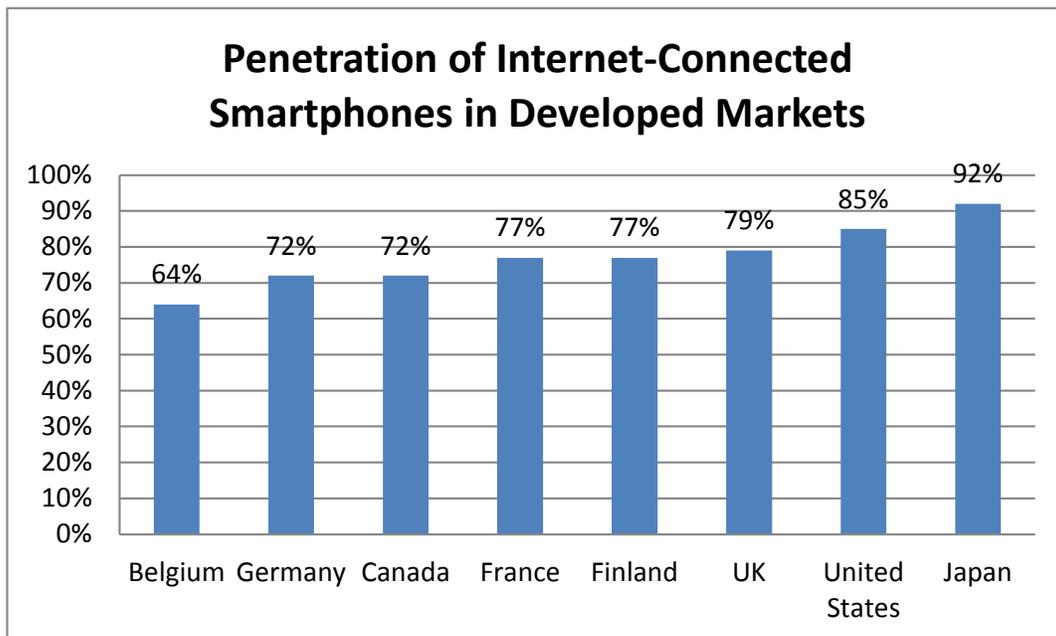# The Impact of Mobile on Contact Centers

Figures from the Pew Research Center released in June 2013 show that more than half of US adults now own a smartphone. This has grown considerably compared to two years ago when the figures were just 35%. More than 90% of Americans now have a cell phone, and the numbers converting to smartphones year after year are only increasing. Smartphone penetration has grown from nothing to 56% in the USA in just six years. Indeed, in 2012 Deloitte predicted that one billion smartphones would be shipped worldwide in 2013, leading to a potential total number of two billion smartphones in use by the end of 2013. Smartphone use in the USA has been projected to rise to higher than 80% by 2015. Contact centers are just starting to catch up on what this means for them, and the impacts are very significant.

One of the most important impacts for contact centers is that smartphone users can connect to the Internet while using their phones, and this impacts how they make contact with the contact center. While Deloitte reports that some smartphones are being bought and then used as so-called 'dumbphones' (phones that are used for calls and maybe text messaging), in fact many are being used to access the Internet. On a worldwide basis it has been found that approximately 20% of smartphone users connect to WiFi with their phones just once a week or perhaps even never. Nonetheless, a great many more users do use these features, and the diagram below illustrates that the USA is among the highest ranking in developed countries for people using the Internet on their smartphone.

Penetration of Internet-Connected Smartphones in Developed Markets

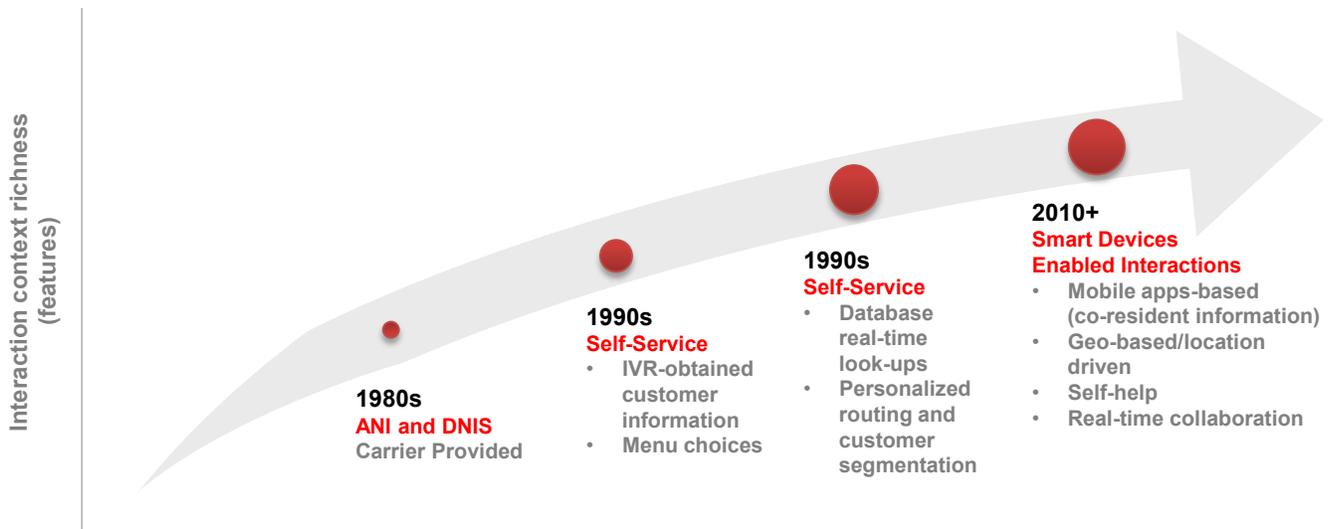| Country	Penetration
Belgium	64%
Germany	72%
Canada	72%
France	77%
Finland	77%
UK	79%
United States	85%
Japan	92%

Penetration of Internet-Connected Smartphones in Developed Markets (among those who own a smartphone), 2012 (source: Mashable)

The advent of smartphones and their extensive, growing use among customers heralds enormous opportunities for improvement in contact centers. At the current time, contact centers can still drive competitive advantage for their organizations by facilitating improved contact by smartphone for customers. That is because smartphones offer so many different possible methods of contact for customers with organizations. At the current time these include the more 'traditional' methods of voice calls and SMS messages, but also Internet pages, access through social media websites and also the developing opportunity of video chat. Those contact centers that are able to embrace these channels and make it easy for customers to contact them through any of these at their whim will naturally be those that rise to the top of the pile and impress their customers.

Additionally, over time, customers will expect to be able to get in touch with organizations' contact centers through all of these means, and those that provide this will be likely to have far higher customer satisfaction than those that do not.

Indeed Avaya considers mobile to be essential to interactive context for customers and positions it as one of the most important developments in technology in contact centers, as the graph below illustrates. The graph also demonstrates some of the important developments of smart devices for the contact center, namely mobile apps, geo-based information, self help and real time collaboration. All of these are likely to transform the contact center, over time, and many of them are already having a very significant impact on contact center operations.

Interaction context richness (features)

1980s
ANI and DNIS
Carrier Provided

1990s
Self-Service
- IVR-obtained customer information
- Menu choices

1990s
Self-Service
- Database real-time look-ups
- Personalized routing and customer segmentation

2010+
Smart Devices Enabled Interactions
- Mobile apps-based (co-resident information)
- Geo-based/location driven
- Self-help
- Real-time collaboration

The Evolution of Interactive Context Technologies, 2012 (source: Avaya)

It is clear that developing a strategic approach for the contact center to be able to handle communications to and from mobile devices is critical for the modern contact center. Some of the specifics of how mobile is impacting the contact center is now discussed in greater depth below, both in terms of customer contact with the contact center and vice versa, but also how mobile can drive efficiency within contact center operations.

How Mobile Applications Impact Contact Centers

Mobile applications are one area that can have a considerable impact on contact centers. Many organizations are adopting mobile applications, and many of these also facilitate ease of communication with the company for the customer. Of particular note, these types of applications can be seen to allow customers greater opportunities for self-service, which in theory should cut down on the number of customer contacts made to the contact center. Many different industries are adopting mobile applications for this purpose, including airlines, retailers, banks and credit card companies. A recent survey showed that almost 80% of customers already use mobile apps for a variety of different customer service activities like account updates, interactive chat with the contact center and billing purposes. At the same time, it was found that more than 90%

of the survey respondents would use a mobile app to replace at least some, if not all of the other customer contact channels if possible. All of this means that mobile apps are likely to be one of the most important drivers in changing the relationship that contact centers have with their customers, from types of questions asked to activities performed by CSRs.

Some companies have developed applications that allow rapid connection between the customer using the application and the contact center agent. Inclusion of a smart button in the mobile application allows customers to hit that button to ask for the help of a CSR via either voice, SMS messages, instant messenger or in some cases, even chat. The mobile device is able to furnish the contact center operative with information such as context, customer information and history, allowing greater information with which the contact center can help to rectify the problem, or better answer customer queries. All of this transactional information that is stored in the smartphone provides context to customer contacts with an organization. This is important because previously customers have had to get out of a customer website on their phone, or out of the mobile application (having already searched for the telephone number) and can now directly contact the organization just at the click of a button.

Importantly, contact center managers need to

realize that when mobile applications are used once and do not work then very often customers will be immediately turned off to the idea of using them. A recent study found that more than 50% of customers simply immediately delete apps that do not work and then forget about them. Very few consider contacting customer service to report the issue with the app (just 4% reported that they would do this). This indicates that any mobile apps released that are designed to assist contact center operations must be right first time, which is a task that requires plenty of user acceptance testing to review potential issues with the app, trying to 'break it' by using it in the way that a customer might before the app is ever unleashed on the actual customers themselves.

Making the Most of Geographic Tags from Smartphones

The contact center may also be impacted by the use of mobile in the way that smartphones are able to access the geographical coordinates of the customer. This brings all kinds of benefits for customer contact with the organization. Provision of location and GPS information between company and customer can help customers to make faster, smarter decisions that impact their customer experience considerably. For example, already some companies have implemented

technology that allows individuals to use their smartphones to find the nearest branch office for an organization, or to find the gate for a flight that they are taking easily and quickly.

The same is true even if the customer is not using the WiFi on their smartphone. With GPS technology embedded into telephones, contact center agents can easily locate customers and point them in the right direction. Again, if the customer is looking for the company office nearby but is lost but does not wish to use data, they should be able to call the contact center with their smartphone and the CSR will be able to locate them, allowing CSRs to be able to provide directions to the customer. These directions could be provided by any of the aforementioned means, such as voice, texting, video, instant messenger, and so on, providing the utmost flexibility to the customer. For example in the future the agent may be able to text directions to the customer immediately that the call is over. This is a simple example of many different possible applications of the GPS technology that will save time and frustration on the part of the customer and will be liable to lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction, overall.

In some cases in the future, geographic tags and GPS information may allow contact centers to be able to communicate with all customers currently in a set geographic district – for example, to alert them to a problem with service in that area, or

perhaps to draw their attention to a sale or an event at a particular location nearby.

The Growing Importance of Text Messaging

A critical component of mobile communications, text is playing an ever increasing level of importance in how mobile impacts on contact centers too. For example, text can be used for activities such as balance requests on accounts, as well as activities such as purchasing and fund transfers. In these ways, customers use their cell phones to interact with the organization.

When implemented effectively, this cuts back on the number of contacts that need to be made to the contact center. At the same time however, in some case contact centers are gaining new contact responsibilities such as notifications by text. Flight delays are one such example of where this can be utilized, and another is going over the allowed balance of an account. While in many cases the actual messages themselves may be automated, the text messages sent can lead to higher contact levels by telephone in some circumstances – where customers who may not have called an airline before to complain about a delayed flight may perhaps be more likely to do so if they receive a message direct to their phone advising them of this. As per the comments provided in the geographical tags

section above, it is possible for companies to be able to locate customers geographically and send out mass communications to them based on their location and its relevance also. This is another very practical application of the use of text with smartphones.

How Mobile Impacts Operational Efficiency of the Contact Center

Mobile also brings with it the opportunity for some very significant impacts on the ways that employees work in the contact center, or indeed, outside of it. That is because mobile technology is increasingly allowing individuals to be able to work on the move, including contact center employees.

In particular, one major benefit of the introduction of mobile technology to the workforce is that mobile devices such as smartphones, iPads and other tablet devices have provided the option for contact center managers and supervisors to be able to work from a variety of different physical locations, with ease. When contact centers implement these technologies supervisors are able to carry out all kinds of different activities remotely. These include reviewing calls between contact center agents, either in real time or recorded. It also includes being able to carry

out activities such as assessing customer satisfaction rates, also in real time. The huge impact of this particular development is that contact center managers and supervisors are able to use formerly unproductive or 'dead' time, traveling between meetings or different company locations utilizing the applications that their mobile devices provide to enable them to carry out a variety of different activities. Since some contact centers already operate virtually with CSRs located across the globe, it is also possible to visualize a future where these types of CSRs are able to access everything that they need through their smartphone or other mobile device, perhaps providing more flexible working opportunities for many.

Another really important benefit of mobile to the contact center is that employees are able to be provided with information that is completely up to date, relevant and timely. Especially in situations where contact center agents have to travel for any reason, those agents can be kept up to date via their smartphones or other mobile devices. Mobile also enables easier updating of contacts as well as better access to different kinds of information. In particular, for a contact center manager that offers contact center services to a range of different companies, attending a meeting offsite with one of those clients is made considerably easier through the ability of that manager to be able to access desired information for that client through a smartphone or other such

device. Of course, contact center managers can already achieve this through the use of laptops offsite, but arguably smartphones and tablets are less clunky to carry around. All of this means that contact center managers are able to be more responsive and communicate more effectively with clients.

For some employees in younger generations, mobile communication is already seen as the way of doing things. These employees cannot remember a time when mobile telephones did not exist. They happily and easily adopt the use of mobile in their work because it just feels

> Mobile is not only commonplace with younger employees, but studies show that many employees using mobile feel empowered by it.

normal to them, and it is how they operate in the rest of their lives too. Importantly, recent research has shown that some employees find the use of mobile in the work place to be empowering. This has the additional knock on effect of leading to employee satisfaction as well,

enabling companies to achieve higher levels of employee engagement and better results within the contact center. Some studies have gone so far as to say that younger generations should be consulted with regard to the creation of new approaches with regard to the use of technology, since they use it all the time and are often more keenly aware than other demographics of what works and what does not.

Summary

The use of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets among customers is growing fast. Already many contact centers have begun to embrace the new opportunities offered through this technology, such as the increasing benefits offered of smartphones and other mobile devices for mobile applications to enhance contact center communication with the customer, geographical tagging possibilities and potentially an increasing role for text messaging also. In addition to this, contact center operations are already being impacted by mobile in some organizations, as they use mobile to increase the efficiency of certain types of workers, and maybe in future, all CSRs as well. However, the situation with the impact of mobile on the contact center is continually changing at the current time because the technology is so new and increasingly impressive developments are regularly being introduced to enhance customer contact through this means. Organizations should implement mobile opportunities where possible but also monitor the situation closely to make sure that they do not get left behind.

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