

“Why There’s Still a Place for Personal Service in the “Age of Interruption”

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Enghouse Interactive Article

It was American author and columnist, Thomas Friedman who first popularised the phrase, ‘The Age of Interruption’. It’s a term that still resonates with many senior executives working in a world dominated by digital technology, where doing battle with a continuous stream of emails, instant messages and mobile phone calls has become a daily fact of life.

Indeed, many people today are working in a state of “continuous partial attention,” a condition identified by former Microsoft executive, Linda Stone, as being triggered by an effort not to miss anything and characterised by always-on, anywhere, anytime, anyplace behaviour that involves an artificial sense of constant crisis.

Most office workers today would recognise the symptoms of working in a world where people expect to get hold of you almost 24x7, where workers increasingly sleep next to their smartphones and have instant message on their desktop, pinging messages to them constantly. As a result, many of us are becoming ‘skimmers’, keeping lots of plates spinning but not doing any jobs really well.

When it comes to customer interaction, what’s been lost is a sense of personal service – a human touch. And this is important. After all, even today, certain customers, executives or senior members of staff need some of that VIP treatment.

Many such business people continue to want personal service backed by a focused line of communication that routes them to a person that understands their needs and can answer their queries quickly and efficiently.

Such individuals are typically highly valued customers and it is therefore critical that the business cultivates them in a bid to keep them loyal. But how can this be done? Interactions can be triaged, routed and prioritised through an automated mechanism, of course, but for these types of customers this is unlikely to be the right way to go.

The existence and indeed critical importance of this kind of customer is one good reason why the role of the attendant console operator has not gone away.

For many businesses today and for at least some of the customers they engage with, the ideal will always be a VIP concierge experience where the customer comes through to a receptionist who knows who they are, understands the problem and routes them through to somebody they either already know or who has the necessary awareness and expertise to deal with their problem there and then.

Why Technology Still Matters

This human interaction is key but it also needs to be supported by the right technological applications. Operator console technology is critical here in helping to provide the optimum caller experience, enabling the customer to have a rich conversation with the person on the other end of the line.

Using the latest systems, the office receptionist can draw on real-time presence and calendar information to pinpoint the back office contact best placed to help engage with the caller and answer their queries. Screenpopping caller information can be used to ensure more personalised service. For larger organisations who may have people spread across the globe in different geographies, business units and departments, the ability to create a global directory and view of who is available and best placed to assist the customer is key.

When coupled with quality and performance monitoring tools comprehensive real time reporting and coaching can be brought into play to ensure a consistent high quality operator performance and caller experience,

Ultimately, this is all a way for the business to enrich that singular form of communication, today typically voice-based but likely, in the future, to also encompass video, and to provide their distracted customer base with a service that is memorable and compels them to keep coming back to the organisation to repeat the rewarding experience they have had.

The approach typically generates several other measurable business benefits. Time to answer is reduced as customers are routed to someone who can provide them with the assistance they need with the help of applications like caller prioritisation and skills-based routing and through associated techniques like centralisation which allows calls to be dealt with efficiently while delivering economies of scale.

At the same time in the process of designing an attendant console, you have to create a contact directory across the organisation which can be kept 100% up-to-date and is also rich with details about people's availability, presence, and information about everything from the time of their next meeting to how they can be contacted next week. This kind of information helps customers to be routed immediately to the right person.

Also, if such a directory exists it can be propagated out to staff who then have presence information at their fingertips, driving efficiencies and reducing costly internal calls into the bargain.

About Enghouse Interactive

Enghouse Interactive develops and supplies the widest range of customer contact solutions on the market through an extensive network of value-added partners. Enghouse Interactive's integrated suite of solutions includes multi-channel contact centre, self-service, attendant operator consoles and workforce optimisation. These solutions enable organisations to classify and respond to customers in the way that they want: quickly, efficiently and successfully, with minimal effort.