*
3. *"Don't Be Left Behind: Build a Mobile Customer Service Strategy for 2013 and Beyond," ICMI, January 2013.*

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