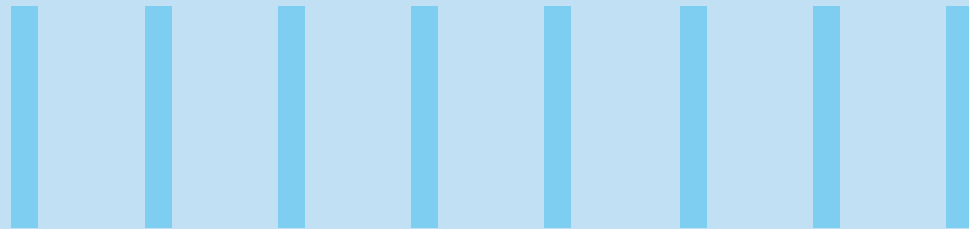# DIGITALLY DRIVEN CUSTOMER SERVICE

The experience revolution in contact centres and service desks

Abstract

This paper explores how digital technologies are revolutionising customer experience (CX) in contact centres and service desks (CC/SDs), by enhancing customer interactions, streamlining operations, and improving overall satisfaction. It also provides actionable insights for organisations to embrace digital transformation and elevate their CX to new heights.

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Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, the integration of digital technologies and data-driven insights to optimise customer interactions is radically transforming the customer experience (CX). Particularly in the context of contact centres and service desks (CC/SDs), businesses are leveraging digital solutions to provide efficient, personalised, and seamless support across various touchpoints. This has emerged as a transformational CX game-changer, giving customers efficient issue resolution, seamless interactions, and personalised support.

The evolution of customer experience in CC/SDs

Traditionally, CC/SD operations were primarily phone-based, where customers would call in to seek assistance or resolve issues. Typically, these centres relied on manual processes, with customers often facing long wait times and repetitive interactions.

However, the advent of mobile devices and responsive design offering instant connectivity and information access has significantly changed the way customers interact with businesses. Social media has further added to this transformation with user-generated content and online communities offering peer-to-peer support, in effect reducing the burden on support teams. Now, increasingly, smart devices and IoT-enabled technologies are allowing for real-time data collection and analysis, enabling businesses to offer predictive support and personalised experiences. Amidst all these advances, digitally native companies have set new standards for customer expectations and thus an omnichannel approach to support has become essential for CC/SDs.

In response to these shifts, CC/SDs today actively monitor social channels to provide real-time support, promptly address customer inquiries and gain insights into customer sentiments. Also, the CC/SD technology has evolved from yesteryear's automatic call distributor systems and email response management systems to present-day artificial intelligence (AI), omnichannel journey mapping, analytics, workflow optimisation and management, and Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) offerings.
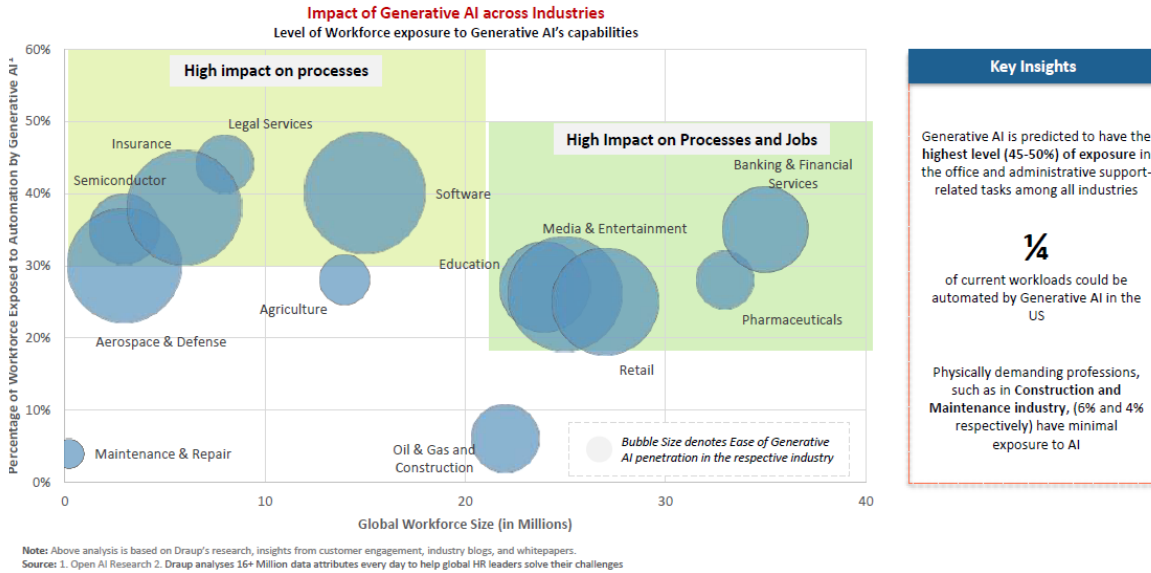
Figure 1 Impact of Gen AI across industries

Here is how some of these technologies are having a significant impact on the CC/SD customer experience:

- AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants using natural language processing are personalising customer interactions through data-enabled contextual support, and continuously improving these interactions with their machine learning capabilities. Their ability to manage large volumes and repetitive inquiries simultaneously makes them both scalable and cost-efficient.

- Video calls and screen sharing enable agents to guide customers through complex processes via real-time troubleshooting and visually highlight product features, thereby reducing miscommunication.

- Self-service portals and knowledge bases empower customers with comprehensive repositories of information, FAQs, tutorials, and troubleshooting guides. With their round-the-clock accessibility, agents can focus on complex tasks and specialised support, helping overall efficiency and cost savings.

- Ticketing and workflow automation systems streamline the process of customer inquiries and support tickets and ensure appropriate categorisation, assignment, and resolution according to predefined workflows. Through generating data for analytics, they are providing real-time insights into customer trends and agent performance thereby enabling continuous improvement and better decision-making.

- Robotic process automation (RPA) enhances the quality and accuracy of backend operations by eliminating the risk of human errors in repetitive tasks. Seamlessly integrating with existing legacy systems, RPA also easily scales up or down to provide volume flexibility.

- AI-enabled customer journey analytics through tracking and analysing customer interactions across touchpoints and channels provides valuable insights into customer behaviour, preferences, and pain points. This enables more informed decision-making and personalised and proactive support delivery.

- Sentiment/opinion analysis using natural language processing and analysis of customer feedback provides real-time insights into customer sentiments, helping to identify and address issues promptly. It also provides feedback for enhanced agent training and other support processes.

- AI-enhanced predictive analytics is used to anticipate customer needs and behaviours, as well as to detect unusual transaction or activity patterns that indicate potential fraud or security breaches. This enables proactive measures by organisations to protect customers' data and assets.

- Data augmentation using generative AI (GAI) generates synthetic data to augment the size and diversity of existing training datasets, thereby improving the accuracy of predictive models.

- Real-time language translation enables support teams to communicate more effectively with customers from different language backgrounds.

Getting ready for digitally driven service

While the canvas is vast for technology interventions in CC/SD operations, organisations considering embarking on these transformational journeys must meet certain prerequisites to fully realise the potential of the change:

- **Customer readiness:** Before deploying digital technologies, organisations must assess via surveys and feedback loops, the preparedness of their employees and end-customers to accept automated processes. It is also important to address any customer concerns and provide adequate support during the transition.

- **Automation maturity level:** Not all organisations have reached the level of automation maturity that allows for seamless integration and effective utilisation of digital technologies. Ensuring a smooth implementation process requires careful planning, training, and investment; and addressing the challenges requires a strategic approach that considers customer needs, organisational capabilities, and cost considerations.

- **Cost-effectiveness:** While digital technologies can streamline operations and improve efficiency in CC/SDs, they often come with significant upfront costs related to acquiring and setting up the necessary infrastructure. There is a need to carefully evaluate the return on investment (ROI) through cost-benefit analyses and consider long-term cost savings before making implementation decisions.

- **Data security:** Digital technologies involve the collection and processing of vast amounts of customer data. Robust data security compliance needs to be ensured through strong encryption protocols, firewalls, and access controls to protect it from unauthorised access and breaches.

- **Data privacy:** The sensitivities around customer data require staying updated with regional data protection regulations such as GDPR, and CCPA, by conducting regular audits and reviewing data practices to ensure compliance. Thus, systems need to be in place to obtain explicit consent from customers for data collection and processing, in addition to regular training sessions for employees to reinforce data privacy principles and practices.

- **Integrating digital solutions with legacy systems:** To preempt any costly operational disruptions due to the complex integration of legacy systems with new digital solutions, a comprehensive assessment is required to identify potential integration points for their compatibility. Apart from appropriate middleware platforms to facilitate data exchange between disparate systems, it is also prudent to take a phased approach to deployment, with the new digital solutions coexisting with legacy systems for a while.

- **Training and upskilling employees:** It is imperative to have in place comprehensive and continuous training programs, learning initiatives, and workshops to familiarise employees with their new digital tools. An effective change management strategy also needs to be implemented to address employee concerns and manage the transition smoothly. Further, soliciting employee feedback and suggestions for improvement will foster a sense of ownership and engagement.

Getting the people ready for digital

McKinsey & Company reports[1] that, depending on various adoption scenarios, automation may displace between 400 and 800 million jobs by 2030, requiring between 75 to 375 million people to switch job categories entirely. The percentage of current jobs being automated in CC/SD varies depending on the industry and the organisation's digital maturity. However, on average, up to 30-40% of routine customer service tasks can be automated using existing technologies.

This growing rise of automation will significantly reduce the demand for entry-level customer service representatives as well as for manual data entry and documentation roles. Further, with the increasing sophistication of AI-driven self-service options, the demand for Tier 1 support staff will also decrease, as customers find answers to basic questions without human intervention.

On the other hand, the introduction of AI, data analytics, and digital strategies in customer service is expected to create approximately 20-30% more jobs in roles that require advanced technical skills and expertise. While mundane tasks get eliminated through technology, it will allow retrained or upskilled CC/SD staff to focus on more creative endeavours such as:

1. **Advanced customer service:** With routine tasks automated, there will be an increased demand for soft skills and customer service professionals who can manage complex inquiries and provide personalised assistance with expert problem-solving as well as empathy.

2. **Data analysts and AI specialists:** As contact centres rely more on data-driven insights and AI technologies, the need for professionals who can manage and analyse customer data as well as optimise AI algorithms, will grow.

3. **Customer experience strategists:** Organisations will require experts who can develop and implement customer experience strategies that leverage digital technologies effectively and ensure the customer journey is seamless across all touchpoints.

4. **Multiskilled agents:** Tomorrow's contact centre agents will need to be proficient in using a variety of digital tools and platforms as their role will shift towards managing technology and orchestrating seamless customer interactions across channels.

The way forward

For the forward-looking CC/SD, the future can be exciting and full of possibilities. AI and machine learning will play an increasingly pivotal role with ever more prevalent AI-powered virtual agents, chatbots, and predictive analytics completely reshaping the CX landscape.

Further, immersive, and interactive augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) experiences will allow organisations to virtually guide customers through onboarding, troubleshooting processes, and product training, reducing the need for on-site visits and speeding up issue resolution. Thus, integrated customer journeys with unified analytics, contextual conversations, and realistic, firsthand experiences will become the norm for customers, while providing businesses with a holistic view of customer behaviour and preferences.

[1]https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages

To this end, and through embracing AI, automation, omnichannel support, and data-driven strategies, businesses can begin rolling out more customer-centric initiatives. However, they first need to ensure that their systems and processes are at the automation maturity level required to embrace cutting-edge technologies and that they are attuned to emerging data protection regulations. They must also adapt their workforce, focusing on upskilling employees and creating a harmonious blend of automation and the human touch.

In the end, in a rapidly evolving digital landscape, the ability of a CC/SD to leverage emerging digital service trends will not only elevate customer experience and drive operational efficiency but also strengthen brand loyalty. A digitally powered CC/SD not only positions itself at the forefront of customer service excellence with a reputation for delivering exceptional experiences but also ensures sustainable growth and a sharp competitive edge for the larger organisation.

Authors

Laxmi Gollapudi
Delivery Manager

Laxmi is an IT professional with over 26 years of experience in the industry. She has over the years led all departments of the IT industry - core delivery, support and maintenance, governance, audits & compliance, software engineering processes, program/project management, systems and process implementation, seamless mergers; all while ensuring 360-degree stakeholder management and relationship building.

Currently, Laxmi heads digital delivery for all customer service accounts, which involves implementing technology solutions such as RPA and intelligent automation. Prior to this, she was responsible for consolidating shared services for the unit (50+ accounts) with primary focus on implementing new service models, tools, connectivity, processes that would result in increased productivity, FTE reduction and cost optimization.

For the initial 19 years, Laxmi was part of the Infosys Ltd. CIO team, where she implemented applications across domains and program managed IT transitions for mergers and acquisitions.

Laxmi holds a master's degree in engineering from IIT Madras and B. Tech degree from JNTU, Hyderabad. She truly believes in working with a high head and heart quotient.

For more information, contact infosysbpm@infosys.com

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