That was then, this is now

Twenty years ago, businesses seeking to improve the customer experience only had a limited number of touch points to consider. Most customer interactions involved one of three scenarios: face-to-face in a retail store or corporate office; over the telephone; or in writing delivered via the postal service. Needless to say, it was a simpler time.

Today, of course, businesses serve customers through all sorts of online channels: e-mail, SMS text, social media and corporate Web sites, to name just a few. And then there’s the fact that use of mobile devices—for example, smartphones and tablets—is exploding. About 35 percent of U.S. adults now own smartphones,¹ and Frost & Sullivan predicts that number will rise to more than 80 percent by 2015.² Worldwide, more than 1 billion people will possess smartphones by 2013.³

To support the explosive popularity of these mobile devices, wireless carriers are building a worldwide communications infrastructure capable of delivering affordable, advanced, interactive services on a truly global scale. With today’s high-speed, high-bandwidth cellular networks, such as LTE and WiMax, and ever-expanding coverage areas, resource-intensive features like real-time multimedia streaming and videoconferencing are now readily available to mobile device users the world over.

Bringing it all together is a new generation of mobile applications that take advantage of the new mobile device hardware and telecom infrastructure capabilities. For example, more than 500,000 mobile apps are available for Apple’s iOS mobile devices alone.⁴

Many of these apps are created to help specific businesses interact with their customers. And these applications are already having a profound impact on the

³ [http://www.telco2research.com/articles/AN_Arete-billion-smartphones-2013_Summary](http://www.telco2research.com/articles/AN_Arete-billion-smartphones-2013_Summary).
way customers want to interact with businesses. Just think about how often consumers today muse about whether there is an app for this or that activity. The implied convenience has become a part of today’s culture.

However, an important shortcoming of many mobile device apps today is that they provide no convenient way for customers to request additional levels of assistance. Even if a “Contact us” button is offered to send customer calls to a contact center, the contextual information surrounding the session is dropped along the way.

Therein lie rich opportunities for contact centers. Consumer expectations of companies to provide convenient apps and other related services continues to grow. Businesses that meet or exceed those expectations could enjoy competitive advantage. One way to exploit this is through the rich and deep array of contextual information about customers that mobile devices and apps provide today, updated in real time as customers use their mobile devices. And given the fact that customers carry these devices literally in their pockets and use them continuously, contextual information introduces new ways for making traditional contact centers more efficient and effective.

In this paper, we share our thoughts about these opportunities, along with ideas about how to weave them into a mobility strategy so you can capture their benefits and leverage them to gain competitive advantage.

How mobile devices are redefining customer experience

Businesses have long understood that customers value both time and convenience. They also know that each customer interaction offers opportunities to improve loyalty and brand perception by delivering an experience that is both engaging and rewarding. The rising popularity of mobile devices both expands the number of opportunities—and raises the stakes for failure should the experience fall short.

With the number of general mobile devices and tablets having already surpassed the number of laptop and PC users, we are well on track for the number of smartphone and tablet users to surpass the number of laptop and PC users by 2013.5 At that point, providing customers with mobile access into sales, service and support will be an essential part of doing business.

About 35 percent of U.S. adults now own smartphones, a number predicted to rise to more than 80 percent by 2015.

The good news is that early adopters who embrace this powerful new channel will have a compelling competitive advantage that differentiates their brand in the market because customers will enthusiastically say, “There’s an app for that!” For laggards, the opposite will happen. Gartner estimates that by 2013, 80 percent of businesses will suffer a revenue loss from not supporting Web-based customer service on mobile devices.\(^6\)

How do mobile devices change the contact center landscape?Increasingly, existing and potential customers want information on the go—pricing, a quick answer, store location or post-purchase support. Mobile devices give them many channels for reaching out, including voice, Web pages, SMS text, social media sites and video chat. With convenience a major factor driving customer habits, businesses with contact centers equipped to initiate interactions through any of these channels have a distinct advantage. Customers often gravitate to companies that make such interactions effortless.

“Contextual” customer data offers even more opportunities

Contextual customer data takes this concept of effortless interactions to the next level. The more a business knows about its customers and their specific requests, the better the odds that it will be able to provide positive experiences to them.

The evolution of technology in contact centers

Technology has long played a critical role in delivering quality information to customer service or support agents prior to or during an interaction with a customer (Figure 1). Decades ago, automatic number identification (ANI)

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\(^6\) Ibid.

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*Figure 1: The evolution of interactive context technologies*
and dialed number identification service (DNIS) technologies helped businesses identify who was calling so they could pull up account records, assemble the right resources, or route calls prior to even answering the phone. Later, interactive voice response (IVR) and self-service systems streamlined call handling and contact center routing. After that, computer telephony integration (CTI) further automated the process of aligning customers with the right resources as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The contextual information that businesses can collect from today’s mobile devices (Figure 2) is dramatically more rich and varied. It includes, but is certainly not limited to:

- **Transactional data.** Data that has been stored in the mobile device, such as account numbers and sales or service history, is extremely useful contextual information. This type of data can also include information that has been acquired from external sources, such as bar codes scanned off product labels or merchant data from credit card readers—all of which gives contact center agents more information to work with and the opportunity to respond faster to customers’ needs.

- **Situational or “triggered” data.** If a business can access a GeoTag (geographical information) that tells where a customer is located, or knows whether the user is signed into an instant messaging (IM) service or using a social networking site, that can improve the contact center agent’s ability to provide a better experience. For example, a company can direct customers to the nearest retail location or service center that has the product they want or service they need.

*Figure 2: Types of rich contextual information*
Mobile device applications are profoundly affecting the way customers want to interact with businesses. But many mobile apps provide no convenient way for customers to request additional assistance.

- **Collaboration-enabled data.** If a customer has initiated a video chat or video-conference session, or has been redirected to a business’ Web site via a browser, that is extraordinarily useful contextual information for a contact center professional to possess. The information that the customer views or downloads during the session, along with the Web sites and Web pages the customer visits—and how the customer navigated through the app’s screens—provide clearer insights into that customer’s interests, preferences and needs.

- **App-driven data.** When customers make choices from self-service menus on a mobile app, such as requesting a callback or answering a customer survey, businesses can receive immediate feedback that can improve the customer experience, especially when that information can be shared with the company’s customer service professionals in real time.

- **Contact center customer data.** By being able to identify customers and their intent as part of the application, the contact center can bring a rich set of contextual data that be used to personalize and prioritize interactions. This can include the status level of particular customers, products and services they have currently, history of past interactions and customer preferences.

**Mobility and contextual data—a case study**

A real-world example illustrates the usefulness of mobile devices in delivering timely contextual data (Figure 3). For cable TV/Internet/phone companies, many customer service calls—which are typically handled by live agents—

![Figure 3: A cable provider uses contextual customer data to enhance customer support](image-url)

- **Set top box**
- **Smartphone**
- **Customer care agent**
- **QR code**
  - QR-scannable code containing:
    - Set top box serial number
    - Location
    - Account number
    - Name
    - Phone number
- **Self-service interaction**
  - Check 1: Check for local outages and announce ETA
  - Check 2: Ask for set top box manual reboot
  - Check 3: Offer agent assistance option if not resolved
  - Check 4: Offer callback and announce estimated wait time
- **Callback request**
- **Callback**
- **Customer satisfaction survey**
  - Smartphone-based survey
  - Social media integration
- **Social media integration**
Businesses can expect easily measurable and quantifiable return on investment, as well as reputational or brand-enhancement benefits, from expanding contact center access to mobile devices.

can be easily solved by directing customers to take a few simple steps, such as resetting the set top box. In many cases, the most time-consuming part of the call involves the agent collecting customer information, such as account names and numbers and serial numbers from the customer, and then walking a customer through steps he or she has already completed. A frustrated customer is often the result of this interaction.

Today, however, a mobile app exists that allows customers to use their mobile devices to scan a quick response (QR) code that has been attached to their cable set top box. The app collects all relevant information, such as account or serial number, and offers the customer self-service advice, such as to check for a power outage or reset the box. At any time, the customer can request assistance by simply selecting the app option to receive a call, keeping the customer in control of the experience, and creating the link back to the cable company if and when needed. The customer can automatically see when to expect the agent to call, or can select a time that works best for him or her.

When a contact center receives the call, contextual customer data comes with it. Such data can include a description of the problem, self-service steps the customer already took and photos the customer attached to the request. The contact center’s communications systems can assess that contextual data, along with insights gleaned from the company’s own customer database and external third-party information, and intelligently route the call to the best-qualified agent. The system might even be programmed to assign a higher priority to that customer because of the time the customer has already spent trying to solve the issue. The possibilities are virtually endless.

After the call, the customer is sent a survey over the mobile device to determine the success of the service call. The customer even has the option of sharing the results of the survey over social media such as Twitter or Facebook.

Benefits of expanding contact center services to mobile devices

Businesses can expect easily measurable and quantifiable return on investment (ROI), as well as reputational or brand-enhancement benefits, from expanding contact center access to mobile devices.
For example, the cable company in the example above has seen the number of service calls requiring live agent assistance dramatically decline. Calls that still require an agent to intervene have much shorter average handle times (AHTs), along with enhanced first-call resolution performance.

Quantitative elements of ROI may include:

- Reduced network costs by optimizing the necessary trunking infrastructure and enabling device-based self-service and callbacks.
- Increased screen POP accuracy by leveraging the mobile app and ensuring the proper customer identification.
- Lower agent AHT by bringing richer contextual data with the call into the contact center.
- Reduced agent calls by enabling device-based self-service.
- Higher completion rates of customer satisfaction surveys.
- Viral awareness through social media—using customer survey responses and customers’ online posts from various social media feeds, companies can virally spread the word about their improved service capabilities and the customer benefits.
- More accurate routing—instead of using IVR systems to prompt for the intent of the customer, mobile apps enable contact centers to gather much more granular information, which in turn enables the routing of a request to the most appropriate agent, thereby reducing redirects.

A company also potentially realizes “softer” qualitative benefits, such as improved customer satisfaction due to faster and more convenient resolution of problems. This, in turn, differentiates a company from its competitors. Plus, soft benefits frequently lead to more quantitative ones, such as sales increases or reduced customer churn.

Qualitative elements of ROI may include:

- Increased customer satisfaction and loyalty—mobility translates into convenience, speed of service and more first-call resolutions, which in turn contribute to satisfied customers.
- Improved competitive differentiation—early adopters of mobility capabilities will stand out from their slower competitors, and savvy customers will notice the difference.
Coupling mobile devices with sophisticated mobile apps and next-generation networks creates a rich array of contextual data, giving businesses unique opportunities to simultaneously streamline contact center processes and dramatically enhance the customer experience.

- Savings on maintenance and updates through the ability to embed logic within an IVR application and extend that logic to the mobile app.
- Perception of brand innovation—customers reward innovation with word-of-mouth and social promotion, which can further distance a business from its competitors.
- Broadening a company’s market space by increasing accessibility for persons with disabilities.

An even brighter future for contact centers

In the future, businesses will be able to tap into the rich array of contextual information even further to enhance the customer experience in ways previously unimaginable. Exciting technological developments, such as mobile currency converters, evolving Web standards, and smart TV-based customer service that integrates mobility apps with TV apps for visual self-service and customer experience, will only accelerate the speed of innovation on a global basis.

For businesses to take full advantage of all the possibilities, three things are needed. First, application developers need feature-rich and vendor-agnostic tools such as:

- **Mobile application programming interfaces (APIs)**—pre-packaged routines, protocols and tools necessary to build software applications.
- **Software developer kits (SDKs)**—complete programming packages that include one or more APIs, programming tools and documentation to make it easier for programmers to develop applications.

Such environments will allow development of mobile apps that work across the entire span of mobile hardware platforms.

Second, telecom providers need to keep expanding the reach of powerful, high-speed and high-bandwidth networks, such as 4G or WiMax. Those that do should win the favor of more customers for all the reasons cited above—customers value convenience, time savings and responsive service, and they are willing to shift loyalties to get them.

Finally, of course, customers need to “opt in” to take advantage of the new mobile customer service channels using mobile devices.
Now is the time for mobility in contact centers

Businesses cannot afford to ignore the impact that mobility in general, and context services specifically, will have on their contact centers in the very near future. Given that more than 80 percent of their customers are likely to own mobile devices by 2015, and that they will expect to be able to use those devices when interacting with businesses, putting a mobility strategy in place is a competitive imperative.

But merely enabling customers with mobile devices to call, e-mail or text will not be enough. Given the rich array of contextual data available when mobile devices are coupled with increasingly sophisticated mobile apps and the resources and performance of next-generation networks, businesses have unique opportunities for simultaneously streamlining contact center processes—and cutting costs—while dramatically enhancing the customer experience. With the right dynamic open framework that integrates device, app and network capabilities, the sky is the limit for innovation and differentiation.

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