



CONTACT CENTER TRENDS 2021

Our favourite CX leaders weigh in!



Contact Center Trends in 2021

Have you got a favourite customer experience leader you follow?
We do!

At the end of 2020, we asked them what they think the year ahead has in store for contact centers and customer experience. We were delighted when they generously shared their views. The next few pages compile these thoughts for you to read.



Contact centers will become more tightly integrated & proactive.

The contact center will be tightly woven into the customer journey and become a proactive, essential part of the customer experience.



For 2021, we're going to see a much more unified contact centre around business operations. This is because we're going to see more alignment between customer metrics and business operational metrics. For customer experience to prove itself and for organisations to grow, this is mandatory on the road to true customer centricity.

For a long time now, and it has become quite habitual I think, it seems the contact centre has been a silo unto itself and when that happens you have a reactive contact centre, who gets a request and they act/don't act on it, depending on what the culture is. It's likely the contact centre may not be able to resolve a customer's issues on the first go and perhaps not to the customer's expectations. The result? The customer receives an inconsistent experience, which leads to customer distrust, which leads to them switching to your competitor.

I believe the trend is to loop the contact centre into the customer journey and it becomes a key participant in delivering a strong customer experience to customers. Remember the contact centre is perhaps the first interaction a customer has with a business. But it isn't enough to include only in the customer journey. The contact center must be included in all tech – conversational AI, engagement, omnichannel, etc.; tech to differentiate on how services are delivered – be it self-service or that which requires a live agent; in metrics; and in the customer journey. Alignment to the customer only works when every team is rowing in the same direction, and that includes the contact centre.

Ultimately, the trend is for the contact centre to transform from a reactive to a proactive unit. And dare I say a predictive one. Understanding the customer and his/her needs before an issue arises will create a truly profitable contact centre.



Sue Duris

Sue Duris is a Digital Marketing and Customer Experience leader with more than 20 years of experience in driving brand, product, customer experience, and content strategies in the B2B sector. She has served as Director of Customer Experience, CMO, VP of Marketing, and Director of Marketing roles in several SaaS, telecom, life sciences, and financial services/fintech/blockchain organizations in Silicon Valley and worldwide. She also serves as Advisor/Mentor to startups and non-executive director in charity and business organizations.

She is the Founder/Host of #CXChat, a weekly Twitter chat on Customer Experience and Employee Experience.

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All Contact Centers operate on the daily frontline of CX, a vital step in many e2e processes and customer journeys. They are a wealthy source of customer data and are the sweet spot to kick-start customer centric transformation with a wider CX scope, linking customer signals to other departments. I believe that time has come for a simple hands-on method, not a complex program, with a sharp focus on the exact drivers for customer satisfaction and where to reduce costs through a better CX.

Such an approach is the fastest route to effective change, leading to measurable results in a few months with statistics evidence. Of fundamental importance is providing guidance with the appropriate leadership to anchor adoption for sustainable success.

Whether focused on customers, employees, or suppliers, all company teams play a role in creating experiences through various programs, platforms, processes, products, and services. Organizations nowadays experience that CX does not exist on its own but is a part of a larger, intertwined Experience Management system. Bottom line: if management is thinking about CX and UX as a marketer's expertise, you're probably missing the lion's share of your DNA and footprint.



Remi Weber Dublaron

Remi Weber Dublaron, MBA CCXP is a Freelance Business Consultant in Xperience Management challenges, with 20 years in international Telco, ICT and Media. He turns customer-centricity into € Business Impact and leads Transformation in CX, Product- and Portfolio Management. He also leads international sales operations and executes Agile Omnichannel Experience Management.

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Some of 2020's big shifts will carry forward.

Customer success leaders will need to extend the lessons we learn from 2020 into 2021, and beyond.



Despite the imminent availability of a vaccine, it's clear we'll be dealing with COVID-19 well into 2021. And some of the pandemic-related changes we've made in our personal and professional lives will continue long after that. That matters for you, your employees, your call center, and your customers.

So it's more important than ever for companies to forge and strengthen their emotional connection with customers during the journey. But this is doubly true for the employee experience. With more people working from home – an arrangement some companies are making permanent – organizations need to step up their efforts to stay connected with workers on an emotional level. That support is critical to ensuring call center employees can connect with callers, even if only through technology. Make that especially if only through technology.

This isn't a short-term fix; it should be a long-term strategy. Like I said, many of these pandemic-related accommodations are going to stick, and technology's role in journey management is certainly only going to increase. Take steps now to imbed this as a priority in your strategic planning so you progress through the end-stage of the pandemic – and whatever we're facing after that – on solid footing.



Jim Tincher

Jim Tincher, CCXP, is an internationally recognized customer experience expert, journey mapper, author, speaker, and entrepreneur.

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For any organisation, it's important to cast a critical eye on customer experience: Before the pandemic, organisations knew their customers, knew their wants, their needs and their expectations. The pandemic has changed our markets which meant the way that our customers interacted with us changed and in response, we had to change the way our organisations operate. Now we are working less reactively, we need to critically review our altered customer personas and our operational strategies to understand if they are effectively fulfilling our customer's needs, wants and expectations in the right way.



Katie Stabler

Katie Stabler is the Director of Customer Experience at cultivate, a consultancy built on passion for customer care.

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We're all hoping for a reprieve, and I'll be excited to put 2020 in the review mirror. However, further change is on the horizon. No matter how favorable change may be, it's still exhausting. Leaders must pay as much attention to their teams' morale and energy level on the way back up as they did on the way down. We also cannot forget the valuable lessons we learned from working in new ways. It will be tempting to put everything back to the way it was, but in doing so, we lose everything we accomplished this year. Don't overlook those achievements once you see the light at the end of the tunnel."



Andrew Gilliam

Associate Analyst, ICMI

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The work-from-home contact center is here to stay.

Leaders will improve their work from home processes and culture to make the work-from-home agent feel more involved.



Work-from-home employee engagement will be one of the biggest contact center challenges for 2021. Leaders need to increase their level of communication, and appreciation, for work-from-home Agents. Team Leaders and Quality Assurance coaches need to be trained to deliver virtual coaching that engages Agents and creates a two-way dialogue for an Agent's personal development. Otherwise, Agent attrition and burn out will increase, as work from home staff feel ignored.



Mike Aoki

Mike Aoki is the President of Reflective Keynotes Inc., a Toronto, Canada based training firm founded in 2001. His background includes 20 years of customer service, sales and management experience, with a focus on call centers. This means that he brings real-life examples to his training workshops, speeches and consulting work.

As an expert in customer service and sales, Mike has been interviewed by the Globe and Mail, Contact Centre Pipeline magazine and the Customer Experience Radio Show.

He helps organizations improve customer service, sales and management with customized training.

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Engaged employees will be vital for success.

The time is ripe for organizations to formally recognize that better customer experience is driven by better agent experience.



It's already rising in importance but I predict the trend to watch in 2021 will be agent experience. It's been over 25 years since the link between employee and customer experience was formalised in the Service-Profit Chain but up until now, the focus has very much been skewed towards CX.

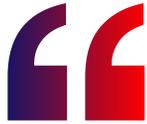
What I'm seeing in Australia is growing recognition of the fact that good customer experience is delivered by engaged employees so therefore companies need to be managing the agent experience as carefully as they're managing the customer's.



Ben Motteram

Ben Motteram is a passionate evangelist for putting the customer at the heart of everything a business does. He has over 20 years' experience developing and implementing customer acquisition and retention strategies in strategic Sales, Marketing and Customer Experience roles. He attributes his success to a dedication to understanding and consistently exceeding customer expectations.

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Employee productivity serving as the cornerstone of quality customer experience, and long-lasting customer retention, will never change. The means by which we empower employees to deliver quality customer experience, already is.

Excessive turnover rates, above the average of 18%, can be damaging to your business, let alone 30-45%. In fact, numerous studies have shown that the cost of replacing an employee is about one-third of that employee's salary.

When it comes to consumption, we have an increasingly short attention span. And the brand that can deliver a service to the consumer with the shortest attention span wins.

As a result of the pandemic, nearly 60% of consumers now (consciously) care more about the customer experience when deciding which brands to purchase from. But when you factor in all the steps of the consumer journey that the customer takes (subconscious) note of, such as a fraction of a second, it's safe to say that nothing today goes unnoticed in your customer's mind.



Matt Wujciak

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High tech will blend with
high touch.

Using modern technology will be important but
staying human centric will be crucial.



Agents will be called upon via channels like live video chats, mobile texts, and in-app conversations in bigger ways in 2021, thanks to new technology.

Respecting the customer's choice for how and where they reach out for support will be one way to provide a better experience for the customer. The pandemic created huge adoption for mobile and digital tools, and customers feel comfortable connecting in these ways. That means agents have to feel just as comfortable with these options.

Customer experience leaders need to evaluate today's customer journey and adapt a new journey for agents to meet these new demands. Ensure employees have not only the right tools, but the right resources, training, and support to deliver on these channels seamlessly. If they've never been expected to be on video before, they might need help adjusting their workflow and more.

The bottom line is that even miles apart, customers are wanting to connect in accessible and human ways. Customer experience leaders need to prepare and support the employees who will be connecting to these customers.



Jeannie Walters

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Blending high tech with high touch is more important now than ever. Be consistent with who you are as people - and make sure that tracks, no matter the contact. Humanity is at the core of what makes companies soar.



Jeanne Bliss

Jeanne Bliss guides companies to the achievement of business growth through leadership bravery and elevated business practices. Bliss' 5-Competencies for customer-driven growth have been adopted around the world, and her 4 best selling books on customer experience and leadership are the guidebooks of the CX Profession.

Jeanne Bliss has delivered over 1,500 transformative keynotes globally, has coached over 20,000 leaders on leading to elevate their company in the marketplace, with sustainable growth. Jeanne Bliss is the cofounder of the customer experience professionals association and is fondly known as the "godmother" of customer experience.

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When it comes to evolving customer expectations, companies cannot meet the needs of customers today with what worked in the past. Keeping pace with rapidly changing expectations is essential to the success of your business."

In 2021, companies need to embrace the opportunities technology affords, take advantage of the significant benefits at hand, and keep people – both employees and customers – at the center.



Nick Glimsdahl

Nick is the Director of Contact Center Solutions at VDS. VDS helps companies with their cloud contact center needs through a strategic, personalized, and consultative approach. Nick is also the host of the Press 1 For Nick podcast. Nick and his guests exchange insightful stories, best practices, and invaluable lessons they have learned along the way. They are focused on the interplay between customer experience, employee experience, and the transformation of customer service.

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The customer remains at the center of it all.

No matter what year it is, to ensure a better customer experience, you begin with the customer.



If the customer isn't involved, it is not Customer Experience. You can design your systems, your products, and your branding, but you cannot design someone else's reaction to them.



Roy Atkinson

Roy Atkinson is the CEO and Principal, Clifton Butterfield, LLC. He is one of the top influencers in the service and support industry, with an international reputation. His expertise been featured by The Economist, Social Media Today, Computerworld, BizTech Magazine, and many others. He has contributed to books on Customer Service, Social Media, and IT Change Management. In May, 2020, Nextiva included him in its list of "The Top 50 Customer Service Experts of the Decade (2010-2020)."

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I think one of the biggest shifts that we've seen in customer service is pumped up empathy. This year, we've really had to understand our customers needs at a deeper level. Some businesses are doing great while others aren't, and trying to provide "one-size-fits-all" service could end up being an insult to some customers given their current situation. We've had to become really great at reading the room and understanding the environment that our customers operate in in order to provide true value.



Sara Ostin

Sara crafted her ability to exceed her customers' expectations in a decade of retail store management. She transferred the skills she gained in retail into administrative support roles, quickly moving her way up into non-profit operations where Sara learned how to improve processes, create tracking systems, measure success with data, and identify small problems before they become big ones. She is currently the Customer Success Manager at www.mein3.com, where she gets to do all of those things and more with a brand new solution that saves users' time and energy while revolutionizing the screening process.

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'Eat your own dog food'. By this I mean follow the process, journey, services and use your own products; exactly as if you were your own customer.

Go onto your website. Shop your own shop. Call your own helpline. Only this way do you really understand what it is like to be your own customer and to walk in their shoes. It's amazing how much traction we see when an exec team do this. Very quickly any obstacles or difficult processes which make it hard for customers are removed. Also ensuring everyone who is customer facing has done the same is key. If you are talking a customer through a journey you need to have completed every step that they are about to. This step-changes your customer service quality. This is one of the strongest approaches you can take to improve your CX quickly and in the way that has the most impact.



Sharon Boyd

CXO at MKL CX

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Change is the new normal.

2020 taught businesses the importance of staying agile. And tomorrow's CX strategy needs to have this agility embedded into it.



2020 has taught us how to survive in what was for most of us, the biggest challenge, of our lives. 2021 will see us harnessing Customer Experience from not only the customer's perspective but also from the businesses' perspective – be it technical or financial. 2021 will be the year of re-defining customer experience and building our skillsets and tools to eventually help our organisations thrive. Education and a focus on agile, advanced practice thinking and doing will be key!



Hasan Mohammad

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Using a structured approach to embedding customer centricity does not make it a 'project'. It ensures customer centricity becomes intentional and sustainable. Many people think that Agile CX takes the 'soul' out of the concept, however without well-defined coordinated efforts CX dreams will not come true. I have seen many wonderful CX strategies and beautiful journey maps go to waste as organisations did not plan robust implementation cycles for customer centricity. In my work, I merge CX expertise with rigorous planning and project management. Not only does it let my clients feel the tangible value from customer centricity, it also leads to higher employee engagement as people feel energised by faster improvements. Agility is a key business discipline, and it is a must in embedding customer centricity.



Olga Potaptseva

Founding Director European Customer Consultancy

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Thank you



ABOUT US

Ozonetel offers omnichannel contact center solutions to help fast-growing, customer-centric businesses transform customer experience. We provide one of the world's most adaptable, flexible, comprehensive contact center suites. But more importantly, we pride ourselves on our helpful, personalised, consultative approach that helps companies build efficient systems, productive agents, and happier customers.

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