

Why Multichannel Customer Service Is Important



By: David Lover, Vice President, Strategy and Technology, Arrow S3

Successfully integrating mobile apps into the organization's customer experience strategy and processes translates to convenience, speed of service, and more first contact resolutions. Early adopters will stand out from the competition, and customers are sure to notice and share their positive experiences. ➡



Consumers may naturally prefer communicating by either voice, email, or text messaging, but virtually all will switch between channels based on mood, need, location, or device. A customer with a nonurgent question may send an email rather than calling the customer service center and risk being placed on hold for several minutes. A customer with a quick question who wants a fast response might choose text messaging or a Web chat. Or a Web customer may switch to voice if he or she is wary of entering credit card information online. That can all change depending on the device the customer is using at that time.

Customers will spend more with organizations that make it easy for them to do business with them. That goes a long way toward retaining that customer, assuming the organization can readily support that choice and deliver a good, personalized, and consistent experience regardless of their chosen communication channel(s).

It can cost companies between \$3 and \$10 each time a customer uses the phone to dial in to a contact center. Those costs quickly add up. Through a multichannel contact strategy,

customers can be given alternatives to the phone along with automated options to resolve issues. That can dramatically reduce costs.

Or, in the case of a feature like automated or live Web chat on an online retail page, it can help generate additional revenue by providing live help when an online consumer with a full shopping cart is dawdling and taking a long time to check out. Engaging a customer directly at a time when he or she may need technical or sales help can boost sales as well as customer loyalty.

Contact center agents also benefit from multiple channels. They get to switch from one channel to another, thereby avoiding fatigue and increasing employee satisfaction. This flexibility can also aid “load balancing”—letting managers better deploy agents to meet demand on different channels during peak times, thereby improving agent occupancy and effectiveness.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of these new communication channels is the opportunity to differentiate customer service by deploying services in innovative new ways. Let’s take a look at how organizations use them to stand out from the competition.

Figure 5.1: **Customers Love Mobile For ...**



Source: Avaya internal research.

The Role of Mobile in Multichannel

The exploding popularity of smartphones and tablets has changed consumer behavior by offering on-the-go access to many channels, including voice, Web pages, SMS/text, social media sites, and video chat. A customer may want a quick price, a map to a store, or help with a product or purchase—and there's probably an application for that.

Organizations also recognize the changing role of mobility within their own operations. A Forrester study commissioned by Avaya in January 2012, "Mobile Solutions Connect Information Workers to Collaboration and Innovation Processes," found that:

- **Seventy-six percent** of respondents listed "improving workforce productivity" as the primary driver for investing in mobility.
- **Sixty-nine percent** said that increasing collaboration between employees is important.
- **Fifty-two percent** felt that increasing collaboration with customers is important.

While mobile apps are useful self-service informational aids, they don't necessarily provide a convenient way for customers to get additional levels of assistance. More often than not, customers have to revert back to more traditional methods of contact, such as a telephone call. The challenge of finding the customer service number, navigating through an interactive voice response (IVR), and then repeating an activity already undertaken on a mobile device causes unnecessary frustration for the customer.

Companies that fully integrate mobile self-service apps into their multichannel contact centers can differentiate themselves from their competitors. A seemingly little thing such as providing customers with a visual

option to request a callback within the mobile application, for example, can fundamentally transform the customer experience for the better. A customer who can request additional assistance, see when an agent is available, or schedule a more convenient time is an empowered, happier customer.

Additionally, rich contextual data can be gathered to better manage the customer experience. This information could include:

- **Transactional, device-resident data**, such as the customer's mobile phone number, a scanned bar code, or the customer's IM presence.
- **Situational data**, such as geotags and location information through GPS.
- **Collaboration-enabled data**, such as websites browsed or information downloaded.
- **Application-driven data**, such as menu options chosen from an application or feedback from a customer survey entered through a mobile application.

Using contextual information gathered from the application and other sources, such as customer relationship management (CRM) or back-office applications, enables dynamic management of the interaction. It can also facilitate routing further requests for information to the best-qualified agent or resource and ensure that the experience can be personalized and prioritized. After the interaction, the information can be used to send a tailored survey request or a relevant promotional coupon directly to the customer's smartphone.

Successfully integrating mobile applications into the organization's customer experience strategy and processes translates to convenience, speed of service, and more first call resolutions. Those are vital ingredients ➡



for improved customer satisfaction and customer lifetime value. Early adopters will stand out from the competition, and customers are sure to notice and share their positive experiences.

The Role of Social Media

The widespread adoption of Twitter, Facebook, company blogs, customer forums, and the like has turned social media into a powerful communication channel. The challenge for organizations is ensuring that it is managed as such: a powerful two-way communication channel that needs to be integrated and given the right priority.

As with voice, social media interactions that require some form of organization response or action must be identified and dealt with quickly and effectively. Integrating the organization's social media strategy with the overall customer experience strategy and bringing social media into the contact center both improve the customer experience in several important ways.

Organizations can cut through the volumes of chatter to identify only those social media items that really require a timely response before complaints and negative comments spin out of control. Responses can be handled consistently by the right trained individuals, which can quickly boost the positive perception of the company across the commenter's entire social network. In addition, contact center agents can be given relevant contextual information such as a customer's history, social media influence, and the positive or negative sentiment of the comment, empowering them to deliver a personal, integrated, and consistent experience.

When deploying social media for customer service, several considerations should be addressed:

- **Cooperation.** Marketing departments traditionally handle Twitter and Facebook campaigns. But as social media management matures, the need for customer service involvement becomes greater. Moving social media into the contact center doesn't mean cutting marketing out of the equation. Marketing can continue to drive the strategy and positioning of the messages delivered to customers by the contact center, which already handles the majority of customer communications anyway. Similarly, marketing needs to ensure that the contact center is fully briefed on marketing campaigns and promotions in order to meet the increased traffic and queries these may generate.
- **Training.** Agents assigned to social media must be trained in the appropriate use and etiquette of various social media sites as well as on the latest sales and marketing campaigns the organization has on offer.

- **Technology.** Monitoring, filtering, routing, and reporting social media interactions requires capable technologies and contact centers equipped with multichannel interaction routing, management, and reporting technologies.

Remember, social media can work for or against your company. But bringing social media into the contact center will help ensure that customers enjoy a positive experience from this additional channel—improving customer service, driving more sales, and boosting customer loyalty.

The Role of Video in the Multichannel Experience

The adoption of video for customer interaction has historically lagged behind other channels. However, increased bandwidth, declines in the cost of video technologies, and the introduction of smart devices have resulted in exponential growth for consumer video services such as Skype and Apple's FaceTime in recent years.

Video's value has also become apparent in recent years as a powerful customer services and collaboration tool, especially in scenarios such as:

- **Retail**—providing a video kiosk for specialist sales support in stores.
- **Finance**—providing face-to-face banking expertise in branch offices.
- **Contact centers**—supporting sign language for the hard of hearing and face-to-face demonstrations.
- **Healthcare**—facilitating remote patient consultations with doctors and specialists.

One of the main areas where video can help is in the area of Web self-service.

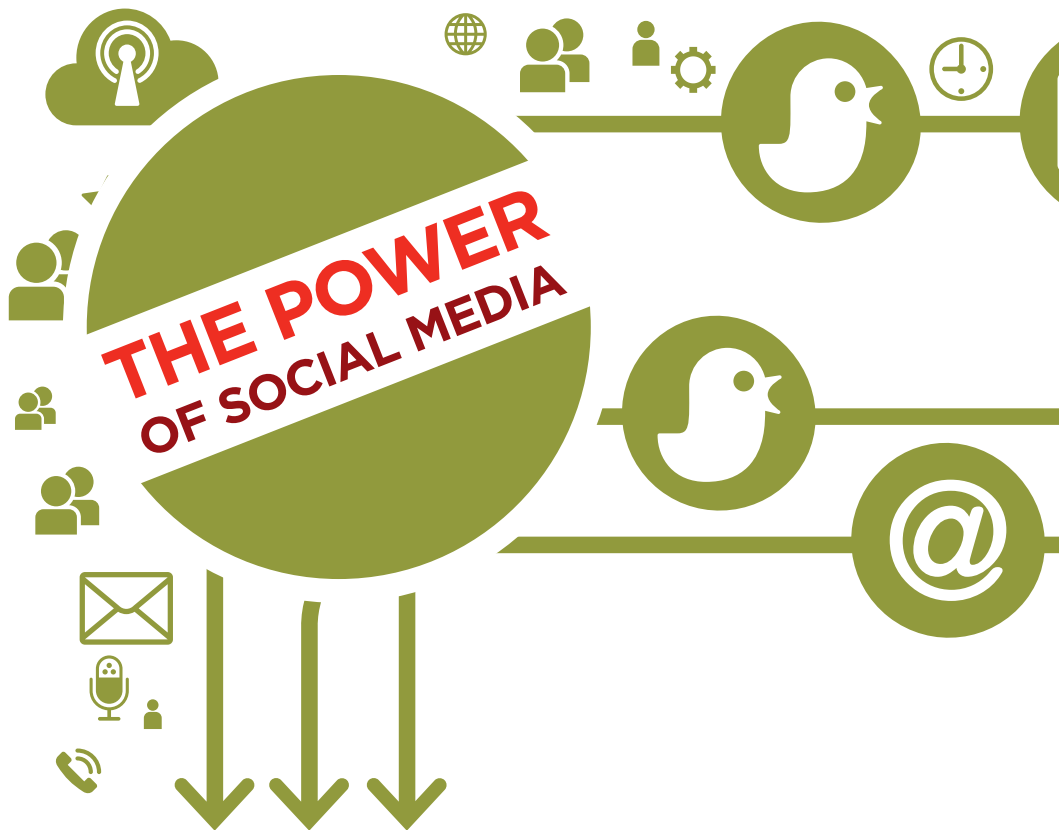
Already more convenient than IVR for most customers today, a Web-based connection can easily add support to a live agent via video. This helps to build confidence and trust and create a more memorable experience. Computer-based collaboration tools also speed the interaction through the sharing of information and materials.

Video should facilitate a real-time, person-to-person conversation. In fact, it should provide across-the-counter service—just as if the customer had gone to the store to speak with a customer service representative in person! Customers should be able to connect with a live agent at the exact moment they want human help. After all, video can be more natural than texting and more convenient than switching to a different media and re-establishing the interaction.

To be most effective, video should be integrated into a customer service Web page and should not require the customer to manually download a plug-in, launch a third-party video tool, or turn on a webcam. A customer in need of assistance should simply be able to click a link, launching a pop-up window with a live agent ready to assist. Providing further collaboration space where the customer and agent can IM and share links and content can further enhance the face-to-face experience.

Whether or not the customer is also on camera isn't as important and should always be left to the customer's discretion. What matters is that the customer moves seamlessly from Web self-service to a video interaction. From the agent's perspective, the interaction must be routed and handled alongside all the other media types on his or her desktop. **[A]**

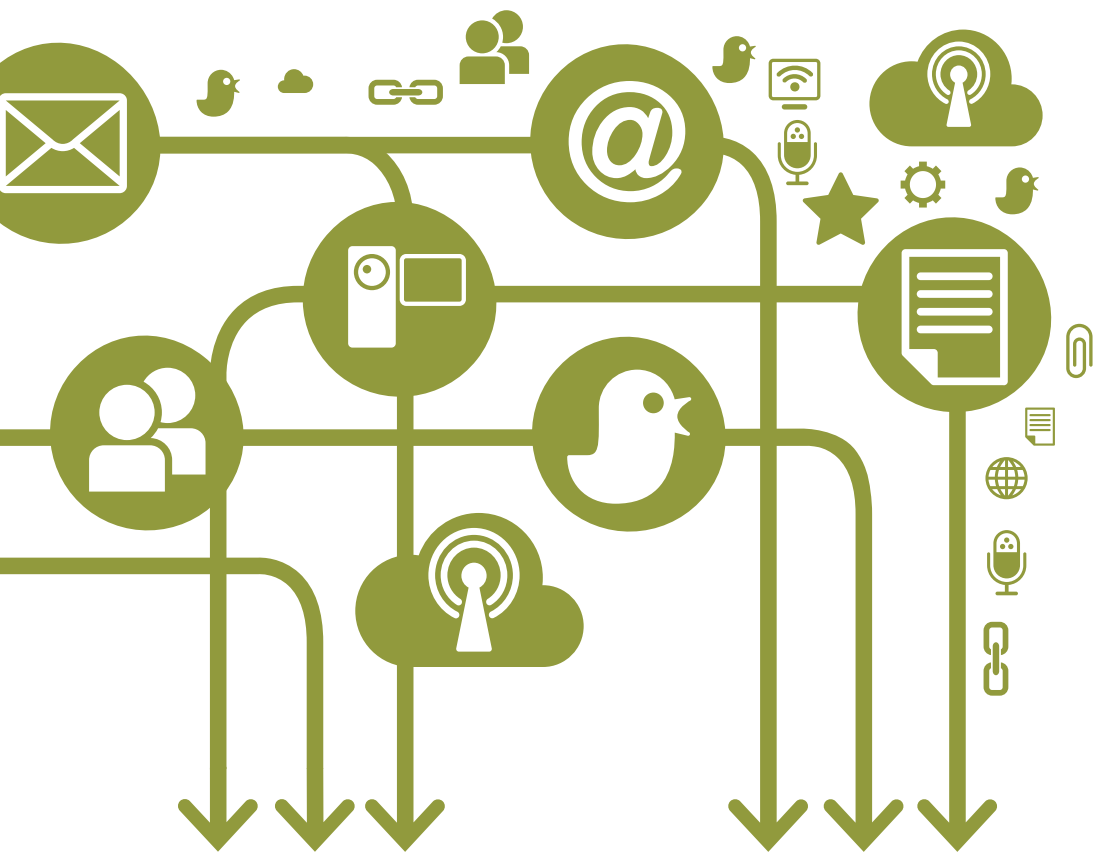
As VP of Strategy and Technology for Arrow S3, David Lover is responsible for predicting the future and working with the various teams within Arrow S3 and their customers to make sure they are prepared to thrive in that future. He is a nationally recognized authority on integrated communications solutions and was instrumental in developing one of the largest and most talented technical teams within the industry.



When customers become excited or annoyed by an interaction they've had with an organization, they have the power to broadcast their experience to thousands of people via social media—for better or worse.

According to “The Facebook Effect,” a consumer preference study conducted by callcentres.net and sponsored by Avaya:

- **Fifty percent** of customers are more likely to buy if they are engaged with the social Web.
- **Sixty-seven percent** of consumers would recommend an organization to family or friends based on their interaction with a contact center.



- **Ninety percent** of consumers are likely to tell their network about a poor customer service center experience that caused them to move their business.
- **Fifty-six percent** of customers feel a stronger connection when they interact with companies on the social Web.

Companies can't stop the chatter. However, they can join the conversation, resolve customer issues, build a positive image, improve satisfaction and loyalty, and differentiate themselves from the competition. ^[A]

The Impact of Video at the Bank of Moscow

When the Bank of Moscow implemented a video-based contact center powered by Avaya a few years ago, it went all out. Moscow residents can now video chat with bank representatives while standing in front of an ATM, giving them access to a full breadth of services any time of the day without having to enter a bank branch.

These video call interactions are now routed alongside other media types and fully integrated into the database. By adding a video channel, the Bank of Moscow is able to create a person-to-person experience when the customer needs it most. It is also able to expand customer interactions, lower service costs through higher levels of self-service, and increase sales through better accessibility to the bank's services.

The Bank of Moscow's deployment is one of the many new ways in which businesses and customers are connecting. Smartphones, tablets, social media, and video conferencing are taking on leading roles in customer experience. They bring new opportunities to connect with customers where they are and when they need help. Not only can they expedite service, these innovations also can be integrated into a multichannel contact center for a consistent, personalized customer experience. Companies that leverage these channels to provide personalized 24/7 service will gain a step or two over their rivals. [A]

