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Cloud Contact Centre

Trends to watch in the South African **contact centre industry**

Leaders in delivering
cloud-based contact centre solutions

1. **Executive** Summary

Emerging trends include omni-channel communication and the advent of chatbots

2016 has been criticised as an all-round poor year with economic and political crises both in South Africa and internationally. And while it was undoubtedly a tough period that brought with it challenges for businesses, and in some cases downsizing, the contact centre industry has weathered the storm and has continued on its path of growth.

This success, despite the odds, has in part been as a result of heeding advice to embrace the imminent changes that lay ahead. This has involved taking on the best that technology has to offer and implementing it in the contact centre space to improve service, streamline processes and ultimately, improve customer experience to drive loyalty and continued business.

The customer remains at the heart of business success, and often as the direct link between business and customer, the contact centre has been driven to place an emphasis on quality service and experience. It is this focus on customer experience that is perhaps the overarching theme that informs many of the trends we see emerging from year to year, and many of the decisions businesses make regarding technology in the contact centre.

Emerging trends include automation and the advent of chatbots addressing the need for cost-effective call-reduction solutions, the inclusion of multi-media offering an improved customer experience, and enhanced visual data and workforce management providing the tools to ensure more streamlined business processes.

While there has been initial reluctance when it comes to significant financial investments into new technology in contact centres, the emergence and subsequent evolution of cloud-based contact centre systems has enabled companies to take full advantage of the technological leaps being made without needing to take on the traditional costs or risks associated with these.

That said, for businesses and contact centres looking to differentiate themselves in a competitive market, now is not the time to rest on one's laurels. Instead, standing out in the crowd will take a clear vision and continual investment in the technologies available that help make a contact centre more efficient and more profitable.

Those looking ahead at strategies involving omni-channel communication, data visualisation and automation, while incorporating effective e-Learning and workforce management will be those that stay ahead in the contact centre industry in the coming years.

2. Reflections

Technology trends including **cloud computing**, **Internet of Things** (IoT), **HTML5** and **WebRTC** dominated the possibilities for businesses in 2016 and how these would enhance the operation and management of contact centres.

Cloud Computing

Cloud indeed saw an increase in interest and adoption in 2016 although there continues to be room for further development, which we believe will take place in the coming years. The move to cloud services requires a shift in both mindset and operations, however, the benefits are being more clearly understood and these solutions are becoming mainstream. For many, the question is no longer *if* to implement cloud services, but rather *when*.

Data Analysis

The trend of big data and Business Intelligence (BI) tools continues while becoming more refined to offer comprehensive data through simpler and more user-friendly tools. The focus has been on providing rich information that is understandable to non-data experts, with the next phase of this focussing on visual data which is discussed in more detail in our emerging trends section.

HTML5 and WebRTC

While the promise of HTML5 and WebRTC remains clear, the practicality of implementing this technology effectively has proven difficult. This is largely as a result of the standard technology in South Africa not being supported by WebRTC, however, these solutions will be implemented in the future, even if the technology needs to be modified in order to do so.

Omni-channel

The concept of omni-channel has moved into mainstream consciousness, and while contact centres have taken on (to a greater or lesser extent) new communication channels such as email, chat, SMS and social media, the uptake has been slow thus far. This is set to increase as the desire exists within contact centres, particularly service desks, to make sure agents are managing all aspects of a business.

Internet of Things

The uptake in wearables has been huge and these devices have become more integrated than ever, although limitations exist due to the slow rollout of fibre in South Africa. The Internet of Things has been harnessed effectively across a number of industries, perhaps most notably the health industry. This simply filters down to all aspects of customer interaction, including in call centres where most calls originate from smartphones.

Visual Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

Visual IVR has significant potential for streamlining the contact process for customers needing the assistance of a call centre, however, the implementation of this technology has proven difficult to deliver. Effective implementation is likely to become more widespread as connectivity in South Africa improves.

Outsourced Managed Services

Many businesses have shifted operations to outsource their technology in one way or another. The move to the cloud and virtual servers has been massive, and it's not just small businesses making this move but also large global enterprises. The benefits of outsourcing these services, both in terms of service quality and cost, have become clearly apparent, driving uptake of this option.

Gamification

The interest in gamification has vastly increased, with many businesses and contact centres seeing the value in incentivising staff through gamification strategies. Implementation, however, has been slow to get off the ground as there is significant legwork, in terms of both system delivery and gamification strategy, that has to take place before it can be implemented effectively. The potential of this technology remains exciting for future use.

3. Trends

Seven Technology Trends Shaping the Contact Centre of the Future

While there are many technology trends affecting businesses globally, we have identified seven that we see to be having a significant impact specifically on the contact centre industry in South Africa.

The contact centre continues to be a pivotal component in a business, playing an ever larger role ranging from support and customer service to sales. However, it is only through embracing and adopting emerging technology that these contact centres will ensure their future success.

Data Visualisation

The last five years have seen a significant increase in the value placed on data and analysis. Not only does comprehensive data provide crucial reporting with much shorter turnaround times, but effective analysis can help improve processes and streamline business operations for the future.

The representation of this data, however, is evolving.

The need within a contact centre, as in many business environments, is for managers and decision makers to be able to access the data and easily identify trends and key information without being expert data analysts. Therefore, this data needs to be clear and easily understood - something best achieved through visual elements.

Visual data, in the form of graphs and charts, provides clear insight to trends, changes and outliers. Modern Business Intelligence (BI) tools make this possible, reaching a much wider audience more quickly and allowing increased agility in reporting.

With data visualisation, a clear story can be told, making this a powerful tool for businesses and contact centres looking for concrete information on which to base future decisions and improvements.

Cloud Services

With a more mainstream understanding of what cloud services mean and what cloud services can offer businesses, the recent adoption rate has been significant, as previously predicted, and continues to be the largest industry growth area.

Within the CRM space, the top providers are cloud based, and according to Gartner, more than half of businesses are predicted to be using cloud-based technology by the end of 2017.

The benefits of cloud – cost efficiency, improved management, expert service through professionals, no longer a need to hire in-house experts – have been proven through experience, pushing cloud-based technology to become an industry standard.

What's more, the big cloud providers such as Amazon and Microsoft are expanding their footprint in Africa, driving an increase in the desire for companies to move to cloud services.

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Omni-channel

As the focus for business in recent years has increasingly centred around customer experience, the term omni-channel has become more prevalent.

Not simply about multi-media, omni-channel in the context of a contact centre involves a seamless integration of platforms through one system to ensure the best service. This might mean the inclusion of platforms such as email, social media and chat, and the latter has provided the possibility of a level of automation in the customer contact process through elements such as chatbots.

The key point to note, however, is that omni-channel must become an essential element in any contact centre, since without it, true BI and the insight it brings cannot be implemented. And the inclusion of real omni-channel is set to become just that over the course of the coming year and beyond.

Automation

Where voice calls used to be the norm, consumers have become accustomed to, and are increasingly favouring alternative forms of communication, both in social interactions as well as when dealing with service providers and contact centres. Particularly when it comes to a simple query, a quick email or chat message is considered easier and more convenient.

With the improvement in technological capabilities, we have already seen the uptake of automation in contact centres and this is set to increase in the coming year.

Visual IVR systems and speech recognition make menu option selections simpler, voice biometrics simplify the process of security identification, and chatbots enable efficient resolution of FAQs.

The challenges presented by this technology is in the implementation: ensuring the necessary IT infrastructure is in place, sufficient resources are available to manage the relevant platforms, and

accurate automated information is programmed to provide a positive customer experience. However, the opportunity afforded by this technology has been clearly seen by many businesses, and this year should bring a significant investment and improvement in its implementation.

e-Learning

Regardless of the industry, there is a shift to online, and this is evident in the field of education where there is a need for alternative methods of effective training.

There has been an increased acceptance and desire for visual online guides such as explainer videos, and we see e-Learning as the natural progression. It is more convenient, further reaching, and in many cases, a more effective means of disseminating important information.

For contact centres, e-Learning offers training on-demand and at a time that does not interfere with high call volume periods. It also enables a more standardised training programme, with consistent messaging and material, regardless of factors such as agent location or training time.

As contact centres grow in size, much of the customer experience rests on the proficiency of the agents, and we believe that e-Learning will become the industry standard for contact centre training whether for staff induction, upskilling or new product training.

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Customer Experience

We continue to operate in the age of the customer, and for businesses to stay ahead in a competitive market, they have to offer better customer service.

In this environment, the associated metrics such as customer satisfaction ratings and net promoter

Workforce Management

In a contact centre, the greatest financial investment is in people, and therefore managing them and their time effectively is critical.

In the past, workforce management systems were considered to be tools for only larger enterprises, but as the demands on contact centres have shifted, so have the workforce management needs.

Indeed, the concept of "always on" has had a significant impact on contact centres who are required to navigate the expectations of being available for longer work hours and for providing multiple channels of communication. Add to this the need for incorporating agent training without negatively impacting customer service, and agent scheduling is no longer linear but rather a game of chess in 3D. This naturally necessitates more complex scheduling and management processes and systems.

The solution to this lies in workforce management and planning tools which have become more comprehensive in functionality and simpler to use, and provide cost-efficient solutions.

While there remains the need for skilled implementation and management of such systems, cloud services with a pay-per-use methodology bring these systems within reach for businesses, and the coming year promises more widespread adoption of workforce management tools.

scores are now the concern of contact centres and their agents, who have become the first, and often, the only point of contact between businesses and customers.

Ensuring a consistent and positive customer experience means providing this through a contact centre.

The trajectory of this customer-centric approach will continue in the coming year, however, while consumers continue to hold power on social media, businesses and contact centres are leveraging these platforms more effectively. Rather than only reactively responding to customer complaints, contact centres will continue to drive engagement via these platforms to provide the best customer experience possible.

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4. Conclusion

The contact centre environment is one that can be vastly improved and streamlined with the forward-thinking implementation of emerging technologies. However, it can be equally detrimental to their own success if this technology is ignored or implementation is put off for another day that never comes.

While this may be seen to add pressure to both decision makers and operations teams, the potential that this technology offers far outweighs the growing pains associated with the change and adaptation that is required.

When you combine the essential focus on customer experience with the continual need to improve productivity and increase profitability, the importance of embracing technology to address these needs cannot be sufficiently emphasised.

In the contact centre industry, as we have seen countless times in other sectors, it will be those who embrace change and harness its opportunities that will lead the charge into the future.

5. About the **Authors**

Bruce von Maltitz

Co-founder and Joint CEO

Bruce has more than 20 years' experience in the service industry focussing specifically on contact centres for the last 17. He has a detailed understanding of how to design, build, and operate contact centres having worked in the industry in SA, Africa, and abroad. Bruce holds a Bachelor of Social Science Degree, a Master's in Business Administration, and a Project Management qualification - all from the University of Cape Town.

Jed Hewson

Co-founder and Joint CEO

Jed studied at York University and has spent the last 20 years in the IT industry. Working as a Technology Director, Jed helped pioneer the voicemail and Unified Messaging industry in South Africa, including delivering SA's first contact centre using VOIP over ATM. His experience in the contact centre industry includes multimedia contact centres, multi-country managed services, and assisting with the first hosted call centre platform in SA.

6. About **1Stream**

1Stream is the leading provider of cloud-based contact centre technology in Southern Africa. Their award-winning omni-channel (voice, video, email, chat and social) solution serves customers of all sizes, providing pay-per-use access to world-class technology that is rapidly scalable and available on demand.

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