

The Future of Digital Care

White paper



“The future is already here, just not evenly distributed”

- William Gibson, Science Fiction Author

This is one of our favorite quotes, and we believe to be fully true – and in many cases – it’s your customer who is holding the future – while you aren’t. The traditional B2C relationship is becoming more of a C2B engagement model. Consumers have multiple options today for how they learn about and engage in dialog with or about a specific brand. Many companies are struggling to make the shift from the use of traditional engagement models to integrated cross channel solutions for serving the customer.

There are various reasons why the transition is difficult for firms:

- Your IT infrastructure is not set up to be able to bring in new technologies as quickly as your customers can adopt them
- There may be security, privacy or regulatory reasons why you can’t leverage these new technologies
- You’re big, and while you’d like to immediately jump on new technologies, you can’t since it takes a while to turn a ship like yours

The focus is on controlling IT operating costs which misses the opportunity to increase customer attention, retention and ultimately customer satisfaction

When it comes to customer care, your customers are already holding the future in their hands. It’s pretty likely that most of your customers have more computing power in their current smartphones than your agents have on their desktops. The question then remains, how can you effectively and inexpensively provide care today and into the future?

If you look out ten years – where will customer care be? Do you still see legions of agents on the phone taking calls and providing services

and support in the same way they are today? Or do you foresee fewer phone calls reserved for high value interactions, while the rest of the support is handled through other means – with customer self-service and customer to customer support leading the way? Do you also see social care – leveraging the social networks that people prefer to communicate on – being the future of customer contact? Why should the customer who prefers to talk to everyone via Facebook Messenger want to actually call you?

To that end – this whitepaper discusses future directions of customer care – not only how to leverage new mediums for customer interaction but how to use the experiences across mediums to guide the overall relationship with your customers. In our view, customer care is in the midst of deep transformation, where brands cannot force customers through traditional interaction paths (in-store, website, email, call center). We are engaging with brands in a complete dialog about transforming the use of these traditional channels while incorporating social, peer-to-peer and proactive data driven solutions into the ecosystem. We believe there is an appropriate balance for each channel.

As we will discuss in this whitepaper – how do you go from here to there – from the current massive cost center of customer care, to an optimized, distributed model.

Following are a number of trends and actions that you can undertake to leverage those trends. Even tackling one or even few of these projects should be able to give you some excellent cost savings. Tackle them all, and you have the tools to truly change your engagement model with your customers... on their terms.



Only a few months ago, it was revealed by a study that the way most people access the internet has changed – of those people who use the internet – they are more likely to use it via mobile phone, than they are by desktop.

While this is a recent trend, it simply points to our future directions – in the near future, more and more customers will have mobile phones. It will eventually get to a point where we can simply assume that the customer has a mobile phone, and we can use that mobile phone in order to provide support.

Mobile Phone as Troubleshooting Tool

Mobile phones today are amazing devices with more computing power than a typical desktop computer of a few years ago. In addition, they are mobile, and can be moved to locations where the trouble lies. Thirdly, they have a camera and a number of sensors built-in, and that camera and sensors can be used in order to assist the customer in troubleshooting whatever problem they might have.

In imagining how a mobile phone could be used to troubleshoot any problem, first one must start with an app. An app will allow you to leverage the camera and all of the sensors on the device in order to troubleshoot. Additionally, it can provide a simple tool for the customer to self-diagnose the issue.

For example, assume that you are a telecommunications provider whose main avenue of customer support is taking a call when the customer has an issue. Let's also assume that the problem is with internet access – the customer can't get to the internet via your service. What do they do?

Here are the typical steps today:

1. Customer calls
2. Customer waits in queue for agent
3. Agent takes call
4. Agent authenticates the customer using birthdate or some other method
5. Agent listens to customer
6. Customer and agent together attempt to diagnose the problem over the phone by undertaking a specific set of steps which worked in the past to solve the problem based on information gleaned during the call
7. These calls could be very short (reboot the router, it comes up) to very long (some weird driver on the computer is shutting down internet access)
8. In either case, costs are incurred, the customer is annoyed, is not trained or knows what to do the next time, and loyalty could become an issue.

Leveraging the mobile phone, with its out-of-band connectivity and the proper software in the form of a very well developed app, is basically your boots-on-the-ground at the customers premise. Not

only can the app allow the customer to self-diagnose the problem, but it can also provide a wealth of data to the app and to agents, if required, in order to not only solve the problem, but inform future solutions.

Let's take the same example above, but this time, equip the customer with an app which has the ability to not only guide the customer through self-diagnosis, but to do its own self-diagnosis and send the results of that diagnosis to your own servers for later mining and integration into the solution set.

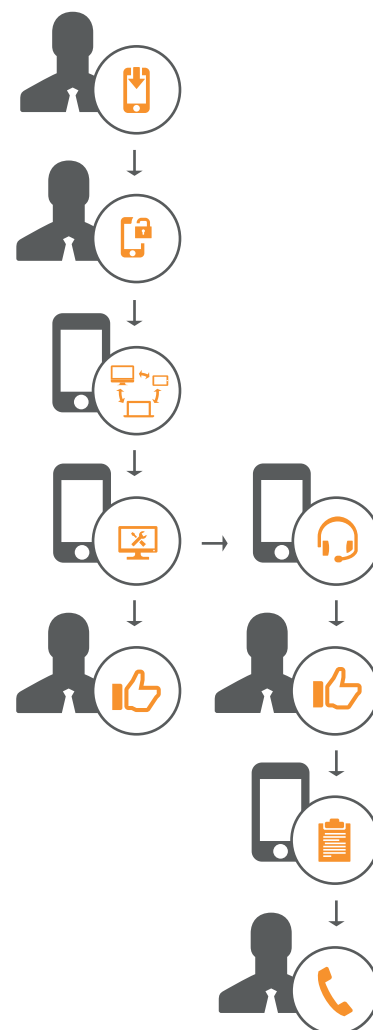
1. Customer downloads support app, if they haven't done so already. In fact, app installation should be part of the service agreement. If not, incentives can be given to encourage app download and use.
2. Customer authenticates with the app by using the fingerprint scanner on the device. If the device does not have a scanner, a pin code, a pattern code or facial recognition can be used.



3. The app determines the customer's current inventoried equipment by looking at the customer's record. It can then, at this time, update the inventory by running a scan on the internal network, assuming that the internal network is operational. This updated inventory can then be uploaded to your database, so you can get a better understanding of the devices the customer has on the network, as well as possibly provide proactive advice on any future issues that there may be on the network. This is done with the consent of the customer. It does this via the outof- band channel if the main internet connection is unavailable.
4. The app can then tell the customer that it is running a diagnostic on the home network, and connect to the router and query it to see if there are issues, and it can even issue a reboot command to the router, informing the customer in the process.
5. If that restores the connection, the case is closed. If not, then the customer continues with troubleshooting via the device.
6. The customer uses the app to narrow down the connection issue to the laptop he is using. At this point, the app itself may require additional feedback from an agent, so the customer enters the make and model of the laptop into the app. The app now seamlessly becomes a chat session between the customer and the agent. The agent researches the issue, and finds that the customer requires an update to the network driver. The agent can then guide the customer through updating the network driver on the customer's laptop, by using the mobile phone as a second reference screen.
7. Eventually, the customer connects to the router, and ends the call. The app provides the customer with a small token of appreciation for being patient and helpful through the process, and then the app asks for feedback (1 to 5 stars) and a review.
8. In the background, the information on the laptop and the required new network drivers are added to the solutions database, and can be called on again in the future – without an agent's intervention. Future customers with this issue will be asked via a pick list if they have this make and model laptop, and will be directed immediately to the solution.
9. If the call is still not complete by this time, the customer can call an agent for auditory assistance. If required, the agent can then ask the customer for permission to stream the camera on the phone to the agent. They can ask the customer to point the camera of the phone to the router, the wall jack, the cable, the outside of the house, anywhere along the line where there may be an issue. All of this is recorded so that if a technician needs to be dispatched, they can review the video records before they go, in order to help to inform the steps that they need to take in order to complete the call. As you can see by this description, agent time is used minimally or not at all, and in rare cases does a call actually need to take place, only after exhausting all other support possibilities.

Elements Available in the App

1. Authentication Mechanism – a way for the customer to self-authenticate via the fingerprint sensor on the phone. The top two models of smartphones, the Apple iPhone and the Samsung Galaxy series, both leverage fingerprint sensors in order to authenticate the user
2. Scanning Mechanism – as the phone itself is like boots-on-the-ground on the customer's premises, why not leverage the abilities of the phone itself to scan the premise network, assuming that it is operational, and look for anomalies which could be causing the issue? For example, if a customer comes in with a complaint that the network is slow, the phone based scanner could conclude that one of the other family members is using bittorrent or some other software which is causing the network to slow down, and can identify the culprit – or the bandwidth may be being grabbed by a neighbor or other unknown user or device. The internal scan would be able to identify these issues, as well as any issues the router may have, from the other side. This tool allows you to diagnose



issues from the other side of the connectivity barrier, which was not previously possible as that out-of-band connection was not previously available. Ideally, the phone app could even inform the router on what settings to adjust per its read on the devices on the network, and could conceivably prioritize traffic from some devices (Mom & Dads) over others (the kids). Additionally, if the mobile device itself is having issues connecting to the internet, its own settings could be scanned.

Texting as Medium

One of the major trends coming out of Silicon Valley today is the trend for some applications to have “no interface” – instead of using a mobile app or a website for the customer to communicate with you, they use preexisting communications methods which already exist on the customer’s phone. When you couple that with automation in order to offload some of the simpler call types, you then have a very powerful tool to reduce call volume and costs.

There is a startup in Silicon Valley called Magic – it has no interface – you communicate with Magic via text message. The service bills itself as a concierge service – you text a request to it, they respond with a price or follow up questions. You communicate solely via text, and when the time comes to pay for something, they text you a link to a secure webpage where you can use your credit card to pay for what you ordered. It’s unclear that what is automated and what is not automated via the service, but what is clear is that the customers of the service enjoy using it.

By the same token, why not create a text based support system which can be automated easily (due to the nature of messages, they are short and can be easily parsed) in order to cover a certain subset of calls, and then the rest can be handled via chat session over the text channel.

Let take the example of a “where’s my tech” call, which is a typical example which is a huge sore spot for many customers – they want to know when the technician will show up or when the next step in the process will occur.

Currently, the customer will need to call in, provide authentication information, then wait while the agent attempts to track down the technician and get an ETA. Leveraging the text based solution could work like this:

1. Customer texts “where’s my tech” or “wmt” or “what’s going on?” to a specific text number
2. The system parses the message and the number it’s coming from
3. The system looks up the number and determines if the customer is on file to receive a technician today. If not, the system requests the phone number attached to the account and if there is no new number, connects the customer to an agent, who connects via text
4. If the system finds a call, it pings the tech’s cellphone to determine their location and the techs log to determine how many calls away from this call they are
5. Once the system comes up with an estimate, it then responds to the customer
6. The customer is given to opportunity to cancel and reschedules if they wish
7. The entire communication is handled via automation, unless the system is not able to parse the request. It is then seamlessly handed off to the agent, who takes care of the rest of the call

More and more recently, as more and more millennials become customers, text is becoming one of the premium methods of communications – it just makes sense to be able to provide that as a channel of communications to your customers. Additionally, text used to be charged per message, now most plans include unlimited text messaging.

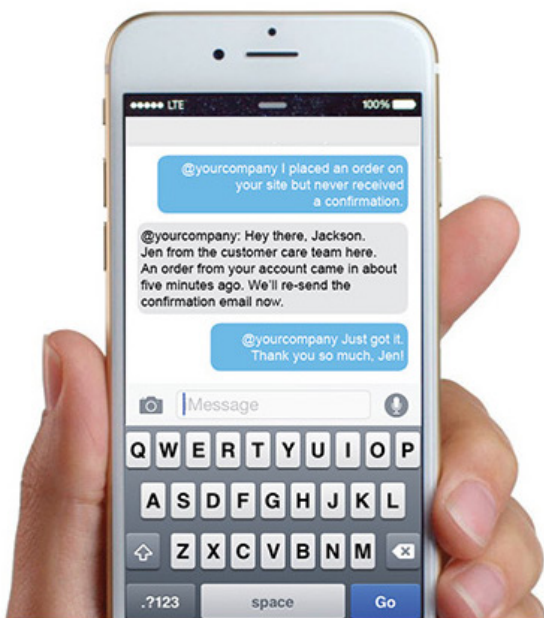
Due to the nature of the communication, it is more easily parsable and the customer is more easily identified, as everything is keyed to the customer’s phone number.

Elements in the Solution

It is relatively straightforward to set up an SMS gateway in order to accept and send text messages between your customers and you – the real intelligence lies in the ability to parse the incoming messages and deal with them properly, funneling ones that need support from an agent to agents and those that can be handled with automation to an automated process.

The solution requires:

1. An SMS gateway
2. An engine to parse and dispatch incoming messages



3. An interface to accept the responses which can be automated and reach into other areas of your systems in order to respond without agent intervention
4. A system to assemble and respond to the messages with automation
5. Integration with your internal chat systems for those calls which cannot be handled via automation. This provides you with the control you need over the dialog on the back end, while the customer interacts in a way which is familiar to them on the front end (text). Additionally, the entire conversation can be archived and attached to the customers file so that you will have future context on the conversation
6. The request and automated response can also be captured and attached to the account.

Providing a textual gateway into your customer service flow is a simple way to connect with a new cohort of customers who are more used to connecting via text than any other method.

Where Is The Conversation Taking Place?

One glance across the landscape will tell you that the way in which people communicate has changed – in a recent Time Mobility poll, 32% of customers preferred to use text or chat over calls, and that number is increasing. Fairly soon, the amount will be over 50% and your phone based customer service staff will be sitting there idle.

Meanwhile, the conversation has now moved to the social networks, where your customers start by searching Google for answers (instead of coming to you), or posting questions to message boards, or Facebook or Twitter. The conversation starts off of your site, continues there, and only if the answers can't be found, and the complaints begin – they will come to your site, chat with you, call you, or both.

You are not the first resort – you are the last resort. Become their first resort, and deflect those complaints before they start.

It's tough to know who is talking about you on the social networks – is it someone who is not even a customer of yours just blowing off steam to a few people with little chance of spreading, or is it an influencer with a lot of friends and followers just ready to take the complaint viral. Remember the Comcast debacle, where the agent was found out changing the customers name to something unsavory, and then it ended up right there, in bold type, on the bill? Or the call that was recorded and went viral on the internet. You don't want this to happen to you – have the conversation where it starts and ends, on the social network.

First, you have to get your customers social identifiers. You may not know that John X. Smith of Elm Street is @PhoenixFlame89 but if you ask, they may tell you. This is valuable information, so be ready to give up something in return for their social network ID – for example,

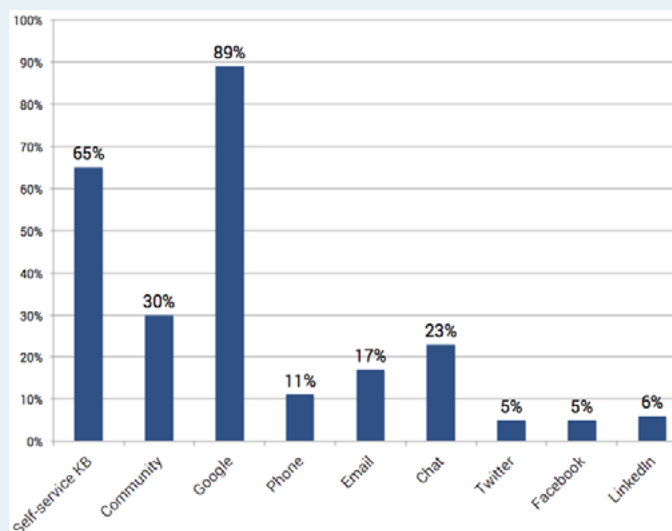
you could provide a premium level of service to those customers who give you their Twitter ID, or friend you on Facebook. If they don't want to give you their identifiers, you can use social network harvesting and big data analytics to make an educated guess on your customer's social ID. Once you have their social ID, it becomes easier to track their sentiment based on their public social media musings. And if they express some kind of dissatisfaction with your service you can catch it.

However, there's a problem. If you look at the sheer amount of data being generated by social networks, you can easily see the one day it might end up being impossible to deal with all of the comments, complaints and requests coming in. How do you scale?

As with the text solution above, the trick is automation. Using the big data that you have already captured, use some predictive analytics to capture the sentiment of people talking about you via social media, then determine if they require a personal touch, or if an automated touch is sufficient. Leverage the automation as much as possible, starting with a small set of automated tasks, and expanding as required.

Before you open those gates, however, build interfaces between your internal chat solution and the social networks. Most of the major social networks already have open APIs, so build a connection between your top 5 networks and your internal chat solution. This way, your agents can connect directly with your customers in a controlled way – and the conversation can be logged and attached to the customer's account for future reference.

Which is your preferred channel to seek support for a product problem?



Source: TSIA 2013 Social Media Survey

Imagine a customer discussing an issue on their preferred medium, Facebook Messenger, then asking for and receiving support for that issue via a chat with the agent. The customer will never need to open or use any other mechanism in order to communicate with you – keeping them within a safe interface that they are familiar with.

Join your customers where they are – don't force them to come to you. Although sometimes, they will have to come to you, so in those cases, you still need a great customer service self-support portal.

Also, don't be afraid to be proactive: one of the other main trends in digital care today is transparency. Your customers will appreciate

it when you tell them that something is wrong before they even realize it. Send out proactive tweets and messages when there are issues. Publish your call times right on your website. Publish your customer service scores right on your website. Let your customers know what's going on at all times – don't be that black hole where no information is issued unless asked – while "don't volunteer any information" might work really well in a courtroom, it works less well in the care department. If you are doing great, let them know. If you are having issues, let them know.

Your customers need transparency even more than rapid response time.

Your Next Steps

As you can see, the trend towards care is towards digital. In some predictions, the volume of calls which are currently being handled by your call center will be 10% of those handled today. Where will the rest of the conversation go? To social networks and conversations there.

In a few short years, the percentage of your customers who wish to call you for support will likely be in the minority. How will you address that shift in a scalable way? When your customers realize that they will get a faster response by tweeting than by calling – you will need to have a strategy to scale.

The Symbio Difference

Symbio is in the unique position of being able to provide the solutions you need, due to our deep expertise and experience in providing call centers, as well as developing software solutions for many of top Fortune 500 companies. We leverage our big data sets on customer behavior, apply predictive analytics, and look for patterns where none were shown before.

Using this data, Symbio engages our customer centric design practices to work with our client's customers to understand behaviors and rapidly prototype new interaction models. Each iteration produces more and more insights into changes to:

- Customer training (in-store, post call, email updates)
- Agent training
- Functionality on mobile apps (self service, upsell opps)
- Changes to in-store interactions (solving downstream contact center interactions with simple adjustments to the in-store buying experience)

Using our solutions, we can optimize call volumes while at the same time enriching your customer experiences via each channel. While call reduction can be self-funding for IT initiatives.

Contact us today and let's talk about what we can do together.