



## How Digital Is Quickly Reshaping Customer Experience Processes

By invoking six strategies that reimagine the power of customer support processes, digitally-savvy companies can create unprecedented levels of new business value and significantly elevate customer experience.

### Executive Summary

Welcome to the new age of the digital customer, a time when offering “customer support” isn’t enough. In this time of heightened expectations, delivering superior customer experience is now a critical capability. Digital stalwarts such as Google, Amazon, Facebook and Twitter have gone beyond “tweaking” customer service and support and fundamentally changed their operating models to deliver sustained customer experience. But if your organization, people, technologies and processes aren’t ready for that level of change, you’re not alone: Digital technologies such as social, mobile, analytics and the cloud (or the SMAC Stack™) have taken the consumer space by storm – and left customer support organizations and the processes that enable them struggling for a way to join in.

By digitizing key business processes, support organizations are finally joining the revolution. New and re-coded processes enable support to offer genuine customer engagement – and to accelerate profound, lasting change. Support organizations are adopting strategies that do away with outdated traditions (such as equating the “offshore call center” with “customer experience”) and embracing valuable new ones,

such as using smart talent and digital processes to create more authentic experiences.

Long relegated to back-office status, customer service and support has languished as a corporate no-man’s land. Worse, traditional contact centers are incident-centric; their only goal is the current interaction. There’s no unified view of the customer and no interest in prolonging the interaction. The message customers take away? “We’d rather you didn’t call.”

What’s more, because relationships are becoming less transactional and more interactional, support is shaking off its back-office past and becoming interwoven with today’s all-important customer experience. (To learn more, read our latest white paper “[Putting the Experience in Digital Customer Experience.](#)”) In many companies, what was once invisible to the C-suite is now gaining center stage in terms of extending customer loyalty and improving operational efficiency to drive top- and bottom-line performance.

Despite the progress, many support organizations continue to associate digital engagement with chat or Web self-service portals. But these only represent one customer channel, and digital data flows through every support channel – and



increasingly, customer experience data resides outside of corporate CRM systems and in social channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others.

These swirls of digital data surrounding customers are what we call their Code Halo.™ The “halo” in the term Code Halo refers to the data that accumulates around people, devices and organizations – data that’s robust, powerful and continually growing in richness and complexity. These halos contain code that companies, brands, employers and partners can use to more deeply enhance their understanding of people or objects. They contain the bits of data generated by customers’ digital activities – from online purchases and browsing histories, to their clicks, likes and swipes.

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Extracting meaning from Code Halos – and applying that understanding to business strategies and processes – is a new and essential management skill that is not yet clearly or widely understood. In a Code Halo environment, the customer’s digital experience has the potential to be as important as the actual transaction itself. Using Code Halo principles, for instance, Amazon can generate product recommendations specifically customized for the individual customer, and the Nest thermostat can customize the temperature in your home according to your personal preferences. By distilling and applying meaning from Code Halo intersections, organizations enable more meaningful, personalized and contextualized customer interactions and transactions.

Leading support organizations are using meaning mined from customer Code Halos to recode support processes and deliver more profound, positive and, in some cases, magical customer experiences. In fact, post-sales support is fast emerging as the key competitive advantage for staying relevant and winning future market share. This white paper details six practical strategies for delivering a memorable customer experience, driving sales and boosting revenue growth.

## Six Ways to Recode Key Support Processes and Elevate Customer Experience



### Redefine Support Processes for Proactive Problem Management

In a world gone social, a company’s reputation – and sales – may have already taken a hit by the time complaints reach customer support. Leading organizations are not waiting for complaints to reach their call centers. Many are instituting proactive processes to reach out and respond to customer concerns via social media.

Twitter is ground zero for complaints, with 37% of tweets related to customer service, according to research by software maker Conversocial and New York University.<sup>2</sup> For example @NikeSupport proactively responds to customer questions and clarifications, and tweets 15 times more than the company’s official Twitter handle @Nike.<sup>3</sup> Responding to questions and complaints via social media is hardly proactive, but this example shows Nike’s emphasis on support and its commitment to making life easier for its customers.

Another approach is timely and proactive outreach by support teams to mitigate negative comments. One study found that 68% of consumers who had posted complaints or negative reviews on social media reported being contacted by the retailer. The results? Thirty-four percent of the consumers deleted their original review, according to the research, commissioned by enterprise CRM maker RightNow Technologies, now part of Oracle. Even better, 33% replaced the original post with a positive review, and 18% became loyal customers and bought more.<sup>4</sup>

Chip maker Intel goes one step better. It uses proactive problem management and leverages feedback from support calls to improve its product line. To reduce reported IT incidents requiring its attention by 40%, Intel’s product team applied text analytics to millions of client PC event logs and thousands of client incident reports. The effort also cut the number of blue-screen system crashes by more than 50%.<sup>5</sup>

- **The impact for your organization:** Identify ways your organization can redefine its processes to drive proactive support – whether responding to potential escalations via social media like Nike or identifying opportunities to improve the product line like Intel. Do you have the organization and incentives aligned for proactive support? Is there a process for taking ideas to the next level?

## It's essential to tie predictive and prescriptive analytics to the service and support process.

It's also essential to tie predictive and prescriptive analytics to the service and support process. Have you changed your processes to capture and analyze data? Is there a closed-loop mechanism in place? Does your support team focus on generating customer insights to drive actionable value? Laser focus is needed to make the shift to proactive support.



### Create Multiple Channels, One Experience

One great channel is no longer enough. Customers move fluidly among call centers, IVRs, social media queues, online chat and e-mail – and they expect customer support to do the same.

While the integration of deceptively complex processes and technologies is challenging for organizations, the payoff is outsized: When paired with analytics, the volume of smart data derived from the customer experience and loyalty processes can become a massive competitive differentiator. A seamless experience delivers the message that your organization values its customers and encourages them to engage with you.

Complicating that straightforward goal, however, is the proliferation of new digital channels. Air Berlin, for example – Germany's second largest airline after Lufthansa – began issuing boarding passes and flight information to passengers' smartwatches in early 2014.<sup>6</sup> British airline Virgin Atlantic outfits its concierges with Google Glass.<sup>7,8</sup>

Voice-activated smartphone transactions are another new digital point of contact. Customers of USAA and Wells Fargo can use spoken commands to interact with the financial services firms' mobile apps.

The new channels' advantages are clear for organizations, as well as their customers. Voice banking, for example, is predicted to reduce contact-center calls by as much as 40% and save the financial services industry more than \$8 billion annually.<sup>9</sup> But they also pose challenges, as inconsistencies still hamper cross-channel support and make IT's job more difficult. New developments can help, such as intelligent automated agents that use machine-learning technology to gather information and close the data gap between enterprise systems.

Clearly, there is a need to integrate the customer data that flows across the enterprise. To do this, some companies are looking to establish a customer data model. This model then becomes the basis of a unified system of record that is the repository for all customer interactions.

While this may sound challenging, potential solutions serve as more affordable alternatives to massive ERP upgrades. Capital One, for example, has created an ambitious process through which it uses its social media presence to listen, engage with and learn from customers. For the strategy to succeed, the financial services company must coordinate multiple steps, first capturing customer insights from its social efforts and then populating them into its enterprise CRM system.<sup>10</sup>

Another approach is to deploy multiple analytics engines to speed the delivery of a seamless personalized experience to each customer at the point of interaction.

- **The impact for your organization:** Begin planning your initiative to create a unified view of customers. A unified view of customer interactions is very different from enabling all communication channels for support activity. Having a common system of record is foundational, and there are different approaches to achieving it, from leveraging existing CRM systems, to going to a cloud-based, multi-channel solution. But the first challenge is to change how your organization defines its support outcomes. In addition to corporate measures and metrics, how does your organization respond to customer demands to “hear me,” “know me,” “anticipate my needs” and –

most important – “influence me?” How will you apply Code Halos and their trove of rich customer information and meaning to your support processes?

From an IT perspective, can your systems marshal customer messages and contacts from every channel, including social media and CRM systems?



### Develop Personalized Product and Support Experiences

Personalized products and services are becoming a key area of focus for companies. Largely driven by the capabilities of SMAC technologies, companies are beginning to craft tailored and customized versions of everything from stylish wardrobes to shipping options. According to recent research from Cognizant’s Center for the Future of Work, nearly half the companies surveyed believe that digitizing the customer experience to deliver “mass personalization” is a core strategic goal. From our perspective, Code Halos are a powerful force-multiplier to catalyze the necessary process change, drive experiences over transactions, prioritize suggesting over selling, and truly drive “markets of one.”<sup>12</sup>

At the vanguard of product personalization are wearables, such as fitness trackers like Jawbone and Fitbit. The exercise wristbands monitor activity levels and communicate with companion apps and even virtual coaches that record stats and offer advice for future improvement. (For an example of this type of personalized device/service, see our [video](#) and [white paper](#) on connected health and our HealthActivate solution.)

What does the trend of personalized digital products mean for the process of service and support? For one thing, it requires a mindset shift regarding the customer, one that’s less reactive and more encouraging – perhaps craving – of customer engagement, questions and interactions to learn about likes and dislikes. Scripted interactions are out, and in their place are open-ended exchanges with questions such as, “How can we make your device work better?”

Imagine a customer receiving a new mobile phone, and as soon as she turns it on, a customer support rep reaches out through a simple automated interface to ask, “What functionality do you want/need on your new phone?” Not only does the process of support become high-level work, but its mission also advances, moving beyond the function’s traditional focus on use, to fixing and improving the customer experience.

Think of Amazon. Although its service and support processes are almost always virtual, the company still conveys profoundly personal interactions. With other e-tail sites similarly serving up personalized suggestions, consumers now expect the same familiarity and helpfulness from all channels of support.

Online retailers have taken the lead in rethinking support staff roles, essentially dovetailing support with sales – and altering the sales process from one that’s transactional to one that’s focused on the art of suggestion. For example, in the UK, online retail giant ASOS refers to its CSRs as advisors and is committed to providing white-glove service to 20-somethings, including styling and wardrobe advice. ASOS was among the first brands to offer personalized advice through the Google Helpouts real-time videoconferencing service.

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But it’s not just online upstarts taking notice of support’s new opportunities; Sears was also an early entrant on Helpouts, staffing a dozen “hangouts” with advice on topics like appliances and home electronics.<sup>13</sup>

- **The impact for your organization:** As products become more personalized, support’s mission is leveraging digital to drive support processes that are equally personalized. How are you infusing personalization in your support processes?

Leading companies are also rethinking their talent and technology. The new approach to talent management is hiring highly skilled

customer advocates and advisors. This will be the cornerstone for personalized support. For the support organization, does your talent strategy take these shifts into account? Are you developing customer advocates and advisors or just scripted-call agents?

On the technology front, as mentioned above, leading organizations are creating unique customer data models by leveraging internal CRM and support data, as well as data from social platforms that drives inputs into specific service scenarios, while still providing flexibility for best near-term business value. Smart sourcing requires identifying partners that understand the shifting expectations of digitally-savvy customers. Is your partner ecosystem at the leading edge of these technology and talent best practices?



#### Deliver 'Moments of Magic'; Go Beyond Metrics

Most support organizations still focus on responding to incidents. But customers crave “moments of magic,” those unexpected interactions that leave them feeling valued. Imagine the positive reactions among customers impacted by Hurricane Katrina when Netflix waived their charges for two months, for example. It was probably a small gesture in the midst of a huge personal crisis for its customers but nonetheless thoughtful and impactful. Customer support needs to plan for such qualitative moments as meticulously as it does for quantitative metrics.

The greater availability of business outcome-oriented metrics is also driving support functions to consider new benchmarks. For example, in order to redefine how it measures customer service, global telecom provider BT implemented the customer effort score (CES) to uncover hurdles it had unintentionally created.<sup>14</sup> CES – which measures how easy it is for customers to interact with a business – helped BT uncover its customers’ difficulty using its IVR survey system. By simplifying the system, BT boosted survey response rates – and its ability to home in on customer experience.

From a digital impact perspective, using social media to drive service and support is gaining traction, but measuring the business value of social customer interactions can be tricky. Volume is one factor, but more important are the total number of queries answered and the resulting customer satisfaction rates.

Smaller, more qualitative gestures, however, leave impressions on customers that are even more lasting. These can be one-time occurrences, such as special consideration or a fee waiver related to a customer’s circumstances, or they can happen through well-run loyalty programs. Seventy-six percent of shoppers, for example, value the status they attain through loyalty programs, according to a 2014 survey by Cognizant and *RIS News*.<sup>15</sup>

### Operational metrics still matter, but versatility is essential for support.

The bottom line: Operational metrics still matter, but versatility is essential for support organizations today. Whether B2B or B2C, customers want recognition, and organizations need quantitative and qualitative measures to deliver it.

- **The impact for your organization:** Evaluate whether you have the right mechanisms and metrics in place to measure business value. In addition to quantitative measures, what qualitative barometers does your company use to encourage “moments of magic” for customers and to then convey success to the rest of the organization?



#### Evolve Customer Support into a Listening Post

The one-to-one nature of customer support makes it a goldmine of feedback on products, services and processes. When organizations train CSRs to probe for information as they respond to inquiries and process returns, the support function becomes an invaluable listening post. The data feeding it requires consistency and a single “version of the truth” across the organization. Combining streams of data from different sources into a “data lake”<sup>16</sup> can help steer

business decision-makers to the insights they need more quickly and efficiently; this is at the heart of how Code Halos generate meaning and insight from many different data sources, driving innovation, sales, marketing around customer support and customer experience processes across the enterprise. (For more on data lakes, read our white paper "[Semantic Radar Steers Users to Insights in the Data Lake.](#)")

Yet, according to Forrester, only one-third of companies analyze customer insight across boundaries.<sup>17</sup> Customer insight may be a challenge to take on, but the results can be eye-popping. Dell, Inc., for example, converted the feedback it collected from a customer service debacle into useful product development information that helped it recover from the public relations fiasco and inspired the launch of IdeaStorm.com, its groundbreaking platform for crowdsourcing ideas. Dell continued to revamp and modernize IdeaStorm in 2012.<sup>18</sup>

### Only when the entire customer experience is represented at the decision-making table can your organization create a more satisfied and valued support function.

Converting customer support into an insight-generator requires rethinking the support function to shift focus from reactive to interactive. There are two distinct steps to this shift. The first is to identify the functional, operational and cultural changes needed to create a more interactive support function. Some organizations like Salesforce have senior leaders driving customer experience and support. Several others, such as Comcast, Samsung and United Health, have developed the role of chief customer officer or chief experience officer.

Leaders in these customer experience and support roles are driving change in the organizational mindset – and developing mechanisms for generating deep customer insight. Going further, these leaders are enabling closed-loop feedback by facilitating a dialog between support and product development, in which both teams can work from a single source of the truth – a singular customer data model – as well as swap anecdotal client insights and experience stories.

Absent these dedicated roles, senior marketing executives need to act by understanding the internal stakeholders inside the business that own crucial aspects of customer interaction, and break down unnecessary organizational barriers to sharing vital customer information and analysis.

The second shift is determining the process mechanisms to listen more carefully to customers. Organizations are enabling two-way interaction through chat, voice and e-mail, together with next best actions (arrived at through predictive analytics) and offers, that can create more meaningful and moving customer experiences.

- **The impact for your organization:** Evaluate whether your organization accords support its rightful place as a front-office function. Does your C-suite include a chief support officer? A chief customer officer?

Only when the entire customer experience is represented at the decision-making table can your organization create a more satisfied and valued support function. Among other key result areas (KRA), the chief support officer should have the mandate to evolve support into a listening function that generates key insights to enhance customer experience. Chief customer and support officers should consider how they will generate these client insights and create a closed-loop mechanism to feed into product development, sales and marketing.



#### Empower Frontline Support Employees

Technology alone cannot create a memorable customer experience, although it can enhance and even transform it. Often, a missing link is the empowerment of frontline employees, or CSRs. To deliver positive and memorable experiences, CSRs need their own positive employee experiences backing them up. For example, in 2013, T-Mobile incorporated gamification within its employee collaboration platform as part of an initiative to continuously improve service levels. This not only helped the company do a better job,

but it also increased recognition of employees who did more to help the organization as a whole and contributed to its knowledge base.<sup>19</sup>

The smartest support investments enrich CSRs' work lives by according them the training and empowerment they deserve. They ensure CSRs can access the information they need to be effective. They also make their lives easier and even a little freewheeling. For example, Ritz-Carlton lavishes attention on customers and famously allots employees \$2,000 per guest per day to ensure a premier experience.<sup>20</sup>

### Consider empowering frontline support employees with the authority to offer refunds or incentives to wow your customers.

Providing CSRs with the training they need to succeed is a start. For example, customer service superstar Zappos rings up only 5% of sales over the phone, but because most of its customers call at least once, it invests in extensive telephone training that focuses on creating emotional impact and lasting memories for customers.<sup>21</sup>

- **The impact for your organization:** Because CSRs care for your organization's customers and its brand, employee satisfaction is a requirement, not an option. Consider ways to increase employee autonomy and flexibility. Rethink how you measure performance and reward CSRs. If your call center tracks average hold time, determine whether the metric contributes to a positive customer experience. If not, engage employees to help establish new metrics that will. A "moment of magic" score may be one metric that you can leverage to give rewards beyond normal operating performance.

Consider empowering frontline support employees with the authority to offer refunds or incentives to wow your customers. It's surprising how few companies allow front-line employees a dollar budget to deliver a memorable customer experience. The answer may lie in an organization's emphasis on optimizing support costs at the expense of the value it can create.

## Looking Forward: Steps Your Organization Can Take to Get Started

Here are three suggestions for how your organization can begin preparing its customer support function to take advantage of the new digital processes underway:

1. **Establish the position of chief support officer or head of digital customer experience.** Act now by understanding the internal stakeholders inside the business that own crucial aspects of customer interaction, and break down unnecessary organizational barriers to sharing of vital customer information and analysis. The chief support officer (or head of customer experience) should be a leadership role filled by a senior executive with a deep understanding of digital customer experience and strong ability to collaborate across best-in-class partners. Additionally, she should have a key role in the customer experience processes across all customer-facing functions. Process-level change requires consensus, but it also demands leadership to drive it. Grant your organization's support executives the mandate and resources to lead the digital process transformation. Reward them for their successes, and provide them with opportunities to move quickly and learn (or fail) fast.
2. **Take advantage of digital technologies and approaches to recast customer support as a front-office function.** Leverage customer service as a profit center. Review in detail your sales and customer relationship management processes. Develop a digital process plan, including the applicability of Code Halos.
3. **Go beyond metrics and define how your organization can create, deliver and reward moments of magic.** Identify specific interaction points with customers that have the potential for moments of profoundly personal and knowledgeable engagement with customers. This can occur during setup, returns, cancellation or other scenarios. Clearly identify how you would empower the frontline support advisor to deliver a memorable experience, by using tools such as customer journey maps. These blueprints can give way to a minimum viable solution that stems from a larger digital experience technical architecture, including roles and responsibilities, touchpoints, value hypothesis, refined success criteria, data requirements and management.

## Footnotes

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## About the Authors

*Mahesh Jadhav is an AVP and Global Market Lead in Cognizant's Business Process Services Business Unit. He is the P&L leader for the communications and technology sectors and helps clients in service operations transformation, outsourcing and digital customer experience. Prior to joining Cognizant, Mahesh spent several years at Accenture leading strategy consulting and M&A engagements in the communications, media and technology sectors. He led the incubation of new BPO offerings such as engineering & R&D services for industrial, automotive and resources clients. Mahesh serves on the advisory board of Cameron School of Business, University of St. Thomas, and on the board of directors at Sankalp Semiconductors, a Red Herring top-100 ranked technology startup focused on the Internet of Things. He holds a B.S. in mechanical engineering from Walchand College and an M.B.A. in strategy from the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University. Mahesh can be reached at [Mahesh.Jadhav2@cognizant.com](mailto:Mahesh.Jadhav2@cognizant.com).*

*Robert Hoyle Brown is an Associate Vice-President in Cognizant's Center for the Future of Work, and drives strategy and market outreach for the Business Process Services business unit. He is also a regular contributor to the blog [www.futureofwork.com](http://www.futureofwork.com), "Signals from the Future of Work." Prior to joining Cognizant, he was Managing Vice-President of the Business and Applications Services team at Gartner, and as a research analyst, he was a recognized subject matter expert in BPO, cloud services/ BPaaS and HR services. He also held roles at Hewlett-Packard and G2 Research, a boutique outsourcing research firm in Silicon Valley. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree from the University of California at Berkeley and, prior to his graduation, attended the London School of Economics as a Hansard Scholar. He can be reached at [Robert.H.Brown@cognizant.com](mailto:Robert.H.Brown@cognizant.com).*

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## About Cognizant

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**Cognizant**

### World Headquarters

500 Frank W. Burr Blvd.  
Teaneck, NJ 07666 USA  
Phone: +1 201 801 0233  
Fax: +1 201 801 0243  
Toll Free: +1 888 937 3277  
Email: [inquiry@cognizant.com](mailto:inquiry@cognizant.com)

### European Headquarters

1 Kingdom Street  
Paddington Central  
London W2 6BD  
Phone: +44 (0) 20 7297 7600  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7121 0102  
Email: [infouk@cognizant.com](mailto:infouk@cognizant.com)

### India Operations Headquarters

#5/535, Old Mahabalipuram Road  
Okkiyam Pettai, Thoraipakkam  
Chennai, 600 096 India  
Phone: +91 (0) 44 4209 6000  
Fax: +91 (0) 44 4209 6060  
Email: [inquiryindia@cognizant.com](mailto:inquiryindia@cognizant.com)