Higher Customer Experience and Satisfaction: Holy Grails for Every Business

By Peter Elsey, Computec Engineering

Great Customer Experience (CX) is a priority for every business. CX can perhaps best be described as a journey, that begins before a customer buys anything and potentially extends through a lifetime of "post-sales" support for repeated transactions.

Of course, every business understands what makes for great experiences of its products and services. But do they fully understand how customers of different nationalities and ages prefer to receive care and support, whether through person to person (human) channels or via automated assistance? And do all their customer support managers have full visibility of their care centre's performance and have ability to respond rapidly to deteriorating situations?

To learn more, we initiated two surveys of CUSTOMERS and CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGERS. This article provides is an abbreviated overview of these surveys and some key findings.

Survey 1: Customer Preferences for Receiving Care and Support

We surveyed 1,000 people from 40 countries, predominantly in Asia but with about 25% from North America, UK/Europe, the Middle-East and Africa. All respondents worked for medium to large companies across most business segments.

We started by asking *"If you have a question or problem and you contact a supplier or provider for help, what is your preferred means of communication?"*.

We found that despite explosive growth in on-line services, when given a choice, 85% of all age groups still prefer person to person interactions whether by voice or chat.

Stated First Choice	All	Age Less than 25	Age 25-35	Age 36-45	Over 45
Speak or Chat with a real person or contact centre agent	83.8	81.6	83.1	88.4	90.3
Use an automated help facility (eg chatbot, FAQ or other	11.2	12.1	12.0	7.4	6.4
No preference	5.0	6.3	4.9	4.2	3.3

Chart 1. Personal vs Automated Preferences

We also found that some nationalities, for example Japanese, overwhelmingly prefer personal (human) care whilst other nationalities are more accepting of automated forms of assistance.

Preferences Vary by Product or Service Type

Although personal assistance is generally preferred (typically 75%) for product-oriented support transactions, percentages can be reversed for services based support.

Preference Type (1st choice)	Clothing	Electronic goods	Services
P2P "human" (face to face or over phone or chat)	73.7	77.9	24.0
On Line or Automated	25.7	21.0	73.4
Other	0.6	1.1	2.6

Chart 2. Personal vs Automated Preferences by Transaction Type

When an Issue is More Important or Demanding

Critically, when a matter is most important, preferences are even more in favour of human help (85-93%) as opposed to automated.

Preference by Age Group	All	<25	25-35	36-45	>45
Person to Person help	86.6%	88.4%	85.2%	86.2%	93.5%
Automated help	13.4%	11.6%	14.8%	13.8%	6.5%

Chart 3. Personal vs Automated Preferences in Critical Situations

In other survey questions we asked about many more preferences for all types of communication channel, product/service type, age and nationality.

Key Takeaways

o **One Size Does Not Fit All**

Age, nationality and language are major considerations. There can be counter-intuitive variances in preferences. For example, the youngest cohort sometimes shared surprising similarities with older generations whilst those in middle age groups may have different views.

o **Choice of Language**

We confirmed customers prefer to use their own language (or dialect), whether by human or automated channel. Many view suppliers more favourably when they can communicate in their first choice of language or dialect with native speakers. However in some automated support cases, high quality English may be more effective than a sub-standard local language option.

Considering the need for local "home" languages and trans-national languages such as English, then the consolidation of both human and automated care into expert, AI supported, multi-lingual centres still makes a lot of sense.

This is especially valuable when supplemented by the use of flexible work patterns and shifts for both office-based and centrally managed but remotely located home workers, some of whom could be part-timers covering short but intense peak periods. Computec itself employs this approach as does Scicom. Headquartered in KL, Malaysia, Scicom operates several physical centres but also has hundreds of centrally-managed agents working from their homes distributed across

o **Automated Help**

Businesses need to be sensitive as the survey indicated little support for automation when deployed simply to cut cost without improving service. However automation can be a game changer when used (for example) to offload tasks from human agents during peak times, or to simplify tasks and reduce call handling times, or provide a business continuity (BCP) back-stop.

Since the survey was taken AI has emerged as a strategic pillar of support operations for uses such as voice analytics to guide human agents. AI will have a far reaching impact on many aspects of customer care.

o **Strategy**

Companies will benefit from a nuanced strategy which drives better CX but is also resilient, adaptable and scalable to cope with changing conditions at global, regional and country levels, whether due to disaster or unexpected growth.

The survey revealed many more findings which can be viewed in the actual report.

## Survey 2. Business Intelligence for Managers of Customer Support and Experience

We asked 400 managers about their levels of insight into support operations. For example, could they set and monitor a full range of KPI's and rapidly identify and assess threats then execute remedies?

The managers came from numerous countries worldwide but were predominantly Asia-based. All were responsible for the delivery of corporate support services or CX. Some worked for BPOs and others for businesses with in-house support teams.

What we Found

The survey confirmed existing Business Intelligence (BI) systems are expensive but may still fail to meet front-line manager needs to set and monitor a full range of potential KPI's, conduct rapid threat

assessment and root cause analysis, then identify and execute remedies. 83% said they did not have immediate access to Insight. 82% felt they were overly dependent on back-office specialists. 48% said it took a day or more to get reports.
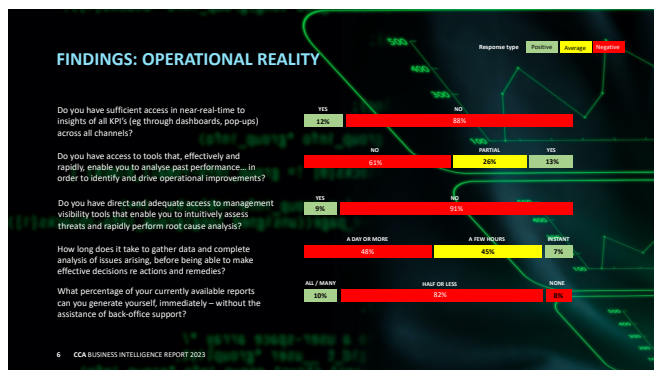
For some, the result is a cycle of problem solving that impacts Service Level Agreements (SLA) and customer experience.
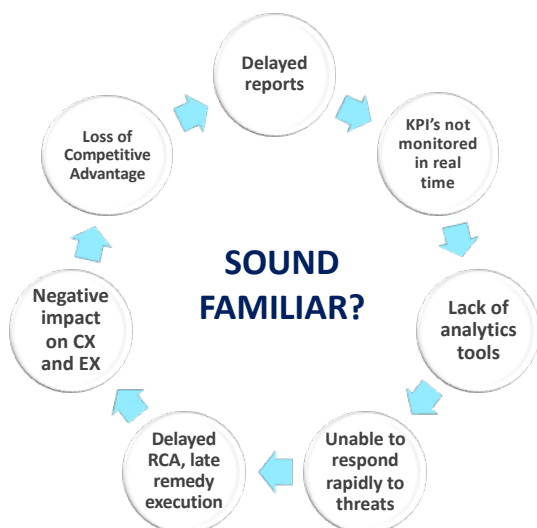
Next we asked customer facing managers how sub-optimal Insight can impact performance. Almost all managers reported feeling frustration. 90% said they felt they could deliver better operational support experiences if they had faster access to deeper insight.
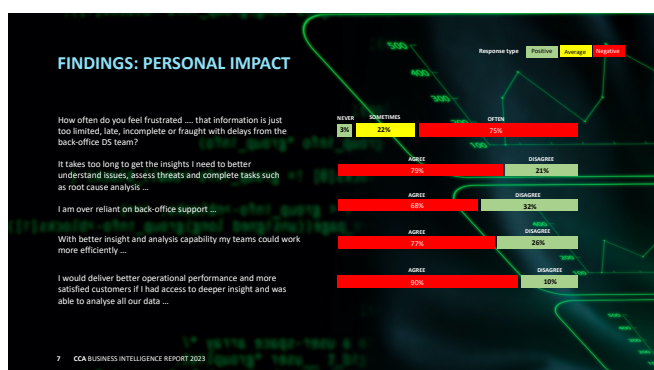
Why are is Some BI Systems Not Insightful?

We found that BI systems may

- Only collect and collate a subset of the total data available across the operation thus fail to enable each manager's full range of desired KPI's to be set and monitored

- Dis-intermediate and cause delays where Businesses over-rely on data analysts

- Automate only a subset of potentially needed dashboards into libraries accessible on demand by front line managers

- Lack tools that allow managers to pro-actively seek ways to improve operational performance.

Getting BI Insight Right

When shortcomings are avoided, managers can achieve higher levels of both productivity and customer and staff satisfaction. One senor manager from a Singaporean Telecom company who had started using a new BI called Contact Centre Analyst (CCA), said "CCA gave us insight that enabled us to make faster decisions which helped improve NPS (Net Promoter Scores) by 192%. Complaints fell and staff attrition reduced by 40%. Productivity rose and led to 25% savings in annual staff costs helped by an 80% reduction in data analysts"

The Author

Peter Elsey has 30 years' experience in the IT and Network services industry and in BPO outsourcing across Asia. Currently he is a Consultant for Computec Engineering Japan in a regional role.