

Taking customer care to the next level: Transforming customer contact centers

Exceptional customer care can drive cost savings



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Many subscribers would rather suffer in silence than reach out to a contact center—the experience has become too frustrating (33% of millennials are only willing to wait one to three minutes to get a response to a customer inquiry before they drop¹).

Calling the contact center often begins with a lengthy interactive voice response (IVR) experience that may eventually lead to connection to an agent who may not be empowered to help and probably has no knowledge of any preceding contact made by the subscriber. Uncertainty and disappointment have become the contact center standard experience.

Communication service providers face a dilemma. The cost of customer care has become so burdensome that cost cutting measures have become top priority. Call deflection and automation can reduce those costs, but can also inflict greater harm on the customer relationship.

A customer suffering in silence will very likely become someone else's customer.

But what if you could turn this approach upside down? What if instead of choosing between cost cutting and great service, you could design an optimal experience for your subscribers and then watch the savings multiply? Is it possible to build personalization into intuitive interactions—whether in web chats, by phone, text or on social media—that are rich in context and meaningful for the customer? Can your organization preempt a negative experience with a tailored and timely connection that lifts a subscriber's satisfaction, while also eliminating cost?

Exceptional customer care can be a catalyst for cost savings and profit, yielding benefits such as subscriber retention, upsell opportunities, and customer advocacy that attracts new subscribers.

IBM® Care Transformation is breaking ground with innovative, cost-effective ways to help:

- Give your customers a luxurious experience while also helping drive down your costs.
- Proactively address potential customer concerns—before those customers become unhappy.
- Use predictive analytics to immediately route calls to the proper agent for efficient handling, without subjecting customers to tedious IVR trees.
- Utilize each customer's individual preferences, such as best time to communicate or desired contact method, for more effective and profitable outbound interactions.
- Empower your agents to intelligently and efficiently resolve issues immediately and accurately.

Limitations to the traditional approach

Call and contact centers are crucial to successful customer experiences. A customer's attitude toward your company is influenced with every interaction, putting pressure on each service experience to be a positive one. Yet today's contact center must manage a challenging and wide array of channels through which customers engage them: text, SMS, voice, email, online interaction, self-service assistance and mobile apps—all of which can be expensive and difficult to manage well.

Traditionally, the management of contact centers has focused on cost take-out maneuvers such as lowering the average handle time (AHT) with streamlined processes, and reducing the hours of operation. Even call deflection, if its objective is to provide alternative customer service options, can be a key factor in customer dissatisfaction—unsuccessful call deflection tends to dehumanize the customer interaction.

Often, companies can create a more arduous process for the subscriber when they provide self-service websites that take time to navigate, lengthy IVRs or web chats that still ultimately require a phone call or in-store visit to resolve the issue.

On those occasions when customers do choose telephone contact, they are often subject to confusing automated interfaces, slow responses, and even inadvertent disconnection. When a connection is dropped, the opportunity to help is gone. A customer may have been lost, not just for the length of the call, but forever.

Your subscribers deserve a luxurious, exceptional customer experience and they expect your organization to respect their valuable time. The moment has arrived to turn the old, traditional approach to customer care upside down.

Breaking away from the passive approach

It's time to subvert the traditional approach—turn the old thinking upside down giving subscribers a luxury experience that proactively caters to their needs with effective remedies and recommendations. Such an approach helps providers give their customers a well-resourced and intelligent experience while simultaneously diminishing service costs.

Achieving a luxury experience

Analytics make it possible to understand your customer, individually and personally, at various touchpoints that matter most to them—understanding a subscriber's behavior, buying choices, usage patterns and contributions on social media—and enhancing that understanding with real-time and contextual data such as weather, current events, and social network tendencies.

To interact with your customers in anticipation of their needs, analytics helps you create micro-segmentation profiles to use in coordination with real-time performance and experience metrics. For instance, you may see that the customer's previous payments are usually late. Based on their payment history, you can adjust the billing cycle or offer a few days grace.

In another example, a subscriber with a new device provides you with an opportunity to send them a personalized video tutorial that anticipates their needs and could replace a “how to” call to your support center. You can also send that subscriber offers to upgrade accessories, provide notification of an outage in their area to allay concerns about the new device itself, or tell them about a new users' forum to promote self-help service. These interactions can all take place with your customers using their preferred method of contact, and in language best suited to their personality and interests.

Understanding effective outbound channels

When you can accurately anticipate customer needs, you can use proactive multichannel communication to reach out and remedy customer issues before they feel the need to call, or even before they are unhappy. Use outbound treatment options to offer:

- Auto-fixes: updates to affected devices or scripts that will perform necessary upgrades.
- Proactive alerts: proactive alerts through app notification or SMS—selecting the method that works best for the customer.
- Personalized help: highly customized communication, like a video, to explain a first bill, how to use a new device or suggest why a rate plan change could benefit them.

When interaction is immediate and resonant, it helps create a differentiated experience. Now you can initiate and manage customer communications with deep precision that can improve customer satisfaction and efficiency, while also reducing costs—the number of inbound calls can decrease by spreading contact across channels appropriate to the type of interaction necessary to most likely satisfy the subscriber.

A cornerstone of IBM Care Transformation is IBM Watson™ Virtual Agent—an innovative and cost effective solution that uses cognitive computing to help you provide a personalized, contextualized experience to lend assistance or resolve issues. Using Watson Virtual Agent you can minimize your dependency on higher cost channels by having Watson handle customer interactions with pre-training from industry experts and your organization.

Watson Virtual Agent can be embedded in an app, web page or in place of the IVR to direct calls. It's trained to ask specific questions and provide answers based on your company's information, helping to get many common customer issues resolved on the first touch, or even assisting subscribers in

completing transactions. By helping your customers help themselves, you can offer new services, and save time and resources.

Because Watson Virtual Agent is pre-trained with core content, there is no need for a technical or machine learning background to get Watson up and running quickly. This core content is configured, not coded, through an intuitive user interface making it simple to tailor Watson's answers to the unique specifics of your organization

Creating meaningful inbound experiences

When necessary, Watson Virtual Agent can pass a subscriber to a live agent where Agent Assist capability in IBM Watson Explorer can access the caller's previous conversation and relevant information and help guide the agent in delivering a superior experience.

This means that when a subscriber has been redirected to a live agent, they can immediately have a meaningful conversation with a well-informed customer care agent; known as predicative call routing, analytics can predict with high accuracy the correct routing of a call and, in many cases, bypass IVR for a vastly improved subscriber experience. Empowered care agents who are advised by Watson can understand the problem more quickly, can provide guidance on issues, negotiate payment options and troubleshoot challenging problems.

With cognitive computing enabled by Watson, you can better:

- Understand what customers are searching for and cater to their needs accordingly.
- Be proactive, and answer questions you think your customers could have later.
- Deepen your knowledge base and continue to improve other channels.
- Increase your opportunity for cross- and up-sell revenue.

Cognitive computing and IBM Watson

You can evolve the customer experience by tapping into the power of IBM Watson and cognitive systems. By transforming customer service with solutions that understand, reason and learn, you have the opportunity to differentiate your customer care and make memorable experiences for your customers.

Cognitive computing solutions offer various capabilities to engage with and discover more about your customer’s needs by:

- Learning and building knowledge from various structured and unstructured sources of information.
- Understanding natural language and interacting more naturally with humans.
- Capturing and deepening the knowledge base across all channels.
- Enhancing the cognitive processes to help improve decision making.
- Elevating the quality and consistency.

Understand, reason and learn more about your customers

Cognitive systems and IBM Watson allow a partnership between humans and machine. Cognitive systems help enable you to make better decisions. They help you:

Understand: Two key attributes are involved. First, the ability of a system to navigate the complexities of human speech is vital—understanding idiosyncrasies, colloquialisms and inferences. The second attribute is being able to put content into context—not search and keyword, but actually bringing forward relevant, actionable content.

Reason: Cognitive systems reason with a purpose—often generating a hypothesis and then proving the theory. Watson’s vast amount of information gleans knowledge and reasoning with purpose.

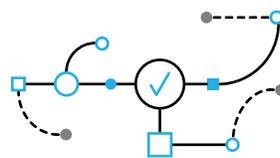
Learn: Cognitive systems are fundamentally different from traditional computational computers, which are hard coded with rules and logic, following a decision tree format. Cognitive systems get progressively smarter with each outcome, action, iteration and new piece of information.

Cognitive computing and IBM Watson



Understand

Cognitive systems **understand**.



Reason

Cognitive systems **reason**.

- Comprehend underlying ideas and concepts
- Form hypotheses
- Infer and extract concepts



Learn

Cognitive systems never stop **learning**.

- Get more valuable over time
- Advance with each new piece of information, interaction, and outcome
- Develop “expertise” and a deeper knowledge base

Figure 1: Through a process of understanding, reasoning and learning, IBM Watson and cognitive systems can help you provide a superior care experience.

Building cognition into customer service

Watson application programming interfaces (APIs) are the cognitive building blocks that harness data and apply Watson's capabilities.

Using Watson APIs—over 30 are currently available on a cloud-based, open platform—you can build cognition into your digital applications and operations.

For example, the **Natural Language Classifier** API enables developers without a background in machine learning or statistical algorithms to create machine-learning, natural language interfaces for their applications.

Tone Analyzer helps individuals understand linguistic tone, separating nuances in intent from natural spoken languages. This API uses linguistic analysis to detect and interpret emotional, social and writing cues that are located within the text, and also offers rhetorical suggestions to help improve the intended tone.

Retrieve and rank helps users find the most relevant information for their query by using a combination of search and machine learning algorithms to detect “signals” in the data—cognitive building blocks—to take advantage of capabilities such as relationship extraction, personality analysis, tone analysis, concept expansion and trade-off analytics.

Each API is capable of performing a different task, and in combination, can be adapted to solve any number of business problems or create deeply engaging experiences

Five classes of cognitive services at your service

Watson is able to read up to 800 million pages per second—such as device operation's manuals, terms and conditions, subscriber profiles, online chats and outage or performance reports—and together with its five classes of cognitive services help your customer care center create better customer experiences by understanding and responding to customers.

- Virtual agents can ask questions in natural language for greater insight dialogue.
- Live agents can explore the information faster and more comprehensively to unearth meaningful insights to improve customer experience.
- Customer care centers can discover what works, and what doesn't, finding rationale in responses, helping improve future results.
- When given a number of variables, Watson can help you decide the best course of action with greater confidence to increase customer satisfaction.
- Consolidate and visualize information to illustrate insights that can enhance subscriber understanding, such as fluctuations in their bills, and improve internal decision-making with easier to interpret analytics.

Taking advantage of Watson's ability to understand natural language and generate answers helps provide innovative self-service capabilities. Using personalized insight to understand the customer and their preferences helps agents to be ready to answer questions and add value to the experience as never before. By enabling a digital transformation of call centers into innovative customer care experiences, companies can help substantially reduce operating costs.

For more information

To learn more IBM Care Transformation and Watson contact your IBM representative or Business Partner and visit:

[IBM Proactive Care](#)

[IBM Watson Virtual Agent](#)

[IBM Watson Developer Cloud](#)

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1 IBM Millennials Customer Survey, North America, 2016



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