Achieving Excellence in CX in Challenging Times

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Executive Summary

Driving better customer experience (CX) remains a top priority for businesses globally. In Australia, 41% of CX decision makers rate it as a top business priority according to the Ecosystm CX study. Contact centres are mandated to not only grow revenue but to drive great CX. However, they continue to struggle to achieve this. Contact centres are under immense pressure to re-look at their operations on a daily basis. This gets further heightened in challenges times like we are facing now.

The contact centre industry in Australia is currently witnessing high call volumes and inbound activity across industries. Many contact centres find it near impossible to manage the high inbound activity especially during peak hours. While calls have to be answered and support provided to the community and customers, deflecting calls to other non-voice channels will grow in importance. Managing data repositories better across all CX activities will empower the agent with more accurate information, in these difficult times. The need for agility in a contact centre has become especially important in recent weeks and will drive a greater adoption of the cloud model.

Against the current backdrop, this whitepaper discusses how contact centres can leverage technologies to solve their day-to-day problems. The data mentioned in the paper are from the global Ecosystm CX study.
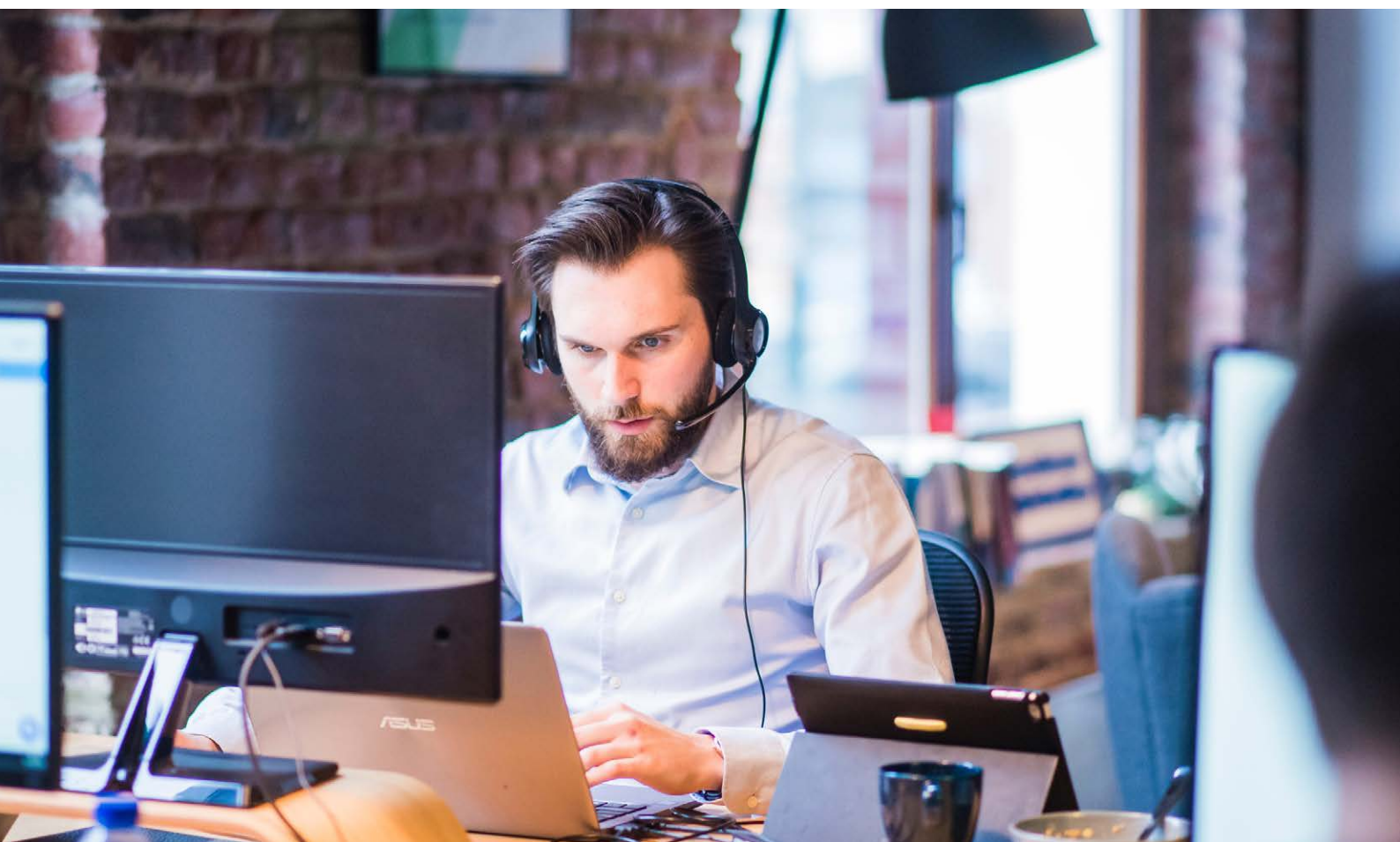
Building a Business Continuity Plan for your Contact Centre

#1 START WITH EVALUATING CURRENT CHALLENGES

> **63% of organisations in Australia are challenged by departmental siloes when it comes to delivering consistent CX**

These are unprecedented times, and the challenges of running a contact centre through these times are equally unique. However, the challenges that your contact centres were facing will not have disappeared. Rather they would have been further exacerbated by newer challenges. In order to build a successful business continuity plan, keep an eye on the challenges that your contact centre was already facing, when it comes to driving a consistent CX. Organisations in Australia find it challenging to manage multiple channels (Figure 1), primarily because of internal siloes in the organisation.

Figure 1: Challenges of Driving Consistent CX in Australia

Source: Ecosystm CX Study   N=131

As your organisation reassesses the way contact centres deliver CX, it will be important to remove departmental siloes, and have a common data repository that can be accessed by sales, marketing and customer service teams so that customers get consistent messaging. Accessing data from multiple CRM solutions will hamper your organisation's CX initiatives. The challenges of providing training to agents who are working remotely, not just on the product range but also on other issues like work efficiency and compliance will gain importance. Given the market situation, budget constraints will remain - chances are that they will get heightened.

For a successful business continuity plan, these challenges should be kept in mind as a starting point and newer challenges identified. There will definitely be a need to do more with less - and the right technologies will help immensely.

#2 ACCEPT THAT HOME-BASED AGENTS IS A REALITY

Only 14% of in-house contact centres in Australia have more than 20% remote agents, while 24% do not allow their agents to work remotely

For many years the contact centre industry in Australia has been talking about home-based agents and while it has received positive feedback with some contact centres implementing it, it has never really taken off in a big way. Ecosystm research finds that nearly half of organisations in Australia allow 10-20% of the agents to work remotely. However, what we are looking at is the possibility that most - and in some cases all - your agents will work remotely from their homes. This has fast become a reality, and this is the backdrop against which you have to frame your business continuity plan.

The challenges around COVID-19 have forced in-house contact centres and outsourced providers, to move agents to their homes rapidly. Technology has an immense role to play in contact centres achieving scale and making immediate, remote changes to call workflows, interactive voice response (IVR) and workload allocation across channels on a daily basis.

Ensuring the smooth running of day-to-day contact centre operations using home-based agents will require:

- Agents having reliable network connections

- Agents continuing to have the right set-up (including the right environment, right headset and other workplace tools)

- Access to call recordings from a centralised location

- Continual training and coaching initiatives

- The right collaboration technologies to be used to keep agents engaged (including continuing to provide help in difficult situations during live calls, sending regular notifications through apps and keeping them in the loop on all changes)

- All forms of security measures in place including device security

While some of the above may sound obvious and simple, organisations must keep in mind that agents deal with live, real-time interactions while simultaneously managing operations and transactions at the back end. Organisations must place equal importance on the people and the technology.

#3 LEVERAGE THE CLOUD FOR AGILITY

67% of internal contact centres in Australia are partially on the cloud, while nearly a third leverage the cloud fully

Cloud contact centre solutions can help organisations drive greater efficiency in these challenging times. The benefits that you can expect from the cloud include:

• Ability to modify agent numbers immediately without the need for IT intervention (depending on daily volumes)

• Easier set-up for home-based agents

• Faster changes to call workflows and IVR scripts

• Instant access to newer features

The cloud model becomes critical when managing peak flows and when changes must be made frequently. 67% of organisations in Australia are partially on the cloud model. It is likely that you are one of those organisations who are using specific cloud applications, while using your legacy contact centre solution. Now is the time to evaluate a cloud contact centre solution that will allow the agility required in today's shifting environment. Some organisations will be required to use a private cloud architecture due to industry requirements and regulations around customer data privacy. While each organisation will have to evaluate their legacy systems and the industry and country compliance requirements, before moving to the cloud, we can expect more contact centres to move to the cloud model in the 2020 and 2021.

#4 IDENTIFY KEY NON-VOICE CHANNELS

67% of organisations in Australia consider improving customer self-service a key measure to improve CX

To take the load off the agents, especially for voice calls, contact centres are beginning to explore various ways they can deflect calls to other channels. Non-voice channels include:

• Allowing customers to find the answers through websites or FAQs (web-based or within apps). The richer the FAQ, the less likely a customer will see the need to talk to an agent.

• Mobile apps that can send pop up notifications to customers for simple and less complicated matters. These include reminders, change notifications and allowing customers to schedule calls with agents.

• Social messaging platforms that your customers prefer to use. Several retail and eCommerce companies are personalising service beyond the mobile app using social messaging platforms. Similarly, we are seeing airlines, government and healthcare agencies reach out through WhatsApp and other messaging channels.

• Virtual assistants that provide answers to common questions that account for most of the call volume. More time will be needed to develop a fully-fledged and more complex Conversational AI platform as algorithms take time and data to learn from the various patterns and permutations of customer-agent conversations.

Ecosystm research finds that 37% of CX decision makers in Australia are more focused on self-service through mobile apps, while the remaining prefer other self-service touchpoints such as community support and social media, and virtual assistants. Evaluate which self-service touchpoints you wish to empower your customers with. This will help reduce call volumes as well as improve customer satisfaction.

#5 EMPOWER YOUR AGENTS TO BECOME "SUPER-AGENTS"

59% of organisations in Australia consider investing in AI and machine learning their top CX priority

Irrespective of the self-service touchpoints you employ, human touch and empathy will prevail. Customers still prefer to speak to an agent when in distress or when handling challenging circumstances. Ecosystm research finds that 95% of contact centres in Australia use voice technologies indicating that while AI and Automation technologies are on the rise, many of these technologies will be incorporated within the voice solutions. What organisations will look to do is to empower their agents with technologies (Figure 2) to make them "super-agents".

Figure 2: Top CX Priorities in Australia
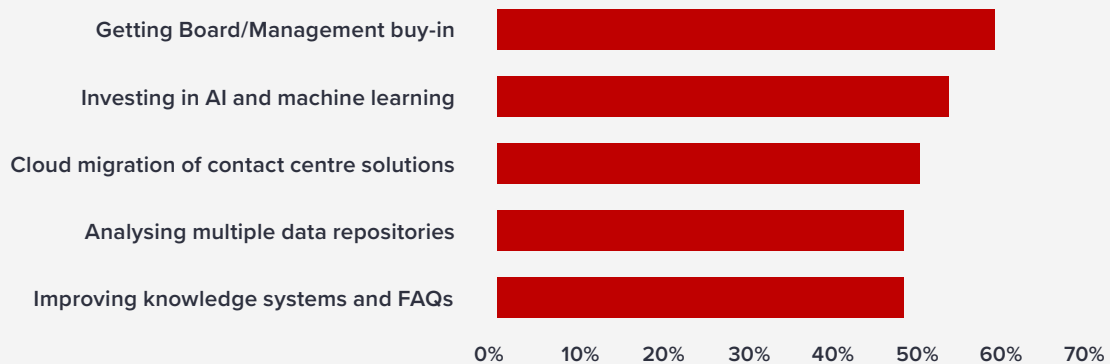
Source: Ecosystm CX Study   N=51

The agent's role will evolve in multiple ways:

- Machine learning and AI will play an important role in providing agents with intelligence prior to the call. Using past interaction patterns and customer history, the solutions will be able to predict customer pain points and preferences.

- Agents will be able to use real-time data to make suggestions to the customer through the use of rich data-driven analytics.

- Agents will be empowered not only with AI from contact centre systems, but also from knowledge management and integrated CRM systems. This will lead to better upsell and cross sell opportunities.

#6 IGNORE COMPLIANCE AT YOUR OWN RISK

84% of organisations in Australia consider agents' improper use of customer confidential data a security threat

Contact centres collect customer data that is private and sensitive in nature including contact details, date of birth, address, credit card information, personal health details, bank account details and much more. Handling, securing and protecting customer data is of paramount importance, especially in the wake of increased cyber-attacks. Security and compliance measures are critical and must be reviewed continually. Many contact centres have only invested in basic monitoring and analytics applications but very few monitor all customer interactions.

Based on Ecosystm research findings, 84% of CX decision makers in Australia state that the biggest security threat is agents are handling confidential customer data improperly, while 74% mention agents leaving the organisation with company data as serious threat.

As you reassess your organisation's compliance requirements, especially with agents working from home, evaluate:

- If all voice and non-voice interactions are being analysed. If so to what degree

- If you are performing ad-hoc monitoring or fully monitoring all interactions

- How you are securing your customer's data

- That the technologies you are using are secure

- If you are coaching agents on how they handle sensitive customer data during voice and non-voice interactions

About the Author

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One of the foremost multi-disciplinary analysts in the APAC region, Audrey boasts an eclectic set of expertise, in segments as diverse as enterprise collaboration, unified communications-as-a-service (UCaaS), video, contact center, CX, outsourcing as well as artificial intelligence, enterprise mobility and digital transformation.

Audrey has a proven track record both as an analyst and a business leader, having spent close to two decades in various analyst roles at Frost & Sullivan, providing counsel to C-level executives on go-to-market strategies – most recently as Head of Research and Senior Fellow at the firm's ICT practice in Australia and New Zealand. As one of the pioneers of the firm in the region, Audrey played a pivotal role in its regional expansion, including building and mentoring a team of analysts across various markets in Asia-Pacific, including Malaysia, Singapore and Australia.

Beyond her involvement as an analyst, Audrey is also a prominent keynote speaker, having delivered over 150 speaking engagements addressing various technology segments. She is regularly quoted in the media for her insights into ongoing technology trends and news.

Audrey is an honours graduate from the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administration (ICSA) in the UK. She also holds Diplomas in Management Accounting and Financial Accounting from the London Chamber of Commerce Institute (LCCI). In her free time, she loves to read literary fiction and is a jazz enthusiast.

About NICE

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About Ecosystm

Ecosystm is a private equity backed Digital Research and Advisory Platform with global headquarters in Singapore.

As a global first, Ecosystm brings together tech buyers, tech vendors and analysts into one integrated platform to enable the best decision making in the evolving digital economy. The firm moves away from the highly inefficient business models of traditional research firms and instead focuses on research democratisation, with an emphasis on accessibility, transparency and autonomy.

Ecosystm's research originates from its proprietary "Peer-2-Peer" platform allowing Tech Buyers to easily benchmark their organisation, while providing Tech Vendors with access to real-time Market Insights in an affordable "as-a-Service" subscription model.