Empathy Is Key to Exceptional Experience

Contact centers have rapidly modernized the constituent experience in response to the pandemic. **Christina Angel**, *senior solution consultant for U.S. public sector at Genesys, discusses self-service, AI, and other trends and strategies to deliver empathetic service experiences with technology.*

What trends are impacting state and local government contact centers?

Internet-savvy constituents are raising contact center expectations. They want more contact channels, self-service capabilities, texting and chats with agents, and better customer experiences overall. We also see state and local governments requiring FedRAMP- or StateRAMP-authorized cloud solutions. Security teams understand their agencies are a target for cybercriminals, and they want to mitigate risk by adopting these established best practices.

How can organizations provide better experiences for callers and agents?

Organizations need to focus on empathy — which really means understanding the situation of a resident who's reaching out for help or information and responding appropriately. We have to put ourselves in their shoes. Yes, contact centers should be efficient and effective. But without empathy they can't deliver exceptional customer experience. Empathy in digital government services is critical because human workers cannot scale to meet the increased demand for services during the pandemic.

How do you bring empathy into digital government services?

At Genesys, our vision is to deliver the power of empathy in every service experience. To do this, we focus on technology to enable four key actions: listening, understanding and predicting, acting, and learning. Our technology accesses and captures data from many sources in real time. We use AI to understand and predict the service need, and then respond with the right action on the right channel. Empathetic service does not always require human engagement. Sometimes a chatbot is the most empathetic option: Password resets are a great example. Agencies use insights derived from the data to proactively guide customer journeys, optimize self-service and chatbot capabilities, and help human agents focus on the most complex requests. The results are then fed back into the system to help drive continuous service improvement.

What IT capabilities enable the ideal customer experience and how can organizations achieve them as rapidly, scalably and cost-effectively as possible?

Key capabilities include a cloud-based customer experience platform for collecting and using customer experience data; AI tools for understanding the next-best action to take; and orchestration, chatbots and intelligent agents that can deliver automated responses in the right circumstances. The end goal should be that engagement between the agency and customer happens via the customer's preferred channel, with every channel allowing intuitive self-service and rapid escalation to an agent if needed. Low-code/no-code options are part of implementing this effectively.

AI-powered bots help organizations quickly scale services without adding headcount. Integrating these bots with contact center solutions allows for escalation to an agent — including the context of the conversation between the customer and the bot, so the customer doesn't have to repeat what they need.

What's your advice for effectively integrating AI and machine learning to modernize customer experience?

When organizations explore adding AI, they may initially try an FAQ — frequently answered question — style of bot. Agencies can deploy FAQ bots very quickly as they typically have no backend system integrations. However, we've seen much higher ROI when AI and ML are given secure backend integrations to help provide targeted capabilities.

How can organizations prepare for increased demand during crises without overspending on unnecessary capacity during more "normal" times?

Migrating to cloud-based solutions should be a priority for organizations that are still using on-premises systems. As we've seen during the pandemic, cloud-native services let organizations respond, support remote work, scale and add new capabilities much more quickly during crisis situations. Gone are the days of hoping the next emergency doesn't exceed your on-premises or hosted hardware's capacity.

AI and ML use cases will vary by organization, but the end goal is those who are able to use self-service can do so easily, those who opt out or have more complex needs can reach a representative, and representatives have the context they need to engage and resolve issues with empathy.