

Did you know a smile can be heard?



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The communication, media and utility industry is moving at an incredible pace with more and more companies trying to be the single provision point for a number of services. Recent years have seen companies like Everything Everywhere being born so that customers need look no further if they want to have both their mobile and broadband on a single bill – the converged market – and at the end of last year announcements were made which would see British Telecom acquire EE in a bid to return to the mobile market as well as enter the TV market. BT would then be able to provide a ‘quad play’ proposition of broadband, fixed-line, mobile and TV to its service-hungry customers.

A similar announcement was made between O2 and Sky.

Indeed many service providers are beginning to either join together or re-sell each other’s services in complex matrices to provide that extra depth of service and ease of use that customers want. Whereas before it was the number of free calls and roaming capabilities on the mobile contract, now it’s about having multiple services all under the same bill.

Understandably, industry terminology is also changing and phrases such as triple-play, quad-play, multi-play, converged billing and end-to-end customer experience are working their way into to everyday vocabulary.

It’s the Customer Experience – or CX – that’s becoming more and more important with the multi-play, multi-resell structures that are emerging. The customer expects to be able to see a single bill with all of their services clearly described. They expect to have a good TV service and a good broadband service. They expect to be able to ask the telephone line engineer about their TV reception or ways to improve their broadband speed. They expect call-centre staff to know about the products of all the services and not just one. If the experience the customer has with one of their services is inferior to another or the total experience is not positive then they will begin to question the value of having everything under one roof.

It is human nature to want to talk about things, especially when the road ahead is a little unknown. When your existing mobile provider combines with a TV service provider and you find out that you are entitled to free cable TV, the first thing you'll probably do is call up the call-centre to see what is happening.

From the instant the call is connected the customer experience is being tested. How solid does this all feel? How much will I now be charged? Will it simplify things or should I continue to pick-and-choose my services from multiple suppliers? Will my life be easier with one bill? Where is the catch?

If the customer can be put in contact with a call-centre representative almost immediately and they can then communicate efficiently and knowledgably a good CX can be delivered. If the call centre system is a joy to use then the CSR will also smile and deliver a great CX. (It will also reduce training costs, but that is another story).

All call-centres understand this logic, but not all companies will implement the same approach to solving it. Each will have varying degrees of success. Some will rely on better trained staff to handle the customer or increase call-centre head-count to reduce waiting times. Some will introduce touch tone systems to help filter the customers. Some will invest in sophisticated desktop solutions that will actually guide staff through targeted up-sell, mining the wealth of customer information stored within the billing systems.

Whichever solution is chosen, one thing is for sure: the new multi-channel service providers will not be able to deflect calls away from the call-centre to self-care portals or apps until they have gained the trust of their customers. And that starts with good customer care through the call-centre.

If service providers succeed in delivering a great CX with smiling call-centre staff, then delivering good UX in self-care will be a simple evolution and not a transformation.