

Creating a Customer-Centric Communications Strategy

Turn strategies into actions that benefit your customers and business



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper is designed to help you create a customer communications strategy that supports both a superior customer experience and more efficient operations. It examines the foundational role of organizational culture, processes, and technology and gives specific advice for assembling a strategic team to overcome obstacles to better customer communications.

WHY A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY?

Today's businesses have a tall bill to fill when it comes to customer communications. Consumer expectations have risen dramatically; they expect businesses to know their specific preferences and provide personalized, relevant information on demand, through the channel of their choice. At the same time, the amount of customer data has grown exponentially and businesses are struggling to create value from it.

These social and technological changes have placed a new spotlight on the customer experience, or a customer's perception of his or her interactions with a brand or business. And with good reason: "Years of Forrester data confirm the strong relationship between the quality of a firm's customer experience and measures of loyalty, including willingness to consider the company for another purchase, likelihood to switch business to a competitor, and likelihood to recommend it to a friend or colleague," noted Deanna Laufer from Forrester Research, Inc., report. "Based on this relationship, we estimate that for a North American company, depending on the industry, all that loyalty adds up to between \$55 million and \$1.6 billion in increased revenue per year."¹

Adding to these challenges is the fact that multichannel customer communications lie at the intersection of several business functions. Improving the customer experience for maximum engagement and revenue demands a unified effort across different channels and departments such as IT, customer

service, and marketing, and across lines of business. Furthermore, making the most of the information gathered during each interaction—for example, to determine the next best offer for a customer—requires sophisticated data analytics beyond the current capabilities of many organizations.

A unified, customer-focused approach can help your business align its customer communications with enterprise business objectives. A sound strategy, well executed, can enable you to harness data to create and deliver more relevant content through customer preferred channels while optimizing delivery to keep costs in check. It helps you address regulatory requirements and compliance objectives in a more streamlined way. And it makes it possible to close the loop with customer response data, creating deeper, more meaningful relationships. **In short, a customer-centric communications strategy can help you create the kinds of focused, contextually relevant experiences that build engagement and generate revenue.**



Customer communications include transactional communications such as statements, bills and invoices, letters, and policy documents, as well as compliance communications such as prospectuses and proxy notices. They may also include presale communications such as direct marketing; onboarding communications such as welcome kits; and post-sale and cross-sale communications. Customer communications are delivered through a variety of channels such as postal mail, email, websites, text messages, mobile apps, social media, and even video.

¹ 'How To Make The Case For Customer Experience,' Deanna Laufer, Forrester Research, Inc.



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, PROCESS, AND TECHNOLOGY: BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Whether your organization is working to streamline operations (“getting it done on time for less”) or raising the bar on the customer experience—or both—the success of your efforts will be determined in large part by your approach to organizational culture, process, and technology. When these three pillars are aligned, they form a strong foundation for any project you choose to undertake. When they are missing or misaligned, they create barriers to the seamless interactions that today’s consumers demand.

In organizations with exceptional customer communications, the **culture** is strategically aligned around shared business objectives. These organizations have a solid customer communications strategy tied to business goals, with cascading plans and tactics that guide both incremental improvements and transformational programs. A cross-functional customer communications team drawn from across the enterprise meets periodically to update the strategy and plans, and sub-teams guide the implementation of plans and tactics. Governance is clearly established and the strategy is supported by all levels of the organization.

Process likewise must be managed in a unified way. In well-run customer communications programs, customer-facing processes from campaign management and onboarding to case

management and issue resolution are documented and well understood by all stakeholders. Business rules and requirements are documented within each business unit and there is a comprehensive, preferably automated approach to quality assurance and change management.

Finally, **technology** must be integrated so that information flows easily from one system, function, department or business unit to another. Business intelligence must be tied to business process management, customer relationship management, and enterprise content management platforms, creating a closed loop between customer data and communication delivery and response. Even in organizations that are just beginning to focus on customer experience, integrated technology is critically important in order to avoid waste and redundancy.

Transactional Communications for Customer Experience

Transactional communications such as bills and statements are a powerful tool for improving the customer experience because they capture customers’ attention. The average attention span of an American adult is less than eight seconds, but 97% of consumers spend at least 1 minute looking at their bill or statement and 55% spend 5-10 minutes or more.²

² Broadridge Consumer Trends Survey, 2017



ESTABLISHING YOUR STRATEGIC TEAM

In order to develop a customer communications strategy that meets your particular business needs, you must first reach internal agreement on business objectives and governance. Establishing a cross-functional strategic team can help ensure that every area of your customer communications program is thoroughly examined. Equally as important, it greatly increases the likelihood of widespread organizational buy-in to any changes that need to be made.

Operations, marketing, and IT are the functional groups most commonly associated with customer communications. In addition, a variety of other groups across your organization can provide valuable input. Begin by gathering a team of internal stakeholders that includes representatives from the various business units, lines of business, and departments who have a stake in your customer communications. Team members should be positive, collaborative, and capable of overseeing plans and tactics related to their work as you implement your strategy.

Here are some additional suggestions to help you assemble your team.

An executive sponsor from the business side of your organization should lead the strategic effort. This role may be filled by someone from the IT, customer service, or customer experience team. In the billing market, the finance department may provide an executive sponsor if they own the billing process. Strong leadership from a senior manager will help guarantee that your strategy is implemented with maximum efficiency and that it builds in opportunities for innovation down the road. From a soft skills perspective, be sure to select someone who is willing to “walk the talk” with regard to organizational change and who is available to meet with the team periodically and communicate with the project manager regularly.

Identify a project manager. The most successful strategic initiatives include a project manager. Choosing an individual

with formal training in project management, such as Project Management Institute certification, will help to ensure that your strategies and plans are implemented as efficiently as possible. Select someone who is knowledgeable about your organization's structure and processes and who has the experience and authority to engage other associates as needed. This person should be able to make customer communications his or her top priority until the desired improvements have been achieved. In terms of soft skills, your project manager should be able to think both strategically and tactically. He or she should also be well-organized, goal-oriented, collaborative, and capable of managing and synthesizing information from multiple areas of the business.

Recruit a digital champion. If you want your customer communications to provide a unified experience across multiple channels, it's critical to recruit at least one digital champion. It can be difficult to determine who "owns" digital customer communications. Many organizations have an ongoing internal struggle between the business and marketing groups over digital strategy. Marketing communications are frequently handled by an external agency, but agencies are typically poorly equipped to handle the volume, security, and compliance requirements that transactional communications demand. Internal IT teams may have responsibility for transactional emails, either because no one else wants to or because they also administer a corporate website with billing and presentment functions.

Your digital champion(s) should know how you handle digital customer communications today, have at least a basic knowledge of IT, and be able to engage other digital subject matter experts as needed. If someone in your organization is responsible for eAdoption or eConsent targets, he or she should also be part of the discussion.

Your marketing team can identify new ways to leverage customer communications for revenue generation. They can also provide a view into your current campaign management process, identify synergies, and suggest improvements.

Customer service can contribute valuable insights into what's not working with your current customer communications and identify current business processes that could be streamlined or

improved. Similarly, the customer experience team (if you have one) can help to ensure that your transactional communications support and enhance other customer touchpoints for more seamless and satisfying customer interactions.

Consult representatives from each business unit that initiates customer-facing communications. They may not need to attend every team meeting, but you should gather their input upfront and keep them in the loop as you develop your strategy and outline potential improvements. Likewise, you may wish to consult channel partners, agents, advisors, or intermediaries who are represented in or affected by your customer communications.

Your compliance department can help you identify regulatory and compliance pain points and help you brainstorm ways to streamline the management and delivery of regulatory documents.

Internal operations, process, and technical subject matter experts can help you capture and organize institutional knowledge around customer communications - a crucial and often overlooked aspect of implementing customer communications strategy.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNANCE

As you assemble your team, you'll need to decide on a governance structure. Will you appoint a small, autonomous sub-team to make decisions independently, or will the entire team provide oversight of any projects you undertake? Which decisions can be made by the project manager, and which require the approval of the executive sponsor? Decision making tends to be nimbler with a small, autonomous team and executive signoff.



Even the most talented team can fail to achieve its objectives without a commitment to frequent checkpoints and communication. Be sure to agree on how frequently the main team will meet. Use written agendas and meeting notes to keep team members informed and on track. Don't forget to determine how—and how often—you will communicate with stakeholders and all associates. (The frequency and content of your communications may vary depending on the group.)

As you prioritize the improvements you'd like to implement, you may want to establish one or more sub-teams to lead pilot projects in specific business units or for specific types of communications. Be sure to determine who will be responsible for doing the work, who will be accountable for its completion, who must be consulted along the way, and who must be informed of changes.

EXAMINING YOUR BUSINESS ISSUES

Your first team meeting should include a discussion of your organization's current customer communication challenges and a brainstorming session to list additional business issues that you could address through customer communications. Later, you'll prioritize this list and use it to guide the development of pilot projects and implementation plans.

Broadridge has developed a brief assessment tool at www.assessment.custcomm.net to help you determine the effectiveness of your customer communications. This responsive questionnaire provides insight into the areas of your customer communications program most in need of improvement. It covers both operational efficiency and customer experience, and it examines how you currently manage data, content, and channels. We recommend that team members complete the assessment prior to your first meeting and use the results as a springboard for discussion.

CREATING A VISION DOCUMENT

Before you begin planning improvements to your customer communications, create a written document describing your vision for customer communications. This document—which could be as brief as a one-page outline—lays out the desired state toward which all your plans and activities will drive. If you already possess vision documents for customer care or customer experience, be sure to re-examine them here. If no

vision documents exist, you may find similar information in the business case for your customer experience organization or other recent, customer-focused initiatives. If your organization has traditionally focused on operational efficiency, don't overlook this opportunity to dive deeper on customer engagement. It is less expensive to retain and sell to existing customers than it is to attract new ones

DRAFTING A STRATEGIC PLAN AND SELECTING PILOT PROJECT(S)

Once you've reviewed business issues and created a vision document, use the information you've gathered to prioritize a list of business objectives or goals. Identify "quick wins" that you could implement as pilot projects over a period of 6 months to a year, and identify long-term changes that will require larger investments and the willingness to change your organizational culture and/or structure. Your strategic customer communications plan should span 3 years at a high level; you'll continue to revise it as work progresses.

Be sure to establish and track against **baseline and target metrics** for each project you undertake. Pilot projects should be agile: By tracking progress regularly, you can decide whether a project is bringing the expected returns in the desired timeframe and adjust accordingly.

Assess the Effectiveness of Your Customer Communications

We've designed a brief, interactive quiz to help you assess the effectiveness of your organization's current customer communications and suggest next steps for improvement.

Visit www.assessment.custcomm.net to complete the assessment.



As projects get under way, it's important for your strategic team to **continue meeting** on a periodic basis. Not every stakeholder will be involved in every project, but maintaining clear lines of communication across functions is key to ensuring that your customer communications continue to improve.

Don't overlook the importance of **organizational communications**. Your strategic team should reach agreement on how progress and changes will be communicated to associates. Clear and regular communication is critical in bringing and keeping associates onboard with your operational and customer experience efforts.

Finally, build in time and resources to **celebrate successes** and process change. Customer communications typically touch many areas of a business; as such, big changes to your customer communications can have a big impact on your associates. Long-term success will depend in no small part on associate engagement.

CONCLUSION

Today, in many industries, customer communications are about much more than cost, timeliness, and quality. Cultural and technological shifts have placed the power in consumers' hands and increased expectations for a seamless, individualized experience across channels and touchpoints. Best-in-class organizations are approaching their customer communications strategically and holistically to generate better customer experiences and business outcomes.

Need More Help?

Many organizations find it helpful to engage outside help in the strategic planning process. Cross-functional teamwork can be especially difficult when you are revisiting culture and processes that have been in place for years, and technology in which certain departments may have a vested interest. A number of firms offer professional services to help you improve your customer communications and create better customer experiences.

CONTACT US

For additional information, please contact us at +1 (800) 353-0103 or at broadridge.com.

ABOUT BROADRIDGE CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS SOLUTIONS

Our customer communications solutions transform how organizations communicate with their customers by creating an optimal, integrated digital and print experience. By seamlessly connecting customers with relevant content across the existing and emerging channels they prefer, your transactional, marketing and regulatory communications can drive greater efficiency, engagement and results.

Broadridge, a global fintech leader with \$4 billion in revenue, provides communications, technology, data and analytics solutions. We help drive business transformation for our clients with solutions for enriching client engagement, navigating risk, optimizing efficiency and generating revenue growth.

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