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VIRTUAL THINK TANK POST DISCUSSION REPORT

**Creating A Smarter Contact Centre
Through Automation And Analytics:**

The Two Key Differentiating Factors For Meeting Customer Expectations In 2021

24th June 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Creating A Smarter Contact Centre Through Automation And Analytics: The Two Key Differentiating Factors For Meeting Customer Expectations In 2021

On June 24th, senior Customer Experience leaders from across the retail industry gathered for a deep dive discussion into the use of intelligent technologies within customer service. Led by the incredibly experienced and engaging Saurabh Bahadur, former Director of Customer Experience at Domestic & General, the group delved into pressing concerns that arose as a result of the pandemic, and the existing key priorities of their customer service strategies. The most prevalent subjects addressed throughout the conversation included:

- > The challenges of collecting real-time, accurate customer insights
- > How automation can help you respond to customer queries quicker and more efficiently
- > How to embed a customer centric culture across your teams

To support attendee understanding of these specific matters and to provide broader insight, Saurabh and the audience were also joined by the team from IGT Solutions, our session sponsors. Together, the group were able to address the nature of customer engagement, internal strategies and relationships, and the value of digital customer enablement, why you should adopt it, and how to build within your enterprise.

Following brief introductions from all in attendance, Saurabh encourages the audience to share their experiences through a variety of direct and open questions to both the end-user attendees and the IGT Solutions specialists. The insights shared were invaluable and throughout this report we will touch on the main questions posed by the group, as well as the challenges they are still all facing within their enterprise as the new retail paradigm continues to settle.

Enjoy



ELLIE MCINTOSH

*Event Director,
CX Retail Exchange*



SAURABH BAHADUR

*Customer Insight, Digital Journey, Culture & Experience Transformation
Specialist (Formerly Director of Customer Experience at Domestic & General)*

WHO ATTENDED?



UK Head of Customer Service,
Pret A Manger



Head of Customer Service,
Bensons For Beds



Customer Services
Transformation Manager,
Bensons For Beds



Customer Experience Director,
Studio



Head of eCommerce,
Tom & Dick's



Customer Service Director,
JYSK



SVP & Head of AI & Analytics
IGT Solutions



Data Science, AI & Machine
Learning Practitioner
IGT Solutions



VP Europe, USA & UK
IGT Solutions

"The CX Retail Exchange is a great opportunity to meet high quality, relevant suppliers to help you achieve your business and department goals in the coming years. It's also a brilliant opportunity to network with other people in the industry, and keep up to date with all the most relevant CX news and innovations."

Rachel Scoffield

Head of Customer Experience
Papier

Virtual Think Tank Highlights

Handling Surges Across Your Omni Channel

One of the first areas discussed in the conversation was the role automation has to play when managing new and varying degrees of customer inquiry volume across various omnichannel platforms. One attendee is quick to share his interest in the opportunities available and the need to learn from larger businesses due to the 'board-room only' approach embedded in their organisation. As an organisation looking to remain small where everyone within the company is on the same page, they are looking to broaden their perspective on this matter.

This is where the IGT Solutions team provide useful insight as they highlighted the following key pressure points for retailers:

- Explosion of data across online channels as they continuously collect new consumer data
- More consumer contact points expands the variety of needs for specialisation across customer contact centres
- Increasingly challenging to personalise communications as retailers and consumers become further separated through virtual platforms

Another attendee, who experienced a sudden shift to virtual channels during the early days of the pandemic, interjected to share they have been tackling the multiple challenges of an overnight jump of 30% in online activity. For retailers who prides themselves in delivering exemplar face-to-face customer experience, they are looking to maintain this reputation through automating a personal service with their unique touch. Attendees agreed that these surges were commonplace during COVID, but the group were split on whether these increases in volume were short-term or whether they are representative of a paradigm shift within consumer businesses.

Effectively Managing Your CRM Programme

This topic is quickly addressed by one attendee who was already implementing a sufficient CRM Programme and online capabilities prior to the global pandemic, and has since had to accelerate this implementation due to surges they have seen. The attendee raises the issues

created by the significant shift to online and the urgent need to find new ways of managing consumer data. Customers are continually expecting quicker responses to their queries so, as such, organisations need to be prepared internally to respond in a timely manner.

To further this issue, especially for smaller retailers, the need to quickly resolve increasing enquiries has elevated the need for investment in automation, resolution, and chat-bot solutions. Where these may have been nice-to-haves before COVID, it is widely accepted that these are now essential. Any areas of legacy drag must be made redundant if retailers are to utilise data for better, more personalised customer experiences and customer service delivery.

Saurabh summarises this by agreeing that the global pandemic did not change any plans but certainly accelerated the need to implement future road maps for retailers, no matter how far they were in the future. However, to be able to successfully do so an organisation requires drive from senior management and decision-makers once they have accepted the shift occurring in their respective competitive landscapes.

Understanding Your Customer For Effective Personalisation

Prior to the session, all attendees were surveyed for their top challenges relating to the topic. Here one retailer highlighted their need for an understanding of how automation, especially surrounding customer communication, can deliver the same level of personalised services as they would in a face-to-face environment. In a short space of time, this organisation realigned their approach to personalisation through a solely virtual, one-to-one consultation and experience delivery service.

To further the pressure on these retailers, increased competition is emerging across markets as digital pure-players and better-established competitors integrate successful virtual and digitalised strategies at a greater pace than smaller retailers can currently occupy. This encouraged the moderator to inject and question whether smaller, less advanced retailers can instead benefit from better consumer knowledge. If so, which tools can best support them with this?

Virtual Think Tank Highlights

It was agreed that increased interactions and investments in diversified touch-points are needed to establish a strong understanding of what a retailer's market truly wants and needs. To create space for this, retailers can take advantage of automation capabilities and chat-bot functions to help them handle the lower-level, lesser demanding enquiries to allow contact centres to cooperate one-to-one with urgent end-consumer requirements.

Technology For Better Engagement

Continuing on this line of discussion, the moderator requested input from the IGT Solutions experts. Specifically, how can retailers adapt and learn from their competitive landscape and how do they know if these organisations are using the necessary and accurate tools and processes suited to their unique needs. To answer this, the IGT Solutions specialists suggested that this can be broken down into two individual challenges which need separate attention:

- 1 How you should engage with your customers during the pandemic and how to ensure interactions are using the right technology?
- 2 How to identify unique business problems and use cases which could be replaced with automation for a future of continuous value?

This encouraged one of the attendees to revisit their experience with excessive volumes of online interactions. The most apparent struggle appeared to be how to best engage with consumers who have never experienced a virtual experience with their organisation before, especially when said organisation's customer contact centre was unprepared for such a significant surge in enquiries.

From this, Saurabh had two main questions from the experiences shared and from this discussion so far:

- 1 Many in the retail space wish to improve their customer contact centre capabilities, so what is restricting them from engaging in the way that is expected?
- 2 Once moved online, how can retailers create the experience their consumers want to feel, and how can the one-to-one experience be delivered virtually?

It is here that the IGT Solutions specialists suggest that retailers must meticulously analyse the areas of the organisation which should be and should never be automated; for example not to automate cancelling subscriptions as this is an opportunity to regain loyalty. Retailers should not change their own behaviour, but instead focus on how they can adapt to a change that is already happening beyond their control.



Virtual Think Tank Highlights

The moderator used this opportunity to revisit the attendee who shared at the start of the discussion, asking how they can approach automation differently compared to better established, larger retailers given they will not have the extent of legacy dependency. In response, the attendee raised that they are in a fantastic position to utilise the role of augmented self-service capabilities due to the luxury nature of their products. Rather than being restricted by legacy drag, the retailer can take advantage of newer, more exciting channels to then be implemented at relative speed.

Conclusions

The pandemic brought to the surface a lot of the pre-existing issues for retailers as the competitive online landscape everyone found themselves forced into exposed gaps and weaknesses in their customer service and customer experience capabilities.

From the conversation, a number of key trends can be identified:

- Organisations have to ensure they are employing the technological capabilities best fitted to their organisation, not those which worked for their competition

- Where moving online has opened opportunities across new demographics for many, retailers should consider opening social channels as part of their platforms for further growth opportunities
- It is crucial to have a sufficient understanding of your customer and the experience they expect from your brand. To do so, retailers should be constantly reassessing the insight tools they have available to do this
- When road mapping and implementing automation changes, links must be made between strategies and their expected achievement to encourage buy-in and ensure processes are correctly and sufficiently implemented before moving onto the next

Thank you for reading the report and thank you to all of our attendees who joined. It was a truly insightful discussion that paved the way for further similar conversations taking place this October at the CX Retail Exchange. Thank you IGT Solutions for sponsoring the session and sharing a wealth of insights their product, and their customers.

