NICE

3 Ways to Empower Agents and Deliver Exceptional CX with AI-Driven Analytics

Perfecting the Customer Experience

By **Marydee Ojala,** Editor-in-Chief, *KMWorld*

The perfect customer experience may exist only in science fiction, where a computer not only competently responds to customer queries, but also anticipates customer needs well before the customer knows there *is* a need. Picture a snowy winter morning when the snow blower won't start or a sunny summer afternoon when the lawnmower won't start. Now picture the perfect customer experience. Before someone struggles to start the snow blower or lawnmower, the computer texts to alert the human that a problem is about to occur. But no worries, the computer has already sent a fix to the machine in question with a suggestion to the human about proper starting protocols and a reminder to buy gasoline as the machine is running low. The computer had analyzed the weather patterns for the customer's area and determined that snow blowing or lawn mowing was probably on the agenda. It then probed the machine to ascertain whether it was ready to go to work, resulting in a perfect customer experience.

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No, we're not quite there yet. Plus, the idea of anticipating customer needs to that extent sounds a bit creepy. Today's reality is considerably different from a potential sci-fi future. Customers contact companies for any number of reasons. Although they don't expect companies to know in advance that the gas tank on their snow blowers or lawnmowers is low, they can have the reasonable expectation that the company has a knowledge base that includes detailed data on their machine. If they've registered with the company, they also expect the company to already know which model they own, when they bought it, and if they've contacted the company before. This leads to a good customer experience since the interaction can be tailored to an individual customer.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERFECT CX

When it comes to perfecting the customer experience, or CX, first and foremost is ease of use. Customers just want things to work.

They want a seamless and hassle-free experience. They'd also like personalization, but not interactions that are over-personalized. Being appreciated as a loyal customer, being recognized as a repeat customer, or being respected as someone with a legitimate reason for contacting the company goes a long way towards creating a sense of connection.

Customers want prompt and efficient service, whether it's a fast response to a query, quick resolution of an issue, or speedy delivery of a product. Businesses that prioritize speed and responsiveness can create a positive impression and build trust with their customers. Analytics play an important role in these actions, along with sufficient customer insights to understand what the customer really wants. Maybe they heard of a promotion and want to know more. Maybe they are already thoroughly familiar with the promotion and just want to sign up. Same promotion, but different responses from the agent are indicated. The first customer is willing to listen to a lengthy exposition of the value and benefits of the promotion. The second wants nothing of the sort, thinking it is a total waste of time.

Here's a worst-case scenario: A customer contacts a company to make an appointment, register a complaint, or request a solution to a problem. A chatbot responds and collects data on the customer's name, reason for contacting the company, and other details. It then transfers the call to another chatbot in the correct area where the query can be handled. The customer encounters another chatbot, collecting the same data as the first chatbot. Another transfer, this time to an actual human being, who says, "Now, before we get started, I just need a little bit of information." And, of course, that "little bit of information" is exactly what the customer gave to the first two chatbots. Reaction of the customer? Frustration, exasperation, and a strong desire to scream. It could get even worse if the call is disconnected, leaving the customer to start all over again. Or the customer is sufficiently annoyed and leaves.

COMBINING ANALYTICS AND AGENTS FOR PERFECT CX

The perfect customer experience results from a combination of AI-powered analytics and empathetic human agents. Not everyone is thrilled to talk to a computer, even when it delivers the information the customer wants. Many prefer interacting with an actual person. It probably depends on the nature of the query. Quick answers, such as a customer's credit card balance or whether a payment was received, are easily answered without human assistance. For more complex issues, customers are happier interacting with a person. Whether it's a chatbot, a human customer agent, or a combination, the key point for the perfect customer experience is that the customer's question is answered and problem solved quickly, accurately, and efficiently. This may well require a combination of computing power and the human touch. Technophiles neglect the soft skills to their peril. A sympathetic voice, a sense that the agent truly understands why the customer called, and active listening contribute to the perfect CX.

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Ideally, the combination of chatbot and person works seamlessly to provide the perfect CX. The vision here is not so much a science fiction mind meld, but a kindly computerized mentor, an AI-assisted coach, looking over the shoulder of a human agent. "Ah," says the mentor/coach, "the customer wants to know about product XYZ. Now, if you just click right there, that information will pop up on your screen and you can relay it to him." It doesn't really work that way, of course. There's no voice whispering in the ears of agents and no one standing behind them, but a well-designed interface could feel that way to the agent. Important is the ability for the agent to quickly access the information needed to satisfy the customer. Real-time guidance from that AI-driven mentor/coach delivers that level of customer service from human agents.

Just because an answer sounds feasible doesn't mean it's correct. Any visitor to a strange city who asks a passerby for directions is aware that those directions may or may not lead to the proper place. They could be just plain wrong or they could be unintelligible. "Go to the green building and turn right. You know, that building that used to be a department store, but now it's something else," says the passerby. "Oh no, wait, I think they painted that building red. But I'm sure you'll recognize it." Not only does the visitor not recognize the building, walking past it, but even when she does recognize it, the turn should be to the left, not the right. This should never happen in a conversation between a customer and a customer service agent. Quality of answers is crucial, and an AI-driven system helps ensure that agents deliver correct answers, not ones they have a "gut feel" are correct. A knowledge base that is easily accessed, coupled with automated prompts to help agents identify the best answer for customers, makes for satisfied customers.

NOT GETTING EMOTIONAL

Another benefit of automated backup for agents is taking the emotions out of the interaction. When a customer is upset, it's hard for an agent not to react emotionally, which all too frequently makes the situation worse. The best response in this scenario is to have a script for the agent to follow, something along the lines of "Let me see what I can do" or "Thank you for your patience, I realize this is taking longer than you'd like." Encouraging agents to take ownership of customer problems can be part of AI-assisted coaching. Prompts for specific behaviors can be built-in.

Inevitably, some customer interactions will take longer than others. And there will be instances when the customer needs to be transferred to another department and speak with another agent to fully solve the issue. To avoid a worst-case scenario of constantly repeating information, not only should the information provided by the customer be automatically transferred to the next agent, but the notes taken by the first agent should be too. This ensures that the customer does not have a "Groundhog Day" experience, where what just happened is replayed again and again.

IMPORTANCE OF ANALYTICS

AI-driven analytics certainly have a major influence on creating the perfect customer experience. Analytics can provide insights and predictions to help companies optimize their service operations, thus improving the customer experience. Not only that, they can have a positive impact on the agents themselves. When agents' performance is evaluated, AI-driven analytics take perceived inequities in the evaluation process out of the picture. Employees want their performance to be judged fairly with all those doing the same job evaluated on the same metrics. They want constructive suggestions about improving their performance. If performance can be measured on all interactions, instead of what an agent might perceive as "cherry-picking" (either just the ones where Agent A excelled versus just the ones where Agent B failed), all the better.

When agents feel they are being evaluated and rewarded equitably, they are happier and more motivated to continue doing a good job. The fact is that no one likes to speak to a grumpy customer service person or one with a negative attitude. The reasonable behavior of the customer in those instances is to terminate the interaction and try again, hoping the next agent is more pleasant, positive, and helpful. This may be a good strategy for an individual customer once in a while, but if many customers are following this path, the company needs to be aware that it is happening on a routine basis and fix the problem.

Investing in technology that improves CX usually ends up paying for itself. Now that it's clear that AI is not a flash in the pan, but here to stay, the advantages of using AI-driven solutions is also becoming clear. AI is now embedded in many systems within companies. The technologies' applications for multiple corporate departments is just short of astounding. Using AI-driven analytics to empower customer support agents to make the experience of customers contacting those agents exceptional is a win-win. Confronted with agents who are knowledgeable, proactive, and understanding, customers naturally respond positively, pleased that the agent "gets" them.

Likewise, agents who are empowered to help customers, have coaches that guide them to correct information and prompt them for supportive and caring responses, and rely on AI-driven analytics to provide excellent service are very productive. They may not know how much gas is in a customer's snow blower or lawnmower tank, but they do have all the information about machine maintenance ready to impart to the customer, making the job of clearing the driveway and cutting the grass easier. ∎

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By Lauren Maschio, Sr. Product Marketing Team Manager, NICE

Key Benefits

✓ Deliver personalized, proactive, transparent customer service

✓ Directly coach agents on behaviors and next best actions, in real-time, to improve sentiment and CSAT

✓ Capture complete notes, improve agent productivity, and reduce costs while improving CX.

WHAT DOES AN EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE POWERED BY AI LOOK LIKE?

Imagine you've received a phone call from the company where you buy your contact lenses. The agent tells you that your prescription is about to expire and that it can be difficult to get an appointment to renew the prescription quickly. The agent then asks you if you'd like to avoid potential delays and order more lenses now, leaving you impressed with the company's knowledge, initiative, and customer service experience. But how was the company able to gather all of that information and use it in a way that was both beneficial to the company and helpful to, you, the customer? The answer lies in the power of artificial intelligence (AI) and its ability to produce data-driven analytics.

> AI-POWERED ANALYTICS = DETAILED INSIGHT INTO EVERY CUSTOMER.

Traditional customer service models utilize data that sticks to the standard demographics of age, gender, and location, which limits an agents' ability to offer personalized, proactive, and efficient service. AI-powered analytics produce more detailed insight and help agents understand the different attributes, channel preferences, and distinct needs of each customer. Agents are then able to provide transparent and hyper-personalized service exactly when it's needed, boosting customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores, and improving the overall customer experience (CX).

For more complex interactions, most customers prefer to speak directly with humans over automated machines, which makes the agent touchpoint more critical than ever. Companies utilizing AI-embedded CX solutions can easily apply smart data analysis to find detailed behavioral patterns within each customer interaction that wouldn't be possible when done manually. AI allows agents to act on these insights instantly by making them part of a company's automated business process.

Today's AI-based solutions can deliver purpose-built models for a variety of different use cases. Let's look at three ways in which AI-driven CX data can empower agents to deliver exceptional experiences in the contact center:

1. AGENTS AND REAL-TIME INTERACTION GUIDANCE

Empowering contact center agents with actionable customer information in real-time is an effective way to improve the agent experience and provide high levels of personalized customer service. AI-enabled solutions on the market today accomplish this by actively monitoring interactions, objectively scoring agent behaviors, and prompting the agent with suggestions for what to say or do next during a call if they are struggling.

These soft-skill behaviors, which include showing empathy, building rapport, demonstrating ownership, acknowledging loyalty, and active listening, amongst others, have been proven to influence overall customer sentiment, which is a predictive indicator of CSAT. Capturing and measuring customer sentiment strongly correlates to how customers would answer an after-call survey and the numeric result (which ranges from positive, neutral, or negative) is a crucial tool that brands leverage to help deliver an exceptional experience. Once the interaction has been measured for sentiment, managers can also use the data to pinpoint individual agent behaviors that impact customer sentiment and work with them to enhance their skills.

This level of specific guidance is also helpful to agents who often must manage complex tools and applications during an interaction. For example, let's say a new agent fields a call from a customer asking about an internet upgrade offer, but the agent panics and puts the customer on hold because they can't recall the details about the promotion. The customer becomes quickly frustrated at the lengthy hold time, customer sentiment goes down, and they eventually hang up. An AI-enabled solution would be able to detect the phrase "internet upgrade promotion," pull the relevant promotion information, and immediately place it in front of the agent, allowing them to provide faster, smoother service while improving their own performance.

> TODAY'S SOLUTIONS HELP BOTH AGENTS AND SUPERVISORS PERFORM AT A HIGH LEVEL—CONTINUALLY IMPROVING THEIR SKILLS TO BETTER SERVE CUSTOMERS WITH QUALITY SERVICE THAT IS PERSONALIZED AND SMOOTH.

In addition to the benefit of agents learning and adjusting their behaviors in real-time, supervisors are also able to monitor agent interactions and intervene or offer coaching, if necessary. Today's solutions help both agents and supervisors perform at a high level—continually improving their skills to better serve customers with quality service that is personalized and smooth.

2. RAISING THE BAR ON QUALITY MANAGEMENT

The role of quality management is also evolving amid rising consumer expectations and advances in AI. Analytics capabilities are now non-negotiable in the contact center, and many quality management teams are making the move toward an analytics-based approach. Traditional quality management programs rely on the manual evaluation of a random selection of an agent's customer interactions. This can leave agents feeling like their work and performance are not being evaluated in an objective manner. Additionally, a small sample does not often reflect the full scope or range of a given agent's performance and can make it

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difficult for organizations to identify the trends or factors that drive the most business value.

On the other hand, AI-driven quality metrics and analytics make it possible for *all* agents to be objectively measured and evaluated on 100% of their interactions. It allows agents and supervisors to have focused conversations around CSAT performance that are grounded in objective scoring and promote effective coaching, employee feedback, and opportunities for improvement.

> AI-DRIVEN QUALITY METRICS AND ANALYTICS MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR ALL AGENTS TO BE OBJECTIVELY MEASURED AND EVALUATED ON 100% OF THEIR INTERACTIONS.

Finally, each time an agent's behavior such as, "show more empathy" or "demonstrate ownership" is measured and/or corrected in post interaction coaching, that same skill can then be reinforced again with real-time guidance. By operationalizing these AI-driven models into a quality management program, contact centers can capture customer data, analyze it, and ultimately transform the customer experience.

3. THE BENEFITS OF AUTOMATED NOTETAKING

In addition to real-time behavior guidance and AI-driven quality programs, agents are also able to enhance the customer experience via the benefits of AI-assisted automated notetaking.

> MANUAL NOTETAKING WASTES THE AGENT'S VALUABLE TIME, NEEDLESSLY INCURS COSTS TO THE CONTACT CENTER, AND CREATES MISSED OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

Most contact center agents are responsible for capturing notes about every customer call, which takes an average of one minute per interaction. This places an undue burden on the agents to secure detailed information in a very limited amount of time, often resulting in notes that are incomplete, and inconsistent. Some agents place customers on hold to complete the summary, causing customer frustration and increasing the average handle time (AHT). Others devote time after the interaction when they could be focusing on more value-driven tasks. Multiplied over millions of interactions, manual notetaking wastes the agent's valuable time, needlessly incurs costs to the contact center, and creates missed opportunities to improve the customer experience.

Automated notetaking uses predictive models to identify the key outcomes of every single interaction, including whether an issue was resolved, escalated, or requires a callback. It also measures the customer sentiment of every call, the reason for contact, and delivers an interaction summary based on key phrases and AI-driven inferences for every interaction.

This automated system allows agents to actively listen to the customer's concerns or to provide useful product information in a personalized, timely manner without feeling the pressure and frustration to hastily record important customer information during or after the interaction. After each interaction, the automated summary information is captured and stored in each company's customer relationship management (CRM) solution to be easily accessible for the next agent in line, providing continuity of service and seamless CX.

CONCLUSION

Contact center agents will retain their critical role in delivering exceptional customer experiences, even as the use of AI technology continues to grow. The role of AI-driven analytics and solutions, such as real-time interaction guidance, quality management, and automated notetaking, enhances the agent-employee function as a key driver of customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Agents are empowered with customer data and insights that help them provide more personalized, seamless CX, while benefiting from real-time guidance on objective behaviors and automated notetaking. Learn more about how Enlighten AI helps teams make smart decisions throughout the customer journey.

HOW ONE GLOBAL BRAND USED AI TO IMPROVE CSAT

One large, global vehicle management company recently found themselves with a negative customer sentiment problem. They needed a way to efficiently improve the overall customer experience, offer targeted training to their large team of agents, and drive higher rates of customer satisfaction. Instead of relying on guesswork or the costly and time-consuming manual analysis of customer interactions, they turned to data analysis powered by NICE's Enlighten AI.

The solution's purpose-built behavioral models provided them with individualized agent data and directed supervisors to which agents needed additional coaching on the specific skills and behaviors that would improve CSAT and reduce negative sentiment. Enlighten AI's ability to provide objective, data-driven, personalized coaching allowed the company to work closely with each individual agent on their behavior scores. Within

> 1,000 AGENTS IMPROVED THE OVERALL CUSTOMER SENTIMENT SCORE BY 13% IN LESS THAN TWO MONTHS.

60-days, a workforce of over 1,000 agents improved the overall company sentiment score by 13%.