MOBILE CUSTOMER SERVICE HOLDS CUSTOMER FRUSTRATION AT BAY

As customers get more comfortable with smart devices, they'll try to solve more problems using mobile apps. But they should have the option to talk to an agent—and not repeat themselves.

When customers need help, they don't want to log on to a mobile application and search through a list of frequently asked questions before ultimately having to use another channel to reach a customer-service operator, a step they could have taken in the first place.

They want to take care of everything on the mobile app without the restart.

Still, most apps today offer only that one-way street, with no real-time place to go if a customer needs assistance halfway through an interaction. Customers want mobile customer service to have mobility.

When customers can't get the help they need through a mobile app, companies lose money, said Art Schoeller, an analyst at Forrester Research Inc. They are forced to dial up customer service and repeat information to an agent, who has no context for the conversation and spends extra time handling the call. An increase in handle time is bad for business, Schoeller said, and mobile technology, after all, is there to solve just that problem.

Companies can overcome this challenge with an integrated mobile contact center, which starts on the mobile app. Customers often try to solve a problem on their own by using a mobile app, but if they get lost and need help, that's when an integrated contact center comes to the rescue with mobile customer service.

Customers need to be able to tap a button that reaches out to a contact center agent. Options can include a chat window or phone call, and they should connect app users directly to agents who are already aware of customers' information and what they are trying to accomplish.

Using What You Have

Many companies have recognized the need for mobile customer service, but few have responded, according to a study published in January by the International Customer Management Institute (ICMI) in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"They all think it's a competitive differentiator, but only 33% are in the planning stage," Sarah Stealey, a content director at ICMI, said of mobile customer service. "It's rather eye-opening."

The good news is that most contact centers already have the technology they need to support an integrated mobile contact center, she said.

For basic phone calls, even those made on a smartphone, companies are urged to have automatic call distributor software or computer telephony integration, and most contact centers are equipped with those technologies, Stealey said. **To have an integrated mobile contact center, companies need to take one more step and install mobile desktop software on top of existing CRM systems.**

"Companies cannot force customers using the mobile device to go off the glass," she said. "Keep them in the mobile app; keep them on the glass. The second you force them to move out of

that application and dial your phone number or send you an email, you've lost that experience for them."

Some companies have little choice but to offer online-only forums, FAQs or email support to help customers. Customers want low-priced apps, and that doesn't always generate enough money to pay for integrated service on every channel.

Documents To Go, a productivity app created by DataViz, once had phone support, but dropped it because it was too expensive, said Bonnie Boyle, chief product officer at the company.

"Email seems to be the most efficient and cost-effective for us and pleasing to the customer," she said, judging by feedback. Few customers have complained about the current system, she said.

Think Different

If a company wants to go all-in on mobile customer service and integrate its app with a contact center, it needs to enlist the team responsible for creating and managing the app.

But Schoeller doesn't see every company tapping that team's expertise. Many companies rely on IT or marketing alone to determine how a mobile app is used, often purely for e-commerce or brand awareness.

The contact center also needs a seat at that mobile strategy table. "We heavily recommend that the contact center really get in early on the strategy side," he said. "IT and marketing rarely have the contact center in mind when they're building these things."

It also helps to be creative; don't rely on what everyone else is doing to set your mobile customer service strategy, said Laura Bassett, director of customer experience management and product marketing for the Billerica, Mass.-based contact center software provider Avaya Inc. Some companies, for instance, offer customers various service options during a call, such as taking advantage of a current discount offered through a voice recording.

"If I have called you and I'm waiting in a queue, why not do something productive?" Bassett said. "If you offer services during the call, that also decreases the perceived time they're waiting for an agent."

Some innovative mobile apps offer customers the chance to schedule a return call at their convenience or list the expected wait time before a call is made. One mobile communications company in Boulder, Colo., Radish Systems LLC, is even helping agents send files or videos directly to customers while on the phone with them. That's queue management at its best, Schoeller said.

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Delivering excellence over all channels may seem daunting, he said, but there is a lot of value in providing context and integrating with a mobile contact center.

"[Businesses] have to pick their battles: Which are the strongest cross-channel elements that will drive revenue?" Schoeller said. **"The mobile hand-off to the contact agent is one of those cross-channel elements that should be on people's radar."**