

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: FOUR STEPS TO SMART OMNI-CHANNEL CUSTOMER SERVICE

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This document highlights four steps to build and nurture an omni-channel program that will help contact centers meet and exceed customer needs, while driving operational efficiency.

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Definition: Omni-Channel

For the purposes of this research, Aberdeen uses the term “omni-channel contact center” to define businesses that have a formal strategy in place to deliver personalized **and** consistent customer experiences across multiple channels (e.g., phone, social media, web, mobile, and email) and devices (in-store, laptop, and smartphone).

Using multiple channels is no longer a differentiator. The ability to use multiple channels in a seamless way is what differentiates the Best-in-Class contact center from others.

Findings from Aberdeen's March 2016 [*Smart Customer Service: Four Steps to Long-Lasting Customer Bonds with Omni-Channel*](#) study show that an average contact center today uses four channels. With more channels getting added into the customer engagement channel-mix, it becomes more important than ever that companies maintain the consistency and personalization of interactions across all channels. This is where omni-channel (see sidebar) comes into play.

Omni-channel is more than just another buzzword. Companies that focus beyond the word, and instead implement the characteristics that define omni-channel programs, excel across measures such as customer satisfaction and first contact resolution rates. Those without a smart strategy, on the other hand, experience a decline in results across key performance indicators (KPIs) — see sidebar.

Below is an executive summary of the four steps Best-in-Class contact centers use to accomplish the results highlighted in the sidebar.

Step 1: Know Your Customers & Optimize Routing Activities

One of the most important attributes of top-notch omni-channel programs is that each customer interaction is designed to address the precise issue of each buyer in a way that is convenient to the client. Best-in-Class firms in the Smart Customer Service study are 31% more likely than All Others to incorporate customer channel preferences within their routing activities (64% vs. 49%). They complement this activity with identifying unique agent skills in order to ascertain that customers are connected to the right agents, with the right skills, to address their needs at the right time.

Step 2: Master Self-Service

Modern day customers increasingly prefer to solve their needs themselves, rather than navigating multiple steps through the interactive voice response (IVR) system and then explaining issues to live agents. Companies understand the requirement to address this need, and those that do it well handle 94% more issues without live agent contact, compared to peers that trail in self-service programs (33% vs. 17%).

If your business currently uses self-service (or plans to use it in the future), then it's vital to incorporate those activities within your omni-channel programs. Best-in-Class firms are 45% more likely to seamlessly incorporate self-service within the customer journey, compared to All Others (32% vs. 22%).

Step 3: Manage the Agent Experience for Better Customer Experiences

One of the most compelling findings noted in the Smart Customer Service study is that agents would rather have the

Best-in-Class Results in Omni-Channel Customer Care

Findings from Aberdeen's March 2016 *Smart Customer Service* study used five metrics to identify Best-in-Class contact centers in omni-channel programs. Below is an overview of those metrics and a comparison of how the Best-in-Class stack up against others across those metrics:

- **Customer retention rate:** Best-in-Class: 77% vs. 35%
- **Year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction rate:** Best-in-Class: 13.1% vs. -1.1%
- **Year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction rate:** Best-in-Class: 9.2% vs. -1.0%
- **Year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction rate:** Best-in-Class: 7.2% vs. -3.9%
- **Year-over-year improvement in customer satisfaction rate:** Best-in-Class: 6.8% vs. -2.6%

→ [Read the full report](#),
“Smart Customer
Service: Four Steps to
Long-Lasting
Customer Bonds with
Omni-Channel”

→ [Related Research](#):
“Self-Service:
Maximize Business
Results by Helping
Customers Help
Themselves”

62%

**of Best-in-Class
contact centers have a
formal program
designed to foster
collaboration and
communication
between the contact
center and IT.**

right technology tools to do their jobs than get paid more. Not providing the right technology tools to agents directly influences customer experience outcomes.

It's ultimately the agents who directly interact with buyers, and as such, they affect the happiness and frustration of clients. Therefore, when agents use multiple screens to find data needed to help customers, keep in mind that this is also time that your clients wait to receive support. Best-in-Class contact centers are 58% more likely (30% vs. 19%) than others to empower their agents with the ability to easily access data captured across multiple channels, as well as query knowledgebase articles to rapidly resolve client issues.

Step 4: Build a Strategic Partnership with IT

One of the most common mistakes companies make when embarking on a journey to build and manage an omni-channel program is overlooking the data infrastructure. The ability to ensure consistency and personalization of customer messages requires organizations to build a truly data-driven infrastructure, where each stakeholder in the business can see the same account information at the same time. This minimizes the risk of delivering conflicting customer messages, and helps contact center agents personalize conversations based on account data, noting previous interactions.

The aforementioned capabilities require involvement of the IT team as internal experts in data management. Top-performing contact centers understand the importance of building a strategic partnership with IT. They are 44% more likely than others to have a formal program designed to foster collaboration and communication between the contact center and IT (62% vs. 43%).

Summary

Use of multiple channels has become the new normal in customer experience management (CEM) programs. As a result, contact centers can no longer rely on adding new channels within their channel-mix as a source of competitive differentiation. Rather, they must master using those channels effectively. In other words, they must incorporate omni-channel programs within their organizational DNA.

While many organizations understand the value of omni-channel, not many put the right processes in place to truly succeed in delivering consistent and personalized messages across all channels. If your company is aiming to improve its customer service results, then we highly recommend you add the below capabilities to your business:

- Know your customers and optimize your routing activities
- Master self-service
- Provide your agents with the right tools to do their jobs
- Build a strategic partnership with IT

Read the [Smart Customer Service](#) study to learn more on how to implement each of the above capabilities to pave the way for happy customers and better results in your business.

Agent empowerment is a key stepping stone to drive better customer experience results. Use the right technology tools to empower your agents.

About Aberdeen Group

Since 1988, Aberdeen Group has published research that helps businesses worldwide improve their performance. Our analysts derive fact-based, vendor-agnostic insights from a proprietary analytical framework, which identifies Best-in-Class organizations from primary research conducted with industry practitioners. The resulting research content is used by hundreds of thousands of business professionals to drive smarter decision-making and improve business strategy. Aberdeen Group is headquartered in Boston, MA.

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