

A telecommunications case study

Digital Experts partner with service agents to deliver world class customer support

A large telecommunications company's Contact Centre offers support to a broad range of client sales and support queries, from account queries to product and technical support. To service all possible queries, specialized teams were required and the IVR system ensures upfront query categorization so that calls are channeled to the right agents.

For risk mitigation two different Business Process Outsourcers (BPOs) were commissioned to run the company's contact centres. This added complexity, not only in ensuring a consistent level of customer service would be offered, but also in ensuring that all agents would remain up-to-date with the constant change in products, policies and procedures.

In addition to the voice channel, the company was looking to extend the service across the digital self-service channels.

The challenge

- The varying call volumes across different query categories resulted in sub-optimal workforce utilization, with certain specialist teams being idle while other teams were overwhelmed. Given the specialized nature of the calls, agents could not easily be transferred across teams.
- It took approximately six weeks to formally train new agents, with many agents taking a further three to six months to be deemed competent on the floor.
- This lead time reduced the company's reaction time when responding to changing customer demands.
- Product, technical and procedure changes are relatively frequent, and keeping agents up to date was problematic. Given the complex nature of most calls, a sizable percentage was being sent to technical experts (second tiered). This was influenced by the agents' fear of making mistakes as well as the pressure to close calls quickly because they were measured by average handling times.
- Free-text call reports varied dramatically in detail and quality, making follow ups and reporting very difficult.
- Consistency was sorely lacking as the customer experience depended on which agent answered their call.
- The digital channels all referenced the same knowledge base, leaving much of the decision-making to customers.

The business requirement

- + Create multi-skilled teams, capable of handling any call category
- + Increase first-call resolutions
- + Improve call consistency and quality
- + Improve client service ratings
- Reduce the time needed to get a new agent performing effectively
- Reduce call volumes as a result of improved digital self-service



The solution

A Digital Expert was built, one that could replicate the contextual logic current technical specialists apply when resolving all known technical queries.

To achieve this, a small team of hand-selected Subject Matter Experts was chosen by the executive to work with the automation team and to 'download' their expert logic.

This process involved a series of knowledge elicitation sessions where all known query types were defined, the context variables identified, and the business rules validated.

Within a couple of weeks, the first version of the digital expert was available for testing, and over several agile sprints, the team enhanced the logic and accuracy until everyone was comfortable that the digital expert could handle the scoped call types at the level of an expert.

The team then gave a few specialist agents access to the digital expert, and they were asked to use the digital expert to navigate them through every call (even if they knew how to do it themselves). Where errors were picked up, these were fed back instantly to the authoring team to improve on.

Within 10 weeks (from the start of the project), the digital expert was ready to get to work. Across all targeted specialist desks, agents were given access to the digital expert and their performance was monitored for a full 8 weeks.

The solution was initially rolled out across 60 agents, and then to the remaining 1 450. After a few months of validating logic accuracy, the digital expert was deployed across the digital self-service channels. The different interfaces included web, mobile app and Whatsapp channels.

The results



More consistent average handling times (both BPOs showed an increase of 4%)



Improved talk time (BPO 1 improved by 1%, BPO 2 improved by 4%)



Improved net promoter scores (BPO 1 improved by 7%, BPO 2 improved by 9%)



Customer dissatisfaction mentions were significantly reduced (both BPOs showed a decrease of 50%)



Improved first-call resolution (BPO 1 improved by 8%, BPO 2 improved by 10%)

In addition to the impact shown within the Contact Centre, the power of offering customers access to the same digital workers via both web and mobile has been impressive.

Up to 180 000 self-service queries per month are being handled by the digital expert, with the numbers continuing to rise.

The benefits

The digital expert enabled the Contact Centre team to deliver a consistent, compliant level of service to all customers without the historic risk of varying agent knowledge and experience. No matter who answers the call, the customer will be asked the same questions, be offered the same answers, and experience the same outcomes.

The deployment of the digital expert as the 'brain' to drive digital customer self-service has also reduced call volumes and lowered total cost to serve. It has also improved the company's ability to adapt rapidly to ongoing product, policy and procedural changes.

Specialist agents now perform as universal agents, and the Contact Centre is able to recruit conversation specialists instead of technical specialists.

The introduction of a single unified front-end, along with digital workers that perform all back-office system processes is set to dramatically improve call efficiencies as well as effectiveness.

