



Delivering smarter CX through a cognitive contact center





Thirty years ago, low-cost labor and landline telephones allowed call center companies to help brands decrease operating expenses. Human error was common as agents manually entered data, and long hold times and disconnections were frequent. As customers began demanding better and faster experiences through voice, chat, email, SMS, messaging, and social media, those traditional call centers transformed into omnichannel contact centers.

Since then, the industry has seen a major shift due to contact center innovation in the areas of cloud telephony, intelligent automation, and artificial intelligence (AI). The movement, which is happening in both captive and outsourced centers, is focused on building a cognitive contact center that deploys a network of bots and brains to simplify the agent experience and deliver customers the right answer fast and on first contact. To do this effectively, contact centers are focused on integrating systems, deploying cloud telephony, leading with self-service and automation, enabling universal agents, delivering insights, and continuously optimizing to become smarter with every engagement.

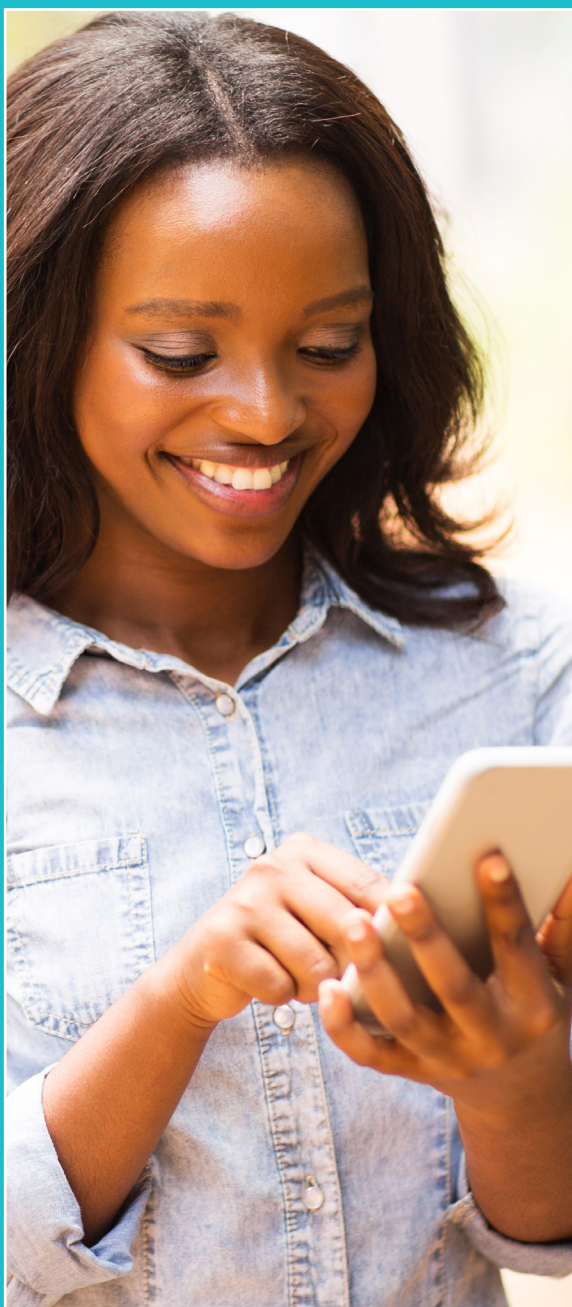
Today's customers expect and deserve to find the right answer quickly and easily without the frustration of long wait times, multiple transfers, and repetitive tasks. In some cases, brands are increasing revenue by nearly a third and reducing costs by up to half through the delivery of more personalized customer experiences and the facilitation of more efficient agent experiences. Additional benefits include shorter average handle times, drops in attrition, and reduced customer churn—while average order values and frequency go up, all contributing to higher NPS scores and more positive ratings in online reviews. As networks of bots and brains are deployed and artificial intelligence gains speed and credibility, the digitally led, cognitive contact center is becoming the modern BPO's solution for smarter CX.

Components of a cognitive contact center

Cognitive technology allows brands to recognize who is contacting them—regardless of channel—and to understand the reason they're reaching out. And when the right solutions are found within a few clicks or during a short call, both customer satisfaction and brand loyalty increase.

To deliver smart interactions, cognitive contact centers require the following elements:

- **Design thinking**
- **Systems integration**
- **Enhanced digital experiences**
- **Bots & Brains™ deployment**
- **Intelligent automation of repetitive agent tasks**
- **Data and analytics-driven insights**
- **Self-service and channel guidance**



Design thinking: collaborate, then construct

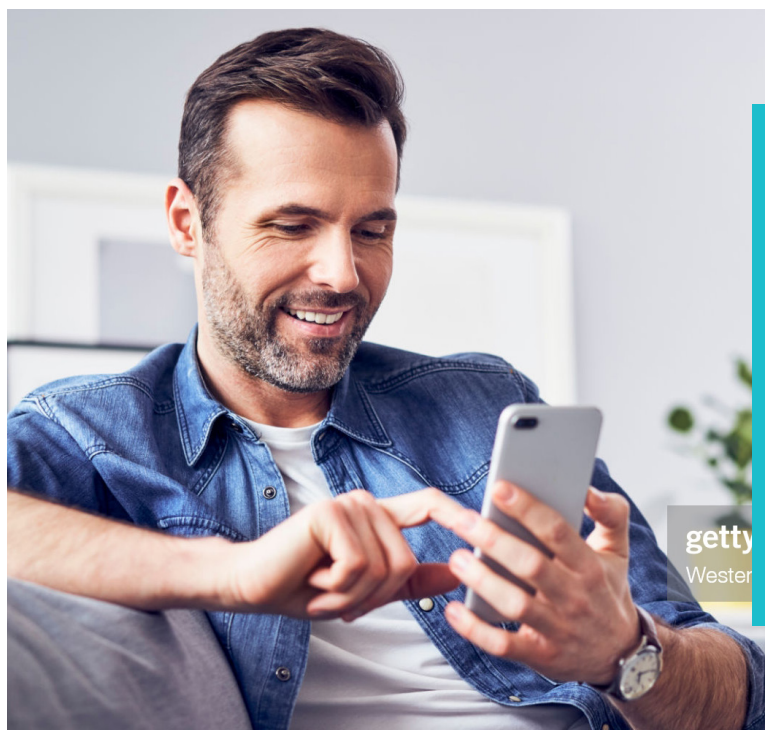
To digitally transform CX, companies must first use data to uncover the voice of the customer to identify:

- » What is causing dissatisfaction?
- » What is agent controllable versus non-controllable?
- » How much effort must agents and customers put forth to find the right answer to the issue?
- » What is affecting loyalty?
- » What is causing customer (and agent) churn?
- » What do customers love about products and services?
- » What product quality issues exist?

Once these questions have been answered, the next step is to map the current state in order to design the future state. This process begins with customer journey mapping of the six main stages: awareness, buy, bill, care, repair, and retain. One best practice is to conduct "mystery shopping" of the customer experience by walking through the process via multiple channels: voice, email, chat, social, messaging and self-help. How easy was the process? How helpful was the agent? The outcome of these two exercises will become the foundation for determining how people, process, technology, and strategy can solve for customer needs and pain points.

It's important to create an internal team of champions with shared goals. This transformational team should include IT, operations, and customer-facing teams. When these three groups come together, they can conduct meaningful pilot tests and evaluate how the changes might affect the customer before the actual implementation of new process, software, or other technology.

As Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO, [says of this approach](#), "Design thinking brings together what is desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable."



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—Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO



Systems integration: put all data in one place

One key challenge in understanding customer feedback is that all the collected data often resides in multiple, disparate, non-integrated platforms. The solution is to build a customer data platform (CDP) that brings together multiple data sources into one place and has real-time operational, customer, and predictive analytics available. By tapping into a customer relationship management (CRM) system, cloud contact center telephony, quality data, and sales and marketing data systems, brands can create a unified 360-degree view of the customer, allowing care and marketing teams to design, deliver, and measure a smart experience that is both personalized and predictive. For example, average order value increases when the personalized cross-sell/upsell offers can be made to customers using predictive analytics and recommendation engines. In addition, customer care teams can be enabled to become more proactive by reaching out to customers who are likely to churn.

For the full CX picture, behavior across channels must be evaluated, including web activity, purchase and return history, marketing offers used, and more.

Self-service: let people be their own guides

The starting point for the customer journey is almost always the brand's website. From there, a visit to the company's Facebook page may occur, followed by an interactive messaging chat. Then, if the matter persists, it might be time for a phone call.

According to Matt Dixon, author of *The Effortless Customer Experience*, "Channel choice was an idea companies invented. Customers don't want choice; they want channel guidance."

People simply want to find what they need with whichever channel works. For a company to truly enable their customers, the goal should be to lead with self-service. A help center on a brand's website will guide users toward the most efficient channel for resolution. Depending on the contact driver, the adequate conclusion of a particular journey may be a how-to video or a chat with an AI virtual agent—with no need for human interaction at all.

Tips for optimizing online help centers

- » Use natural language processing (NLP) to lead customers to a single correct answer, instead of displaying multiple pages of search results
- » Monitor what is being typed into the search bar to identify trends
- » Leverage interaction analytics to understand the top contact drivers—by customer location—to continuously evolve and update in real time
- » Track the exact issue resolution rates



Enhanced digital experiences: support with visual aids

In issue resolution, a voice interaction is often unnecessary, and image-sharing can often more easily convey what is needed. With video support, smartphone users won't struggle to explain technical problems about products. For example, if a customer has a leaky faucet, the agent will send an SMS message with a link to the customer's phone. When the customer clicks the link, the video camera on their mobile device is activated, and the agent can see the faucet to help troubleshoot and solve the issue quickly, often within seconds. Another option where agents and customers can exchange photos or videos is online messaging, with the advantage of allowing conversations to start, stop, and continue at the customer's convenience.

These channels provide continuous threads of conversation, and their documented transcripts can be mined in real time using text analytics.

Bots & Brains™: deploying robots to assist humans

Brands can bring together the efficiency of bots and the empathy of agents by looking at data, analyzing the top contact drivers, and determining which should be addressed by a person, AI, or a mix of both. When a bot has already collected the upfront case information, intelligently integrated agents can provide customers with an empathetic and more efficient experience.

Bots can also analyze habits and patterns and provide proactive support by anticipating problems before they arise, mitigating the need for reactive human assistance, as well as help predict with a high level of confidence the right answer to an inquiry in any digital channel. With no need to conduct spell checks, look up answers, or tag or categorize conversations, agents will simply hit "approve" or "personalize" on the predicted responses.

The key is to ensure data analysts are tracking resolution rates on the back end. If customer issues are not resolved as anticipated using a bot, the experience should be redesigned. AI is only as good as what the model is trained to become. It takes many historical transcripts to build and train the model—and the more data there is, the more accurate predictive models become.

The role of a universal superagent

Using a contact center cloud platform such as Twilio Flex or Amazon Connect, agents can manage all channels at once, and even multiple interactions at once. They have the history of a customer readily available to personalize engagements. Meanwhile, bots do the heavy lifting on the back office processes, and AI predicts and populates the right responses to customer inquiries.

Insight delivery: analyze the data

In a cognitive contact center, multiple datasets including switch, workforce management, quality, sales, marketing, survey, and CRM data sources are presented to the operational and customer analytics teams in a single real-time dashboard. From there, the teams can translate findings and correlate the datasets to make informed business decisions rather than waiting weeks for teams to dump multiple data sources into Excel, only to face outdated and oftentimes inaccurate data..

An **operational analytics team's** real-time dashboards tap into performance to determine:

- » how many customers are contacting the brand
- » how long it takes to reach a CSR
- » whether hold times are too long
- » whether first call resolution was achieved
- » number of transfers made
- » which agents are performing well
- » which agents need additional coaching

A **customer analytics team** taps into the voice of the customer to determine:

- » why customers are contacting the brand
- » whether customers are happy with the brand experience
- » which specific store locations are causing poor (or positive) customer experiences
- » which products have bad quality issues
- » reasons customers are expressing dissatisfaction

Further, companies can mobilize customer service teams to become proactive by using predictive analytics to discover which customers are likely to churn, buy again, buy more frequently, or increase their average order values. For example, store or restaurant revenue can be start to be predicted by weather pattern to determine when online or delivery offers should be presented to customers.

Intelligent automation: give bots tedious tasks

Automation can improve quality in both front office and back office operations, significantly reducing employee hours spent on basic tasks and resulting in much faster issue resolution.

For the back office, robotics processing automation (RPA) applications are effective by assigning bots to assume repetitive data entry and other menial service tasks in areas such as credit card payment processing, transaction processing, and claims adjudication. For [one large healthcare insurance payer](#), RPA helped reduce agent average handle time of claims processing by 26% or 120 seconds, thus saving over \$700,000 annually.

In the front office, bots and automation can provide agents with a highlighted, step-by-step process that makes interacting with a customer and capturing information easy and efficient. With lower manual errors and time spent reworking or navigating systems, agents are more confidently able to assist customers with more complex, exception-based tasks.

Automation advantages

- » Less searching/clicking needed
- » Fewer interruptions/screen pops
- » Decreased copying/pasting
- » Lower amount of human errors
- » Well-timed presentation of personalized cross-sell offers
- » Increased operational efficiency
- » Reduced industry-wide attrition
- » Confident, competent agents lead to more satisfied customers

Seven steps for designing a smart cognitive contact center

The cognitive contact center's focus is to provide a smarter, simplified experience, either by enabling customers to help themselves through self-service and channel guidance or by connecting them with empathetic employees who can find the right solution fast with the help of bots.

Modern BPOs and brands must work together to reevaluate past systems and processes and establish new standards for moving forward. The following steps can serve as a guide to designing and maintaining a smart cognitive contact center.



1

Find the right workforce model

Companies should consider the pros and cons of the different workforce models available today in relation to how their customers will be affected. For example, a flexible workforce can be used strategically to help staff the hours that were previously difficult to fill, thus reducing customer wait times. Many traditional brick-and-mortar centers are currently de-staffed due to COVID-19 concerns, but the work-at-home platform has surged, facilitating business continuity. Plus, the gig economy model is contributing to employing those displaced from previous jobs, which also helps keep customer service running.

As BPOs navigate the current landscape and look forward to a post-pandemic world, a hybrid model of brick and mortar, work-at-home, and gig agents will likely be the common choice, though the delivery of where these agents are located will also remain part of the decision process.



Modernize the basics

The foundation of the customer engagement model is having the right people to empathize with customers when they are escalated past the initial bot. To ensure that customer experience leads to successful resolution, brands must focus on upgrading the basics of hiring, training, and retaining staff.



Hire – Massive hiring campaigns, job fairs, and multiple face-to-face interviews are no longer applicable. In the modern contact center, the process is nearly all digital, from the identification of the employment opportunity on job boards to the screening via a bot and the data-driven fit index that matches applicants with available openings based on the historical success rate of programs under management. The entire process from application to job offer can now be completed in hours instead of days.



Train – It is vital to establish both competence and confidence in the frontline and leaders to ensure that the right answers are being provided and to create positive brand experiences that earn customer trust. The classroom and paper-based training of the past has been eclipsed by self-paced, computer-based training and online learning management platforms (often with bots) that certify the support team in the necessary skills before they begin nesting and on-the-job training. Ongoing enhancement training is offered in bite-size and snackable formats with gamification to promote continuing education and performance improvement. In addition, there is technology available in the nesting period for newly trained agents to walk through the process, screens, and data in need of capture.



Retain – Keeping the best and brightest is a journey, and like customers, employees value options and experience. An ecosystem of support, learning, and career development will incent people to want to learn and grow within a company. People don't leave jobs; they leave leaders. Investing in the development of frontline leaders will result in effective coaches and mentors. Supplying near real-time performance metrics enables leaders to encourage top-quartile performers, coach the middle quartiles, and push the bottom performers back into training.

Conduct employee workshops

Even with the growing assistance of AI, live support is still necessary, and those with expertise around CX transformation and design thinking will excel in their roles. Internal consultative workshops should be conducted in order to:

- » Map the entire consumer journey
- » Identify the top contact drivers and sentiment at each stage of the journey
- » Figure out which contact center systems are required or require integration
- » Determine what the best channel guidance strategies are
- » Decide when to deploy bots or brains
- » Learn how to deliver insights and continuously optimize processes

Call center agents were once known as customer service representatives, but now with advanced skills and training, they're earning the title of virtual (and also video) brand ambassadors. They add more value to each interaction by being more knowledgeable about the companies they represent, upselling and offering additional products or services whenever possible.

Video brand ambassadors allow brands to deepen relationships with customers who enjoy connecting via webcam. Some individuals prefer to see an agent while learning about new products. The agent can demonstrate how something works, for example, as well as offer related products available for purchase via co-browse technology. Trust is established through the face-to-face conversation, and a loyal shopper may later specifically choose to interact with the same agent again for future products.

While bots handle the easy inquiries, these higher-level agents use their advanced empathy skills and ability to resolve complex issues—and in some cases with the help of a bot. Higher compensation in exchange for this level of labor helps decrease attrition—the industry's most prevalent pain point—and employees stay longer when they can prevent burnout. A true CX professional thrives when building and maintaining customer relationships.





Create a process and technology playbook

A good agent experience leads to a positive customer experience. To define and outline which roles humans will play and which roles bots, AI, or automation will play in a cognitive contact center, brands should create a playbook detailing operational best practices.

Agent Experience

Customer Experience

Humans

- » Hiring agent talent, interview process
- » Virtual training
- » High-touch employee engagement in a virtual world

- » Best practices for creating a 360-degree view of the customer to aid in personalization
- » High empathy customer care
- » Complaints management
- » Complex technical support

Bots/AI/automation

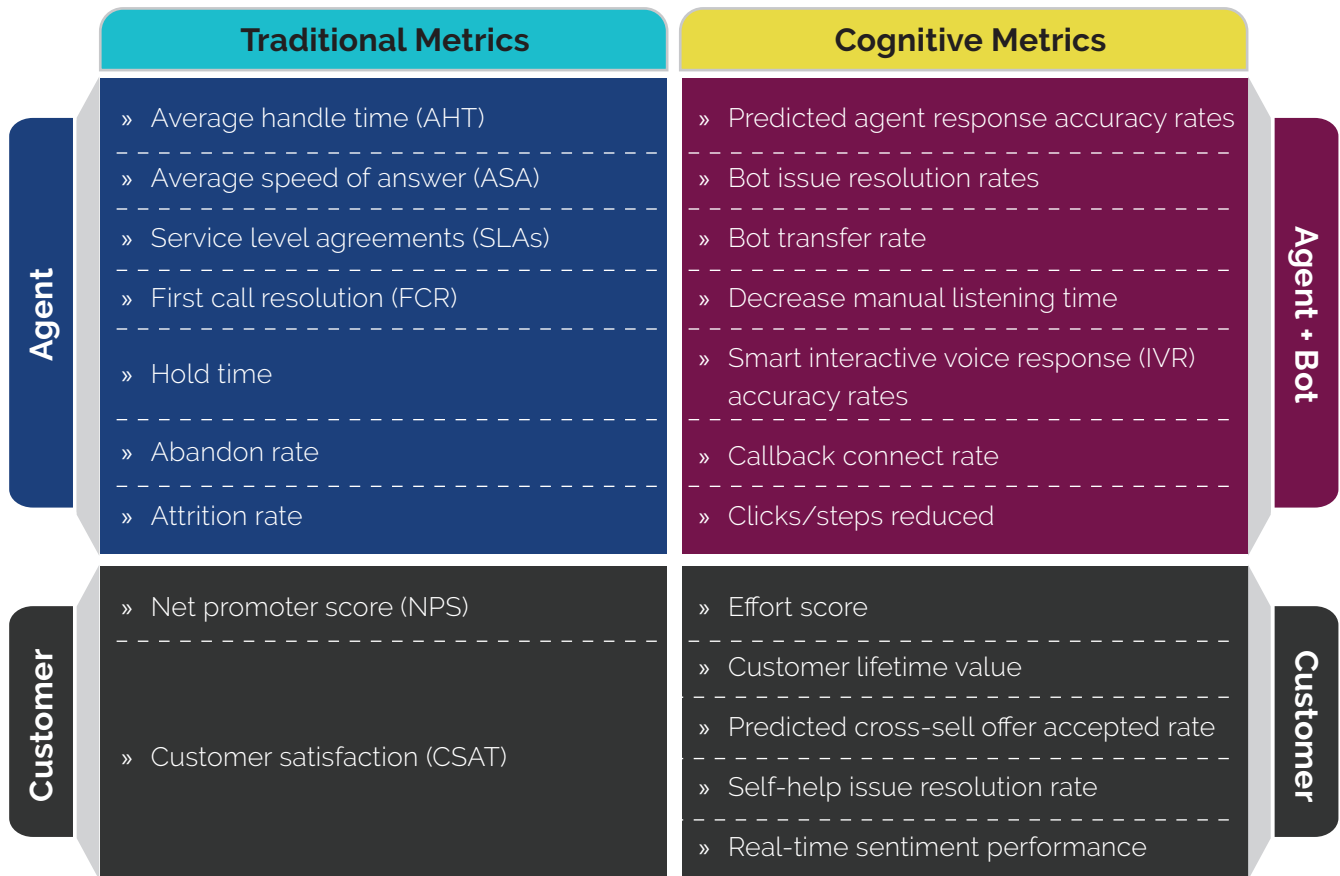
- » Allow bots to aid in recruitment and training
- » Leverage automation to assist newly hired agents in nesting
- » Build and optimize a NLP knowledge base to help agents find the right answers fast
- » Use bots to predict the best digital response to a customer inquiry
- » Deploy robotic desktop automation to reduce the number of clicks, copy/paste, and screen pops
- » Deploy a smart agent desktop to make handling multiple channels easy
- » Use AI to mute background noise in the work-at-home agent environment
- » Deploy voice of the employee surveys

- » Implement smart IVRs
- » Leverage speech analytics for real-time sentiment analysis
- » Leverage face recognition for customer authentication
- » Develop an effortless self-help experience
- » Deploy customer analytics to drive insights
- » Deploy a virtual assistant on web or mobile
- » Deploy a voice of the customer survey and dashboard for real-time insights
- » Send proactive SMS customer alerts

5

New CX metrics for a cognitive contact center

The cognitive contact center is focused on improved measurement and KPIs by training the AI models to become smarter over time with the addition of new metrics, as detailed in the following chart. New metrics resulting from the cognitive contact center approach will inform better decision making and improve customer experience for brands.



While the old agent metrics were focused solely on the efficiency of people, the new metrics are focused on the accuracy of AI and machine learning models deployed, which operate at a much faster pace than humans and with higher accuracy rates over time.

Regarding customer metrics, previous metrics were focused on the "satisfaction" of a customer after a single interaction. However, the new metrics are focused on the longevity and value of the customer relationship, as well as on customer effort—the highest factor affecting satisfaction with customer service.



6

Adopt cloud contact center telephony and “as-a-service” business models

Over the past 30 years, contact centers have transformed. On-premise platforms delivered the foundations of existing contact centers, transitioning from phone-only to multiple channels, managing a shift from inbound to outbound, and even integrating with other business tools. However, the era of on-premise systems is coming to an end, due to the high upfront cost (capital expenses), and the complexity involved in managing, operating, supporting, and keeping the systems up to date. These pain points triggered the move to cloud services. Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) vendors reduce the upfront cost by moving to a monthly cost per seat (operating expenses), while eliminating the need for managing onsite servers.

It is evident that cognitive contact centers must be flexible enough to continuously evolve as customer habits and preferences change, while also being able to deliver the ideal agent and customer omnichannel experiences. Agents can manage tasks across multiple channels with a single user interface, as well as a customer (not ticket) view, and application programming interface (API) integrations are used to pull inventory data, customers' past orders, payments, etc., giving the agent customer history and context of the customer's full relationship with a brand.



7

Cognitively and continuously optimize

The best part about cognitive contact centers is that the optimization will happen automatically with trained AI and machine learning models. With more data and more engagements, these models will continue to become smarter. However, the human processes should be revisited often with a different perspective. Can anything being done today be automated? How can clicks, copy/paste, steps, and screen pops be reduced? How can even more customer data be captured? How can customers find the right answer themselves, fast? Continuously optimizing the agent and customer experience will help drive revenue, reduce cost, and increase customer loyalty over time.

Working smarter, not harder

The global health crisis of 2020 has accelerated several shifts in the BPO industry, including a move toward a customer experience network industry, where CX professionals are no longer phone service reps but are now professional brand ambassadors armed with proactive solutions and backed by AI.

While the number of interactions being handled end-to-end via automation is growing rapidly, most will continue to require the involvement of human support to reach resolution. What companies must realize is that pairing the right brand representative with the customer on the call, chat, email, text, message, or social media post is imperative when issues become exceedingly complex or require a higher degree of empathy or emotional intelligence.

The cognitive contact center is built to support the right mix of bots and brains for every business. The first step is to integrate systems, leading with self-service and automation. Next, companies must intelligently incorporate people where they best fit, helping to deliver insights. Finally, systems must continuously be optimized to become smarter with every engagement. As the experiences of both agents and customers are enhanced, brands will see significant improvements in revenue, cost savings, reputation, and loyalty.

Time, effort, and cost savings with a cognitive contact center

- » AI-predicted responses to reduce AHT
- » Agent assist bot to reduce clicks, screen pops, and copy/paste
- » CX assist Bot as a call deflection strategy for easy contact types
- » Smart, streamlined IVR to reduce transfers and customer repetition
- » Self-help issue resolution as a proactive call deflection strategy
- » Streamlined back office processes using RPA
- » Contact center as a service to reduce infrastructure by moving contact center technology to the cloud

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