

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The dominance of mobile

Mark Brown, managing director, contact centres and loyalty, arvato UK, discusses how the consumer interacts with customer services, and how brands they represent are anxious to retain their custom. The answer lies in the increased use of mobile-accessed social media.

The consumer revolution is in full swing – customers determine not only the channels they use to communicate with a brand, but also the quality of service that will convince them to stay loyal.

Brands will continue to shift contact centre channels towards an effective, relevant multichannel approach in order to keep their customers happy, but rather than seeing this as simply serving customer demands, savvy brands will be considering how to best to leverage self-service to gain the added benefit of cost efficiencies. Balancing the consumer power shift with an increasingly tight budget will be the key challenge for the next twelve months and beyond.

It's certain that with a sluggish economy and weak consumer confidence ahead, customer satisfaction will be the 2012 battleground for Britain's biggest brands, fighting to retain their market share. Those brands that overlook areas such as contact centres – which remain a key interface between brands and their customers – will see consumers vote with their feet.

Harnessing the potential of social networks: lead – don't just follow

The evolution and rapid acceptance of consumers communicating and transacting with brands via mobile and social media channels will play an increasingly important role in the shape of contact centres. A major challenge will be maintaining an individual approach across social channels.

Research commissioned by YouGov indicated that 73% of consumers rank friendly, helpful staff as most important

element of the contact centre experience, and 41% of consumers view a personal approach as the most important. Brands have to not only ensure that their capabilities stretch far further than just voice calls but also that their level of personalisation and passion for customer service remain just as strong across multiple channels, including social media. This could be adding an element of engagement using Twitter, or implementing a more intelligent use of video chat to immediately quash any negative comments on social networks – making the impersonal personal.

Mobile will continue to drive customer communications. Location-based functionality will become increasingly important as people turn to their phones, rather than their laptops to interact with brands. Payment and billing transactions, the ability to redeem vouchers or coupons or collect and redeem bonus points all need to be smartphone-enabled, to ensure customers can access what they need through their chosen medium.

Naturally, there's a need to handle inbound requests via social media in a way that makes sense to customers, but the best call centres are going beyond this reactive approach. They are proactively thinking about how to use social media to create an online community of ambassadors that protect and support the brand, ultimately driving loyalty and sales.

The fight for loyalty

Loyalty and customer retention will remain the key priorities over the next year. Companies can start to develop loyalty, with dedicated account teams that understand a customer's history, requirements and previous engagement with a brand. This helps identify issues before they escalate, but also creates an opportunity to add value – either by up-selling with relevant products, or offering promotions that will match that customer's profile.