

## 5 HOT #TRENDS IMPACTING CONTACT CENTERS

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# 5 #HOT TRENDS

## IMPACTING CONTACT CENTERS

*From AI to millennials, these topics should be on every leader's radar.*

BY Susan Hash, Contact Center Pipeline

**Y**ou would expect to see a feature article about trends in January. It's a common practice among analysts and media to set your sights on what to expect in the upcoming year. We did that. But things shift quickly in this digital economy—and when it comes to customer expectations, the pace of change continues to accelerate and affect how businesses adapt and respond.

We decided to take a mid-year look at five “hot” topics that have been generating a lot of buzz in the press and on social media in recent months. We reached out to industry thought leaders for their insights on why these issues are worth exploring now, how they will affect your operation, what actions you can take to prepare your center, staff and company, and what to expect in these areas over the next year or two.



### EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



**RYAN HOLLENBECK**  
SVP, Global Marketing  
Verint  
[www.verint.com](http://www.verint.com)

#### WHY EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IS A HOT TOPIC RIGHT NOW:

Employee engagement is getting a lot of attention right now. Making the workforce more productive and efficient is always a hot topic. However, now, there is an even greater focus on how to make the work more meaningful to employees. This is part of the evolution with an added twist on how to engage employees with unique perks and special ways to become invested in the organization. Expectations have changed a lot—on both company and employee perspectives. Customers expect a knowledgeable, productive person to interact with, which means the organization needs to better motivate and empower their people across the enterprise.

#### HOW IT'S AFFECTING CONTACT CENTERS:

This is where knowledge comes in. Getting the right info to the right employees so they can make smarter, faster decisions is key. Giving them information in real-time helps to create more personalized interactions with customers. Lots of employees want to self-manage these days. With this as a consideration, it's important for contact centers to be transparent with staff about how they are performing. Allow them to compare scorecards, participate in self-training and learn how to work individually and also together as a group.

#### WHAT ACTIONS CC LEADERS NEED TO TAKE NOW:

I think a good starting point for contact centers is to look at their strategy. What are they doing to retract, retain and engage top talent? Are they looking at their metrics? Are they mapping it into an overall customer experience program? Contact centers need to create a holistic plan with these items as considerations. Most organizations want a more modern work environment—one that can adapt to personalized employees. Create opportunities for open shift bidding, mobile schedules and gamification, as well as an employee community so work becomes more meaningful and interactive.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT 12-24 MONTHS:

Verint expects to see three big themes come to light in the next 12-24 months. These include the following:

1. **MODERN WORK ENVIRONMENT**—companies will start to adapt work environments to personalize to and focus more on the employee.
2. **AUTOMATION**—robotic process automation will help address speed and efficiency, and also free up employees for more complex work.
3. **VOICE OF THE EMPLOYEE**—collecting feedback from employees will be important, as they want their voice heard and their input can make a real impact on company success.



## IOT-ENABLED SERVICE STRATEGIES



**MICHAEL RINGMAN**

Chief Information Officer

TELUS International

[www.telusinternational.com](http://www.telusinternational.com)

## WHY IOT-ENABLED SERVICE STRATEGIES ARE A HOT TOPIC RIGHT NOW:

By 2019, there will be an estimated 2.1 billion IoT-consumer devices on the market, according to research published by IDC ("[Preparing your support team for the IoT-connected consumer](#)"). Millions of customers around the world will be reaping the benefits of IoT-enabled products, but many will also come face-to-face with the problems associated with an environment of interconnected objects. Connected consumer applications means managing devices and services across multiple vendors, with customers uncertain where to turn when problems arise. In addition, a vast number of users don't know how to operate their devices or aren't aware of their full capabilities. This poses new customer service challenges in problem identification and resolution for vendors, but it also signifies huge opportunity for differentiation through proactive customer support.

## HOW IT'S AFFECTING CONTACT CENTERS:

The contact center will play a critical role in delivering a great customer experience with the complexity of IoT-interactions requiring more support from customer service agents, not less. It's no longer about understanding the technical requirements of one single device, but about how that device interacts within an entire ecosystem of products. IoT-related problems can quickly reach the limits of the decision tree, requiring

skilled agents who can think creatively and cope with unusual contexts. As a result, agents will need to have the training and capabilities to provide consistent, cross-channel handling, and in many cases, be certified to address privacy and security issues related to IoT. Success metrics will also need to evolve beyond average handle time, to account for the additional resources and time needed to achieve a positive resolution.

## WHAT ACTIONS CC LEADERS NEED TO TAKE NOW:

Given the evolving requirements and skillsets needed from a contact center agent supporting IoT products, leaders must start re-evaluating and recalibrating their hiring criteria. A pleasant demeanor and helpful attitude remain important, but tech-savvy, knowledgeable and problem-solving attributes become critical. This is all the more important in industries such as healthcare, where an agent's actions can significantly impact the well-being of a patient. Further, leaders should prepare and account for the continual expansion of knowledge bases given the multiple variables in an IoT environment, and the constant innovation and deployment of new IoT products in the customer landscape. Investing in artificial intelligence and data analytics will also prove helpful in the agent's support of the entire customer journey.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT 12-24 MONTHS:

Despite a popular belief to the contrary, a majority of IDC survey respondents anticipate a 10% to 50% increase in the contact center agent population to help meet the growing demands and opportunities related to IoT. Forward-thinking companies will use innovation, knowledge and service excellence as a way to differentiate themselves in this growing and competitive marketplace. And for many, finding a contact center partner with skilled agents that can deliver seamless support across a multitude of platforms may be the key to delivering successful end-to-end service in a mixed IoT environment.



## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



**BOB FURNISS**

VP, Global Service Cloud Practice

Bluewolf, an IBM Company

[www.bluewolf.com](http://www.bluewolf.com)

## WHY AI IS A HOT TOPIC RIGHT NOW:

We have all used artificial intelligence (AI) available through Siri and Alexa to ask questions about where to eat dinner or

to find the age of an entertainer in a movie we're watching. Our daily use of AI sets the expectation for how it will change the landscape of knowledge in the contact center. For years we have attempted to stack-rank knowledge articles based on tags—hoping that the agent can locate the article, read it and find the answer. AI will change that paradigm by, not only reading the content of the article, but by consuming multiple articles, understanding the intent and pushing back the exact answer in natural language to the agent (and the customer via self-service).

#### HOW IT'S AFFECTING CONTACT CENTERS:

Contact centers must now rethink how they see knowledge. Knowledge will no longer be static in the self-service environment. But chatbots will allow callers to get solutions in real-time—and, in some cases, without human intervention. Using technology like IBM's Watson Conversation, Watson Discovery Services and Salesforce's Einstein services, customers will be able to first seek an answer via live conversation with AI. If the AI bot believes the conversation is too complex, the entire conversation can be routed to the best live agent to support the question. This is another example of how technology is handling easier issues, while leaving complex issues to be handled with human intervention.

#### WHAT ACTIONS CC LEADERS NEED TO TAKE NOW:

Stay connected to what is being written about the technology. Attend webinars and conference sessions that focus on AI. (I'm presenting a session next month in Las Vegas on "[The Future Frontline: How AI, Cognitive and Chatbots Will Change Contact Centers Forever!](#)")

#### WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT 12-24 MONTHS:

As we look at the future of AI in the contact center, chatbots are hot—and seem to be everywhere! While they are dependent on a host of interconnected and emerging technologies, their value is just beginning to be confirmed. Many still rely on machine learning and require massive amounts of data to be effective. The game-changer is their ability to be conversational. Natural Language Processing (NLP) continues to improve and many bots can now have conversations in which customers cannot tell they are talking with a bot. Over the next 12 to 24 months, most companies will ride the wave of AI by implementing bots as a solution across digital channels (e.g., chat, text, facebook messaging, etc.).



## MILLENNIALS



**CHRIS BAUSERMAN**

VP, Segment and Product Marketing  
inContact  
[www.incontact.com](http://www.incontact.com)

#### WHY ARE MILLENNIALS A HOT TOPIC RIGHT NOW:

With millennials as consumers and as the largest generation in today's workforce, contact center leaders are taking heed of their preferences and needs to ensure that they can deliver service experiences—and a work environment—that this generation is expecting.

#### HOW IT'S AFFECTING CONTACT CENTERS:

First, brand loyalty is not an absolute with millennials (ages 18-30 years). Different studies have mixed findings on brand loyalty with this group. However, consider that while Gen X was the last generation to grow up in an analog world and experience the leap to digital as adults, millennials are the first digital natives. Millennials' perceptions of interacting with brands and customer service are shaped by this upbringing. These consumers have instant access to unlimited offers and endless choice through their phone, they are active on social media and they are highly influenced by customer reviews. In our recent "[inContact Customer Experience Survey](#)," 8 out of 10 millennial respondents said they are likely or very likely to switch to another company after a bad customer service experience.

#### WHAT ACTIONS CC LEADERS NEED TO TAKE NOW:

To most effectively ensure a positive contact center interaction with millennials, the first step is to understand where they're most comfortable. As digital natives, millennials are comfortable interacting in all customer service channels. When initiating conversation, millennials favor chat and web over email. However, in the reverse, 67% prefer companies reach out via email. Therefore, contact centers need to ensure their operations and technology allow for seamless transition between channels. Regardless of channel, millennials value personalized, expedient service, with 53% citing personalization as a top priority for customer service. Once a connection has been made, if contact centers don't get it right the first time they will be punished for it. Ultimately, millennials want to feel that their concerns are not just being recorded, but heard by a human being through authentic conversations.

Something else to consider is that millennials shouldn't just be viewed through the lens of your customer base—they're also employees. Millennials in the workplace expect their tools to mirror their consumer experiences, with an intuitive interface that allows for a seamless transition between chat, voice and web. At inContact, we believe that great customer experiences can best be delivered by agents with an equally great employee experience—both how they are treated and with the technology they rely on to support their interactions with customers. A modern user interface for contact center agents should seamlessly integrate channels and customer data in an easy to use desktop. As one of the first generations raised online, their entire relationship with technology has been shaped by their decades-long role as a consumer, so millennial contact center agents look for technology built with this in mind.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT 12-24 MONTHS:**

As we look toward 2018 and digital transformation efforts continue to influence the way contact centers operate, we can't lose sight of the basics—convenience, personalization and getting it right the first time. Artificial intelligence, chatbots and predictive analytics have great promise, but millennials, and for that matter all generations, will not care unless the new technology gives them faster, better service. Millennial agents hold the key to providing great service from the human point of view. They need the best tools and the best information to provide that service. New contact center technology should free them from highly repetitive, mundane and time-consuming tasks that can and will be automated. While tapped into new tech trends, millennials are more traditional than you might think.



### **A SOLE SOURCE OF DATA IN THE CONTACT CENTER**



**MARTIN TRACEY**

CEO

LANtelligence

[www.LANtelligence.com](http://www.LANtelligence.com)

### **WHY HAVING A SOLE SOURCE OF DATA IS A HOT TOPIC RIGHT NOW:**

The most efficient contact centers rely on multiple applications like workforce management (WFM), quality management (QM), analytics and call recording/screen capture to perform at peak efficiency. Until recently, these features were

often priced out of the small to medium-sized contact center environments. If these applications were available, it was either through a third-party integration or an acquisition of third-party software, which was then bolted onto the existing contact center solution.

This has created solutions that require multiple sources of data to communicate in complex ways, creating a spaghetti-like mess of applications and integrations leading to unreliable performance and data.

### **HOW IT'S AFFECTING CONTACT CENTERS:**

Historically, one of the biggest challenges that contact center leaders have faced is not being able to run accurate comprehensive reports. Even when these reports are available, the validity is often questioned based on other observations.

In the contact center environment, data is king. Having reliable, measurable and effective reporting can have a significant impact on every facet of the day-to-day operations. Having a sole source of data for all of these applications makes for far more accurate and customizable reporting. When a supervisor has confidence in the reports they are running they can make changes, and quickly measure the effectiveness of those changes. They can also make accurate decisions that improve the contact centers' performance, thereby improving the organizations overall profitability. In addition, the supporting IT staff does not face the never-ending challenge of trying to upgrade integrated solutions that continually cause issues with the accuracy across multiple application databases.

In addition, having data spread across multiple systems can have a significant impact on customer satisfaction ratings. One of the biggest customer gripes is needing to repeat themselves over and over again while speaking with agents. Having a single database and a system for elegantly handing off calls can vastly reduce this pain point. This increases productivity and creates a far more harmonious customer experience.

### **WHAT ACTIONS CC LEADERS NEED TO TAKE NOW:**

As a contact center leader, it is important to realize just how valuable the accuracy of your data is. It flows into the business at an incredible rate with the goal to create a significant competitive advantage. It is your responsibility to assure the accuracy of this data, to reduce the risk of errors and failures, and figure out how it can be best used to drive growth and create a competitive edge. Utilizing one all-encompassing source of data in the center helps to fulfil these obligations. The industry is changing more rapidly than ever. Companies that lean in and leverage these changes, and remain agile and flexible will reap the biggest rewards.

**WHAT TO EXPECT  
IN THE NEXT 12-24 MONTHS:**

The rapid evolution of Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) in the cloud environment is creating an incredibly dynamic environment. Features that managers might have only dreamed of are available within the budgets of the small to medium-sized contact center thanks to CCaaS. Not only are these features available, they are also being rapidly deployed to solutions that can be updated and improved on the fly without causing major downtime or requiring manual software updates. In today's competitive landscape of data-driven decision making, data accuracy and simplification is paramount. Managers are already taking steps to combine data from other solutions like

CRMs in an effort to present an even more complete picture of the customer experience and contact center performance.

It is an interesting and exciting time to be in the industry and new leaders will begin to emerge as some of the biggest players struggle to evolve and keep up with the rapid rate of change. ●



*Susan Hash is the Editorial Director of Contact Center Pipeline and Blog, ContactCenterPipeline. (susan@contactcenterpipeline.com)*



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