



An enterprise-wide approach to connected customer experiences

Executive summary

The contact center has long been synonymous with customer service, but neither of these terms fully reflect the state of things in 2021. Aside from needing to manage the high volume of traffic coming into the contact center, new traffic is rapidly growing via digital channels, much of which bypasses the contact center, going elsewhere in the organization. As such, the contact center is no longer the only “place” for customer service, and in today’s experience-driven economy, “customer service” is no longer the only form of customer engagement.

These new realities present significant challenges, not just for contact center leaders, but for the organization as a whole to rethink how to effectively engage with customers. This whitepaper examines the need for a more holistic, enterprise-wide vision that includes the contact center, but goes beyond it.

With today’s digital technologies, businesses have never had access to so much data about their customers, but many lack the necessary framework to properly manage it to provide a complete picture of the customer and their various journeys. Our analysis outlines four considerations to develop and support that framework, along with Webex’s vision for more connected customer experiences.



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The core challenge - meeting both business and customer needs

With digital technologies come digital expectations, not just for how businesses operate, but for how they engage with customers. Until recent times, these two sets of needs were parallel, but not connected. Businesses were less customer-centric, and could pursue their operational objectives without taking customer experience into account.

Digital technology - especially digital communications tools such as social media, mobile messaging and real time communication applications - has made the needs of businesses and customers far more interdependent. In many ways, the balance of power now favors customers, as they have readily- available

options if you cannot meet their needs, along with far-reaching channels to share stories within moments of a bad experience. More than ever before, it is in the best interest of businesses to be more customer-centric, and strike a balance between its needs and those of their customers.

To address all of these needs, it isn't sufficient to just up-level the contact center to improve customer experience. A truly enterprise-wide focus is needed - one that is integrated across the organization - not just drawn piecemeal from silos and islands of data. This is harder to do than it looks, and to illustrate, consider the following for each set of needs.

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Meeting customer needs

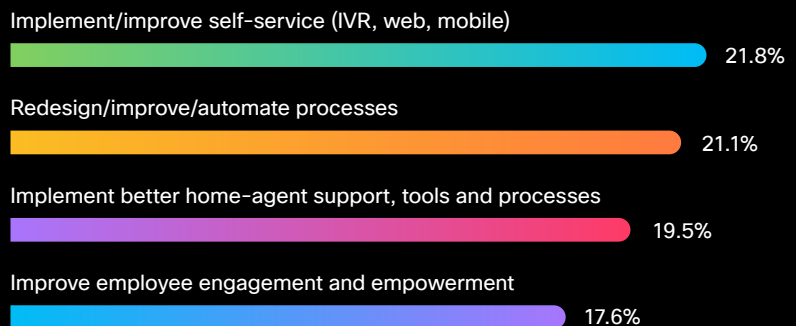
Note how these needs have largely been shaped by digital technology, with the result being heightened expectations that most contact centers struggle to

meet. When the business needs that follow this are considered, it should be clear that balancing both is a challenge that goes beyond the realm of the contact

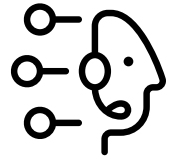
Table 1 – Key Customer Needs

Quick service	Digitally savvy customers won't wait on hold and expect real-time responses and single call resolution.
On-demand	Any place, any time is today's baseline expectation. Customer service must go beyond when live agents are available.
Omnichannel	Multichannel is the norm now. Effective customer engagement is more than just supporting multiple channels; it needs to be based on using their preferred channels, not the business'.
Conversational	Customers expect this now - especially with web chat and voice bots. There is little patience for menu driven IVR for self-service.
Automated / Self-service	Digital customers are amenable to self-service, so long as it's intelligent and low effort. Some even prefer it to dealing with live agents.
Proactive	Most customer service is reactive, but proactive forms like notifications and alerts are now part of customer engagement.
Personalized	Customers don't want to feel anonymous and want the context of their interactions with the business to be known and appreciated. Digital natives in particular value personalized experiences.
Low effort	Any method of engagement must require less effort, and be perceived as easier than the one it replaced

What are your top priorities to work in 2021?



Meeting business needs



All of the customer needs discussed above are important, but they don't exist in a vacuum. Even the most customer-centric businesses have broader organizational needs that must also be addressed. In most of the examples below, they are well-aligned with customer needs, making the business case easy to support.

However, other business needs – such as cost reduction – can be more challenging to address while trying to meet customer needs at the same time. To effectively address both sets of needs, decisions about the contact center must be made in this broader context, and not all of them will align smoothly with the needs of the business overall. The more disparate operations across the business are, the more challenging it will be to balance all of these needs.

74%
of CX leaders
reported higher
call volumes during
the pandemic.

Table 2 – Key business needs

Top line growth	Increasing revenues and acquiring new customers will usually be the top needs, but these are not always aligned with the delivering best possible customer experience.
Competitive differentiation	Customer experience is often viewed as the best way for sustained differentiation and drives brand value, making it well-aligned with business needs.
Be innovative	Bringing new products/services to market is key for the above two needs, and customer-driven innovation is one way to do this.
Improve customer satisfaction (CSAT)	When contact centers cannot provide a good customer experience, customer satisfaction (CSAT) suffers, and this impacts many business needs.
Cost reduction	Businesses must find efficiencies, often via automation. There are many opportunities to do this and at the same time enhance customer experience, especially using AI.
Extract value from digital transformation initiatives	These initiatives are creating massive volumes of new data that can improve customer experience, but only if properly managed.
Manage growing volume of customer inquiries	The global pandemic accelerated the amount of interaction with contact centers, especially via digital channels, and is expected to continue. While businesses should welcome more customer engagement, adding agents to keep pace is not a viable option.
Business agility	Ability to respond to rapidly changing external realities quickly.

Digital transformation is changing everything

Every business is undergoing a digital transformation journey, and success here will be critical for balancing the above sets of business and customer needs. The effects of a global pandemic are still with us, and for businesses, one of the strongest impacts has been an acceleration of cloud migration plans*. Cloud is the common thread driving all forms of digital transformation, so as cloud adoption grows inside an enterprise, so will the impact of digitization on both the business and your customers.

In terms of driving better customer experience, digital transformation is good news, because more customer journey touchpoints can be measured, creating new streams of data that could not previously be captured. While this opens up rich possibilities for deeper customer engagement, the bad news (and also the opportunity) is that most businesses are not well-positioned to capitalize.

One reason the inherent value of data is not fully realized is technology-based, in that the systems and platforms in place are not integrated in a way that can manage all this data in a holistic manner. Each manages a distinct set of data, and while these may produce rich individual insights, the net result is a fragmented set of inputs related to the customer journey.

Related to this is a second reason, namely the way business leaders and decision makers are thinking about all this. Digital transformation is producing unprecedented data sets – both in quality and quantity – that need to be managed strategically. These data sets will only grow as cloud migration continues, and a decentralized, silo-based model for managing data will not serve the broader needs of the business well, let alone meet the needs of customers.

The larger the organization, the more complex this model becomes, and the more difficult it will be to extract business value from all this data. To some extent this will be due to the limitations of the technology being used, especially for lacking the ability to centrally manage all these various data sets, and then to channel the data into a holistic view of the customer.

Aside from technology, however, management must also think beyond line of business needs, and organize their systems around serving a common goal – their customers. Consider Figures 1 and 2 below, which illustrate the difference between a decentralized and centralized approach for managing customer-centric data.

* **87%** of global IT decision makers agree that the current pandemic will cause organizations to accelerate their migration to the cloud.

https://www.logicmonitor.com/resource/cloud-2025/?utm_medium=pr&utm_source=businesswire&utm_term=na&utm_content=na&utm_campaign=2020_Q2_Press_Release_Cloud_2025_Study&utm_theme=na

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Figure 1 – Decentralized model for CX

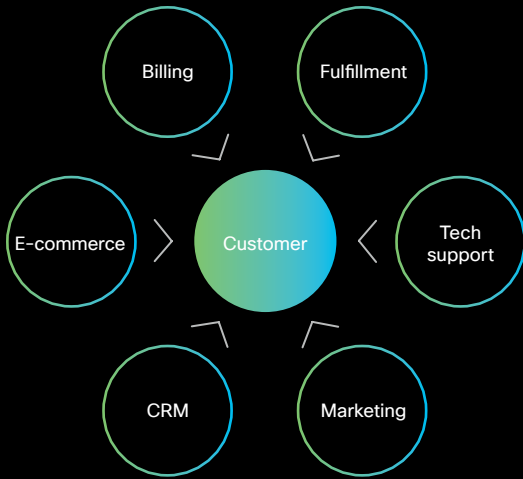
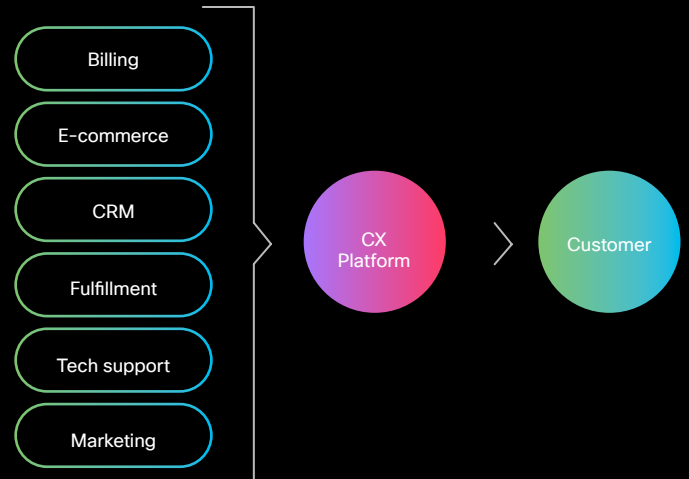


Figure 2 – Centralized model for CX



As digital transformation continues, even more channels will emerge, each adding new layers of understanding about customer needs and their various journeys. Balancing the needs of the business and customers is a major challenge, but this challenge is very different, albeit inter-related.

Rationale for a centralized data management model

Adopting a centralized data management model isn't just about deploying new technology; it also requires thinking differently about how best to serve customers. The same data sets flow through the models depicted above, but only with a centralized model can all the data have a unified focus.

With digital transformation, everything is connected, and there's more of everything.

In this regard, digital transformation really does change everything. Today's digital customers have higher expectations, and a fragmented approach to data management will not provide a complete picture. With digital transformation, everything is connected, and there's more of everything:

- More operational systems and platforms, each with distinct sets of data
- More customer touchpoints for engagement – mobile devices, PCs, monitors, kiosks, etc.
- More channels for customers to communicate and interact with your organization – voice, chat, SMS, video, email, social, bots, etc.
- More customer journeys to manage – browsing, buying, paying, returning, troubleshooting
- More customers to support as you grow – existing, new, former, prospective, etc.

None of these vectors are new, but there's more of each in today's digital world. What is new will be how you manage all these data sets. Not only are these data sets getting larger as the cloud proliferates, but the inputs are coming at a faster rate. Everything evolves more rapidly in the digital world, and business leaders need to plan for this. For businesses that truly want to become customer-centric, a shift will be needed to some form of a centralized data management model.



Customer experience – it's bigger than the contact center

Customer experience has never been more important, but also never so hard to deliver. As businesses strive to become more customer-centric, the constraints of legacy, premises-based contact center deployments become apparent. These issues intensified during 2020, as many forms of pandemic-related anxieties produced surges not just in conventional voice-based call center volumes, but also for new digital channels such as web chat or SMS text.

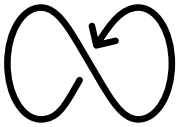
Not only must contact centers manage higher traffic volumes overall, but they must also adapt to digital channels, which are rapidly gaining momentum, largely due to their convenience and familiarity. Contact centers are now realizing that this new environment can only be addressed by the scale that comes with cloud-based solutions. Compounding that was the wire speed shift to home-based agents, which cannot be sustained with a conventional contact center infrastructure.

As contact centers migrate to the cloud, adopt AI-driven applications, and build around the omnichannel model, they move much closer to closing the customer

experience expectation gap with today's digital-first customers. Technology aside, many businesses now view customer experience as a strategic differentiator for long-term competitive advantage.

A key reason is that digital transformation now makes it possible for businesses to compete on traditional differentiators like features, quality and price – not just locally, but globally. As we move to an experience-based economy, value will be driven by factors that are more difficult to replicate, and customer experience falls squarely into that bucket.

While businesses are absolutely on target going along this path, the customer experience journey does not end there. Adapting to digital transformation and taking a customer-first approach are critical first steps, but there is a new reality to embrace. These remain the right boxes to check, but by the time most contact centers are in position to finally provide the kind of customer experience that customers expect, the goal posts will have moved again, and the journey will need to continue.



Customer experience is not just about what happens in the contact center. Just as work is defined now by what you do rather than as a place you go, the same holds true now with customer experience.

The contact center is so 2020

Both the need to balance business and customer needs, along with the primacy now of digital transformation, should cause a re-thinking of the relationship between the contact center and customer experience. If the strategic imperative is to be customer-centric and to consistently provide great experiences, then business decisions and technology investments need to be aligned this way.

This alignment is how we view the future of customer experience. The contact center is – and will remain – the primary conduit for customer engagement, but it does not define the totality of their experience. Again, the forces of digital transformation create more touchpoints between customers and businesses, as well as more seamless boundaries across organizational silos.

These changes mean that customer experience is not just about what happens in the contact center. Just as work is defined now by what you do rather than as a place you go, the same holds true now with customer experience. With so many vectors for interaction, and so many channels available for communication, experience needs to be viewed as always-on rather than incident-based. The customer's experience no longer begins and ends when buying your product or service; rather there is a continuum of engagement that constitutes the customer journey.

The longer a business can nurture and deepen each customer relationship, the greater the value that can be realized over time. That is the essence of being customer-centric and what the future of customer experience represents. This means that every customer interaction is important – not just via the contact center, but with sales, marketing, operations, technical support, providing notifications, etc. Some of these interactions will be person-to-person (P2P), and some will be automated, as in application-to-person (A2P).

Stepping back, the future of customer experience is about taking a holistic view of being customer-centric. Rather than being the hub of customer service, the contact center is one of many spokes that defines customer perception and the overall customer journey. In terms of decision making, customer experience needs to be viewed as being business-wide, across the entire enterprise, and not just being the domain of the contact center.

The culture of your organization may need to change in order to become more customer-centric, but technology will be a critical enabler for the future of customer experience. Technology investments need to be more holistic, and the contact center needs to integrate with other systems and platforms across the organization. The centralized model outlined earlier comes into play here, where an enterprise-wide approach is taken to support capabilities that focus first and foremost on the customer.

Messaging is the driver of the next generation of customer experience

Nowhere has the impact of digital transformation been greater on customer experience than with communications channels. For decades, customer service has been telephony-centric, with toll-free numbers providing a direct connection between customers and agents – and only agents – the contact center was synonymous with customer service. Customers had limited options for engaging with other departments for support, and non-voice channels such as email or fax were far less effective than telephony.

Broadly speaking, this model has persisted until recent times, buoyed in part by costly and complex contact center systems that were built to last. So long as telephony remained the dominant communications channel, this model allowed businesses to frame customer service expectations on their terms, namely via telephony and through the contact center.

While these legacy systems performed very well within those parameters, they had limited flexibility to adapt as technology evolved and customer preferences changed. With customers adopting new technologies faster than contact centers, the gap between expectations and experience began to grow.

Messaging – today’s channel of choice

Telephony remains the dominant channel for customer engagement, but among today’s digital natives, it is not the channel of choice. While nothing can match telephony for intimate communication, this is the costliest of all channels to support, and no contact center can afford to scale operations to handle all inquiries this way.

As such, these changing preferences present an opportunity for contact centers to better meet customer needs by adapting to new technology, along with addressing business needs by finding more cost-effective ways to engage with customers.

That opportunity is messaging, which takes several digital forms. Not only is it the preferred channel for digital natives, but it is far more cost-effective than telephony, and scales effortlessly to keep pace with growing adoption by your customers. Messaging adoption* has grown on massive scale in recent years, and as long as it keeps providing utility, that trend will continue.

*More than

2/3

of people in our survey used private messaging channels to interact with a brand.

<https://www.conversocial.com/blog/consumer-habits-digital-solutions-move-to-messaging>

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Aside from the fact that messaging has many use cases pertaining to customer experience, its adoption is closely tied to smartphone usage, which also continues to rise. Aside from becoming digital-first, today’s customer preference is becoming both mobile-first and messaging-first, and this represents a radical departure from the telephony-first model that contact centers have relied on for so long. To better understand why messaging is a core driver for next generation customer experience, Table 3 below summarizes the key benefits.

By 2025,

80%

of customer service organizations will have abandoned native mobile apps in favor of messaging for a better customer experience.

Table 3 – Key benefits of messaging for next generation customer experience

Rich customer engagement	Voice is rich as well, but the messaging channel is rich in different ways. Its pervasiveness provides a new source of deep customer insights, and ways to personalize experiences.
Automate interactions	Contact centers need more automation to streamline workflows and manage rising call volumes with self-service. Messaging is an easier channel to deploy for automation than either voice or video.
Many distinct use cases	Different forms of messaging will be used for different types of interactions – web chat, browser-based in-app messaging, RCS/SMS, social media platforms, push notifications, etc.
Cost effective	Low cost for the network to support compared to voice or video, so it can scale as demand grows.
Efficient communication	Ideal for transactional interactions and near real-time responses. Allows agents to manage multiple inquiries concurrently.
Innovation friendly	Messaging platforms use APIs and no/low code to quickly develop microservices and adapt to keep current with changing business conditions and customer expectations.
Aligns with business objectives	Beyond improving customer service, messaging supports broader business needs, such as increasing automation, reducing costs, faster time to market with new functionality, etc.

In broad terms, messaging’s ascendancy will continue in lockstep with digital transformation, and this makes it central to the next generation of customer experience. Traditional channels such as telephony and email still have a role to play, and voice provides distinct

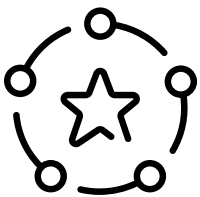
customer insights that messaging cannot capture. AI advances in speech recognition will ensure an important role for voice, but the future of customer engagement will be messaging-centric.

<https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2021-01-12-gartner-predicts-80--of-customer-service-organization>



Being digital by nature, not only are messaging applications the channel of choice for digital natives, but the messaging platforms over which customer interactions flow – Facebook Messenger, Apple Business Chat, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc. – are becoming the primary vehicles of engagement across all facets of your business. Increasingly, this is where the customer journey starts, so this is where customer experience happens.

Since these platforms are not tied specifically to your contact center, these interactions can occur at any vector across your organization. Messaging enables customers to engage directly with sales, marketing, billing, technical support, etc. – just as easily as they would with the contact center. This is why the future of customer experience is about the entire enterprise, and this means thinking differently customer service, and the technologies needed to support that.



The overriding objective is to serve customer needs, regardless of where inquiries go or what channels are used for engagement.

The way forward

Contact center platforms will continue to serve as purpose-built solutions, and those capabilities will always be essential for the multi-faceted demands of customer service. Whether agents are onsite, at home or anywhere in between, they need a comprehensive set of tools and a consistent user experience, and that's what these solutions provide.

That model may fully serve the needs of the contact center, but can only partially do the same for overall business needs – so long as the contact center operates in a parallel silo to the rest of the business. Without integration with other operational platforms and systems, the contact center will not have a complete view of the customer journey, and will fall short of the customer experience capabilities outlined herein.

Going the other way, this also means that the contact center will not be able to properly support other operations inside the business as customers engage directly with them via digital channels, and bypass the contact center.

While this may raise some territorial issues about who owns the customer within the enterprise, a customer-centric business will view all forms of engagement as being important, and will not distinguish whether an inquiry came into the contact center or anywhere else. The overriding objective is to serve customer needs, regardless of where inquiries go or what channels are used for engagement. This speaks to the need for a holistic way of thinking about customer experience, and the following four considerations provide a foundation for the path forward.

CCaaS addresses the complexity of the next generation of customer experience delivered from the contact center, and CPaaS provides the foundational innovation engine to keep pace with ever-evolving technology and customer expectations.



1. View the contact center as part of the solution for customer experience, and not as the solution.

No matter how many agents you hire, how many chatbots you build, or how much leading-edge technology you deploy, the contact center alone cannot – and should not – fully address all the needs of today’s digital customers.



2. Centrally manage data. Being digital-first, next generation customer experience means that customer insights will be drawn from many sources and channels – all of which will be digital – producing a rich, complex set of data. In terms of technology and an architecture for managing all this data, a centralized platform will be needed to orchestrate customer interactions, many of which will be in real time. Customer experience will be too complex to manage with a decentralized architecture and a silo-based approach to data management – especially at scale.



3. Prioritize context-awareness across the

entire organization. Delivering exceptional customer experience requires an understanding that in a digital world there are many types of interactions – both inbound and outbound – and many types of customer journeys, each of which will be best served with a distinct set of channels. Optimizing all of this requires context-awareness across business systems and all the channels used with customers. Not only does that require a centralized model for data management, but one that is AI-driven. Digital transformation yields massive volumes of data, and AI applications such as machine learning (ML), natural language understanding (NLU) and automatic speech recognition (ASR) will be essential for converting all this data into intelligent customer experience outcomes.



4. Adopt a customizable customer experience. Digital customer service is about personalization, anticipating needs, engaging based customer preferences, and agility to respond quickly to changing market conditions. These needs cannot be met with static, legacy contact center systems, or a decentralized data management model. With cloud being the deployment model of choice for digital transformation, the way forward is having a mix of both contact center as a service (CCaaS) and communications platform as a service (CPaaS). CCaaS addresses the complexity of the next generation of customer experience delivered from the contact center, and CPaaS provides the foundational innovation engine to keep pace with ever-evolving technology and customer expectations. At minimum, this means using APIs and no/low code tools to constantly develop microservices to drive customer experience innovation. Customization may seem far removed from the contact center we know, but it's essential for today's world of digital customer engagement.





Webex's connected journey vision – leaning in to the next generation customer experience challenge

Webex Contact Center remains the foundation for Webex's vision to provide truly connected customer experiences. Meeting the expectations of today's digital customers requires cloud capabilities, not just to support all the requisite channels – both traditional and digital – but to provide intelligent, personalized responses in real time. This cannot be achieved with a customer service model solely built around the contact center, nor with premises-based technology which lacks the flexibility to adapt to fast-changing customer needs.

To address this, Webex has evolved Webex Contact Center into a leading CCaaS platform, offering contact center as a service for all sizes of businesses. Building on having best-in-class CCaaS, Cisco's vision goes further by drawing on their enterprise networking pedigree to approach customer experience from an organization-

wide perspective. This is very much a next-generation model of customer service that must be developed and managed, not just by contact center leaders, but also other line of business leaders who are now engaging directly with customers.

The need for connected journeys has never been greater, where CCaaS is but the foundation upon which new forms of service automation will arise, more complete customer journeys can be orchestrated, and richer analytics will evolve to make every customer experience personal. Webex has developed a framework that addresses the complexities of managing this across large organizations, and if this whitepaper aligns with your customer experience challenges, you should consider learning more about their vision.