Contact Center Modernization: Raising the Bar on Customer Service

*Contact centers are the public face of many government organizations and often serve as the first point of contact with an agency. **Chad Cole,** director of solution consulting for North American public sector at Genesys, says modernization can improve the contact center experience for callers and the agents who serve them.*

Government contact centers have played a crucial role in serving constituents during the pandemic. What are the main challenges assocated with legacy contact center systems?

The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for contact centers. The safety of personnel became top priority. As a result, many organizations were unprepared to support new requirements quickly — if at all — and maintain business continuity. Perhaps the toughest challenge has been providing the ability to work from home. Many legacy systems were not designed to support remote access to network applications and services such as voice. Many government agencies also must comply with mandates such as HIPAA and PCI. Security measures like multifactor authentication and encryption to address these requirements are often not available in legacy systems. Finally, contact volumes are at record levels as governments deal with the huge demand for information about safety protocols, vaccine rollouts and other services. The only way to effectively respond to all of these requests is to utilize digital channels, self-service and AI. Many legacy systems were designed and deployed long before these modern tools were even commercially available.

What is the ideal experience for callers and contact center agents?

The ideal experience includes support for the caller's contact channel of choice, robust self-service options and proactive notification. Agents need secure access to the tools required to do their jobs, regardless of their location. It's also important to remember that many agents have come from traditional contact center environments that provide social interaction, guidance, recognition and so on. Agents are now at home and possibly alone or dealing with distractions. Their at-home toolset needs to include employee engagement, as well as applications and processes to foster physical and mental health and productivity.

What IT capabilities enable that experience and how can organizations achieve them as rapidly and cost-effectively as possible?

A number of features help deliver a satisfying experience for customers and agents. These features include true omni-channel support so customers can use their preferred communication channel, AI-enabled self-service (voice and chat bots), employee engagement via workforce engagement management (WEM) capabilities, quality assurance, gamification and other approaches. In addition, a true cloud-based platform is required to support rapid deployment, scalability and continuous feature delivery.

Contact centers have been a proving ground for AI — in the form of natural language processing and virtual assistants. Why is AI so important to modernization?

AI connects relevant data across real-time, historical and asynchronous engagements; voice and digital channels; customer relationship management tools; and other data sources. It empowers citizens to intelligently self-serve in unique and effective ways. And, if AI can't process the request, it can seamlessly transition clients to assisted service when necessary.

What should organizations consider as they move to modernize their contact center operations?

Modernizing how you serve citizens should be a continuous process. Methods of communication change. Technology improves. A pandemic exposes weakness in an entire process. And all of these things must be addressed in the context of resource constraints. Organizations should look across their constituency and current platform and ask questions such as: Are we communicating effectively? Do we have the necessary tools to properly manage resources? Do we have a business continuity plan? Is owning and managing technology the best use of our resources? Regardless of the question, the key is to be proactive in your evaluations.

How can organizations get the most out of their investments in contact center modernization?

The effectiveness of the contact center can be critical to success — so much so that recent federal stimulus packages include funds to help equip organizations to respond to current events. To get the most from their technology investments and modernization projects, organizations should begin with an effective strategy. A thorough examination of their current technologies will allow them to focus on areas that need attention and determine their current IT costs. With this information, they can evaluate against modern technologies, calculate return on investment and so on. Developing effective strategies and evaluating technology can be difficult. This is where a qualified contact center expert can provide technology and expertise to help organizations get the most from their modernization projects.

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