The New Contact Centre Future Proofing Guide

Some years ago, at Foehn, we published the first edition of the Future Proof Your Contact Centre guide. It's remained one of our most popular downloads to this day, showing how the industry's stayed at the forefront of innovation.

However, times change. Ideas shaping contact centre innovation three or four years ago no longer apply in the same way now, particularly after the exceptional circumstances consequent on COVID-19. While future-proofing contact centre operations remains as important today as it's ever been, the way customer experience (CX) and contact centre leaders go about it is very different.

There are new trends to consider, new steps in the customer journey to factor in, new priorities to take account of and – above all – new tools and technologies to improve the value of contact centre operations. This revision to the guide analyses these issues.

1. Introduction

Many things have changed in the world, but one thing remains certain: the contact centre is still the indispensable hub for customer care and communications for most public and private organisations. In fact, if they weren't before, contact centres have been thrust onto the frontline by lockdowns and mobility restrictions imposed by coronavirus.

Managing in-person experiences at a distance have pushed contact centres even further into the limelight as the prime medium for customer interactions. At the same time, they increasingly sit within a dense digital ecosystem of smartphone-enabled, self-service platforms. For example, mobile apps and bots are now often the first point of entry for accessing a brand, with human agents acting as backups to deal with more complex queries and escalations.

Conversely, a disjointed digital strategy creates extra pressure, giving agents less opportunity to make a positive first impression. Forcing them, for example, to work harder at turning around negative perceptions formed by the effects of data siloes.
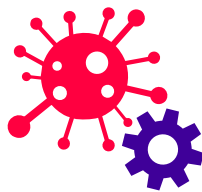
Key stat:

84% of business leaders agree that the coronavirus pandemic is fundamentally changing their contact centre operations.

Source: Forrester Research, 2021

2. Top priorities

The contact centre of 2021 is unlike the contact centre of 2019. Coronavirus has accelerated several trends already previously in play, creating fresh challenges for CX leaders and operators. Here are eight of the hottest new trends to be aware of:

▸ **You need to take care of your home-based agents.** The pandemic forced many organisations to move wholesale to a home-based agent model. That model (or a hybrid) is now here to stay, but motivating agents at home is not the same as having them all in the same room.

▸ **Your contact centre is delivered as a service.** In tandem with home working, a growing number of operators are migrating from on-prem to contact-centre-as-a-service (CCaaS) delivery models. Unlocking advantages burst scalability, lower costs and faster time-to-innovation, the key is a tried-and-tested migration strategy with the right managed service partner.

▸ **You must manage at a distance.** With agents working from home, walking the floor while looking over their shoulders isn't an option – in person, at least. So, another key 2021 trend is the rise of virtual monitoring and management tools for distributed workforces.

▸ **Your voice channel is going down in usage but up in value.** Customer interactions moved online en masse as coronavirus closed high street and branch offices. Although 99% of the time that's fine, it means agents need to cover a broader range of topics and not just service issues. So, they need faster, better access to tools and – most importantly – subject matter experts.

▸ **Your security challenges are bigger than ever.** Increased data protection regulations, homeworking and cloud-based technologies make it harder to keep on top of security vulnerabilities and potential data breaches.

▸ **Your agent performance toolkit has changed.** Maintaining and improving agent performance is as important as ever. Doing it well with a remote-working model requires new tools and techniques like AI-powered workforce engagement management and gamification.

▸ **Your contact centre and unified communications are one and the same.** A customer-centric culture needs to exist in all parts of the company. Contact center and UC solutions can no longer exist as separate platforms. Getting this integration right could be this year's top IT headache.

▸ **Your latest contact centre recruit is a chatbot.** Back in 2019, a Call Centre Helper report noted that 63% of contact centre leaders thought virtual assistants and chatbots were good for customer service. Today, AI-enabled IVR and chatbots as assistants are key tools for directly improving agent performance and CX.

Key stat:

CCaaS will be the preferred model of adoption for 70% of all new contact centres by 2024 (up from 20% in 2019).

Source: Gartner, 2020

3. Connecting customer journeys

Effective customer journey mapping has long been central to contact centre success, but the process has become more difficult over time. Two trends are driving complexity in particular: a greater reliance on digital channels; and the proliferation of those channels and connecting journeys as customers hop and shop around. But the goal is unchanged. Customers expect consistent service when it matters most. Which is all the time.

What does this mean when it comes to mapping the customer journey? In essence, instead of asking "what channels will the customer use?" the question in many cases should be "which ones won't they use?" We already routinely use videoconferencing platforms, which are fast appearing as web-page windows. Meanwhile, established social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have been joined by a host of contenders including YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

In such ways, customer journeys are constantly evolving, so the best bet for contact centre operators is to invest in platforms with open interfaces and a solid product development roadmap that can evolve constantly at the same time.
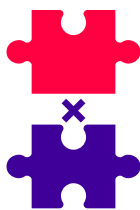
Key stat:

Top benefits from integrating UC and contact center applications are improved understanding of customer issues (57%), faster time-to-resolution (53%), simplified interaction (51%) and providing suggestions for assistance in real time (50%).

Source: Forrester Research, 2021

4. New management dashboard

CX and service leaders need to obsess less about stick-and-carrot productivity measures like first first-call resolution and average handle time. What's needed is a fresh approach designed around five-star digital service and the data, communication and collaboration needs of the employees assigned to deliver it. That also means removing reporting barriers such as manually gathering data from multiple sources. 2021 requires a new management dashboard including metrics like:

▸ **Employee attrition rate:** Employee engagement is hard to gauge with a remote workforce. To counter this problem, it's important to measure and analyse attrition rates and counter losses by adopting workforce engagement management tools.

▸ **Cost-to-serve:** No organisation can afford to leave valued customers behind. And customer value itself is becoming harder to judge, which is why process-driven metrics like cost-to-serve are on the ascendency.

▸ **Time-to-revenue:** As the contact centre increasingly takes over from the branch office as the driver of customer interactions, it also needs to be judged according to business-oriented metrics such as time-to-billing and time-to-revenue.

▸ **Employee net promoter score:** Hiring, onboarding, and training agents is an expensive and time-consuming business that's best kept to a minimum. That means ensuring home-based agents feel just as engaged and motivated as colleagues working in the office.

▸ **Customer satisfaction score:** A seemingly valuable metric, CSAT needs to be analysed carefully within context. A customer can easily give a high score to a courteous agent while remaining furious with the organisation.

▸ **Customer effort score:** Tracking the time and effort a customer needs to put into getting their issue resolved is a vital metric but one that can be hard to measure in practice.

▸ **Net promoter score:** Whether your brand or service will be recommended to others is a key measure of customer satisfaction that remains relevant in an area of diminishing face-to-face interactions.

▸ **Average handling time:** one of the most commonly collected contact centre metrics, AHT needs to be used with caution when gauging success in customer interactions.

Key stat:

More than one in three decision-makers struggle with fragmented data due to organizational silos and lack of tools.

Source: Forrester Research, 2021

5. Tools and technologies

Four major tech shifts are shaping the 2021 contact centre industry.

Workforce engagement management (WEM) and gamification

Contact centre platforms are increasingly equipped with a range of engagement and gamification tools that tap into techniques taken from social media and online gaming. During 2021, companies will discover WEM can also be used to run competitions – giving teams that wouldn't normally interact the chance to meet, have fun, collaborate, and compete for prizes.

### Contact centre and unified communications

When agents need to consult with a subject matter expert, they'll be able to use integrated directory, search, and presence features within a **unified desktop** to find the person with the right expertise. Getting fast answers to questions through a single interface. In one click.

CCaaS and cloud

Pay-as-you-use, cloud-based delivery is now increasingly the norm. With the rise of distributed workforces there's even less logic for deploying expensive, hard-to-manage on-prem systems. CCaaS and UCaaS allow businesses to consume on-demand only the technologies they want, reducing the need to recruit and retain rare IT skills.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning

With fewer opportunities to turn to a colleague or manager, remote agents need extra support. AI and machine learning started out as self-service channels. Now they're increasingly being used to identify customer intent and surface valuable contextual data to make life easier and more rewarding for agents.
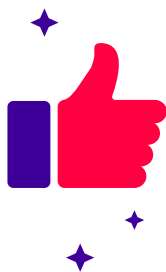
Key stat:

Companies that adopt a full suite of workforce engagement management tools and processes are 60% more likely to have highly engaged and motivated employees. They are also 82% more likely to provide better customer service and 96% more likely to achieve overall profitability.

Source: Frost & Sullivan, 2021

Get in touch today

Recognised as the Genesys EMEA Cloud Provider of the Year for two years running, Foehn has a proven track record in helping customers plan for uncertainty and successfully leveraging trends as they develop. Click here for further information or get in touch:

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About Foehn

Founded in 2000, Foehn is a Cloud UC and Contact Centre provider based in Richmond, Surrey. As well as being a Genesys Gold Partner and the Genesys EMEA Cloud Partner of the Year, the company has developed its own award-winning cloud UCaaS and CCaaS products in Voxivo and VoxivoCX. Foehn has over 300 customers in both the public and private sectors, including Kiwi.com, The Zoological Society of London (ZSL), See Tickets and The Local Government Ombudsman.

In 2020, Foehn merged with leading IT businesses DoubleEdge Professional Services and Metaphor IT to create the Kerv Group. This year, cloudThing and UCNS Managed IT also joined the group. A next-generation customer-first, cloud-first managed services provider, Kerv comes to the market with revenues approaching £35 million and a highly experienced team of 330 across offices in London, Birmingham, Richmond, Bangalore (India) and Vigo (Spain). It will offer business outcome-focused solutions, comprising contact centre, converged IT managed services, unified comms, security, and compliance applications.

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