Customer Centric Calls
for a Care-Centric Approach

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Digital savvy, demanding, and empowered

Today's telecommunications customers are firmly in control of the provider-customer relationship, largely due to low switching costs and a plethora of provider options. Having grown accustomed to a world in which goods and services can be summoned at the click of a button, communication with others is instantaneous, and choices are abundant. Customers expect their providers to offer products that are personalized based on their interests, accessible whenever they want, and available on whatever device they choose.

Accustomed to using digital technologies in their everyday work and home lives, customers expect their service providers to anticipate their needs, immediately respond to inquiries or problems, and allow customers to self-serve when appropriate. In short, today's telecommunications customers are digital savvy, demanding, and empowered.

Perhaps most importantly, today's customers demand that their provider treat them as unique individuals, know their personal preferences and purchase history, and will anticipate and respond to their needs. Customers will rate and choose their providers based on these factors, as well as their overall digital CX, which can encompass the quality and availability of the provider's product offerings, their interactions with their representatives, and their presence and responsiveness to problems, questions, and inquiries.

Meeting and exceeding the expectations of customers today requires a centralized care approach, which involves putting the focus on the customer, rather than the transaction, taking a proactive and predictive approach to addressing the needs of the customer, and ensuring that all marketing, sales, and service requests and inquiries are addressed quickly, through the customer's preferred channels. This unified approach relies on the alignment of people, processes, and policies, and increasingly underpins using powerful and flexible platforms and tools.

## The role of today's telco provider to meet these CX challenges

Customer journeys are not linear, but an infinite loop that begins with an initial touchpoint or interaction, continues through to the purchase or use of a service, and returns to a point of repurchase or renewal. Often, additional touchpoints along the way are encountered, usually to handle questions on how best to use the product, to address problems or concerns with the product or service, or administrative or account-focused issues. In each of these cases, organizations need to keep the elements of delivering excellent CX in mind:

- **Customer care:** This refers to how well customers are taken care of while they interact with the brand.

- **Customer success:** The methodology of ensuring that customers achieve their desired outcomes while using your product or service.

- **Customer service:** The category of providing advice or assistance to customers, which can cover administrative, product, and technical issues.

- **Customer satisfaction:** A measure of how well a company's products and services meet, exceed, or fall short of customer expectations.

CX is the sum of a customer's interaction with a company, brand, or service, and encompass each of the actions or measures listed above. And because telecommunications product and service offerings are generally comparable across the competitive landscape, CX has become a key differentiator that exerts a significant influence across the entire customer journey and lifecycle. Ultimately, it is incumbent upon the telecommunications provider to be present and responsive along each step of the journey.

At the initial touchpoint, consumers expect any outreach by the provider to be both relevant and personalized. Customers expect that any marketing or advertising should speak to them directly, with a clear understanding of who they are and what their needs are, and ultimately, offer a specific solution. Collecting data on customers and prospects to generate personas can be useful in creating more relevant marketing and sales interactions, because the content, verbiage, approach, and channel are tailored and targeted to the individual, with a focus on the customer's specific interests, triggers, and needs.

The Customer Journey: An Infinite Loop

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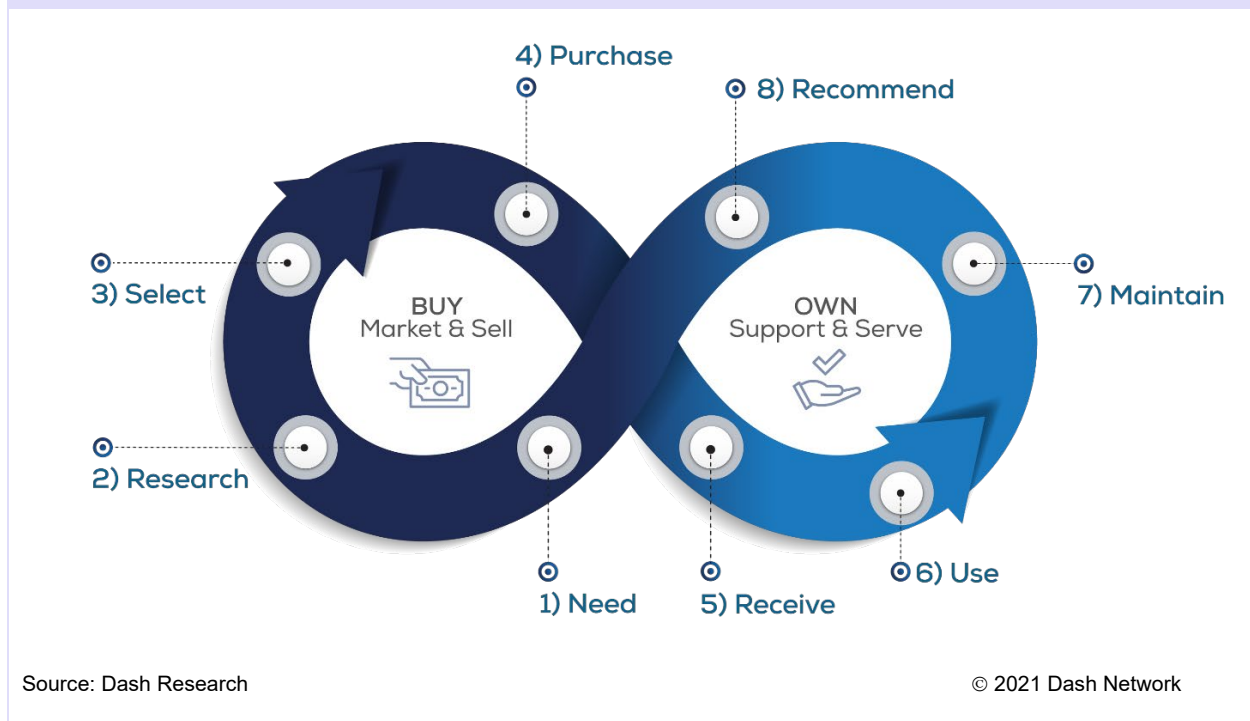
Once the prospect has become a customer, providing excellent customer service is paramount to creating an experience that will meet or exceed their expectations, transforming customers into evangelists. By applying a customer-centric mindset to CX, rather than a transactional approach, organizations can deliver a unified, cohesive, and effective CX strategy that becomes part of the company's overall brand message and value proposition. There are several specific benefits from approaching each customer as a valued, long-term asset to be nurtured and supported:

- **Increases customer loyalty:** Customers that have good CXs tend to stay with the same provider, which, in turn, reduces customer churn. Forrester's CX Index data has shown that when a company makes customers feel appreciated, 76% indicate they'll keep their business with the brand, and 80% say they will spend more with the brand.

- **Improves sales conversions and increases customer lifetime value:** Happy, satisfied customers are more likely to make incremental or add-on purchases, thereby increasing the total amount of revenue per customer. According to Marketing Metrics, the success rate of selling to an existing customer is 60-70%, while the success rate of selling to a new customer is only 5% to 20%.

- **Improve brand perception and reputation:** Demonstrating that the company is attentive and responsive to customer feedback can improve the overall reputation and perception of the company.

- **Drives product or service evangelism:** Superior CXs can help transform customers or users into evangelists, who will act as unpaid brand ambassadors or influencers. A 2020 survey of 10,000 US customers across 20 industries published by the XM Institute found that 94% of customers that rated their experiences as "very good" indicated they'd recommend the company to others.

- **Improves employee experiences:** Happier customers can also improve employee experiences (EXs), as they are less likely to encounter angry or frustrated customers.

The shift to digitization is also extending to traditional call centers. Rather than eliminating or reducing the role of human agents, integrated CX-focused technology can be used to further empower agents with more information that allows them to address complex customer demands more efficiently.

How technology can support and augment agents to deliver an excellent CX

To enable a more unified and comprehensive approach to providing excellent CX, employees must be provided with tools that can not only offload routine, time-consuming tasks, but can also augment and support their customer interactions across multiple channels. In fact, data published in 2020 from the Harvard Business Review found that 86% of business executives say frontline workers directly interacting with customers need better technology-enabled insight to be able to make good decisions in the moment.

Customers view agents as an extension of the online experience, and they expect quick, efficient care. They will no longer accept being transferred to separate departments or agents to handle routine questions or actions, and agents need to be provided with the product, account, and customer information to address these queries quickly and authoritatively. Essentially, call centers have become "engagement centers," and should be aligned to customers' expectations to get the service they need across any and all channels, quickly, efficiently, and easily,

There are three key technology attributes that can support agents in their quest to deliver an excellent experience across any channel, every experience, and with every customer. First, a cloud-native software platform is essential, particularly for today's workforce, which may be located on-premises, distributed around the world, or in a hybrid on/off-premises mix. Ensuring that agents can always access customer and product data and from any setting can improve workflow, reduce onboarding and training times, and ensure that customers are always able to access representatives, even when external conditions are challenging due to weather events, public health scenarios, or other national emergencies.

Second, self-service options should be tightly integrated into any CX solution. American Express research found that two-thirds (60%) of American consumers say they prefer digital self-service tools for customer support. Agents are overworked, and should not expend time on simple, routine tasks that customers are able and willing to handle themselves. Self-service technology, which can be implemented via integrated artificial intelligence (AI) technologies such as machine learning (ML), deep learning (DL), natural language processing (NLP), and sentiment analysis, can improve efficiency and speed of care interactions, and can positively impact the overall CX if executed properly.

3

Any technology platform must be able to provide a comprehensive view of the customer's interactions with the company over time, and across all channels.

Finally, any technology platform must be able to provide a comprehensive view of the customer's interactions with the company over time, and across all channels. Customers will not feel like they are truly valued if the agent cannot view and access the comprehensive details of previous and relevant interactions, particularly if they are having an issue or problem. Further, this information must be captured across all channels, and should also be able to incorporate any unstructured content, such as notes entered by other agents during previous interactions. Making this information available and easily accessible will not only delight customers, but will greatly enhance the ability of agents to focus less on trying to find customer information and allow them to focus on empathizing with their customers and working with them to find solutions to their problems.

The key attributes and elements required in a modern CX platform

Telco providers must provide a comprehensive, overarching approach to providing care, which allows the company to focus on a customer's needs through the user's channel of choice, which can include voice, automated bots and self-service applications, social media platforms, SMS, or mobile applications. Most importantly, a unified platform should include embedded artificial intelligence (AI) technology, which allows providers to offer personalized and context-driven tools. Data from Invesp found that companies with omnichannel customer engagement strategies retain on average 89% of their customers, compared with a customer retention rate of 33% for companies with weak omnichannel customer engagement.

Key features will include a cloud-native, low-code environment that supports flexibility, fast deployment schedules, and the ability to roll out intelligent automation across hundreds or thousands of use cases efficiently without requiring extensive data science or application development skills. Software deployed in the engagement center, as well as in other customer-facing roles, should have several attributes to support efficient and effective customer service, including:

- The ability to quickly capture customer feedback, which can drive better customer insights, understanding, and empathy models.

- The ability to support interactions across any channel, along with seamless handoff between those channels, based on the context of the issue, customer needs, and preferences.

- The ability to ingest customer data, analyze it for customer behavioral and product trends, and then provide predictions and recommendations for agent interactions, product upsell opportunities, and interventions (such as assessing when a customer may be likely to switch providers) in real-time.

- The use of embedded AI to handle routine tasks and support intelligent automation, improving the speed, efficiency, and accuracy of basic tasks, while also supporting compliance mandates (such as legal disclosures or terms and conditions).

- The ability to pull in data from other platforms and systems, including customer relationship management (CRM) software, customer data platforms (CDPs), marketing platforms, and product information data systems, presenting them to agents in context.

Ultimately, investing in digital transformation with a focus on customer experience can generate increases of 20%-30% in customer satisfaction scores, as well as generate economic gains of 20%-50%, according to a McKinsey & Co. analysis.

The engagement center agent

Organizations need to truly understand their customer base and create personas based on different types of buyers, which likely have disparate needs, decision drivers, and preferred methods of interaction with their provider. Based on these personas, the company can define what excellent CX looks like for each of these personas.

To support the shift from a call center agent to an engagement center agent, organizations need to implement policies, procedures, and training to empower agents to address all types of customer issues, and then provide them with the appropriate tools and technologies that will facilitate an excellent customer experience.

But the most important aspect of providing a great CX is ensuring that the policies and procedures that have been established are adhered to throughout every interaction, with every customer. Today's customers will not tolerate being transferred to different agents or systems when they contact the company; as such, agents are expected to own the customer relationship across all lines of business, while handling a wider variety of issues across multiple communication channels.

To support the shift from a call center agent to an engagement center agent, organizations need to implement policies, procedures, and training to empower agents to address all types of customer issues, and then provide them with the appropriate tools and technologies that will facilitate an excellent customer experience. Companies should ensure that:

- Relevant product or service knowledge is automatically delivered to the agent, based on the context of their interaction with the customer, to ensure the agent can provide immediate assistance.

- Comprehensive customer data, including their customer journey information, is available to the agent, allowing the agent to fully understand the customer's situation and provide empathy.

- Omnichannel communication tools are incorporated into the platform, including seamless handoff between channels, based on the customer's preferences and availability.

- Support for self-service or automated responses, to reduce agents' workload with repetitive and lower-value tasks.

- All technology tools and applications are unified so that agents can easily view and access the information they need to support the customer efficiently.

This process is not complete without two additional steps. To improve CX, telecommunications companies must shift from focusing solely on key performance indicators (KPIs) related to transactions or interactions, instead focusing on the overall CX. This means abandoning outdated metrics, such as average handle time, and implementing metrics that focus on overall satisfaction or success ratings. Then, agents must be judged and rewarded on these metrics, to ensure they are aligned with the company's CX goals.

Perhaps the most important aspect is ensuring that customers and agents can submit or capture feedback that can be used to ensure a continuous CX improvement loop that responds to customer changes, product or service changes, or external conditions. Empowering agents by implementing an intelligent, unified, and customer-centric platform will help ensure that today's telecommunications providers can truly embrace and thrive using a customer-centric, relationship-based CX approach, driving customer satisfaction, success, and long-term loyalty.
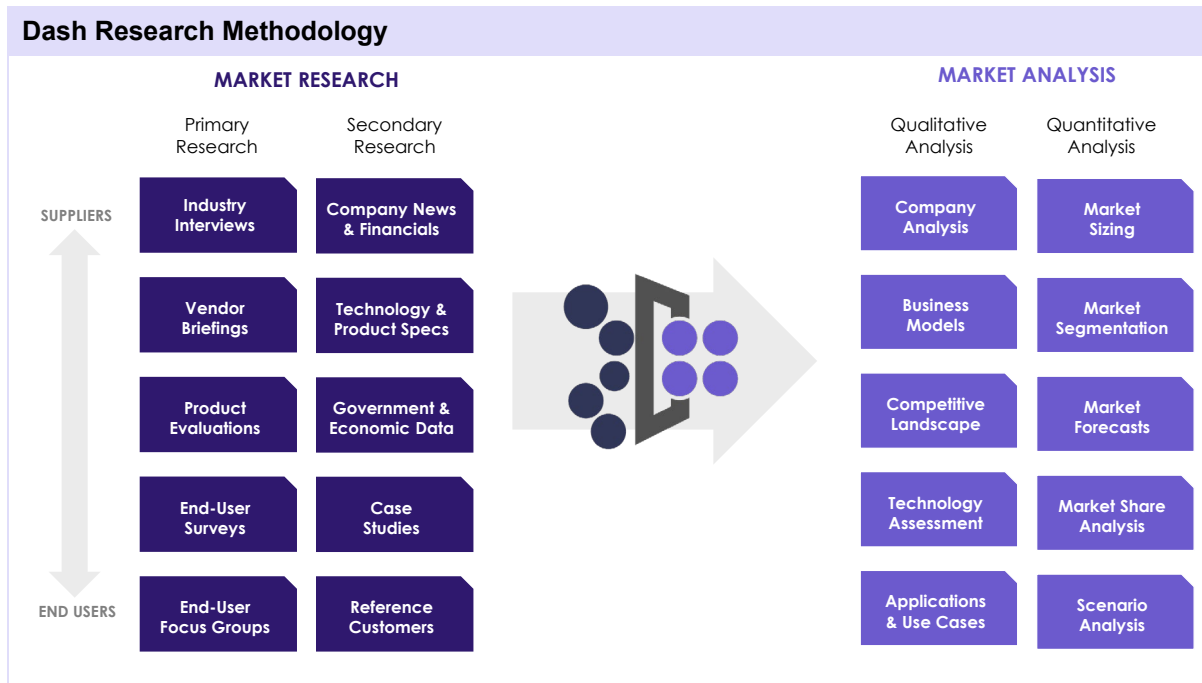
Appendix

Sources and methodology

Dash Research is an independent market research firm that provides industry participants and stakeholders with an objective, unbiased view of market dynamics and business opportunities within its coverage areas. The firm's industry analysts are dedicated to presenting clear and actionable analysis to support business planning initiatives and go-to-market strategies, utilizing rigorous market research methodologies and without regard for technology hype or special interests including Dash Research's own client relationships. Within its market analysis, Dash Research strives to offer conclusions and recommendations that reflect the most likely path of industry development, even when those views may be contrarian.

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Dash Research Methodology

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