

Report by



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
FOUNDATION

A photograph of a person's hand in a grey suit sleeve dropping a white ballot into a white ballot box. The box is open, and the ballot is falling into the slot. The background is a plain, light grey wall. The image is partially overlaid by a dark purple circular graphic in the top left and a pink circular graphic in the bottom right.

Navigating the 2024 Election Year in CX

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INTRODUCTION

2024 is not just an election year. It is quite possibly The election year. Globally, more voters than ever in history will head to polls as at least 64 countries, representing about 49% of the people in the world, are due to hold national elections.

(Source <https://time.com/6550920/world-elections-2024/>)

The results, especially for us here in the UK, and across the US and SA, will prove consequential for years to come. Deloitte's data show that 50% of respondents rated the level of external financial and economic uncertainty facing their business as high or very high in Q4 2023, up from 46% in Q3 but down from 61% in Q4 2022.

(Source <https://www.thecityuk.com/news/the-economy-in-2024-uncertainty-ahead/#:~:text=%5B1%5D%20Deloitte's%20data%20show%20that,from%2061%25%20in%20Q4%202022>)

Whatever the outcomes, uncertain times present both opportunities and challenges and as an industry we need to remain focussed on customers and EX, to drive growth and success through technology innovation and investment in our people.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Keith Gait, CEO: The Customer Experience Foundation

In this exclusive and innovative report, we explore what this means for the Contact Centre and CX sector. What new strategies for growth and success are being seeing in 2024? How can organisations drive these? And what new strategies are needed for success in uncertain times.

Global Political Landscape and Economic Impact

The year 2024 is marked by an unprecedented number of national elections, with at least 64 countries, representing about 49% of the global population, heading to the polls. This surge in democratic activity signifies a pivotal year for global politics and economic policies. Key nations like the USA, UK, Brazil, India, and others are participating, making it a crucial period for geopolitical shifts and economic strategies.

Consequences for the CX and Contact Centre Industry

For the Customer Experience (CX) and Contact Centre industry, these elections represent both challenges and opportunities. Political changes often lead to shifts in economic policies, impacting consumer behaviour, regulatory environments, and ultimately, the strategies of CX-focused businesses.

The industry must adapt to these changes by leveraging technology, enhancing customer interaction strategies, and maintaining operational flexibility.

Technology and Innovation as Drivers of Change

The rapid evolution of technology, especially advancements in AI and data analytics, is transforming the CX landscape. Companies are increasingly relying on these technologies to streamline operations, enhance customer interactions, and gain strategic insights. The integration of AI in customer service not only improves efficiency but also helps in managing the increased volatility expected during the election year.

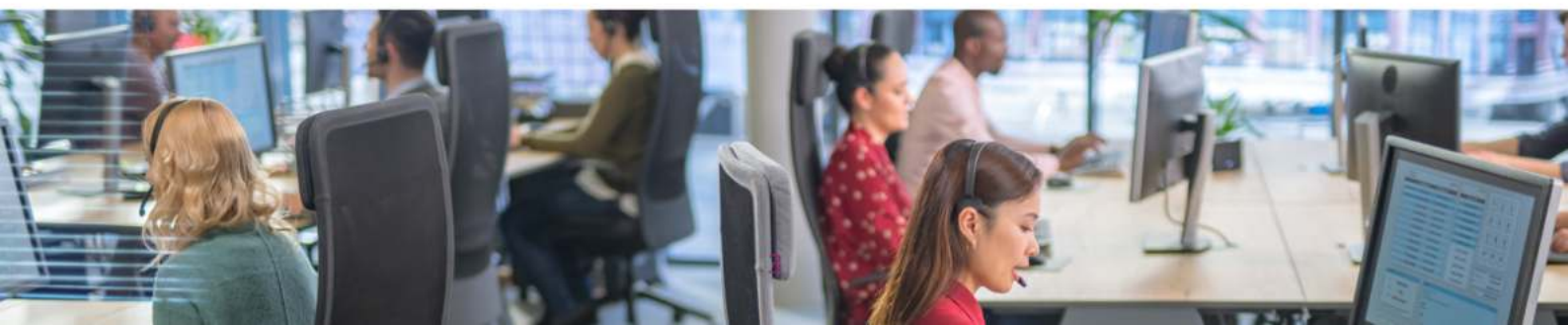
Regulatory Challenges and Opportunities

As political landscapes shift, so do regulatory environments. The CX industry must stay agile to adapt to new regulations that could affect operational tactics and strategic planning. This includes changes in data protection laws, consumer rights, and sector-specific regulations that directly impact service delivery models.

Economic Uncertainty and Consumer Behaviour

The elections are likely to introduce economic uncertainties that could affect consumer spending and confidence. CX providers must focus on maintaining high-quality customer service and adapting to changing consumer needs to navigate this uncertainty effectively.

Companies must invest in understanding consumer behaviours through analytics and adjust their strategies accordingly to sustain growth.



Strategic Imperatives for CX Providers

Flexibility and Scalability:

Companies must ensure that their operational models are flexible and scalable to quickly adapt to sudden changes in the business environment.

Innovation and Customer Engagement:

Leveraging innovative technologies to enhance customer engagement and personalisation will be crucial. This includes adopting omnichannel strategies, AI-driven interactions, and personalised customer experiences.

Regulatory Compliance and Advocacy:

Staying updated with changing regulations and participating in advocacy for fair regulatory frameworks will protect companies from potential legal challenges.

Employee Training and Support:

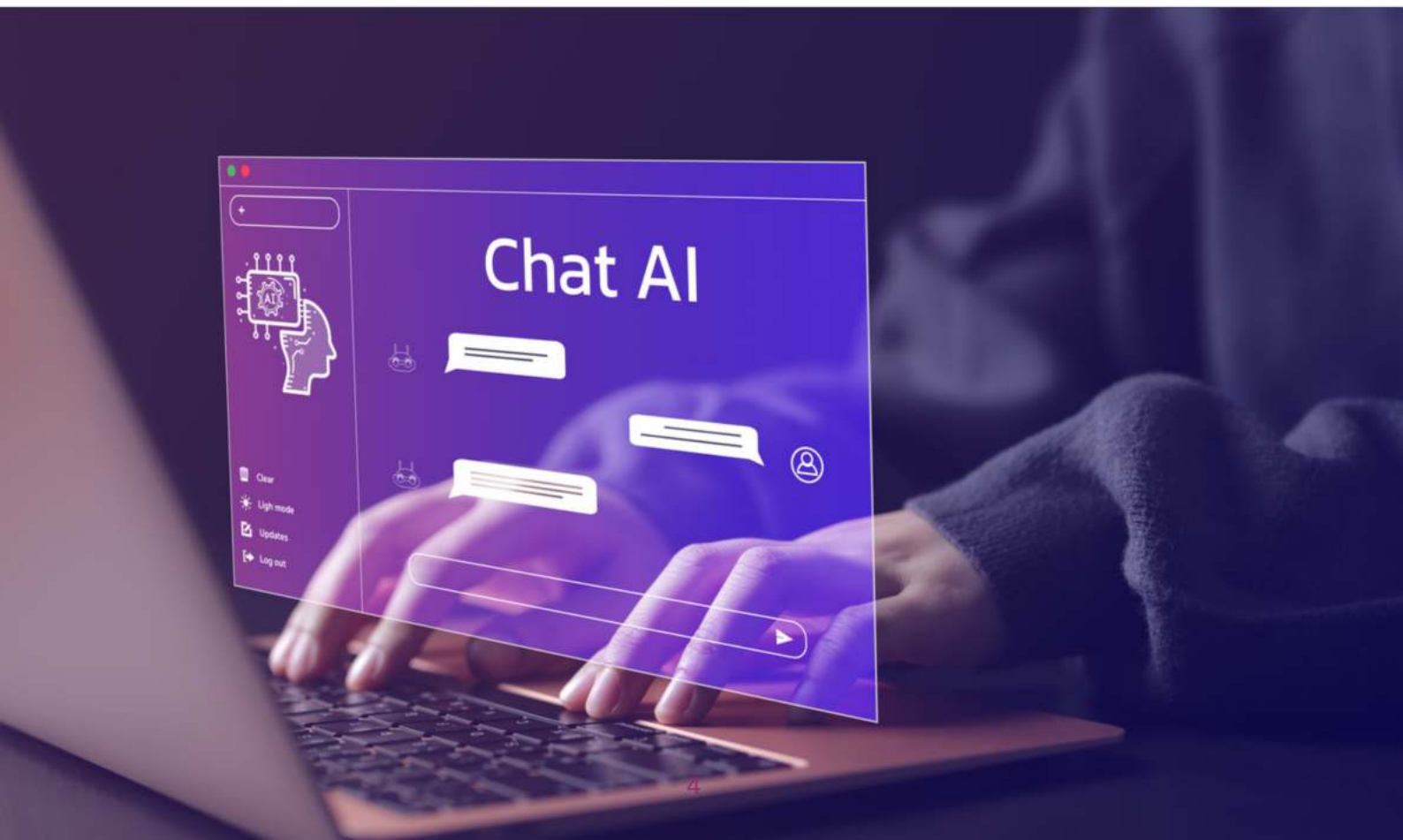
Equipping employees with the necessary tools and training to handle the evolving market conditions is vital for maintaining service quality and efficiency.

Conclusion

The election year of 2024 presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for the CX and Contact Centre industry. By focusing on technological integration, regulatory compliance, and adaptive customer engagement strategies, companies can not only survive but thrive in this dynamic and challenging environment. The ability to swiftly adapt to the outcomes of these global elections will be a definitive factor in the success of CX providers in the upcoming years.



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NAVIGATING GLOBAL TURBULENCE: ELECTIONS, ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY, AND THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN 2024

William Carson, Director of Market Engagement: Ascensos



After a January that seemed to last 9 weeks, we're already accelerating through Q2 in 2024, with elections being held on nearly every continent, and almost every month, for the rest of the year including December. Of these, 8 of the world's 10 largest nations (Bangladesh, Brazil, India, United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, and Mexico) are voting – which accounts for nearly half of the world's population.

The UK electorate will most likely dismiss the Conservative party in July while the EU elections are expected to see more right-leaning, populist parties gain power. Across the Atlantic, the USA has every possibility of returning Trump to the White House, while Africa will host elections in 15 countries, from Tunisia to South Africa.

If we consider that these elections reflect the dominant forces at a macro level impacting the global economic consciousness, those at a micro level are just as significant, and hint at a growing instability, distrust, and genuine concern about how international relationships, and their supporting constructs, are going to succeed in the coming years.

They include Joe Biden ordering all federal agencies to appoint a Chief AI officer within the next 60 days, while China has doubled the price of the rare metal gallium to £454 per kilo, even while the world is concerned that there's not enough to go around. The industries that are highly dependent on gallium include those of semiconductors, radar devices, solar panels and smartphone screens, and gallium chips are widely used in defence and aerospace equipment. China is thought to have produced around 97% of the world's needs in 2021.

Those macro and micro factors are converging to create a perfect storm of global economic uncertainty that could stall investment, close channels to market, and damage consumer confidence. Then there are the genuine logistic challenges that we've seen emerge because of conflicts – in shipping lanes around the world – that impact the delivery of goods which in turn can negatively impact company sales, profits, and growth.

Getting down to the basic engine oil of our economies, at least in the West - employment is high, but the cost of living remains challenging for many, and ruinous for some. Climate change is increasingly difficult to deny, with economic and social impacts that are now impossible to ignore in developed and developing nations.

All this is playing out against a backdrop of a 'world at war' with conflicts ongoing in more than 12 countries, the most notable between Russia and Ukraine, and Israel and Hamas.



It is strangely macabre that a world which pulled together so effectively in one direction just 4 years ago to deal with a global pandemic now appears to be hell bent on irradicating all signs that a détente of such magnitude ever existed at all.

In our industry of CX and contact centres, it was of course the response to the pandemic that saw the implementation of some of the most significant innovations of the past quarter century. Zoom topped out at revenues of \$4BN in 2023 vs. \$330M in 2019, while the number of daily active users of MS Teams went from shy of 40M to over 300M in the same period.

These innovations are now considered part of the standard tool set for contact centre infrastructure, while for customers, the glut of social media memes during that time has made smartphone zombies of us all! The result being if we can't access customer care via WhatsApp or a similar non-voice channel, we are more quickly frustrated than ever before, and less likely to bother contacting customer service at all.

To ensure corporate success in both the delivery of great customer management and engagement while growing a profitable business, precarious as the economies of the world may be, we need to throw wide open the 'curtains of conformity' to let in sunlight, and that sunlight is data.

Data analytics is finally getting the attention it has deserved for more than a decade. It is to a business what a tuning peg is to a stringed instrument – getting the harmony between operations just perfect to allow all manner of projects to play out in real-time, taking advantage of intelligent automation and sophisticated AI-enabled platforms to predict and execute, review and remedy for a multiplicity of customer/colleague journeys and desired outcomes.

Whether customer contact is inhouse, outsourced, on or offshore, the value of data and the smart application of the new tech it can drive is going to pave the way for new commercial models – internally facing into the wider enterprise through shared service centres, and outwardly through outsourcing partnerships, to achieve objectives that mutually benefit all parties and stakeholders.

Ultimately the resilience and adaptability of our industry over the past 25 years has outlived Y2K, the explosion of the internet, a global financial crisis, and more recently a global pandemic.

It is not immune to the ravages of what this global year of elections might bring – to economies, legislation, or cyber and physical security, and the impact these may have on resources, use of technology stacks, and consumer confidence – but I would argue it is the intellectual capabilities behind the processes that have evolved over decades of CX evolution that are the genuinely unique, and will serve us well beyond 2024 and into the future.



Ultimately the resilience and adaptability of our industry over the past 25 years has outlived Y2K, the explosion of the internet, a global financial crisis, and more recently a global pandemic.



THE ELECTION YEAR: WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE CX INDUSTRY

James Towner, Chief Growth Officer &
Nathian Carnall, Chief Operating Officer: ArvatoConnect



2024 is THE election year. Over 64 countries will be participating in a vote, many leading to huge changes of power, and when that change happens, so does legislation, regulation, and policy.

This confluence of political dynamics inevitably casts a shadow over businesses both at home and abroad - regardless of current positioning - but as ever, uncertainty creates opportunity. What will this look like for the customer experience and contact centre world? After the debacle of COVID-19, will our industry ever fear change in the same way again?

Uncertainty is the new certainty

Political turmoil seems to be our new normal, with fluctuating regulations, tax policies, and other government priorities, not only is there a lot of uncertainty for the industry, but this also directly affects consumer attitudes and behaviour, which directly impacts CX and contact centre operations.

But if we separate the political from the economic, most political parties in the UK have one agenda in this area: to strengthen the economy and generate jobs. Continuously monitoring political developments and proactively adapting to new strategies and change is a must - and the only way to create a level of certainty.

Balancing technology with the right to request a human.

In an election year fraught with uncertainties, consumers will seek out more reassurance and empathy, especially within financial and public sectors.

While automation and self-service technologies are revolutionising customer service (we don't believe we're fully through the revolution just yet), the human touch remains invaluable, especially during this time. Striking the right balance of both automation and human interaction not only enhances the customer experience and frees-up agents to focus on adding value and providing this extra reassurance.

As well as this, the likely increase in election stories around fake news and AI interference will only heighten this sense amongst consumers, meaning that maintaining a human touch will become even more important.

We firmly believe the right balance between human touch, supported by dynamic AI systems, such as our Arvato Discovery Engine (ADE), that learn to improve processes and support agents, as well as Robotic Process Automation to remove the mundane, routine tasks, are paramount to delivering the optimal end-to-end service.

It's also expected that more regulation and policies will be created around AI, so keeping up to date with how this evolves and being adaptable will be key to keeping ahead of the game.

With ongoing conversations around job creation and economic stability, intensified during an election year, we're expecting to see heightened scrutiny around employment practices - specifically dedicated policy changes around 'the right to request a human'. It also serves as a message to both consumers and policymakers that your organisation is committed to employment opportunities.

As technology evolves, so do security threats. Resilience is key to ensuring airtight systems and processes that allow you to adopt new technologies, confidently and without fear of the unknown. For business continuity, this is non-negotiable. And for your customers and end users, it further enhances your reputation and increases reassurance – something an election year can hinder.

It's not just about the balance of tech and human interaction for organisations. It's also about creating a robust partner ecosystem, including SMEs, that allow you to adapt to market changes, approaching the election year with agility.

Investment in this ecosystem takes away the reliance on offshoring hundreds or thousands of seats. Roles are kept within the UK, job satisfaction is increased from the removal of the mundane, and employees can focus on what matters most – helping customers and citizens.

Positive social impact

Election years often create a flurry of policy proposals aimed at addressing societal concerns and economic growth – the increase in National Living Wage, for example. Whilst these initiatives may be well-intentioned, their implementation can have unintended consequences for businesses – particularly those in the contact centre world.

Elections can also bring digital infrastructure and connectivity issues to the fore – both from a consumer and worker perspective. Consumers need choices and options to be digitally included. Employees require upskilling and empowerment. Prioritising digital inclusion isn't just a matter of corporate social responsibility – it's a strategic imperative.

Seamless digital interactions are integral to the customer experience. Utilising inaccessible or unreliable channels, without the ability to interact with a human, hinders your ability to engage with multiple demographics of consumers and citizens. Added to this accessibility, user-friendly interfaces and support for diverse user demographics matter. Beyond this, digital disparities will limit how effective those self-service solutions are.

At ArvatoConnect, we follow the 'Four Ds' - define, design, develop, deploy. Following these steps ensures a robust framework is created, so that any transformative efforts have the strongest foundations for success. Your digital transformation is only as good as the process you have in place to achieve it.

The Four Ds allow us to understand customer and citizen needs and address them accordingly. The initial stage of defining what those needs are is key – but something which is often missed by the majority. In fact, our research shows that 84% of firms surveyed haven't trained employees on the new technologies or processes and 81% haven't gathered feedback from their customers about their current processes. How can we have a positive social impact without addressing employee, customer, and citizen needs from the get-go?

Increased data privacy or consumer protection (such as Consumer Duty changes) impose stringent compliance requirements, which demand more investment in technology and training.

When compliance requirements and operational costs increase, alongside a change in consumer buying habits (due to higher taxes, inflation, cost of living etc.), businesses begin to recalibrate their service delivery models.

By championing digital inclusion, for both employees and end users, organisations can ensure they align with consumer preferences and societal expectations, meeting new government challenges head on.

Offshoring vs onshoring

The debate between onshoring and offshoring extends beyond cost considerations – especially during an election year.

It encompasses broader socio-economic implications i.e. the emphasis on supporting the local economy, preserving UK employment, and strengthening social responsibility.

Offshoring comes with its own perils in an election year, ramping up uncertainty around their outcomes and with some of the major markets for offshoring (India, South Africa etc.) undergoing their own elections, this will only increase the challenges that exist.

Election cycles create uncertainty for employees, which places more emphasis on employee wellbeing and engagement programmes. As businesses reassess their outsourcing objectives in 2024 and beyond, we're predicting a renewed focus on this.

Transparency, inclusion, and value will provide employees with that level of reassurance they deserve – especially during turbulent times. A place where they can voice their opinions and concerns, shaping the way forward.

For ArvatoConnect, our highly effective employee initiatives, such as The Big Debate, our employee-led forum with our CEO, which gives colleagues a platform to suggest improvements and help shape business decisions; Town Halls, a chance for employees at every level to hear business updates and ask questions to our Board; and MyCreationStation, our employee-driven innovation channel, which rewards ideas and fosters a culture of 'intrapreneurship' are yielding increased employee retention (a perennial challenge in the CX industry) and helping to improve customer satisfaction scores.

Beyond the ballots

Outsourcing will continue to be a strategic imperative for organisations looking to maintain a level of operational flexibility and cost efficiency. By utilising a robust partner ecosystem, businesses can tap into diverse talent pools, increase employee retention, navigate new policies and regulations, and leverage a wide breadth of expertise.

Resilience is the name of the game when it comes to this election year. Regardless of the result, cost pressures will remain prevalent and social impact and ESG initiatives will underpin many CX and contact centre decisions.

But by prioritising human-centric approaches, keeping on top of policy changes and the regulatory landscape, and leveraging outsourcing partnerships, this election year doesn't have to be as rife with uncertainty as previously thought. Harnessing this, with the power of technology, will be the key to navigating the election year.

Staying agile and innovative will always get our vote – ensuring organisations sustain their success beyond the ballot.



CX IN THE BIGGEST ELECTION YEAR OF ALL TIME



Mike Butler, Executive – Sales and Marketing: Nutun

Global democracy has never seen a year quite like 2024. 64 countries - plus the European Union - all go to the polls this year. This is now April, so some elections have already taken place, and some may be in progress as you read this. Through the entire year though, around half of the entire population of the world will have the ability to go and cast their vote. (Source: time.com/6550920/world-elections-2024/)

This is even more impressive when you consider that democracy is not universal. There are many types of government around the world and enjoying one where you get to vote and choose your leaders is not a universal right. (Source: pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/05/14/more-than-half-of-countries-are-democratic/)

Although there are dozens of elections approaching, and they are all important for the citizens of the affected countries, I will personally be most closely watching the outcomes in South Africa, the UK, and the US.

South Africa is where the Nutun operational team is based so it is a critically important location for our business. The Government of National Unity arrived in South Africa thirty years ago this month, of course, led by President Nelson Mandela. This was a time of enormous celebration for the entire nation (Source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_South_Africa_\(1994%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_South_Africa_(1994%E2%80%93present)))

There have been many ups and downs in the past three decades, but South Africa is far stronger today than it was in the early nineties and there is now a rainbow generation of young adults who grew up after the end of apartheid.

The ANC has ruled South Africa for the entire post-apartheid era, but analysts are suggesting that this election might see the first coalition government in South Africa. Some are concerned about this, but it now feels like South Africa is mature enough to handle whatever the people decide.

I live in the UK, so it is where I personally vote, but it is also where many Nutun clients are located. The timing is not yet defined, but the election here has to be before January 2025 so it will almost certainly be later in 2024.

The situation in the UK is very unclear. The present government is generally very unpopular. They have been cutting taxes, but it has not really boosted their support. Analysts and political commentators are eager to see the election take place because the business community really just wants certainty about how the government will manage the economy.

If we believe the polls then it looks like the UK will change to new leadership soon. Although nothing can be assumed, because no matter how bad it looks for the government right now, a complete switch to the Labour Party after a landslide win by the Conservatives in 2019 would be the largest ever change in fortune inside a single political term. Will it happen?

The US is even harder to call. We know that it will now be a rerun of the previous election with Donald Trump now positioned as the Republican outsider and Joe Biden as the incumbent Democrat president. Both candidates have been criticised for their age - even many supporters would rather see a new generation of leaders as the available options. Trump appears to have fired up his popular base once again, but it's like the UK - a very unusual election and hard to call.

To my mind, what connects all these elections is that international customer experience (CX) and business process outsourcing (BPO) services will continue whatever happens. Whoever wins these elections will not dramatically impact how our business functions in the next few years - and in some scenarios might even improve it.

I think there are really three macro trends taking place in our industry that are much more significant than any of the political changes. There are a hundred changes taking place in business and technology at any one time, but these are the three I would focus on right now:

1. Cost of living in the UK and Europe

Customers in the US are feeling more positive. Inflation is fading and the predicted recession never happened. In The UK and Europe it is a different story. Consumers are still facing very high energy costs and food prices, and a decline in public services. This means that European customers are not yet ready to spend more and subsequently companies across all sectors will be embracing any measures they can to reduce customer service costs - exploring options such as South Africa will be hard to avoid for any UK-based company that wants to remain competitive in a challenging environment.

2. Technology Innovation

When ChatGPT launched 18 months ago there was a wave of experts telling us that customer service was finished - the bots could now handle everything. They were wrong. Technology and innovation is important and customer self-service is getting better, but the real story at present is how to blend technology with the human touch - how can artificial intelligence offer help to agents inside the contact centre and also customers too?

3. Major BPO mergers creating a mid-size focus

In 2023 we saw six of the largest BPO companies merge to become three. Their strategy is to get bigger, grow volumes, go global. I don't think this is what most clients want. I have never met anyone who wants a service partner that is so enormous that they are the 233rd most important customer. Mid-size BPO companies with the scale to deliver, but the ability to also be agile and innovative, this is where the real growth is coming in the 2020s.

Managing customers went global a long time ago. Elections and how governments approach international business is important for our industry, but I don't see any immediate dangers to CX and BPO from the elections in the three main countries I am focused on.

The American CX analyst Stephen Loynd has written a book called 'The Widening Turn' that is about to be published. I haven't read it yet, but from all the online comments it appears to be a deep exploration of how international relations - and conflicts - affect the flow of international services like CX. It really looks like a book for the beach in summer 2024.

What all business leaders want is more certainty over interest rates, energy costs, and the cost of financing. 2024 is already looking better than 2023, and the immediate post-pandemic period, so we are on an upward trajectory.

The sky truly is the limit for CX in the 2020s. I've never been involved in this industry at a time when it felt like the possibilities are so endless. Change creates opportunity and we should be embracing it.

STEERING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY: STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH AND RESILIENCE IN THE BPO INDUSTRY

Clayton Williams, CEO: CapeBPO



Empowering Growth and Resilience: Navigating Uncertain Times in the BPO Industry

As a non-profit organisation headquartered in Cape Town, our vision at CapeBPO is clear: to catalyse job creation and foster economic growth within the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector.

In 2024, amidst what may be heralded as "The Election Year," the global landscape is characterised by unprecedented uncertainty. With national elections slated in at least 64 countries, including pivotal nations like the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and South Africa (SA), the ramifications hold profound significance for businesses worldwide.

In this dynamic environment, it becomes imperative for the BPO industry, particularly in Cape Town, to chart a course that prioritizes resilience, innovation, and sustainable growth.



Embracing Technological Advancements for Strategic Leverage

In an era fraught with uncertainty, technology emerges as a potent enabler for the BPO industry. As a non-operational entity, our role at CapeBPO lies in fostering an ecosystem conducive to innovation and growth. Embracing AI solutions, notably conversational AI, holds the promise of unlocking new pathways for success.

Conversational AI represents a paradigm shift in customer interactions, offering the potential for personalised and efficient services at scale. By advocating for the adoption of AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants within the BPO ecosystem, we can facilitate the augmentation of service delivery capabilities. It's important to note that while embracing technology, our front-line staff remain integral in providing a more personable and professional service to customers, leveraging their expertise and interpersonal skills to build meaningful connections and foster trust.

Strategic Imperatives for Growth and Success in 2024

1. Facilitating Specialisation and Niche Development: In times of uncertainty, differentiation becomes paramount. We can play a pivotal role in facilitating the development of specialized and niche services within the BPO sector. By fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among industry stakeholders, we can help identify emerging opportunities for specialization, empowering operational partners to carve a unique identity and attract high-value clientele.

2. Advocating for Diversification and Adaptation:

Diversity breeds resilience. We can advocate for the diversification of service offerings among operational partners, encouraging the exploration of new verticals and markets. By promoting agility and adaptability, we empower partners to pivot in response to shifting client demands and market dynamics, thereby mitigating risks associated with economic uncertainty.

3. Investing in Talent Elevation and Development:

Talent is the cornerstone of the BPO industry. In uncertain times, investment in talent elevation and development is paramount. We can champion initiatives aimed at nurturing a skilled workforce, including training programs, skills development initiatives, and mentorship opportunities. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional growth, we empower operational partners to drive innovation and deliver exceptional service experiences.

4. Advocating for Flexible Operating Models: Agility is the essence of resilience.

We can advocate for the adoption of flexible operating models within the BPO ecosystem, facilitating rapid adaptation to changing market conditions. Whether through remote work arrangements, agile staffing solutions, or hybrid service delivery models, we empower partners to navigate uncertainty with confidence, maintaining operational resilience and continuity.



We must champion innovation, resilience, and collaboration to navigate uncertainty and drive sustainable growth within the BPO ecosystem.



5. Fostering Collaborative Ecosystems:

Collaboration drives progress. We can spearhead efforts to foster collaborative ecosystems within the BPO sector, bringing together industry stakeholders, academic institutions, government bodies, and regulatory agencies. By facilitating knowledge exchange, resource-sharing, and collective problem-solving, we drive synergistic outcomes, propelling the BPO industry towards sustainable growth and impact.

In conclusion, 2024 presents both challenges and opportunities for the BPO industry, particularly in Cape Town. We must champion innovation, resilience, and collaboration to navigate uncertainty and drive sustainable growth within the BPO ecosystem.

By leveraging technological advancements and empowering front-line staff to provide personable and professional service, we can catalyse positive change and create lasting impact for the communities we serve.



FROM DISRUPTION TO DIFFERENTIATION: GEN AI'S ROLE IN RESHAPING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Deepak Gupta, Chief Business Officer: WNS



In the current landscape of geopolitical and economic uncertainty, where concerns about the cost of living persist, how are businesses delivering exceptional customer experience? Gen AI presents the solution.

This year marks a historic milestone in global politics: nearly half the world's population (49 percent) will go to the polls across 64 countries, including the US, India and the EU. The outcomes of these elections are uncertain, introducing a level of unpredictability that complicates planning and strategy for businesses worldwide. Coupled with international tensions, fragile consumer confidence and technological disruptions, the current business environment is rife with challenges.

In today's uncertain economic climate, prioritising customers and enhancing their experience is crucial to drive growth, improve profitability and bolster resilience. By focusing on customer loyalty and grabbing a greater share of the wallet, companies can navigate the challenging economic landscape more effectively.

The key to delivering consistent and superlative customer experience lies in technological innovation and investing in people. A growing number of enterprises recognise the potential of Generative AI (Gen AI) in transforming their customer service. (Source: <https://www.wns.com/perspectives/reports/reportdetail/1187/generative-ai-in-cxm-assessing-enterprise-readiness-for-this-disruptive-transformation>)

The [Everest Group's Generative AI in CXM survey report, supported by WNS](#), reveals that “enabling personalisation and customisation of customer interactions” is a key driver for Gen AI adoption for over half (55%) of the leaders and decision-makers surveyed. For 43%, it is “increasing efficiencies and improving automation in CXM processes,” while just over a third (34%) see it as a means of “enhancing agent experience.” (Source: [wns.com/perspectives/reports/reportdetail/1187/generative-ai-in-cxm-assessing-enterprise-readiness-for-this-disruptive-transformation](https://www.wns.com/perspectives/reports/reportdetail/1187/generative-ai-in-cxm-assessing-enterprise-readiness-for-this-disruptive-transformation))

Preliminary applications reveal that Gen AI can empower customer support staff by speedily delivering pertinent information through intelligent tools, such as agent assistance and recommendations, improving productivity and reducing turnaround times. It can also enable bots to deliver more personalized and smart responses. Leveraging Gen AI to analyse past and ongoing interactions thus aids businesses in customizing their services and replies to individual consumer preferences and behaviours.

This cognitive support can free agents to deal with more complex, value-added tasks where human experience and skill are vital. In fact, around 80% of the respondents in the Everest Group survey expressed confidence that Gen AI could improve the operational efficiency of their Customer Experience Management (CXM).

The survey uncovered that companies are leveraging Gen AI to automate, prioritize and categorize helpdesk tickets. Additionally, it is being used to enhance real-time interactions with chatbots, personalize e-mail responses and foster social media interactions. Gen AI can also facilitate sentiment analysis to comprehend customer emotions and satisfaction.

Looking ahead, we will see customer experience venture into new territory with the advent of product co-creation with consumers. Gen AI-powered shopping assistants will browse on behalf of shoppers, while in-store environments will adapt to individual customers, offering distinctive and immersive retail experiences.

However, despite these myriad potential benefits, many enterprises – approximately a quarter of those in the Everest Group survey – lacked the know-how to initiate their Gen AI journey. This underscores the importance of awareness and education programs, as well as collaboration with industry experts and specialist providers.

To fully leverage the transformative potential of Gen AI in CXM, businesses must address several challenges. These include acquiring the capabilities and infrastructure needed to create high-quality training data and address concerns regarding privacy, security and regulatory compliance.

The Everest Group survey revealed that just one-third (32%) of the businesses covered were adequately equipped, internally, to create the Large Language Models (LLMs) needed for Gen AI. Furthermore, just over a third (34%) have the necessary data storage (e.g., vector databases, data lakes) and extraction capabilities.



We will see customer experience venture into new territory with the advent of product co-creation with consumers



Customer experience leaders must also focus on talent: 40% of the survey respondents identified cultural inertia as a barrier to effective Gen AI CXM adoption. Hence, leaders must initiate a cultural shift to enable existing teams to accept Gen AI and fully embrace its potential. Establishing partnerships with third parties allows organizations to tap into external expertise and address internal skills gaps.

Despite the ongoing macroeconomic uncertainty, one fact remains changed – businesses that prioritise their customers are poised to thrive. Implemented swiftly and effectively, Gen AI solutions offer a way to elevate customer experience, surpassing current expectations and extending the organization's reach ever further.

However, it is crucial for businesses to approach Gen AI implementation with caution and seek expert guidance to maximize its potential and minimize risks. While Gen AI technology offers unprecedented opportunities to enhance customer experience across industries, businesses must tread carefully to avoid potential pitfalls. With the right strategy, infrastructure and talent in place, Gen AI can drive significant improvements in customer satisfaction, loyalty and business performance.



GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES AND THE FUTURE OF SERVICE EXCELLENCE: EMBRACING DATA, AUTOMATION, AND COLLABORATION IN 2024

Nicola Collister and Simon Norrie: Custerian



It Is Easy to Think the Uncertainties We Face Are Local – But in Reality, They Are Often Global

I have been involved in Service Transformation & Delivery across multiple sectors and continents, the later point often for the same organisations where it would not be untypical to be working across in house, outsourced, onshore, near shore, offshore and office and home-based models – SO much so that I coined the phrase ‘Martini Service’ many years ago. So, a bit like death & taxes, the only real certainty is uncertainty – especially as we can now consider 2024 to be the year the world gets to vote, setting the agenda for the next 4 to 5 years for many of the economies that we work in and with to deliver our outcomes.

BUT - Can We Stop Talking About When the Great Service/CX Revolution Will Land

Personally, I don't share the view that we are finally entering the time of CX/EX (Customer Experience /Employee Experience – better framed as People Experience though). I say this because I don't believe in BIG BANG solutions. I do, however, believe in the power of people to deliver transformational change. - IF - they are supported and directed well so that they can adopt a process of continuous improvement, so that they can deliver the outcomes the brand promised to its' Customers, as efficiently and effectively as possible.



I do, however, believe in the power of people to deliver transformational change.



HOWEVER – We Are Seeing Two Very Significant Enablers (And a lot of Snake Oil)

OK, so I have been there and got the T-Shirt, so I know it's hard to avoid clutches of the ‘Silver Bullet’ solution peddlers when the CEO is demanding yet more cost reduction (and the rest of the C suite keep asking when you are putting TikTok onto the Omnichannel plan), but there are two reasons:

1. Data – Specifically what is happening due to ‘shifting’ to the cloud.
2. Automation – The real bit of AI/ Large Language capability

The combination of these two, in this order because without great data in a highly curated and stable/single truth layer you CANNOT reliably take advantage of what is coming with the advances in AI.

ENABLER – We Need to Free People up to do What They Are Paid For

And this is not administration or checking in across 17 systems to get a complete customer picture. Or spending 45 minutes per colleague collating information so you have a 10-minute chat about how they are doing.

This is what you need to have on your radar as a creator and deliverer of Service Experience. Be that internally to other Colleagues, or externally to create competitive advantage.

Because with well curated Data and Automation that can learn from the IoT, but then be deployed safely and securely on this internal single voice of Data truth, you have a very powerful tool that can help Colleagues spend less time trying to work out how to do stuff, and significantly more time doing it.

FOCUS – Not on The Systems You Use. But on Being Systematic

Systems rarely if ever sort out problems. They often become whipping horses in an ever more additive array of screens to be viewed or data/insight to be challenged. If we are honest that is often because we have not been clear on our requirements (that Silver Bullet thing again).

Now that your CIO/CTO/CTIO is 'clouding' a lot of systems though, you can and should shift your attention from what is wrong with your current array of tech and be systematic in identifying & removing wasted time and effort. Build this into your day-to-day ways of working with your technology support. Talk about Outcomes to be achieved, not the systems you need to deliver them.

TECHNOLOGY - Be Collaborative with Your Tech Teams. Not Combative

So often I find a level of distrust (often mutual by the way) between the Service & Technology teams, but if you are going to adapt and thrive using Data & Automation as the levers of a better Service Experience that keeps you ahead of the competition then you need to face into this.

And the biggest piece of advice I will give is that most technology teams are far more absolute in their thinking that virtually every other function. Perhaps this is because they deal in absolutes when in the mists of programming. Whereas Service tends to deal with the vagaries of human nature and customer demands. Spend time thinking, talking, and working on how to make the most of each team(s) strengths and minimise the effects of each other's 'weaknesses'.

ANYTHING ELSE – Hybrid Working. A Work in Progress for Most of Us

I have not gone into this because it is really this simple. It is the most significant impact that will affect everything from your Culture to Your Operating Model. It is a Leadership level issue and has its roots bound in the fact 5 generations are now in work together.

You don't even get to describe the significance of it in an article, let alone offer solutions for it. What I will say is Service should inherently be ahead of this curve (though it often lags because what can be measured most, tends to get held close).

So, if the company is talking about Hybrid (versus getting on with it – because it will take time to land) then you should be in that discussion. If it is not having that chat, then you should be stepping up to the plate and leading it.

BUT – Have your Guard Up. The Snake Oil Sellers Are Still Out There

For example, 80% plus of AI solutions are existing Automations. Might be a bit faster and more capable, but automations, nevertheless. Just reflect on this. Most current systems have not been built from the ground up to be integrated nor single sources of data and they tend to have expanded the capability by buying and merging specific applications.

Now there is nothing wrong with this as such, but it does mean that a) they may well have a lot going on behind the scenes that results on more expensive configuration than you expect and b) means there is nothing wrong with you taking the same approach and knitting best of breed and/or functionally appropriate 'Apps' together.

ADAPTING TO UNCERTAINTY: KEY STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN THE BPO AND CX INDUSTRY IN 2024

Rob Dermott, Client Solutions Director: CCA Recruitment Group



We are constantly meeting with clients and talking about their challenges and opportunities to overcome whatever 2024 may hold. There are many deep seated issues that are spoken about that no election is likely overcome, at least in the short term.

The market for 2024 will still have challenges but there have been positive signals within the UK through Q1, not least with interest rates looking like they have peaked which means that it is much easier for both businesses to plan and invest.

Globally there are international conflicts and supply chain issues which will still impact and obviously although Covid-19 is under control its impacts are still felt in how we work and live. Energy prices have also reduced again and are at a third of their peak.

So, 2024 will be an interesting year globally with the potential seismic political changes on the horizon, however we are not sure that will have immediate impact on how individuals feel. Even though the pandemic started four years ago and caused a much larger impact (than any political changes) to CX and how that is delivered by organisations.

So, what are our observations that this year holds to ensure organisations deliver a positive outcome through these uncertain times whilst continue delivering great CX.

Clients are indicating confidence is returning to hiring plans but are often unaware of how the market has moved in terms of salaries and candidate availability It's an area we have been able to provide significant insight into. Most observations for 2024 talk about AI & Technology, forgetting about the people – which is the most important asset a business has and as people focussed organisation, we've included those observations:

Ways of Working – It is four years since the way people work shifted so for those that have not already done this, some real decisions need to be made by business on future ways of working. There are no further excuses on this whether it be poor customer service / support (as a few organisations still blame long call waiting times for) or how the workforce works (home/hybrid/office). It is time to move forward with certainty.



However, there is some complexity within this. We have had direct feedback from clients that offer homeworking - certainly for front line agent that this way of working is positive for lower income workers during the 'cost of living' crisis. As an industry we know that many of our front line workers are on lower incomes, so by saving commuting costs has a positive impact on these workers. This can reduce staff attrition and absence which together can ensure that customer experience standards are maintained or improved. But, on the flip side of homeworking, there is still a way to go for organisations to ensure a true blanket business culture and effective remote management permeates though all workers wherever they work.

This is a huge challenge that many organisations that we speak to continue to have and can have both positive and negative impacts on attrition. So, investing in re-establishing company culture is something we have heard organisations speak about in 2024.

Real Incomes Rising – with the recent minimum wage increases per hour rates for most workers are £11.44+ (1st April 2024), this can cause a drag on organisations investing and we know it has had an impact on some businesses which have been lower payers for their frontline staff. It is positive for those lower income workers.

Continued focus on D, E&I – clients are continuing to focus on this to ensure that leadership more closely reflects diversity, equality and inclusion and provides opportunity for all within.

AI, Insight & Technology – AI powered customer service is set to really take hold. Introducing and embedding this technology effectively will be the challenge. This will be coupled with hyper-personalisation of customer engagement and provision of real-time analytics for continuous improvement.

These improvements should generate additional revenue from those organisations that implement it successfully. We know that many organisations are also looking to invest further in change & transformation programmes this year which should lead to improvements across customer delivery channels.

Data & Security – further scrutiny and tightening in this area as 'scams' get more prolific and data breaches are a continual threat. The feedback from our clients is this is really an area of concern for all.

Wellbeing & Engagement – all changes and operational delivery need a motivated and engaged workforce and as indicated by the Recruitment & Retention section above and Gallup poll this will need to improve in 2024. Investment in Engagement programmes & wellbeing strategies to increase employee engagement. According to a Gallup survey last year only 10% of UK workers were fully engaged this does have an impact on how Customer Service is delivered. We know that Employee Experience & Customer Experience delivery levels are interlinked. Investing in that will reduce costs such as recruitment to allow investment or savings.

Social Responsibility & Sustainability – data across the industry shows that business that integrate ethical principles into their contact centres report around 15% improvement in brand image and around a 20% increase in candidate attraction and similar for employee engagement.

So, in 2024, as in any other year, it will be a holistic approach to driving success and innovation across contact centres and CX; people, process and technology go hand in hand whatever any election outcome.

NAVIGATING 2024: SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES IN A YEAR OF GLOBAL CHANGE AND CX TRANSFORMATION

Jonathan Shawcross, Chief Growth Officer: Concentrix



2024 is shaping up to be a historic and important political year, with regional conflicts and national elections bringing about large-scale global change. This year should be the biggest election year in history, with an estimated 76 elections being held in countries including the US, UK, India and Taiwan. Having steered a path through a pandemic and cost of living crisis, the CX sector is used to dealing with change, so what are the things to watch out for and where are the opportunities to drive success?

Global events will impact online spaces, along with consumers' trust of them

Strong convictions often lead to intense, potentially violent, reactions. Online platforms should expect a surge in emotive and reactionary content being posted this year – often bringing businesses into the discussion. This will include propaganda, images of violence, discriminatory content, threats and AI driven misinformation.

To face such a context and to protect users, the only solution is for businesses to be well prepared. An increase in content posted online requires the mobilisation of greater moderation capacities to identify and remove harmful and problematic content. The way brands react to this expected wave of content will have an impact on users' safety online, and ultimately on the brand's reputation.



Companies are facing a demand from consumers for more content that's personalised.



Empowering people with AI

As the world seeks to resolve its major conflicts, one of the other significant challenges it faces is the rapidly emerging role of AI and how it will impact consumers and economies. From a CX perspective, companies are facing a demand from consumers for more content that's personalised, and they need a lot of data to personalise the content, the messaging, and the experience overall. That means that, increasingly, there's a need for employees to have the skillset required to interact with generative AI. It doesn't sound hard to type something into a prompt to get the result you want, but it does require a specific skillset to ask the right questions to get the right output - and companies are hiring people with this skill.

This means good things for employees. Automating menial and repetitive tasks frees employees to focus on the more important work. They'll be more productive and efficient, learn new skills, and have growth and development opportunities – which will enable them to add more value and seek greater rewards.



The digital skills gap is widening

As politicians seek re-election based on their ability to generate new skills and new jobs for those skills, becoming a digital-first company may be harder than companies think. Workers worldwide aren't well equipped with the resources to learn the digital skills they need to succeed. And workers aren't the only ones feeling left out of the digital economy. That skills gap could result in \$8.5 trillion being left on the table by companies globally.¹

The ever-expanding sea of digital tools presents both an opportunity and a challenge. 2024 should be earmarked as the year for rationalisation, with a focus on reducing the variety of tech solutions that you use as a business, eliminating peripheral ones, and maximising the use of existing, more strategic platforms.

Leaders and Executives are under pressure to navigate change

Hyper-change is here to stay – not just in geopolitics but also in business. As technological innovation and market shifts occur at an ever-faster pace, 40% of global CEOs are under pressure, wondering if their businesses will survive the next decade. The pressure is on, and this could be the year many executives face a wake-up call in their industry.

The time to act is now!

The goal posts are moving, and the CX industry can't afford to sit on the side-lines waiting for things to return to where they were in 2023. Whether it's leveraging generative AI for the value of customers, or rapid investment in driving up core, digital CX capability, 2024 is the year to actively seek the next big thing to drive CX differentiation.

To be relevant in the next decade, being a fast follower won't cut it anymore – brave leadership to break new ground will be key. Not just at the ballot box, but in the Boardrooms and offices of CX Executives worldwide.

1. "The \$8.5 Trillion Talent Shortage," Michael Franzino, Alan Guarino, and Yannick Binvel, Korn Ferry. (Source link: <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/this-week-in-leadership/talent-crunch-future-of-work>)
2. "How AI Can Help Leaders Make Better Decisions Under Pressure," Mark Purdy and A. Mark Williams, Harvard Business Review, October 26, 2023. (Source link: <https://hbr.org/2023/10/how-ai-can-help-leaders-make-better-decisions-under-pressure>)



AN UNCERTAIN BUSINESS CLIMATE IS THE RIGHT TIME FOR CX INNOVATION



Nadine Stumpf : Yoummday

2024 is already shaping up to be an unusual year in business, economics, politics, and sport. Europe is hosting the Euro football championship in Germany, and the Olympic Games will be in Paris this year. Europe also had the warmest February ever recorded - a lot is happening.

There are more elections taking place globally than in a single year. At least 64 different countries, plus the European Union, will head to the polls, representing about 49% of the world's population.

Some were entirely predictable, like Russia. Still, some are unpredictable and consequential for many corporate leaders who want to know how their business should plan for the coming years. The UK and US elections are both good examples of this.

Deloitte has published data indicating that many financial executives still feel uncertain about the future. The US has avoided the predicted recession, but growth is still slow in Europe and the UK. Deloitte's Chief Economist, Ian Stewart, summarised the situation by saying, "CFOs start 2024 in a positive mood, but one tempered by high levels of uncertainty."

Deloitte found that 50% of respondents rated the level of external financial and economic uncertainty facing their business as high or very high in Q4 2023, up from 46% in Q3 but down from 61% in Q4 2022.

So, the economy could be better in most places, but it's also not great. Around half of CFOs think that this economic uncertainty and lack of confidence may affect their business this year and into 2025.

What can be done?

Adversity - or the potential for adversity - can be a time for innovation. It can free companies from traditional planning. The danger presented by economic uncertainty can lead to new thinking. But innovation feels risky, so what are the most common actions taken by business leaders when faced with uncertainty?

1. Focus on customers: The first and most important step is to take action to retain the customers you already have and to push any levers that can engage new customers—start focusing far more on what customers are saying.
2. Automate: look at your business processes. What can be automated? What can you do right now to make the existing team more productive?
3. Reduce red tape: Explore your bureaucracy and start slashing it where it is preventing agile and flexible decision-making. In uncertain times, you need to move fast.
4. Work with partners: you almost certainly have a group of suppliers helping you deliver for your customers. Talk to them. Build a plan together.
5. Create a contingency plan: Reduce costs where possible and start scenario planning — how bad could it get, and what might trigger a recovery?



At least 64 different countries, plus the European Union, will head to the polls, representing about 49% of the world's population.



I summarise this approach as customers, cost, and cooperation. You need your internal team firing on all cylinders, aware that the market isn't strong, so they need to step up. You need partners to suggest new ideas and innovation. You need to automate and reduce cost wherever possible, but most of all, you need to double down on your customer focus.

Whatever you do about containing costs, exploring innovation, or working better with partners, your approach to customers has to lead when there is uncertainty in the business environment.

This is when your customer service team needs to demonstrate their value. Interactions with customers can generate additional sales, develop loyalty, and generate advocacy - where customers recommend your products to their friends and family. So, what are the main issues or blockers that need to be addressed?

Employee attrition is the single most significant issue for most customer service leaders today. Disengaged team members are absent more often and frequently quit. Some contact centre managers need to hire and train new recruits constantly - just to stand still.

This is not great for the customer experience — imagine the difference between talking to an agent who is interested in and cares about fixing a problem and another one who is just watching the clock and waiting for the end of their shift.

This research shows that only 27% of agents are highly engaged, 10% are employed, 57% are indifferent to working in the call centre, and 5% are highly disengaged. That is around two-thirds of agents who don't really care about what they are doing or are actively negative about their role. (Source Link: <https://www.sqmgroup.com/resources/library/blog/agent-engagement-remains-low>).

The answer isn't rocket science. Just think about what anyone wants from their job. The immediate answer is cash, but we have all been in careers that we disliked and have been prepared to earn the same, or less, to escape.

This is about more than just the amount that the agents are paid. It is about how most contact centres are organised. The company defines where and when the agents have to work and which products or brands they are going to support. The agents don't have much control over their work.

What if this could be turned upside down? Allow the agents to work from home, let them choose their own hours, and let them select the products or brands they want to support.

How would this affect the employee experience, let alone the customer experience? It's worth asking why contact centres have such bad attrition anyway. Why do people quit their jobs? Sometimes, it is for career advancement or because of the pay, but control and flexibility are prevalent reasons. In a Pew Research study reasons such as childcare issues, no flexibility, wanting to move home, too many hours, and too few hours are all listed in the top ten reasons why people quit.

Job Satisfaction

- Flexibility: work/life*
- Satisfactory Salary*
- Job Security*
- Work Itself*
- Career Advancement*
- Working Conditions*



Taking a more flexible approach to managing your customer service team can resolve all these issues immediately. It gives agency and flexibility to your customer service team so they are engaged. They are interested in their work and they are giving their best.

Instead of two-thirds of the agents being disengaged and not really bothered, you could switch to an entirely engaged and interested team because they have chosen your brand, chosen these working hours, and decided to stay and work from home.

Not every job is perfect, but some contact centres replace their entire teams every year. How does that lead to a great customer experience?

In an uncertain business climate, all companies must focus on getting closer to their customers - improving the customer experience. This is only possible by applying new thinking to how the customer service process is organised. If you are not offering more control and flexibility to the customer service agents, then is it a surprise that they keep quitting?

Building a team that enjoys their job and wants to help customers could be the key to survival for your business in any period of economic uncertainty - and when good times return, it will feel even better to have a customer service team on board that really enjoys their job.



Building a team that enjoys their job and wants to help customers could be the key to survival for your business in any period of economic uncertainty.



EMPOWERING FEMALE VOTERS - SIMPLE STEPS TO PROMOTE DEI DURING ELECTION SEASON



Paula Kennedy Garcia: Global CX BPO Leader

As the 2024 elections loom, BPO leaders find themselves immersed in critical assessments of future costs, resource stability, legislative policy, and short-term forecasting. Amidst these pressing considerations, there's a crucial but often overlooked aspect: the integration of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies. Specifically, our support for female employees to exercise their fundamental right to vote on polling day.

The significance of the female vote cannot be overstated, echoing the imperative of an equally inclusive government to ensure legislation and policies align with the populace's views and needs.

In the UK, recent elections have underscored the formidable influence of female voters. Statistics from the last election reveal that women comprised 52% of the electorate, and typically wield substantial sway over electoral outcomes as the late swing vote. Despite this numerical strength, women remain glaringly underrepresented in political decision-making bodies, with only 34% of parliamentary seats held by women. Consider just what this means as new legislation and policies are created, debated and passed for the nation, not least in a tech led future. (Source: House of Commons Library - "Women in the House of Commons: Statistics," November 24, 2021)

Women remain glaringly underrepresented in political decision-making bodies, with only 34% of parliamentary seats held by women.

Conversely, South Africa's electoral landscape presents a slightly elevated perspective on female participation. Recent elections evidenced a higher level of female voter engagement, with women constituting 55% of the voting population, however, significant disparities persist in parliamentary representation, with women holding only 43% of seats in the National Assembly. (Source: Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa - "2019 National and Provincial Elections," May 2019; Inter-Parliamentary Union - "Women in National Parliaments," January 2022)

Critical lobbying and campaign work by bodies like Centenary Action's initiative for equal parliaments by 2028 underscores the urgency of achieving gender parity in governance. This necessitates not only increased female voter turnout but also enhanced representation in elected bodies where the system remains stacked against women who face barriers and challenges that are even higher for those from ethnic minority backgrounds or those who have a disability.

And there remain persistent barriers that hinder women from fully exercising their civic rights. A significant hurdle lies in the intersection of work and caregiving responsibilities. Unlike many male counterparts who might conveniently vote before or after work, numerous women grapple with the dual role of employment, carer, parent and household duties. Consequently, female voter turnout often lags behind that of men, perpetuating gender imbalances in political participation.

Business leaders, particularly within the BPO industry with its significant female representation, hold a pivotal role in addressing this issue with simple advanced consideration:

1. Plan ahead with regional WFM teams to incorporate flexible working schedules that include time to visit the polling station.
2. Take time to consider the needs for childcare during polling day, especially where schools are used as polling stations and children may be at home.
3. Communicate with your teams well in advance, so that employees can co-ordinate their time, request PTO or make shift changes.

As we approach the pivotal elections of 2024, the call to action is clear: prioritise the challenges and work-life balance of the female workforce and provide flexibility for them to exercise their right to vote. This support not only reinforces the organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion but also has the potential to significantly impact historic turnout and election results. By championing diversity, fostering inclusivity, and embracing innovation, this small yet significant consideration can contribute to a marked difference in election outcomes amidst wider economic uncertainty and geopolitical shifts.

” prioritise the challenges and work-life balance of the female workforce and provide flexibility for them to exercise their right to vote. ”



LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY: HOW CX, AI, AND LEADERSHIP WILL SHAPE 2024



Michelle Ansell - Managing Partner: Douglas Jackson

It is true that CEOs have seen a significant shifts in where they view the risks to growth for their business. Geopolitics and political uncertainty are now seen as the greatest risk to the growth of their business according to research by KPMG. These uncertainties affect investment, hiring, and strategic planning within the industry.

The same political and economic shifts could also affect customer behaviour, preferences, and expectations, something we seem to already be grappling with due to changes in recent years.

Research also showed that 70% were investing heavily in Gen AI as their competitive edge. Similarly, Accenture conducted a survey among 2,300 global leaders, and an overwhelming 97% of them believe that generative AI will be transformative for their companies and industries. Generative AI is seen as a game-changer technology worthy of long-term investment. However, ethical risks and an uncertain regulatory framework surrounding AI bring caution.

When you get down to the reality of today and speaking with people in the organisations, across Tech, Operations and or, Customer, we hear a mixed response and whilst some have trialled and had some success, many are still thinking about how, or what, the reality is we know that when it comes to multiple sources and sets of Data, AI will struggle.

AI hallucinations and decision making are also a continued concern at this time. It seems that the majority see it is a helpful virtual assistant for the near future as opposed to a complete solution. Although longer term, 3-5 years from now we could be in a very different place.

The Customer Contact environment is said to be one of the highest impact areas for the development of generative AI. There is an estimated 4% of the UK population employed in nearly 6,000 contact centres and if we look at the growth and change of the Customer Experience roles: Journey, Insight, Research, Design, Strategy, Transformation etc then the numbers will be much more.

The industry has been talking about the loss of low-level high-volume transactions and the 'super agent' for many years. AI certainly has the potential to finally bring this prediction about, but we are yet to see the development of these 'super agent' roles and functions and then we need to consider how they will be managed and led and this is a major consideration for one and all.

We also have a problem with leadership. Or let's say a lack of good leadership.

Almost 8 in 10 employees are promoted into a management position without any management training and many of our leaders are spending up to 80% of their time on the poor performers, the bottom 20% in their teams. Imagine if we could reverse this and they were spending that time on their top performers and raising up our average performers instead?

In this **'Why Most New Managers Fail And How To Prevent It'** article by Forbes, '60% of new managers fail within the first 24 months in their new role, according to [research from CEB Global](#). That's a staggering number, and the consequences of those failures reverberate throughout the organisation, often with a long-lasting impact. (Source: <https://news.cebglobal.com/press-releases?item=67148>)

Managers have an outsized influence on their team members while being key players in nurturing the organisation's culture. When a transitioning leader is struggling, their direct reports perform 15% worse on average than those who report to a high-performing manager. They're also 20% likelier to leave the organisation or be disengaged, according to the Gartner consulting firm.

For me, it all comes down to people and leadership, better training, development, engagement and communication. Any technological change must be driven and improved through the voices of the customer and employee for a business to truly succeed, the AI or tech on it's own will only exacerbate certain issues. I hope that we can learn from the mistakes of the past, where many organisations were forced into technological changes they had not considered before, or plans in these areas were vastly accelerated and we know that some of these companies are now paying the price with ill thought out strategies which left out the employee and or customer centred design.

We know there is no silver bullet when it comes to tech, that very often the shiny new platform and promises fail to deliver easily what was expected, we have seen issues from this far and wide.



When a transitioning leader is struggling, their direct reports perform 15% worse on average than those who report to a high-performing manager.



We have been through some tricky years and business in the part seem to still be grappling with many of the challenges we have seen. That said, investment is starting to open up especially in X-tech companies and therefore hiring in sectors which have been doing less so in recent times, the X-tech sector typically covers those that we used to know as Fintech, Insurtech, Edtech etc and it is not just about digitalisation and process optimisation - something we have seen for some years but about the disruptive way of understanding business models, adjusting to the demands and needs of today's consumers and solving them through market proposals in which technology is pivotal.

Those who are more likely to bounce back stronger than most, 9% of companies according to the Harvard Business Review look at Innovation and investment, new products, services and technology which meet the ever-evolving needs of their customers. They invest in attracting and retaining top leadership talent, who are proven to drive innovation and productivity.

They support Quality and Customer Experience initiatives, cutting costs in these areas, whilst offering short term gains can lead to compromised quality, which in turn churns customers. Happy customers become loyal advocates and drive more profitability and growth.

CEO's need to have a clear understanding of their customer base, market trends and the competitive landscape. They need to develop a strategy across customer acquisition, loyalty and retention that is both effective and efficient, maximising revenue while keeping costs under control and they need to be able to hire and grow, good, if not great leaders.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES AMIDST POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY: STRATEGIES FOR CX AND CONTACT CENTRES IN 2024

Martin Newman – Founder: The Customer First Group



The impending elections in the US and the UK undoubtedly bring political uncertainty, which in turn is likely to affect consumer confidence and could impact spending in the short-term. This has ramifications for retailers and brands in the US and UK and will come at a time just as the economic climate was looking as though it was turning around to a more positive outlook. However, this presents potential opportunities for the contact centre and customer experience (CX) sector to provide further support to retailers and other consumer facing organisations to adapt and innovate to maintain growth and ensure success. There are several strategies and approaches for navigating these uncertain times.

Digital Transformation and Automation can play a key role as an enabler at the heart of driving efficiencies, better outcomes for customers and increased profitability:

1. Enhanced Self-Service Options:

Organisations can implement more sophisticated self-service options through AI-powered chatbots and knowledge bases. This not only improves efficiency but also caters to the growing preference amongst some customers for quick, autonomous service interactions.

2. Automation and AI:

Leveraging AI for predictive analytics can help in understanding customer behaviour and preferences, allowing for more personalised experiences. We've been talking about personalisation for 25 years. But a tiny % of retailers offer this to customers.

Automation of routine tasks frees up human agents to handle more complex queries, enhancing overall customer satisfaction.

My most important ROI is Return on Inspiration. Therefore, investing in Employee Experience (EX), can be the cornerstone for both short-term and longer-term performance and success:

1. Remote Work Flexibility:

While I'm a fan of having teams working collaboratively in the office, there is no question that the shift towards remote and hybrid work models has shown to have a significant impact on employee satisfaction and retention. As we've learned from our days in lockdown, by providing tools and technologies that support remote work, contact centres can maintain operational efficiency regardless of external uncertainties.

2. Training and Development:

A focus on providing continuous training programmes, learning and development and upskilling, can equip employees with the skills needed to navigate complex customer interactions, especially in times of uncertainty when customer queries may be more nuanced or sensitive.



Focusing on inputs rather than outputs and building resilience through customer Insights:

1.Customer Data Analytics:

Utilising data analytics to gain insights into customer behaviour and sentiment can help businesses anticipate changes in consumer confidence and adjust their strategies accordingly. It's never been more important than now to listen to the voice of the customer (VoC). We can no longer be confident that whatever we decide to offer customers by way of products or services will be successful. We need to listen to customers and take account of their aspirations and requirements.

2.Agile Response Strategies:

Being able to quickly adapt to changes in consumer sentiment or behaviour is crucial. This agility can be facilitated by a robust feedback loop where customer insights directly inform service improvements and innovations. Implement a solution where you capture feedback daily from customers based on their interactions across all your channels and touchpoints. One of the most effective business turnarounds was grounded in the voice of the customer. Dreams, the largest bed, and bedding retailer in the UK went from a £50m annual loss and almost being bankrupt to selling the business for nearly £600m five years later by capturing customer feedback on products, people, and service and continually implementing improvements.



In times of uncertainty, customers appreciate transparency and proactive communication regarding any changes in service or policies that may affect them.



Drive trust with customers by enhancing communication and transparency:

1.Proactive Communication:

In times of uncertainty, customers appreciate transparency and proactive communication regarding any changes in service or policies that may affect them. This approach builds trust and loyalty. And trust is at the heart of building customer lifetime value.

2.Empathy in Customer Interactions:

Training customer service representatives to handle interactions with empathy and understanding can go a long way in maintaining customer trust and satisfaction, especially during uncertain times. As can measuring them by customer facing KPIs such as customer satisfaction (CSAT) and net promoter scores (NPS). All of the above leads to an approach where we move from focussing on productivity and volume to first time resolution.

Deliver more relevant service experiences by diversifying your service channels:

1.Omnichannel Customer Service Experiences:

Offering a seamless customer experience across multiple channels (e.g., phone, email, social media, chat) not only caters to varying customer preferences but also ensures continuity of service amidst external disruptions.

2.Localised and Personalised Services:

Tailoring customer experiences to reflect local sensitivities and personal preferences can significantly enhance customer engagement and loyalty.

Always be on the front foot and aim to innovate. I always say that if you need to be 100% sure, you'll be 100% late:

1. Emerging Technologies:

Exploring emerging technologies such as blockchain for secure transactions or augmented reality (AR) for enhanced product demonstrations can differentiate services in a competitive market.

2. Sustainability and Social Responsibility:

Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and social responsibility can appeal to increasingly conscientious consumers, fostering a positive brand image and customer loyalty. Which becomes even more important as consumers increasingly make buying something new a secondary decision.

In conclusion, I urge every brand, every retailer, every other consumer-facing business to move from an approach of customer service to customer care, as this engenders a very different outcome for the customer as the onus moves serving to caring, everything revolves around driving customer retention, reducing churn and building customer lifetime value.

While navigating the uncertainties of impending elections isn't an easy task, it requires a multifaceted approach that prioritises flexibility, innovation, and a deep understanding of customer needs and sentiments. By focusing on digital transformation, employee experience, customer insights, communication, service diversification, and forward-thinking strategies, organisations in the contact centre and CX sector can not only survive but thrive in uncertain times, and ensure they come out of this with an even more robust business foundation upon which to grow more sustainably and more rapidly in the future.



Always be on the front foot and aim to innovate. I always say that if you need to be 100% sure, you'll be 100% late



THE ELECTION YEAR AND CX – LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD



Paul Weald: Contact Centre Innovator

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) reports that the next government is going to face some of the most difficult economic and fiscal choices the UK has faced outside of pandemics and major crises.

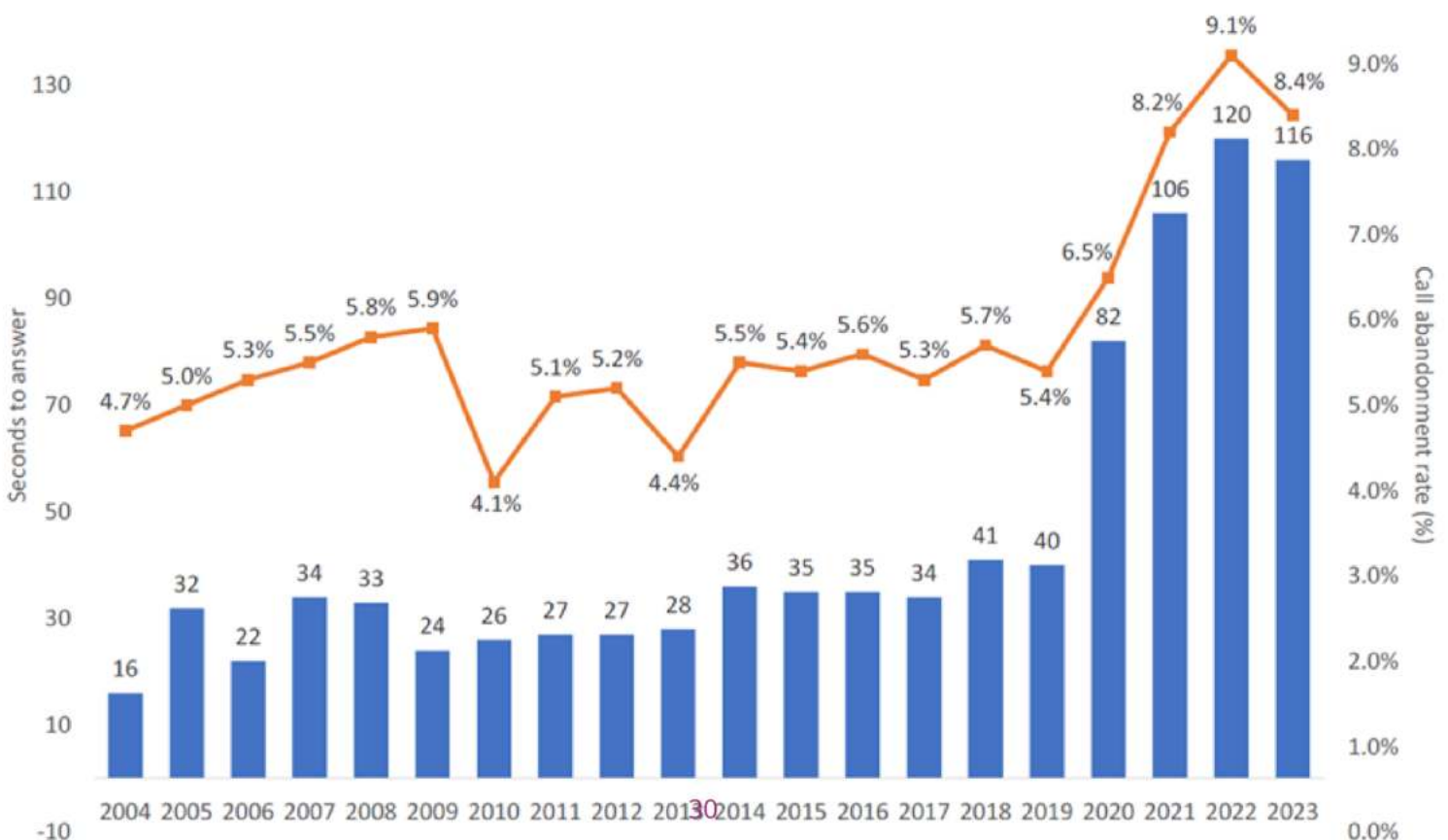
- Recent living standards have endured an unprecedented long stagnation – a legacy of high inflation in 2023 where price rises outstripped wages growth
- Taxes are at record levels for the UK – a legacy of rising national debt caused by the economic measures used to combat the COVID pandemic at the turn of the decade
- Public services are showing visible signs of strain and are, in many cases, performing less well than they were in 2010 – a legacy of rising population levels fuelled by higher levels of net migration

And we can draw common parallels to our world of CX and contact centres.

The Institute of Customer Service in their latest January 2024 UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) reports a decline of 1.7 points compared to a year ago and 2.4 points below the January 2022 level.

- Each of the 13 UKCSI sectors has lower customer satisfaction than a year ago, where Utilities, Transport, Insurance and Services have declined the most (more than 2 points)
- 35% of customers said positive use of technology by an organisation has led them to use that organisation again, but 45% reported that poor use of technology has made them avoid an organisation.

And then in the latest 2024 Contact Babel Decision Makers Guide – issue 21 – their chart on response times makes stark reading, showing that service performance is still well below pe-pandemic levels.



It appears that despite all the recent industry investment in chatbots and self-serve, there are still too many issues that need to be resolved by an agent, causing demand to outstrip the availability of front-line resources. Increased queue time is the inevitable result.

How do you make things better – looking back

The challenge of high abandon rates is not a new phenomenon – it's a challenge I faced some ten years ago when asked to step in as an interim to run the contact centre operation for a global airline.

The lost call rate into the airline at that time was a staggering 23%, so the primary objective was to reduce this to below an industry average of 5%. And the management team went on to achieve this within a nine month timeframe, by correcting the root cause imbalance between customer demand (fuelled by repeat calls) and too few resources (a legacy of budget shortfalls).

This situation is similar to the challenges currently faced in government public sector departments like the health service – a backlog of patient demand (following the pandemic) alongside resource shortfalls (caused by record NHS employee vacancies).

Returning to my airline situation, we initially focused on Quick Wins related to getting the basics right:

- Supply side changes to improve the availability of resources e.g. roster changes rescheduling the use of existing part time resources.
- Targeting improvements to operational metrics that were outliers in terms of industry benchmarks e.g. specific initiatives into non productive time which were running at c.10% above industry norms.

- AHT reduction: specific initiatives addressing the core components of talk, hold and wrap. Whilst dealing with customer needs was always the paramount objective for call handling staff, any improvements to AHT was an effective capacity release which had a positive consequential impact on answer rate.

How do you make things better – looking forward

It's important to remember that 10 years ago technology advancements like Generative AI were nowhere on the horizon. The concept of developing a machine learning algorithm based on a model that generates content hadn't been proven. Now we have Large Language Models and sufficient computing power that has increased the accuracy of these tools to such an extent that it can be used by contact centres to enable automation and to assist agents in real time.

But, and this is my personal contact centre industry manifesto, if we are going to base our future success on clever new technology then we first need to remember to put all the operational foundations in place. That involves not thinking about AI as just a tech solution and instead seeing it as an enabler for Continuous Improvement and Operational Change. To enable the fundamentals of balancing supply to demand – which in turn drives call abandonment rates down and customer outcomes up.

It's not rocket science.

It appears that despite all the recent industry investment in chatbots and self-serve, there are still too many issues that need to be resolved by an agent!



BEING RELENTLESS, EMOTIONAL, AND EXCELLENT

Iain Banks, CEO: Ventrica



In these turbulent times, emotions run high. In unparalleled ways, emotion is driving people to the ballot box in 2024 to cast decisions based on their passions or frustration. We really can't be sure what the global political landscape of the world will look like by the end of 2024. This uncertainty harshly impacts economies and financial markets, damaging confidence and hindering growth.

We in the global Contact Centre Industry often feel like weather vanes during economic and political storms. Few experience the ups and downturns of economic change as quickly as both our customer experience and management teams.

So, are we getting better at dealing with uncertainty and more resilient? I would argue that we are and, indeed, go a step further to say that our Contact Centre industry has the experience to lead us through the storm by using our patented blend of people, resilient processes, and cutting-edge technology to guide our path.

Let's be emotional and passionate ourselves about our industry and what it can achieve. Let's employ invigorated and energetic staff and warmly welcome and share the passion customers have for their brands. Positivity is contagious.



A new Emotive CX strategy

We've already mentioned that emotion is a key driver for political and economic turmoil. However, it is also a force for good and who is better at dealing with emotions than the customer experience industry. We manage millions of emotional conversations every single day. We know better than anyone that not only is soothing the frustrated customer good business, but it is also a catalyst for brand loyalty and further sales.

Let's apply our skills to an emotive marketplace. Instead of cheaper transactions, the Contact Centre industry should collectively be the standard-bearer for better quality interactions, quicker service and support and drive growth through improved CX.

We all have our part to play, but managing and embracing emotions, and having agents who are highly skilled at being wonderful (not just average) with a frustrated customer, can stimulate warmth towards brands.

Let's be emotional and passionate ourselves about our industry and what it can achieve. Let's employ invigorated and energetic staff and warmly welcome and share the passion customers have for their brands. Positivity is contagious.



Technological progress – accessible and affordable.

If we have the people, have we harnessed technology to improve CX and reduce costs? Yes, we most certainly have.

All too often we have been reliant on the big software companies to carry the development burden, but only then to see products in the marketplace that can be perceived as being too expensive to invest in during challenging economic conditions.

Fortunately, what we are seeing, in 2024, is organisations like Ventrica, who are developing their own software suites to complement the large enterprise products.

Technological innovation leads to growth, reduces customer handling time, integrates existing systems and monitors sentiment. All are hugely desirable and works closely with our ambition to embrace and manage emotional CX, **but it must be accessible and affordable.**

Looking at our products and others similar in the marketplace. we can see an accessible strategy for growth and a reduced cost base using software developed and delivered by businesses with front-line experience.

Growth of Generative A.I. (but with a warning)

There is a huge opportunity to leverage those technologies to enhance the employee experience. Taking the more simple, repetitive tasks off agents' plates so that they can focus their energy on higher-value interactions is another opportunity to grow a brand and business.

For businesses premised on high volume, low-value transactional interactions a Chat-bot or Chat AI **can be a hugely impactful tool.**

However, for more sophisticated customer experiences - those that are anchored in deep emotional connections - **there will always be an important role for the human touch.**

We must make clients understand that there are certain aspects of the journey where that human connection is essential. They should double down on developing their employees – invest in the Real Living Wage, train them in soft skills, and give them the tools and training to create positive emotional experiences.

In conclusion, I truly believe there is an end in sight to the current uncertainty, and growth will come, I have no doubt, but our industry must be leaders in the emotional journey towards and better and more impactful customer experience in its patented blend of people, process, and technology.

Technological innovation leads to growth, reduces customer handling time, integrates existing systems and monitors sentiment.



A YEAR OF UNCERTAINTY

Iain Moss: DigitalGenius



Amongst all the economic and political uncertainty that 2024 holds, one thing is for certain: you have heard about AI and the impact it will have on your job too many times to count.

Whether you're an advocate or a sceptic, the truth is always somewhere behind the hype and headlines that you have to sift through. Some people we speak to are convinced that AI can right now solve every customer service issue they face. Others hate that idea, and are fearful of letting AI near any questions at all.

The truth is in the middle. AI can understand many use cases, but to be truly effective it needs to be deployed cleverly and in a way that supports the existing customer service teams. Done well, AI has a role to play in providing better customer experiences, better employee experiences, and also keeping costs under control.

When it comes to CX and AI, your mind will naturally drift towards chatbots. You will have your own experience with them, and in most cases that experience will be poor.

When friends of mine find out that I work for DigitalGenius and that we build chatbots, I have to hear about the terrible chatbot they just experienced, before explaining that it doesn't have to be that way.



Whether you're an advocate or a sceptic, the truth is always somewhere behind the hype and headlines that you have to sift through.



The mistake most brands make is that they look at chatbots as exclusively a cost-saving tool. A way to "deflect" tickets away from customer support, meaning that they have to hire fewer staff. But put yourself in the shoes of a customer – do you ever want to be deflected?

There are tens, hundreds, or even thousands of providers who can plug your knowledge base into a generative AI machine – OpenAI's ChatGPT or similar – and generate natural-sounding answers to FAQs. This is a massive step up from simply pointing people to a relevant-seeming FAQ and hoping they go away (the old chatbot model), but it's not far enough.

The right thing for brands to do is to look at how AI can actually resolve customer tickets. To do that well, requires a bit more thinking but it also requires deep integrations with other systems.

For every customer service organisation, there are broadly three types of questions.

- Generic FAQs – questions with answers that are true for any customer (e.g. How long is the returns period on this product? What is the maximum deposit for this bank account)
- Personalised FAQs – questions that come up a lot, but the answer is different for every customer because the context is different (e.g. My order is late, when will it arrive? Am I eligible for this bank account?)
- Unique questions – questions that require real expertise, and/or a human touch.

The first group is handled with FAQ pages, and can be supplemented with chatbots, with human agents as the last resort. The last group is handled by human agents first and foremost.

The middle group is where AI gets interesting. We work with retailers, so I'll use a retail example: "Where is my order?"

An old school bot might look at that question, "understand" the meaning, and send the customer to a tracking page where they can put in a number and see the status. And that's it.

But by connecting to the shipping provider through deep integrations with APIs, the chatbot can find that answer itself. If the status is "delivered", then it can ask whether the customer has received the package. If the answer is "No", then the chatbot can set about rectifying the situation: offering a replacement (through integrating with an order management system) or refund (through a payments system), escalating the issue with the shipping provider, or any other appropriate action that a human agent would do.

"Where is my order" questions are about 20% of what a typical retailer has to deal with. By taking those kinds of questions out of the queue, it means that customers get answers faster, agents don't have as many tickets to deal with, plus the tickets that are left are less repetitive and mundane meaning agents have better workloads. It's a win-win for everyone.

The bottom line is that for brands who want to pride themselves on their CX, AI is essential. But that deployment has to be with the customer in mind. For your business, you need to work out what questions can AI answer as well as a human, only faster, and what questions should AI never touch?



"Where is my order" questions are about 20% of what a typical retailer has to deal with.



NAVIGATING THROUGH UNCERTAIN WATERS – THE ROLE OF THE CONTACT CENTRE AND CX IN A PERIOD OF GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Nick Martin - International Sales: Medallia



The uncertainty that has so far clouded this decade shows no signs of abating. Economic and financial concerns continue to dominate the headlines as the cost-of-living and the cost-of-doing business crises rage on. On top of this, 2024 is an election year – and a historic one at that. Across the world, more voters than ever will head to the polls – the results of which will have a bearing on global economic and geopolitical stability for years to come.

Here in the UK, with the Conservative government on the verge of calling a UK general election, market uncertainty is a theme business leaders should be braced for over the coming months. As such, whatever the results and whenever they come, business leaders need to focus on maintaining stability with what matters most – relationships with customers and employees – if they are to survive and thrive in this turbulent marketplace.

Time has shown the value that customer experience can bring to an organisation. We know the power that good CX yields when it comes to customer loyalty, repeat business and referrals. However, CX is an ever-moving target and as customer needs evolve and their expectations grow, business leaders must adapt to ensure that they remain ahead of the curve.

“ CX is an ever-moving target and as customer needs evolve and their expectations grow, business leaders must adapt to ensure that they remain ahead of the curve ”

The vital role of the contact centre in the delivery of CX

Sitting at the hub of customer service operations, the contact centre has a vital role to play in the delivery of stellar CX, and even more so in these uncertain times. The cost-of-living crisis has left an increasing number of people in debt and vulnerable, which has resulted in heightened pressure on contact centres, and their agents, who are experiencing a rising tide of enquiries across channels.

The often sensitive nature of these enquiries means there has been a particular increase in calls into the contact centre – something which shows no signs of slowing down. Indeed, McKinsey’s latest report found that the majority of leaders expect call volumes to increase by as much as one-fifth over the next one or two years. And despite many customers favouring a digital approach, voice will remain an important part of the customer service mix with McKinsey finding that all customers – irrespective of age – say live phone conversations are one of their most preferred methods of contacting companies for help and support.

With this in mind, where should business leaders prioritise their efforts in enhancing the delivery of CX from the contact centre? Here are our top three tools:

1. Make it personal

Personalisation is a topic on most CX professionals’ priority list, and with just cause. The majority of customers today now expect personalised experiences to be part of their journey and are frustrated when they don’t get them. In addition, 61 percent are willing to spend more when such a service is offered, making personalisation a valuable tool in an organisation’s CX arsenal.

From simple measures, such as addressing customers by their first name when they call a contact centre, to having an understanding of a customer's journey with a brand without them having to retell it, contact centres have a wealth of solutions available to them to personalise customer interactions.

Automated summaries of calls are invaluable here. Summarisation of customer, employee and business records enables customer service agents to get a quicker handle on the collective experiences that an individual has had with an organisation and make decisions based on that data. This enables the agent to tailor their approach to deal with the customer empathetically and appropriately and resolve their enquiry first time round. This all feeds into a customer's perception of the organisation that they are dealing with and enhances their relationship with them.

These decisions can be further informed by AI to personalise exactly the next steps to take to improve a customer's journey, and as such, laying the right foundations for this technology is critical.

2. Embrace AI and machine learning

With an increase in enquiries into the contact centre comes an influx of data about customers. Machine Learning and AI can provide the ability to analyse this data at scale, delivering real-time insights that can positively enhance the customer experience.

Whether through text or speech or video analytics, organisations have the ability to use AI to derive insight from customer feedback into the contact centre. AI is the key to unlocking this data, unearthing core trends and providing the actionable insights that can drive positive change throughout an organisation. When these analytics engines are coupled with AI-powered alerts, organisations benefit from being notified, in real-time, of any opportunities for customer retention by recommending high-value actions, related to specific situations.

3. Focus on equipping agents

Of course, the real skill within the contact centre is understanding when to automate tasks, and when the human touch is needed. As the face, and indeed mouthpiece, of an organisation, agents play a vital role in the delivery of CX and as such, it is essential that agents understand how best to engage with customers and set them at ease throughout their conversations with them.

Whether it is through the provision of the aforementioned automated summaries, or the creation of a dedicated knowledge bank of information, it is essential that organisations equip their agents with the right information in real-time – making sure customers receive the most up-to-date information at all times. Regular training must play a key role here as well, providing agents with insight into how to appropriately handle customers with empathy – particularly those who may be vulnerable.

In a sea of uncertainty, focus on anchoring your customer relationships

With so many different factors at play, there is no way to predict exactly what the months ahead hold for businesses. Shifting political dynamics and continued financial pressures make the current state of the market unstable. And as such, business leaders' only response must be to smooth out the waters for their customers, setting out a solid anchor for them to rely on. That means ensuring that the lines of communication are open and functioning optimally.

With an increasing number of customers in debt, the contact centre has a leading role to play in this puzzle and business leaders would be wise to focus on enhancing this vital hub of customer service. Those who cast the net wide and listen to their full spectrum of customer feedback, and make positive changes as a result, will benefit the most, fostering long-term relationships that can weather any future storm.

NAVIGATING ELECTION YEAR UNCERTAINTIES: STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH AND SUCCESS IN THE CONTACT CENTRE AND CX SECTOR

Russell Attwood – CEO: Route 101



In the ever-evolving landscape of customer experience (CX) and contact centres, the impact of an election year – especially in the current climate – cannot be underestimated. As the CEO of a leading Systems Integrator specialising in delivering next-gen CX technology platforms and services, I've witnessed first-hand the transformative power of innovative solutions in navigating political uncertainties and driving business success.

Understanding the Impact of an Election Year:

Election years usher in a wave of heightened emotions, regulatory changes, and shifting consumer behaviours that significantly influence the CX sector. As businesses brace for potential policy shifts and regulatory adjustments, the need for adaptable and customer-centric strategies becomes paramount.

Customer Sensitivities

I believe that the most significant impact area for businesses operating a contact centre during an election year lies in managing increased customer sensitivities and uncertainties.

During an election year, customers may experience heightened emotions and anxieties surrounding political and social issues. This can influence their interactions with businesses, including their expectations for service quality, responsiveness, and empathy. As a result, businesses operating contact centres must be prepared to address a wide range of customer concerns and queries that may extend beyond their usual service topics.

There's also typically an impact surrounding consumer spending, which may fluctuate due to uncertainty surrounding the election outcome and potential policy changes. Many organisations in the retail and eCommerce space could see customers become more cautious with their spending or delay major purchases until after the election.

Regulatory Changes

Regulatory compliance is non-negotiable in today's data-driven landscape. With potential changes in government policies looming, businesses must stay ahead of the curve in ensuring data privacy, compliance, and transparency.

New Strategies for Growth and Success in 2024:

- **Embrace AI and Automation:** The proliferation of AI-driven automation technologies presents unprecedented opportunities for contact centres to enhance efficiency, productivity, and customer satisfaction. Investing in AI-powered chatbots, virtual assistants, and predictive analytics enables organisations to streamline operations and deliver proactive support.



- **Focus on Omnichannel Customer Engagement:** In an era where digital interactions are increasingly prevalent, providing a seamless omnichannel experience is essential for meeting customer expectations. Integrating channels such as phone calls, emails, chat, social media, and self-service portals enables organisations to enhance accessibility, convenience, and satisfaction.
- **Prioritise Data Privacy and Security:** With growing concerns about data privacy and security, organisations must prioritise the protection of customer data and comply with stringent regulatory requirements. Implementing robust data governance practices and encryption technologies builds trust and credibility with customers.
- **Enhance Employee Training and Well-being:** Contact centre agents are the frontline ambassadors of the brand, playing a pivotal role in delivering exceptional CX. Investing in comprehensive training programs and prioritising employee well-being fosters a positive work culture and enhances agent morale and performance.

“ **Providing a seamless omnichannel experience is essential for meeting customer expectations.** ”



Strategies for Success in Uncertain Times:

- **Agility and Adaptability:** Navigating uncertainties requires organisations to remain agile and adaptable in their approach. Flexibility in strategy execution, resource allocation, and technology adoption enables organisations to respond quickly to changing market dynamics and customer needs.
- **Customer-Centric Innovation: Putting customers at the centre of innovation** is crucial for driving meaningful improvements and staying relevant in a rapidly evolving landscape. By soliciting feedback, analysing customer insights, and experimenting with new CX technologies and approaches, organisations can identify unmet needs and deliver innovative solutions that delight customers.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Collaboration with industry partners, technology experts, and regulatory bodies provides valuable insights and resources for addressing common challenges and seizing opportunities. Building strategic alliances enables organisations to leverage collective expertise and networks to drive innovation and deliver superior CX.

In conclusion, navigating an election year and uncertain times requires a strategic focus on agility, innovation, and customer-centricity. With the right partner by their side, businesses can navigate election year uncertainties with confidence and resilience. By embracing AI and automation, prioritising omnichannel engagement, ensuring data privacy and security, enhancing employee training and well-being, and fostering collaboration, organisations can drive growth and success in 2024 and beyond.



Steve Sullivan: Channel Doctors

Through the course of 2024 nearly half the world's population will be able to vote in national elections. And for quite a few - but not all - of those people, the elections will be free and fair and will give them a genuine voice in how they are governed. So, what's that got to do with customer experience? Well, maybe something and perhaps nothing, but whatever happens out in the wider world will find an echo or response in the contact centre.

Cone deaf

Nearly 32 years ago, UK Prime Minister John Major launched the Cones Hotline (*Source link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cones_Hotline*). For those of you who weren't even born in 1992, the Hotline was a - much derided - initiative to give frustrated motorists the answer to that burning question "why have they put cones along this stretch of road?". It turned out that perhaps not that many people were keen to find out why cones were slowing their journey - or at least, in a time before the widespread adoption of mobiles, not keen enough to take a detour on their journey to find a phone box to make the call! So, Mr Major may have misjudged traffic cone-related demand in the '90s, but maybe he started something. Even over 30 years ago what we now call contact centres were starting to be used by government to spread messages and provide services to citizens.



Obviously, the world is a very different place to 1992. For all it's stumbles and limitations (like the recent rapid reversal of HMRC's decision to close its Self-Assessment Helpline for 6 months of the year) central and local government has got much better at delivering services to citizens online. Just like nearly all commercial organisations, though, when online and self-service fail - either due to poor design or the frailties and vulnerabilities of users - then person-to-person contact will be required. And that will usually be remote, via a contact centre.

When the peripheral became central

In the past, contact centres were peripheral to most organisations. Customers could head to the contact centre, but they could also walk into stores and offices. A lot of the contacts made by centres were proactive, not responsive; they were generating need (or leads), not meeting it. Nowadays contact centres tend to be more central to the organisation. They work across more and more activities, lines of business and contact channels - and every time a self-service customer journey breaks or runs its course its likely that the customer will end up interacting with the contact centre. We know that those interactions and insights can be an invaluable resource when organisations look to improve their processes and customer experience. And if they don't then the contacts just keep coming and the centre feels like an immovable necessity!

“ **A lot of the contacts made by centres were proactive, not responsive; they were generating need (or leads), not meeting it.** ”

First Responders

Struggling to pay your utility bills? Suffering a mental health crisis? A newly-arrived refugee? Trying to work out how to register to vote? Then there will be a contact centre service for you.

Decisions made by politicians and the wider events they try to manage can directly impact on the type and scale of contact centre activities. It's a real boon that 'contact centre people' are innately flexible and responsive to events. Did anyone foresee tens of thousands of home-based agents guiding people on how and when to quarantine before the emergence of Covid-19? I doubt it? Did British Gas plan to recruit and extra 700 advisors to respond to the doubling in contact from newly-impooverished customers before the start of the Energy Price Shock in 2022? Of course not.

The Reserve Army of Labour

Marx and Engels talked about the reserve army of labour in the 19th century. They meant a pool of unemployed workers that it suited capitalism to have available to help keep wage rates down. Whether or not that's still the case, I now think that the organisational reserve army of labour is in the contact centre. Even if in reality contact centre frontline staff are harder working and more closely managed than most of their colleagues, when the executive team looks around for where to shove a newly-emerging and/or unexpected set of activities they'll often fix on the contact centre operation.

What about AI?

We've got to talk about AI, of course. In the context of 'election year' AI or Machine Learning will no doubt be driving a lot of the misleading and manipulative social media content designed to influence voters.

Many of the major economies – but not the UK, so far – are developing laws to manage the application of AI. How these will impact of CX largely remain to be seen, but as contact centres have been identified as early 'beneficiaries' of AI tools through intelligent bots, the CX community will need to remain aware and informed of the changing political environment for AI.

Of course, we know that Gen AI works best off large-scale sources of data and models. So, some of the crisis-driven uses of contact centres that we've looked at will be quite ill-suited to AI. A combination of a lack of experience and usable data, added to heightened levels of consumer stress and anxiety will make the authentic 'human touch' especially important.

Democracy (even when the 'wrong' people win) is a great thing. We can't have democracy without elections, assuming they are free and fair. 49% of the world's population will have the chance to vote this year – and whether they do or don't, 99% of the world's population will probably be interacting with contact centres - Irrespective of who wins their elections.

The contact centres always win.



49% of the world's population will have the chance to vote this year – and whether they do or don't, 99% of the world's population will probably be interacting with contact centres - Irrespective of who wins their elections.





CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
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