Customer Engagement Hubs:
The new frontier of CX

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About the author

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Mike McClelland is a technology services pioneer who is responsible for service sales delivery in Servion's Americas region. Mike brings with him over 20 years of thought leadership in technology implementation, contact center analytics integration and service management in Energy, Health Care, Finance, Software and Telecommunications industries.

He is highly focused on partner and client strategies across the contact center UC, Infrastructure, WFM, WFO, QM, CRM, Chat, E-mail, Dialer, Customer Journey Analytics, and Next Best Action decision tree systems. Having combined experience working for Saudi Arabian, Israeli, American and now Indian organizations, Mike is a critical player to ensure client satisfaction, operational excellence, and financial performance.

Mike holds a Bachelor's degree in Managerial Science from National Louis University. He resides in St. Louis, Missouri with his wife and daughter.

A Brief History of Customer Experience

Contact centers originated in the late 1960's and can be traced back to the UK-based Birmingham Press and Mail that had rows of agents handling customers. This moved to the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) technology which was used to filter and assign calls to the best agents available. Increasingly marked as the physical origin of the call center, ACD technology has led to the growth and development of large scale contact centers.

By the 1970's, the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology was introduced to the call centers. This allowed callers to be navigated with an automated voice and DTMF tones inputted using the keypad. In the 1980's the outbound dialer was launched to help agents make marketing and sales calls to open new doors of opportunities. In this period, call centers were computer-integrated which helped agents recognize callers easily.

From 1983, the term contact center replaced call center and became widely popular. By the 1990's, the Internet age was booming, email was introduced and dotcom sites became the central point of contact. And in mid-2000, the Internet and social media generation became more prominent.

As time progressed, contact centers became more important as they were the means of building a relationship with the customer while offering them technical support. All through this, the telephone was the primary channel of communication. In the current era where technology is changing each day, contact centers are transforming into Customer Engagement Hubs with top-priority on improving customer experience, integrating state-of-the-art and intelligent technologies, and breaking down the silos of data and information.

The Customer Engagement Hub (CEH), termed the technology of the future, is helping forward-looking enterprises orchestrate a seamless and consistent customer experience. An architectural framework, the hub combines multiple systems to engage a customer in a personalized and contextual manner through any channel of communication.

A sophisticated piece of work, the hub is a technology that many enterprises are waiting to invest on. It can be built to suit the unique asks of individual enterprises that follow a fit-for-purpose platform-centric approach. Each of the platforms also comes with a flexible architecture that integrates the stand-alone customer experience management software.

In today's fast-paced and customer-centric era, with artificial intelligence coming to the forefront of the digital revolution – CEHs are becoming more contextual, intuitive and responsive than ever before.

Customer Engagement Hubs: A Framework for Success

This rise of the empowered customer and need to get it right, the first time – every time, has led to the need for a Customer Engagement Hub. Is CEH just a hype? No. There is more to it than just another customer experience buzz word.

Meeting and Surpassing Modern Customer Expectations

Creation of CEHs has helped in alleviating many of the frustrations that customers have on a daily basis. But more importantly, it has empowered enterprises to win over customer expectations by meeting and scaling their expectations. Given the ease with which they connect with retail organizations, they expect the same seamlessness during interactions with other enterprises, be it banking or telecom.

Here are some of the common expectations that today's customers have:

Personalized Interactions

Connectivity

Customer Expectations

Authenticity

Responsiveness

Usage of Social Media
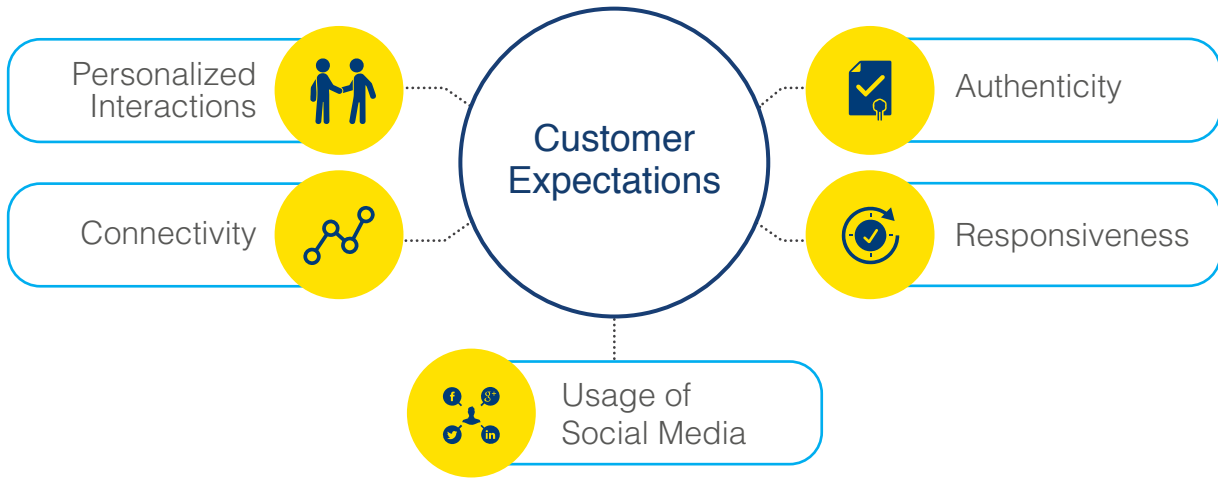
Personalized Interactions

Most customers want a personal one-on-one experience. It is essential for the agents to make the customers feel important. Customers should not be treated like someone who can help in increasing the revenue and carrying the brand's name forward, but they deserve to be treated as individuals whose choices and buying preferences are taken care of.

Connectivity

Customers of today want an instant resolution to their problems. It is important that the contact center supports all major kinds of channels for communication like SMS, social media, e-mail, live chat, and calling services. As the contact center offers multiple mediums to connect, this will inevitably boost the enterprise's growth and also help in better engagement with the customer.

Authenticity

Today's consumers and buyers can easily spot the difference between what is genuine and what is actually maintained to attract more buyers. So, the organization needs to be transparent in all the stages, right from the production of a product to its dispatch and payments.

Responsiveness

Gone are the days when it was okay for an organization to respond to complaint emails or customer feedback in the span of a week. Today, clients/customers expect enterprises to be prompt in their support and be available throughout the day.

They demand instant answers on live chat and social media. You must remember that if your enterprise promises to solve the query within 24 hours, then you must try resolving it before that.

Usage of Social Media

Messages on social media platforms spreads like wildfire and thus organizations have to keep a check on their social media profiles, blogs, and the organization's web pages for comments and complaints from the customers. The key to giving the perfect customer experience to any buyer/consumer is to give them the right amount of information at the right time through the channel they prefer.

Managing the influx of new service technologies

Technology is reshaping all our lives at a pace beyond anything we have imagined. Customer experience is reliant on technology to continue to serve the customers and meet their changing demands. This has led to an influx of contact center technologies by which many barriers such as expensive hardware and limited bandwidth were removed.

Organizations have come a long way in improving their self-service portals, which allow their customers to solve many common problems. But it should also be mentioned that organizations have started to move from a multi-channel approach to an omni-channel approach in order to ensure the customer has a seamless experience.

This ultimately means that if a customer still needs to call a contact center, then their issue must really be complicated. Thus, the underlying issues that need to be addressed right now in customer service are:

- To improve the customer's overall experience
- To be more approachable
- To coordinate across various channels

CEHs answer the call of customer experience leaders who struggle with the complexity of enabling such seamless, enterprise-to-customer conversations, and the coordination of complex customer experience activities.

Understanding the role of customer journey analytics

With real-time customer engagement rising as the need of the hour, the integration of big data and analytics is crucial for running an effective CEH. Going beyond analyzing customer interactions in silos, enterprises are now unifying data, action, and analytics by mapping customer journeys.

Customer Journey Analytics helps to understand what the customer/buyer thinks and feels at each step of the journey. Analytics has to combine advanced analytics, big data technology, and functional expertise to help enterprises map out the journeys of their customers.

To define a customer's journey, think of the journey as a map that details how a customer becomes aware of your brand, how they interact with it (through your website) and beyond. It is important to understand the path of the user to strategically put forth ideas that consider what kind of information must be provided and when it must be supplied for the customer to form decisions to purchase.

Search

This is where the user starts on a path by searching for products or services that suit his or her use cause.

Discover

Now, the user narrows down results to a set of services or products that meet his or her requirements.

Consider

The user then evaluates the short-listed set of products and services based on various factors.

Decide

He/She then proceeds to make a decision on a particular service or product.

Sign up

The user is now asked to complete the setup or sign up process that is required to begin using the chosen product.

Personalize

The user/buyer personalizes the service or product to suit his/her requirements.

Act

The buyer now uses the service or product.

Engage

The user spends significant time using the service or product. This is when they try to recommend the service or product within their personal/professional networks.

Abandon

The buyer now exhibits diminishing usage of the service or product.

Exit

The user ceases to use the product or service entirely.

Outside of the purchase behavior, another key facet of Customer Journey Analytics is centered on servicing of a customer over the lifespan of their engagement with their providers. When assessing every human to the system, system-to-system and human-to-human interaction involved between a customer and their provider of choice, many positive and negative behavioral trends can be unsurfaced. Organizations now can be empowered to understand which products,

sites, IVR flows, and agent groups lead to an uplift in customer acquisition, complaints, or customer churn through frustration or dissatisfaction.

This can lead to a better understanding of how to restructure your contact center design, workforce, as well as cross-functional feedback from the contact center back into other departments such as marketing or product management.

Transforming Customer Experience through Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has played a minimal role in customer service in the past. But it is only during recent times that AI's full potential for transforming customer experience has come to light. Contact center agents/ customer care executives must communicate with customers through various channels like social media, instant messaging, video conferencing and web chat. Can human agents do it all? Increasingly, they can't.

That is why most organizations are administering bots powered by AI to communicate with their customers. **The most popular trend in AI-powered customer service is the usage of chat bots.** These bots have conversations with the customers and are able to perform a multitude of tasks that enrich customer experience through various chat interfaces including messaging apps.

AI also powers certain contact center technologies, within the CEH, that drive seamless customer interactions and experiences every day.

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is one such technology that connects customers quickly with the most qualified agent and also allows prioritized callbacks that enable the customer to save time. AI is dramatically changing contact centers by predicting customer behavior and by providing advice to the customer service executives on how to solve a particular issue.

AI technology can be implemented to monitor customer behavior and is able to analyze and compile each and every individual customer's behavior as they browse and purchase. It also cross-references the information it has collected with additional data pertaining to millions of SKUs in a catalog to present the products that will most likely appeal to the shopper. If this is done manually, it is highly impossible to analyze the behavior of one single customer alone, as they may follow different paths, on different devices during different times. But, with a little help from the right AI technology, organizations will be able to achieve highly valued personalized marketing and simultaneously alleviate a huge pressure faced by the analysts.

With all these advances in AI, it is known that the role of human agents has changed inevitably. As time goes on, more processes are becoming automated enabling human agents to focus on complex cases that cannot be handled by bots or intelligent assistants.

The future of customer engagement is now

At present, contact centers carry out inbound and outbound calls, emails, web inquiries and chats globally. To keep up the pace, organizations will have to infuse their contact centers with SMAC (Social, Mobile, Analytics, and Cloud) technologies that help extend the agility of enterprises by addressing the ever-changing customer preferences.

What will the contact center of the future look like? To start with, it is highly unlikely that it will be a physical center anymore. Cloud technology is on the rise and it is predicted to increase the number of remote contact center agents.

Many consider the contact center as a means to deal with immediate problems. This has led to a short-term strategy with which enterprises deal with one customer emergency after another. They react to a problem instead of adapting to the needs of the customer.

This will change as it is predicted that contact centers will become an integral part of the business strategy, acting as a CEH. Intelligent call routing is already available in the present, but these tools will definitely improve in the next 10 years enabling the customer to get matched with the right expert almost instantly.

You may wonder if AI will eventually replace human support altogether, but we must remember that to establish such a bold move, an organization needs to establish trust with its customers. We should also consider some generations of customers who may prefer to talk to a live agent by phone. It cannot be said that all customers would feel comfortable relying completely on technology for support.

Customers today and in the future will be savvier than ever before in navigating services and products. Thus, we will start to see a proliferation of customers who demand agent accountability through the transparency of historical actions taken and a record automatically sent to them of every transaction. This will not be the traditional bill pay notification or renewal update, but the holy grail of the contact center – agent CRM comments, all changes made, and a historical record of every chat conversation.

No matter how we look, AI will be the future of Customer Engagement Hubs.
Incorporating AI into an existing support channel in an organization can free up employee time, offering better solutions for common problems and create happy customers. AI may not be perfect yet, but the current technology in **AI offers a wide variety of benefits that will keep your employees and your customers satisfied.**

How Servion provides the firepower to run CEHs

Each organization is unique and each customer is unique. Hence, each Customer Engagement Hub has to be unique. It cannot be procured from the market. And taking a one-size-fits-all approach will eventually lead to an undifferentiated customer experience. Gartner estimates that by 2018, 60% of large organizations will design a CEH, yet only 20% will select the correct technologies to make it work.

Servion enables business transformation for enterprises in the area of Customer Experience Management (CEM). Servion is a platforms-led solution provider who is focused on enhancing customer experience by automating and integrating customer interaction channels. Servion's IP platforms enable enterprises to drive the true value of their CX investments and build their CEHs.

Over the past two decades, Servion has evolved from being a single channel (voice) interaction expert to being an industry pioneer in omni-channel customer experience. Servion's omni-channel solutions empower enterprises to address the customer experience expectations of the millennial customers and manage over 10 billion customer interactions annually across 60 countries in 6 continents.

Five building blocks of an effective Customer Engagement Hub

Servion takes a platform-centric approach to offer five unique CX platforms that help enterprises architect a unique enterprise CEH. Each of these platforms come with a flexible architecture and can integrate the best-of-breed and stand-alone Customer Experience Management software.

ServDesign

Many customer experience challenges can be attributed to the gaps between what customers expect and what is actually delivered. These gaps can be either people, process or technology related or an alignment gap caused by the interplay of these three facets within an organization. ServDesign is a business-consulting framework that helps organizations to identify these gaps and design the right customer experience. Through a series of analytical tasks, it gauges the maturity of contact centers and helps them develop a technology blueprint to achieve their CX goals. By leveraging components of its CX framework, ServDesign enables organizations to progressively bridge the gaps between expectations and experience. It also offers blueprints, methods, tools, analytical models, and best practices that design a future-proof CEH.

ServCare

Contact centers are made up of a diverse group of people, processes, and technologies. Bringing these disparate components together, and making them work in harmony takes a concerted effort. But, they have their work cut out. It is, after all, a difficult job to keep abreast of technology advancements, increasing CX demands from customers and manage growth while keeping costs predictable. Often, operational challenges come in the way of delivering an outstanding customer experience. ServCare is an end-to-end managed services offering for contact centers that give them the freedom to focus on the customer instead of worrying about daily operational challenges. ServCare offers remote and onsite managed services - right from basic support services and change management to comprehensive service delivery management, advisory services, and value-added services.

ServInsights

More than half of the analytics projects are destined to fail because they do not deliver the features and benefits that are agreed upon. They end up in heartbreaks as far as the enterprise is concerned. Contact center analytics projects are no exception. They suffer from lack of multi-channel analytics, poor integration with core enterprise applications such a CRM and data warehouses and lack the ability to offer holistic

insights. ServInsights is a contact center analytics platform that integrates data from multiple customer channels and enterprise systems. It uses advanced analytics to offer a 360-degree view of the contact center and enables informed decision-making. It offers unified dashboards and advanced UX capabilities for informed decision-making. Enterprises can leverage ServInsights to perform operational performance analysis, Next Best Action analysis, customer effort score analysis and use a real-time dashboard for critical contact center KPIs.

ServIntuit

Omni-channel customer experience is no longer nice to have. However, creating consistent, seamless, and hyper-personalized experiences across multiple channels and touch points is not easy. Customers often navigate between channels and expect to take-off from where they left before they switched channels. Even at the hint of slightest frustration, the customers are quick to react and they take their business elsewhere. ServIntuit is an omni-channel customer experience platform that helps enterprises gauge customers' intent and optimize their journey for better outcomes. ServIntuit integrates data from all enterprise channel applications such as chat, voice, website, mobile, email and video to drive personalized, consistent and contextual customer experiences. It offers a Next Best Action engine and analytics module that helps enterprises provide optimal responses to customers – on the channel of their choice.

ServCloud

Moving your Customer Experience Management to the cloud promises to yield huge benefits to any enterprise, yet many are cautious to make the shift. Perceived high costs of migration, challenges in integration, lack of skills and the overall impact on IT organizations contribute to enterprises being wary of the cloud. ServCloud is a comprehensive cloud-based customer experience platform, built on Cisco HCS, that ensures effortless cloud adoption. ServCloud features integrated analytics and Next Best Actions engine that offers a completely omni-channel customer experience. Whether it's email, inbound and outbound calls, chat or social media, ServCloud enables enterprises to engage with customers in meaningful conversations, and provides a consistent, contextual and omni-channel experience, using the customer's preferred channel.

Conclusion

In the last couple of years, there has been an explosion of vendors focused on providing CEHs. Customer-centric organizations today face a paradox of choice with literally hundreds of solution providers each claiming their own definition of what constitutes a CEH. However, a CEH cannot be a fit-for-all platform, product or a piece of software that can be acquired from a single vendor. Gartner explains this the best.

According to Gartner...

"The Customer Engagement Hub (CEH) is an architectural framework that ties multiple systems together to optimally engage the customer. A CEH allows personalized, contextual customer engagement, whether through a human, artificial agent, or sensors, across all interaction channels. It reaches and connects all departments, allowing, for example, the synchronization of marketing, sales and customer service processes."

Some of its primary business benefits include:

- Freedom to choose a channel of choice

- Personalize interactions to ensure seamless and timely service

- Synchronize marketing, sales and customer service processes

- Ensure service continuity through contextualized omni-channel engagement

- Proactively understand customers' preferences before the point of interaction

Recently, Ovum - a leading analyst firm - has recognized Servion as a well-positioned Customer Engagement Hub (CEH) vendor in the latest Ovum "On the Radar"

report. Written by Mila D'Antonio, a principal analyst in Ovum, the report recommends that Servion's data-driven and consulting-led approach to working with clients to build their own CEH is a unique differentiator

Some of the highlights of the report are:

- Servion's CEH works on a foundation that comprises five building blocks: ServDesign, ServInsights, ServIntuit, ServCare, and ServCloud

- Servion enables enterprises to build their own CEHs through a framework called ServEngage, a fit-for-purpose approach to CEH by integrating all channels and enterprise applications and connecting them back to the core of the business

- Servion takes a platform-centric approach to architecting a CEH; each of the five platforms comes with a flexible architecture and can integrate best-of-breed and standalone CEM software

- The company's complementary solutions, including customer journey analytics and contact center analytics, help complete the CEH offering. (Servion also provides workforce automation and AI powered virtual assistants.)

The Servion Difference

Servion is committed to helping clients deliver next-gen customer experience. We combine more than two decades of experience in providing Customer Experience Management and extensive knowledge of customer journey design to deliver unprecedented value.

- Consulting-led approach and strong IP-based platforms that extend, augment, and upgrade existing systems for superior ROI
- Focus on efficiency and effectiveness by providing people, process and technology-based recommendations
- Unbiased vendor agnostic recommendations
- Powerful and proven analytics' methodologies and tools for implementation success and follow through

If you have feedback or queries, write to us at **marketing@servion.com**

About Serviont Global Solutions

Servion enables business transformation for enterprises in the area of customer experience management. Over the last two decades, Servion has evolved from being a single channel expert then to now converting omni-channel touch points into customer journeys with over 10 billion customer interactions in 60 countries across 6 continents. Servion's CX experts based in USA, UK, UAE, Singapore, and India deliver measurable outcomes through consulting, advanced technologies and industry-specific IP platforms. I For more information, visit us at **www.servion.com**

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