

Wave Goodbye to 2020: What's in store for 2021?

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As we say farewell to 2020 there are plenty of positives to take from this year of change and challenges. Magnus Geverts at Calabrio sums up the lessons learned and reveals his top 3 predictions for 2021.

The COVID-19 health crisis has reshaped the business landscape and the world of work. In contact centres, more employees than ever before now work remotely while customer expectations have risen to their highest levels since Internet connectivity and the smartphone revolution first transformed everything.

It's been a difficult year and yet the challenges have made it a game-changer that has caused the industry to innovate at a precipitous rate and there's no going back, as 2020 draws to a close and we wave goodbye to a year of unexpected lessons and change, it is the perfect opportunity to take a step back and learn from the past, then move ahead with renewed confidence.

Lessons learned

By far the biggest takeaways from 2020 are:

- Remote work is here to stay – the pandemic has finally ended the decade-long debate on remote or home-working. Recent government figures show that the proportion of adults who travelled to work decreased by 5 percentage points, to 60%, and the proportion who worked from home increased to 25%, the highest since the beginning of August 2020(i) This is a trend that is likely to continue as the UK braces itself for a tougher tier system and future lockdowns.
- If you weren't in the cloud before, you are now – many of our own customers tell us that organisations with an on-premise infrastructure have often struggled to cope with the huge number of calls flooding their contact centres over recent months. Agility is the name of the game and the ability to scale up and down flexibly with 99.9% guaranteed uptime and total security means there really is no better time to transition to the cloud.
- Customer demands are greater and more complex - in a recent Calabrio survey(ii), one of the key findings was that the pandemic has caused heightened customer expectations, with 3 in 4 respondents believing that this will remain long after the acute crisis subsides. The pandemic has also revealed how agents are typically the preferred option to self-service solutions. Going forward, the real challenge is to strike a balance between keeping CX personalised, whilst encouraging self-service, in order to drive down operational costs generally associated with high call volumes and meeting heightened customer expectations.

What's in store for 2021?

With these lessons in mind, next year promises to be a fine balancing act between motivating the workforce while delivering optimal operational processes and even better customer experience (CX). Here are three predictions for 2021:

1. Agent wellbeing will take centre stage - as more contact centres continue homeworking into 2021. Agent skillsets are set to change as frontline staff increasingly need to self-manage and problem solve

independently. They will also have to overcome technical challenges and be adept at using cloud collaboration tools to become a new type of SuperAgent. Meanwhile, contact centres will have access to a wider talent pool as commuting or physical disabilities will no longer be a barrier to recruitment in 2021. However, this means increased employer competition for top talent, meaning flexible scheduling and engagement tools will be key to recruiting and retaining the best agents, wherever they are.

2. Analytics adoption will continue its acceleration – for agents and for customers. 2020's move to remote working and less in-person contact has made it clear that knowing rather than guessing or 'trusting gut instinct' will be critical to anticipating employee and customer needs to keep both happy and loyal. The latest analytics tools will become pivotal to gathering the internal and external insights necessary to empower frontline staff and drive competitive advantage - whether through eye opening desktop analytics, employee sentiment analysis and stress predictors or sophisticated Voice of the Customer (VoC) innovations. By using analytics in all shapes and forms to quickly analyse the sentiment of customer interactions, contact centres will finally get the visibility they need to pre-empt and predict customer requirements and raise their own profile within organisations.

3. Changing customer journeys will keep everyone on their toes - as more contact centres use real-time metrics to manage CX as it happens, it will no longer be acceptable to look at old data to make decisions. Surges in e-commerce and speedy adoption of digital services have changed customer behaviour. This move to digital channels is likely to continue for the medium to long term, making it more important than ever for companies to continually re-think how they engage with customers. Meanwhile, the continued reticence of customers to visit in-store will continue to drive demand for online shopping and the sharp increase in order volumes and delivery delays will inevitably cause more queries into contact centres.

Brands will need to prioritise the ability to predict future customer behaviour with powerful predictive analytics. However, changes in behaviour will not all stick, customers who do not find online shopping a satisfying experience will return to stores at some point. By leveraging valuable intelligence, customer journeys can be re-engineered for optimal CX delivery in a world where everything changes.

What does 2021 have in store for you? For more information on where we are going and what we are thinking, download Calabrio's latest report "Embracing the evolving world of work" (<https://info.calabrio.com/evolved-contact-centre/>)

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About Calabrio

Calabrio is the customer experience intelligence company that empowers organisations to enrich human interactions. The scalability of our cloud platform allows for quick deployment of remote work models—and it gives our customers precise control over both operating costs and customer satisfaction levels. Our AI-driven analytics tools make it easy for contact centres to uncover customer sentiment and share compelling insights with other parts of the organisation. Customers choose Calabrio because we understand their needs and provide a best-in-class experience, from implementation to ongoing support.

Find more at calabrio.com and follow @Calabrio on Twitter.

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(i) ONS Gov.uk

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusthe>

(ii) “The State of the Contact Centre: Embracing the Evolving World of Work – How leading contact centres are turning forced changes into future-ready strategies.” – published by Calabrio June 2020

(<https://info.calabrio.com/evolved-contact-centre/>)