Healing the Fractured Customer Experience

*How Service Organizations Like Yours
Are Achieving Cross-Channel Consistency
In Customer Interaction*

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Executive Summary

Once upon a time, service was personal. People treasured the emotional bonds formed with their service providers, and this translated into long-term loyalty.

Today, customers understand that the service relationship can't be one-to-one. However, they're still looking for the emotional attachment that truly personal service once provided. Moreover, they want their service on-demand, when and where they can squeeze it in to their hectic schedules.

For these reasons, a consistent multi touch-point customer experience is no longer a luxury. It's a basic customer expectation. Customer-facing organizations already know they need to unify the customer experience at all touch points.

Happily, many companies have the knowledge they need to deliver this consistent customer experience. However, this knowledge is itself fractured within the organization – in diverse IT systems, in knowledge bases, or even in service agents' heads.

To meet the challenge of multi touch-point customer service consistency, service organizations should focus on tools that intelligently harness existing knowledge and processes.

Organizations do not need to compromise on best-of-breed backend systems in order to meet expectations of service consistency. Intelligently rolled out and tightly integrated with existing systems and processes, today's multi touch-point customer service tools not only raise satisfaction and lower churn, but can actually serve as an engine for growth.

The Way It Was

Generation X'ers still remember the now-archaic concept of *personal customer service by actual people*. The butcher that knew your name. The banker who remembered when you took out your mortgage, and at what rate. *People* that provided service, yet had actual faces. *People* that knew who you were, and remembered what you'd discussed that last time you met.

The beauty of the personal relationship, from a purely business point of view, was the loyalty it engendered. Why would you go to the new butcher, when "your guy" had good prices, put the good lamb chops aside for you, and always asked about your mother's health? People treasured the emotional bonds formed with their service providers, and savvy providers knew how to turn these bonds into long-term business advantage.

The Way It Is

Today, both the world and business have changed. However, as mass-market service providers have discovered – human nature *has not*. In this age of regulatory-enforced pricing and seamless transitions between providers, customers gravitate to those providers that make them *feel good* about doing business.

Even though customers understand that the service relationship can't be one-to-one, they're consciously or unconsciously looking for the emotional attachment that the butcher and banker once provided. In an inherently depersonalized service arena, where the consumer does not always feel in control – loyalty is something to be *bestowed*, not given lightly. And a consumer will grant his or her loyalty only to a service provider deemed worthy.

Delayed Service Gratification – No Such Thing

No matter from what generation, today's on-the-move customers expect immediate service gratification. Just like they consume news and entertainment or conduct conversations via SMS - they want their service on-demand, when and where they can squeeze it in to their hectic schedules. They want to start a service call via mobile chat on the morning train, check progress from the car on the way to soccer practice in the afternoon, and see resolution of the issue on their home PC that evening. To them, this is a natural way to receive service.

For providers, however, the discontinuous, fractured nature of service interaction has become a key impediment to meeting customer expectations and winning coveted loyalty. Because while fractured communication may be natural for *customers* in today's hectic, hyper-connected world - it is not the way most corporate knowledge bases and customer service systems are structured.

Siloed Service: Bad for Business

If a fractured interaction is natural for customers, then *siloed service* is the absolute antithesis. It is *not* natural, from the customer's point of view, to receive inconsistent information from various service channels.

Each service call is, and should be regarded as, a conversation between a customer and a service provider. If a customer has begun a conversation and received information from the call center, they should be able to seamlessly continue this conversation in the nearest POS or any other touch point. Anything less leads to frustration and erodes the trust relationship with the service provider.

Simply put, inconsistent customer service reflects badly on the brand. Inability of customers to form an emotional, trusting relationship with a service provider translates into lack of satisfaction, lowers loyalty, and raises churn. Moreover, in an era when customer opinion matters more than ever, when consumers can share experiences (good and bad) with thousands of contemporaries at the click of a mouse on a social network – unhappy *existing* customers translate into fewer *new* customers.

Healing the Fractured Experience

Today, a consistent multi touch-point customer experience is not a luxury. It's a basic customer expectation.

Forward-thinking customer-facing organizations already know that they need to unify the customer experience at all touch points – from storefronts to web sites, from handsets to call centers.

The good news is that most organizations have the knowledge they need to deliver this consistent customer experience.

The bad news is that this knowledge is itself fractured within the organization – residing in diverse IT systems, personal or departmental knowledge bases, or even your service agents' heads.

In a time of tightening budgets, companies need tools that can cost-effectively harvest their existing knowledge assets, consolidate them and make them accessible and digestible for customers across all touch points.

Meeting the Challenge: How to Get Multi Touch-point Right

When choosing a strategy and tools to meet the challenge of multi touch-point customer service consistency, service organizations need to address both *business processes* and *technology*. In other words, it is crucial to consider the *what, where* and *how* of customer service – *what* information you provide, from *where* the information originates, and *how* it reaches the customer.

To get multi touch-point right and keep it working, organizations should keep the following in mind:

1. Identify Existing Knowledge

For any given customer service issue, it's highly likely that the knowledge of how to best resolve that issue already exists somewhere in your organization – at a touch point, in an IT system, or even in a customer service representative's brain.

A crucial first step to adapting business processes to effective multi-touchpoint customer service is identifying, mining, and extending existing knowledge sources. To this end, it is important to *choose a tool designed from the ground up to mine and consolidate knowledge from multiple systems.*

Moreover, the knowledge gathered from these multiple systems needs to be put into context. This may require an additional layer of content – clear explanations of technical specifications, for example - to make knowledge accessible and understandable to customers.

Finally, the data needs to flow in both directions – to and from the customer. For example, if a customer updates his/her address via your self-service web site, it should be updated immediately across all relevant systems and touch points, including (and especially) "closed" applications like billing.

2. Identify Existing Customer Service Gaps

If the knowledge of an optimal service query *resolution* exists, then the knowledge of *resolution gaps* exists, too. Identify the gaps in your customer service – by business process and touch point. What questions are regularly asked or asked more than once? Which touch points produce more repeat service enquiries? Where do customers get frustrated, or agents provide unsatisfactory answers constantly?

3. Fully Leverage Existing Assets

Once you find the best-of-breed service scenarios, leverage them to the fullest. Existing agent scripts and IVR flows should be fully reusable in self-service scenarios, notably via a smart phone. There is no reason to allocate scarce resources to re-create existing, effective tools.

4. Make New Interactions Reusable

If new interactions *do* need to be mapped out, then these should be write-once, deploy-anywhere: i.e. a new agent script should be immediately usable by Point of Sale staff, via a self-service mobile app, or on the support web site.
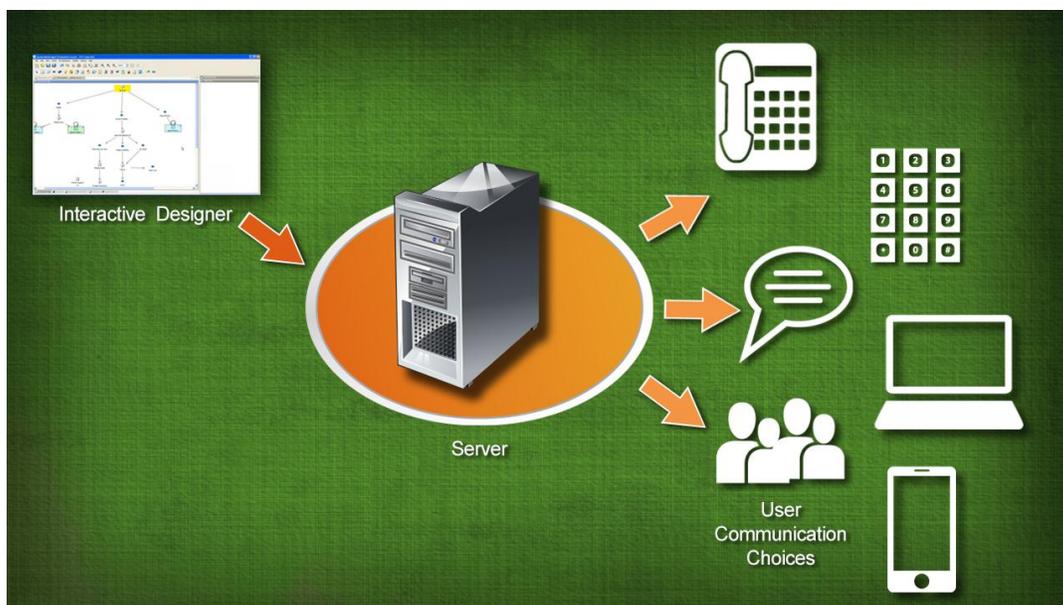
5. Tweak On-the-Fly

To maintain agility in service, tweaks and corrections to interaction flows, which is inevitable; need to be made on-the-fly? And "on-the-fly" means flow changes need to be made by business users – without coding, without porting, using simple drag and drop capabilities. And, these changes need to be made available to customers "on-the-fly" as well.

6. Smooth Cross-Channel Navigation

Some customers will always require personal agent attention. Thus, it is mission-critical to enable smooth cross-channel navigation and knowledge transfer. This means that a customer who began his or her interaction via a smartphone should not have to repeat any part of his or her query when the live agent comes on the line. The conversation should be completely and seamlessly linear.

7. Measure Success, Tweak Again

To keep support strategy agile and fresh, companies need tools that will enable them to measure the success of the newly-integrated consistent customer experience. Detailed reporting capabilities should enable, for example, recording of self-service sessions down to an individual field level. Sophisticated audit trail reporting should show how interactions are performing, where bottlenecks are occurring, and where interactions may be further optimized.

In Conclusion

In the era of customer engagement, where service organizations are stretching resources to cover whole new channels of interaction (mobile, social media, and more), the most basic of customer conversations – the service enquiry – can no longer be neglected.

Unifying the customer experience across all touch points is neither a new concept, nor a technologically unobtainable and excessively costly one. And it is, in today's hyper-competitive service arena, an *imperative*.

By choosing the right tools for the job, organizations do not need to compromise on best-of-breed backend systems while meeting expectations of service consistency. Intelligently rolled out and tightly integrated with existing systems and processes, today's multi touch-point customer service tools not only raise satisfaction and lower churn, but can actually serve as an engine for growth

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Customers can benefit from an improved customer service experience at every touch point with the organization, whether at the call center, on the mobile or at the retail store.

Jacada projects often deploy in less than six months, and our customers can often realize a complete return on investment within 12 months of deployment.

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