

# The Customer Contact Center: Your Branding Moment of Truth

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**A**S MUCH AS \$40 BILLION/MONTH is spent in the U.S. on marketing—to build brand recognition, differentiate brands from their competitors, and ultimately win sales. Much of this well-honed and refined corporate branding, marketing and advertising—ranging from more traditional outreach such as newspaper and television advertising to online advertising and social media marketing—is being implemented to drive consumers to take action. We want consumers to visit our stores and websites, to call us and e-mail us, and ultimately spend money with us.

**H**OWEVER GIVEN ALL OF THE time, money, and attention that is being spent to drive customers to action—what are we doing with our customers once we actually have them where we want them—what are we doing at the “moment of truth”? When a marketing campaign is successful, and customers reach out and engage with our brand, the first (and often times only) interaction they have with us is via our customer contact center. Does the experience that your customer has with your brand continue through their experience with your contact center?

Does the promise of your brand match the reality of the customer experience?

## Brand Experience Management: Aligning Your Brand Promise and Ultimate Customer Experience Into the Contact Center

The old adage about first impressions making lasting impressions still rings true today. Every interaction a consumer has with your company is so much more than just an information session or sale, however all too often very little attention is paid to how the brand experience continues for the customer once they leave your store or navigate off of your corporate website.

The bottom line is that no matter where they are or what the venue, every interaction your customers have with your brand is a unique marketing event. Every impression that they have—from the window display in your retail outlet at the local shopping mall to the contact center representative who helps them when they call your toll-free number to what they read on your corporate Facebook wall—is a branding experience.

In order to be effective, a brand strategy must extend all the way to the most critical, personal point of contact: when a customer or prospect calls, sends an email, or initiates a chat to find out more. This personal contact is what is going to determine whether your customer continues to remain loyal to your brand, or whether they transfer allegiances to a competitor—a 2007 Accenture study revealed that 50% of customers who switch brand allegiances do so because of poor contact center experiences.

Is what you deliver—your ultimate customer experience—aligned with your brand promise?

## Six Strategies for Aligning Your Brand Promise and Ultimate Customer Experience

### Give your customer service team a test drive.

Have you ever called your own toll-free number? I'm sure you have heard sample calls, however every marketing executive should call their own toll-free number at least once. When you do, call from your home or cell phone, preferably in the evening or on a weekend. Don't call the “employee hotline”—call the number which is printed on your packaging, published on your website, and promoted in your advertising and direct mail. Then when someone answers—be a customer. Ask a few questions, then make a purchase, and see what happens next. Chances are, you will be very surprised at the results.

### Listen to the voice of the customer

If you aren't making decisions based on customer feedback—how are you sure your decisions will resonate with your customers? Your customer service and quality assurance teams are already capturing the voice of your customer with every interaction—and trust me, they will look forward to sharing it with you. Every member of your marketing and executive team should review customer feedback on a regular basis—ideally weekly—in order to gain strategic insight into what your customers are saying about your brand.

### Build a customer-centric corporate culture

Do you truly empower employees to act as champions for your customers, or is customer-centricity merely an afterthought? A customer-centric corporate culture must be embedded throughout the organization—not just in the contact center. Southwest Airlines is a company that empowers its employees to go the extra mile to ensure customer satisfaction—employees have been known to even give their own companion tickets to passengers they have never met before,



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to ensure that they make it to their final destination. The result? 2009 was Southwest's 37th consecutive year of profitability.

**Replace your call center agents with brand advocates**

Does your front line have a true passion for your brand and what it stands for? Your contact center is your front line—the first, and oftentimes only, contact that your customers have with your brand. In order to deliver upon your brand promise, your front line must have not only a clear understanding of, but authentic passion for, your brand. Passionate contact center agents are true advocates of your brand—both serving your customer's immediate needs and leaving a lasting impression that will strengthen customer loyalty and truly differentiate your brand from that of your competitors.

**It's the little things that make a brand**

Do you think of the little things that give your customers a complete brand experience? If you spend hours debating the font used in your corporate email signature, take a few minutes to think about the little things that add up to really express your brand. Such as hold music. I recently called the toll-free number of a very trendy retailer in order to purchase some back-to-school clothing for my niece—and spent several minutes listening to smooth jazz while on hold. This was a very different musical experience than the latest Lady GaGa

hit (extremely popular with the retailer's target demographic) heard by everyone passing within 25 feet of the same brand's retail outlet in the local mall.

**Mix up your metrics**

Is your contact center being evaluated on metrics conducive to a positive brand experience? Often, contact centers measure success based on key performance indicators (KPI's) such as average speed of answer,

provide the ultimate brand experience.

For instance, if your agents are being measured—and potentially compensated—partially on average handle time (AHT), they are literally being rewarded for getting your customers off of the phone as quickly as they possibly can. Even if every call ends with "Is there anything else I can help you with?" they don't really mean it. They want to end the call and move onto the next one. In contrast, there is a direct correlation between first contact resolution and overall customer satisfaction. A simple shift in focus from AHT to that of first contact resolution can dramatically shift the overall brand experience your contact center provides.

**Memorable Customer Experiences Produce Memorable Results**

It is hard to turn your customer service center into a branding powerhouse overnight, especially if you have historically looked at your contact center as a cost center, and not the strategic business unit that it can be. An enterprise-wide shift to a customer experience more in line with your brand promise, versus a customer experience more in line with a contact center that operates like a well-oiled machine can be a challenge, as this is a dramatic shift in mindset for many companies. However time and time again, a dedication to creating memorable customer experiences produces memorable results—just ask Southwest Airlines. **1**



average handle time, cost per contact, and first contact resolution. While these metrics are certainly indicative of a contact center functioning as a well-oiled machine, they aren't necessarily those that are going to