

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN TELECOMS

CX EXPERTS INSIGHTS EBOOK

Insights from customer experience experts in
telecoms on designing excellence into customer care
to impress customers and boost lifetime values



DISCLAIMER: The information in this piece does not constitute as legal advice and so should not be regarded as such.

Foreword

While the Covid-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to the ability of telecoms providers to meet the needs of their customers, it has also propelled telecoms brands to drive toward new heights of improved customer experience and reliability.

Trustworthy telecoms services have never been more crucial with the public relying on broadband and mobile connectivity to access everyday necessities such as education, social interaction, financial income and food supplies.

Released at the height of the pandemic, last year's CX Network CX Market Leaders in Telecoms: Expert Insights

"CX practitioners are where the magic comes from [in business]: you and your oversight are what keep orchestrated interactions personal, intuitive and memorable."

Crystal Allen

Executive director of customer engagement marketing at CSG

eBook highlighted the shift many leading players in the industry were making, moving from traditional customer acquisition-led strategies to becoming more focused on customer retention. This represented a timely shift given the increased and intense reliance customers have on their telecom providers.

This year's eBook explores how leading customer experience practitioners across the world are designing excellence into customer care to impress, capture and retain telecoms customers via analytics, smarter organizational design and genuine human empathy.

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CX trends and challenges in telecoms

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Before diving into five case studies, a panel of leading CX experts in telecoms sheds light on the state of customer experience in the market and how more than a year of the pandemic has affected their strategies and the industry's trajectory.



Top five CX trends

Even though CX Network's telecoms panel works across a wide variety of projects, five recurring themes surfaced around the prominent CX trends and investment priorities for 2021 and beyond:

- 1 Data and analytics
- 2 Customer journey mapping
- 3 Artificial intelligence (AI)
- 4 Customer loyalty and retention
- 5 Voice of Customer

In contrast to the trends witnessed in last year's panel of experts, digital transformation and digital customer experience do not feature in the top five trends, replaced by customer journey mapping and voice of customer. The increased focus on journey mapping is a good signal for the industry's growth toward prioritizing

customer retention. It demonstrates an appreciation for identifying points of friction throughout the lifespan of a customer relationship, not just at acquisition. Crystal Allen, executive director of customer engagement marketing at CSG, notes that successful customer identity management acts as the foundation for optimizing customer retention, especially through the likes of AI.

Mark Smith, VP of digital engagement solutions at CSG, explains that before deploying effective AI, telecoms firms must bring together disparate customer data sets from across their organization. He adds: "Only then should they try to establish patterns—as the accuracy and timeliness of the pattern prediction depends on the quantity and quality of readily available customer data. Brands need a strong, holistic view of the customer, and for that, a simple pattern from a broad and complete data set is more valuable than a complex pattern derived from a narrow set of points."

Rather than having AI systems pull from fragmented customer profiles, which often generate inaccurate insights, brands need to create a single, clear, comprehensive data profile of each customer. "These identities can then be used across the organization to ensure the brand's response to the customer is consistent, wherever and however they interact with the brand," says Smith.



Top five CX challenges

In the mission to boost customer loyalty, our experts are facing a few obstacles. This year, the biggest challenges are:

- 1 Demonstrating Return on Investment (ROI)
- 2 Integrating CX into company culture and processes
- 3 Finding budget
- 4 Too much noise in the vendor market
- 5 Integrating into existing tools

These challenges present a broadly cohesive list of obstacles similar to those seen in last year's panel of experts. The challenges practitioners face, however, point to a more mature stage in organizations' journeys. More granular concerns have started to emerge, such as integrating CX into processes and existing tools, or demonstrating ROI to unlock additional budget to go further on customer-led missions.

The remainder of this eBook will explore how CX practitioners at Sky, Dialog Axiata and EcoNET are adapting to some of these CX trends and challenges.



Voice of the Customer: Avoid being a CX postman

Nick Macfarlane, VP of customer engagement at Sky Ticket

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On moving to his current company, Sky, in 2011, Macfarlane was tasked with addressing the fracture points around how customers were being supported with their broadband issues. This project helped shape one of Macfarlane's key CX learnings in his career: Avoid being a CX postman.

"Back then, and remember we are talking about the state of play 10 years ago here, issues were encountered when Sky's customer service advisors who were mainly familiar with hosting standard support calls were faced with assisting customers with broadband issues," Macfarlane reminisces.

This disconnect was breeding bad practices where customer service advisors would automatically send customers new routers thinking they were helping even though this would not solve the root issue. In this case, says Macfarlane: "The customer was happy as they left the initial call, but when they plugged the new router in and they were twice as unhappy as before because the issue still was not fixed."

Instead of simply posting this insight to the right location or department and leaving, Macfarlane and the CX team worked with the relevant divisions to find the needed solution and make meaningful changes.

Automation systems were deployed that equipped staff with real-time assistance. These systems diagnosed the customers' broadband issues and advised the agent on how to best communicate with the customer in an accessible way so they would understand.

Macfarlane says: "My biggest CX lesson over 20 years is that, if you are really tuned into your customers and you understand so much, CX teams have got to convert this understanding into making meaningful changes.

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Using AI-powered journey management to increase up-sell conversions by 300%

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Mark Smith, VP of digital engagement solutions at CSG

One leading American telecom brand worked with AI-powered customer journey orchestration platform CSG Kitewheel in its mission to increase engagement and up-sell conversions for its 1 million small and medium business (SMB) customers, which had been a notoriously difficult segment to reach effectively.

Reflecting on the project, Mark Smith, VP of digital engagement solutions at CSG, notes: "Telecoms aren't lacking customer data, but what their CX practitioners are straining to do is extract insights from an ocean of data, which they need to deliver personalized customer experiences in the moment. As if that weren't enough of a challenge, the pandemic rendered swaths of their historical data on pre-COVID customer behavior less relevant, and it forced telecoms to pivot quickly."

He adds: "That's why customer journey management benefits greatly from AI and machine learning: all the unique and ever-changing customer preferences, activities, and locations can be translated into a relevant, impactful customer experience."

The telecom operator used CSG's AI-powered on-demand orchestration and decisioning solutions to present its SMB customers with suitable cross-channel

up-sell opportunities, at the right time. Adaptive machine learning (ML) was used to modify content for up-sells across web, email and customer relationship management.



As a result of the collaboration, the telecoms firm saw the following returns:

- > 111 per cent increase in email engagement
- > 336 per cent increase in up-sell conversion
- > 887 per cent ROI on up-sell journey project

Crystal Allen, executive director of customer engagement marketing at CSG reminds that: "AI and ML only work in customer experience because they have human logic to guide them toward business objectives. CX practitioners are where the magic comes from: you and your oversight are what keep these orchestrated interactions personal, intuitive and memorable."

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Mark Smith

VP of digital engagement solutions at CSG

25 years ago, Dialog Axiata was the fourth-largest telecoms brand in Sri Lanka. Now, in 2021, it is the largest telecoms firm in the country.

Rekha Weerasooriya, senior general manager of CX and people development at Dialog Axiata Plc, has been an integral part of that journey, having initially started, like many of today's CX leaders, in the contact center.



Reflecting on her greatest success stories in the industry, she highlights a customer journey simplification project delivered between 2017 and 2019 by a cross-functional team.

Dialog managed to merge multiple divisions handling tickets and customer support into one single team of 107 staff members. This internal simplification and restructuring project enabled staff to provide faster problem resolution. The initiative translated into a 16pp increase in its complaints NPS.

The importance of technological upgrades

With its dedication to push customer care to the next level, Dialog Axiata is investing how it can seize the opportunities in the channel of preference on average for Sri Lanka's population: phone calls. Dialog's intelligent contact center harnesses dynamic and

predictive IVR to route customer calls to either the most adequate team member or a self-service tool based on their reason for calling.

More recently, Dialog Axiata has implemented real-time speech and text analytics algorithms, machine learning-based sentiment analysis and even an employee churn prediction model for its contact center. The intelligence from the employee churn prediction model allows Dialog Axiata to plan its response accordingly so it can reduce the disruptions felt by customers.

Weerasooriya says: "There is a lot of technology that contact centers can adopt in order to deliver better experiences. It's not necessarily done as a cost saving initiative but it's key in order to give personalized customer experiences, so customers will see you as a world-class service provider."

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Rekha Weerasooriya

Senior general manager of CX and people development at Dialog Axiata Plc.



The power of AI-powered customer support automation

Paul Rilstone, head of assisted digital at Telstra

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To optimize its customer care levels, Telstra, a leading Australian telecom provider, embarked on an AI-powered automation journey. IBM Watson was engaged to identify how Telstra's could service its demand more effectively, by delivering better experiences to customers and more productivity to the team.

The journey started with a chatbot delivering relatively narrow use cases, consulting the amount of a bill or a package renewal cost. With successful cases in hand, the chatbot was developed into a virtual agent capable of going beyond simple frequently asked questions.

Reaching to solve more complex problems and adjust customer subscriptions.

Telstra progressed to build several virtual agents, nine currently, each with their own personalities and areas of expertise to expedite resolving user issues and enquires. These range from customer-facing to field engineer or internal colleague facing.

Paul Rilstone, head of assisted digital at Telstra, attributes much of the project's success to the strong collaboration with IBM Watson. The Telstra team

streamlined the learning curve by embracing the partnership and absorbing IBM's technical best practices and expertise.

Rilstone explains this commitment accelerated the results of the project, noting: "We went from a 'set-and-forget' mentality to a partnership where we speak to IBM two or three times a day [...] The performance we've seen from this dynamic is that some of our metrics have doubled and others have tripled. Huge performance benefits from this handholding and partnership model."

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Building customer loyalty through understanding and empathy

Hazvinei Ashley Matsangaise, head of contact center operations and customer experience at ECONET

In response to the global pandemic, ECONET, Zimbabwe's largest telecom company, faced significant changes in customer and employee behaviors.

Hazvinei Ashley Matsangaise, head of contact center operations and customer experience at the brand, notes that customers were facing some truly distressing situations. Some customers had their disposable income reduced. Others were struggling with physical or mental health challenges, while others lost loved ones.

In regards to changes in employee behaviors, the demand surge for home broadband caused by Covid-19 meant employees were facing more power cuts. This left staffing unpredictable on phone lines and digital channels, creating longer delays and waiting times for customers. Also, with the spread of Covid-19 prohibiting working from a centralized office, employees required new equipment to be able to work from home.

Knowing this, ECONET focused on becoming the most sensitive and empathetic version of itself. It worked on remodeling its pricing strategy and explored ways to better understand customers. By doing this, it was able to connect at a much deeper, emotional level, moving away from the purely transactional mode it used to operate in. Given the added strain of its call queues, the operator focused on strengthening its digital tools,

enabling more self-service, particularly through its chatbot.

Hazvinei credits a lot of the brand's success to a cross-functional team (CFT) put in place in the early days of the pandemic. This group served as a steering committee that was able to meet at a moment's notice for making decisions that would impact customers. The CFT was given full authority to make decisions across the organization without any requirement for further sign-offs. This model allowed EconET to accelerate mission critical work and investments that would have taken months to get approved otherwise, says Hazvinei.

In dealing with these challenges, Hazvinei highlights that agility was crucial.

"What is relevant today may not be relevant tomorrow," he remarks. "So anything we build has to be flexible and sustainable, and we must be able to rapidly change the plan if things change."

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Final remarks

Reflecting on the growth in CX maturity demonstrated by CX experts in telecoms over the last 18 months, it appears the industry is using the pandemic as a tipping point to reinvent itself and become more customer-centric.

Significant pressure has been placed on the industry as the Covid-19 pandemic forces individuals to depend on their telecoms providers for everyday necessities and, fortunately, the market is stepping up to the challenge.


CSG's Crystal Allenvv says: "What the pandemic showed us is that even if the entire world shifts, so can our brands in response—what's more encouraging than that? Since those early pandemic trial-by-fire days, we are seeing more bona fide, real-world examples of AI helping brands orchestrate customer journeys. Telecoms can have a clearer view of the customers they are targeting, what those customers want, and when and how they want it. It's exciting to think about the level of personalization CX practitioners can apply now to ordinary customer touchpoints and make them extraordinary."

An industry that was once known for being obsessed with aggressive customer acquisition is now focusing on empathy, journey mapping, loyalty and AI to do right by its customers and in turn boost loyalty levels.

STATE OF THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY REPORT

kitewheel

a CSG Company



Kitewheel, a CSG company, tracked nearly 10 billion customer journey interactions in 2020. The State of Customer Journey Report uses that real data to provide a comprehensive overview of the customer journey space.

Highlights from the report include:

- Surge in engagement and retention journeys
- Financial and healthcare industries lead in decisioning complexity
- Customer experience journeys increase in sophistication vs. marketing journeys

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About CX Network

CX Network is an online resource for customer experience professionals providing value-rich content such as industry reports, customer trends, best practice, latest industry news, interviews with CX leaders and so much more! Our focus on the content that matters to customer experience leaders most, allows us to cut through the white noise that surrounds this ever-changing subject, and makes us the primary resource for CX executives to turn to.

By joining our network you will receive expert commentary, reports and resources developed by and for experienced customer experience professionals and industry insiders. With a growing membership and global portfolio of events, *CX Network* ensures you keep your finger on the pulse by delivering practical and strategic advice to help you achieve your business goals.



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