

Hybrid Working Part 3

Customer contact without the contact centre



One of the problematic areas our clients faced in 2020 was maintaining the level of availability and service that customers expected pre-pandemic. With staff no longer in the office, emails could still be serviced but taking phone calls proved much harder. Telephony, in most cases, is dependent on an office based deployment of infrastructure such as wired handsets and headsets. Remote working also makes the day to day interactions between Team Leaders and Agents a challenge, something that is essential to the efficient running of a contact centre. Team Leaders are no longer a few steps away to ask questions or escalate complaints, take over call handling or prompt Agents to make themselves available. There are no screens giving teams a view of call queues, abandonment rate etc.

Typically, organisations would have a business continuity plan for scenarios where the office is no longer available. But when you can't have people collectively in any building, this doesn't help. No doubt, BCP's of the future will cater for global pandemics!

Some organisations were prepared. Many had to seek alternatives, either enabling existing phone solutions to allow VOIP via their VPN systems, or adopting a new, cloud-based telephony solution. Obviously, the latter takes time to implement leaving a gap in customer support. Some organisations simply stopped taking calls and relied purely on email.

Fortunately, the current situation presents, and in some cases, forces opportunities to maintain continuity for customers and improve the experience they have when they interact with your company.



Channel Funnel

Whilst phone calls have remained the mainstay of most contact centres, customers now expect to be able to interact using a wider range of contact channels. Email, webchat, social media and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp have all become desirable methods of seeking support, often for convenience. With the digital age, there is also more capability to self-serve - can I find the answer without needing to speak to someone?

With all of this comes the challenge of how these interactions are collected, routed and resolved by contact centres in a consistent, easy to use and traceable way. We can also consider deflection by using self-service capabilities. Done correctly, this can reduce overheads and improve experience.

Omnichannel solutions have emerged to address these challenges and comprehensive solutions such as Zendesk and Freshdesk are cloud-based, allowing support staff to handle phone calls, emails, webchat with nothing more than a Wi-Fi connection, laptop and headset. This office-less telephony should have already been a tempting option pre-pandemic, removing the need for expensive office infrastructure.



Conceptually, these solutions treat each interaction as a trackable ticket regardless of channel. If a customer record exists, the interaction is automatically linked based on the email/phone number/twitter handle that is used. Therefore, all information related to the customer is grouped for future reference, so the next agent is able to see all previous interactions.

Agents are able to reply using any channel from the ticket, keeping a centralised audit trail across all channels. Pre-defined responses increase agent efficiency and automation rules take this a step further by allowing conditional auto-assignment, notifications, status changes and much, much more. SLA's can be configured to measure service and satisfaction ratings can be captured on resolution of each ticket.

Most of these solutions offer a marketplace of extensions built by third parties enabling functionality such as screen sharing during webchats or integrations with other systems such as Jira Service Management. Also, API's enable easy integration with peripheral systems to keep customer records in sync.

None of this is particularly new, but we find that as our clients look at how they deal with hybrid or remote working, solutions such as these solve the problem and can be leveraged to optimise the experience offered to customers and staff alike. Something that organisations should be seeking to exploit regardless of whether staff are in the office or not.

In conclusion:

While times have been tough recently, now is the time to review and remodel your firm's digital contact model. As our working world continues to change and we start to move away from the traditional office models, we need to start reimagining contact management without the "contact centre".

At the very heart of this type of change is understanding your clients' expectations - why are they contacting you now, for what, how frequently, across what media and vitally how effective are you at meeting their needs. As a client, I'm not sure I care too much that you have an average handling time of 8.4 minutes, or an abandonment rate of sub 2% etc. I do though care passionately that you resolve my issue on my first contact.

Understanding your clients' needs, matching this to current and achievable future state options will help you form a roadmap that drives efficiency and effectiveness for both your firm and your clients. After all, the maxim here should always be "make it easy to do business with you".

Taking the opportunity to be bold, be creative and trial solutions and working patterns will drive out rapid and effective quick wins - the firms that make several small changes quickly will surely be more noteworthy than one large change in x years time.

Our propositional model CX Improve has been built on extensive experience with our clients to create focused intervention points with specific outcomes (and proprietary tooling) to help drive each of these crucial stages in the define, design, deliver and optimise model.

We would be delighted to discuss how we could use our experience to help your firm. You can also find more about how we see hybrid working evolving by checking out our white papers here: [Dunstan Thomas: Optimisation \(dthomas.co.uk\)](https://www.dthomas.co.uk)



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