

Email in contact centres: 5 reasons to give it a second chance

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Colin Hay at Puzzel assesses the latest research and believes it's time to raise the bar for humble emails

Despite being the first of the non-voice multimedia channels, email was initially doomed to failure when it was introduced well over 10 years ago. With response times stretching into many days, if not weeks, appalling levels of service sent customers rushing back to the phone. It took many years, much investment and the coaxing of customers, along with the demise of the letter and fax, for email to re-emerge as being credible for customer service.

The UK Contact Centre Decision-Maker's Guide 2017-18 (DMG) reveals some interesting developments in the often rocky road of email. The Digital Channels chapter reveals how humble email is gaining renewed customer confidence and showing signs of a definite revival. Let's take a closer look:

- On average, 20.5% of all inbound interactions are now done by email
- In terms of service levels - there have been vast improvements with 66% of email enquiries being answered on the same working day whilst the number of those taking more than one day to be answered has decreased significantly to 28%
- 45% of respondents to the DMG survey already have an email management system to support customer service interactions.

Multi-channel is the way to go

The research also shows that contact centres which have adopted a blended environment, supported by a universal queue system to handle enquiries regardless of channel, can proudly claim that twice as many emails are successfully handled within one hour. This is probably because as contact centres move towards customer engagement centres, the ability to handle all channels through one integrated solution allows for the central management of customer email enquiries. In turn this speeds up response times.

In fact, it seems that the success of email transactions relies on interacting with other channels. Thirty-eight percent of respondents said that fewer than 10% of emails can be answered without recourse to alternative channels, while 10% claimed that more than half of all emails needed supplementary channel assistance. The fact that emails typically require supplementary channel assistance should come as no surprise. However, the advent of cloud-based technology makes it possible to deliver a seamless multi-channel customer experience as integration with other databases, CRM and media archive solutions provides the ability to respond to enquiries regardless of channel, including email.

Five reasons to give email a second chance

Technical innovations have come a long way in ten years providing endless possibilities and a wealth of benefits that have contributed to the rising status of email as a sophisticated communications medium in the contact centre. Here are just a few:

- 1) No queue time – email is an immediate action, you just press and send.
- 2) Cost - email is still less expensive than voice.
- 3) Intelligent routing - means email queries are directed to the agent with the appropriate skills to respond and urgent cases are passed to the next available agent.
- 4) Time savings and increased customer satisfaction all in one - important announcements can be made by email and distributed simultaneously to multiple parties yet it is simple to create and change, signatures to personalise emails and boost customer loyalty.
- 5) Superior reporting capabilities - give managers the hard evidence they need to make meaningful service improvements.

A time and place for voice

This is all very good news for email but there will always be a place for traditional voice. Take sectors with complex cases such as healthcare, social work, insurance and law. Enquiries from this type of organisation often require sensitive handling that only a voice conversation can achieve. However, email is perfect for complaint handling where a reliable audit trail is required. This is corroborated by DMG's research which shows complaints account for 14% of email traffic whereas less than 10% of voice calls involve handling complaints. The latest solutions treat cases not individuals using unique identifier technology. This means sophisticated search, respond and reporting capabilities support efficient case management by triggering consistent, consolidated responses to customers.

Renewed confidence in email is reflected in many of today's organisations who use it as part of their daily customer service activities. Take Puzzel's customer, dedicated facilities management help desk provider Fm24. Since deploying cloud-based contact centre technology, Fm24 has noticed a rapid increase in email traffic, currently 30% more than the company's annual call statistics - proof that it's time to give email a second chance and take advantage of its elevated status in the contact centre.

Copies of the full UK Contact Centre Decision-Maker's Guide 2017-18 can be downloaded from the Puzzel website at Puzzel (<http://www.puzzel.com>)

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About Puzzel

Puzzel builds on 20 years' heritage. It was one of the first pioneers to develop a cloud-based contact center. Puzzle also encompasses leading mobile messaging and mobile payments to deliver a flexible and customisable customer interaction platform to meet the needs of today's omni-channel and mobile environments. Puzzel can be adapted to accommodate from one to several thousand agents using any device, in any location and integrates with multiple applications seamlessly.

Headquartered in Oslo, Norway, Puzzel is passionate about delivering innovative customer interaction solutions for contact centres and mobile environments.

For more information please visit www.puzzel.com

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