

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Apply the human touch for less: the future of interactive communication.

2010 Perspective

For decades, written communications between companies and customers centered on high-volume, mass-produced documents. Legacy mainframes easily handled the structured output, consistent formatting and batch processing required to generate bills and statements with modest degrees of personalized content.

Certain documents, however, are simply too complex for auto-generation. Claims correspondence, contracts, customer service correspondence and custom proposals, for example, require a human touch—especially as companies look to deliver more relevant customer encounters.

But this “human touch” can be costly on many fronts. A reliance on Word documents has led to error-prone processes, a lack of historical record and over-dependence on the skills of individual customer service reps—problems that have not been solved by overgrown macro solutions or expensive homegrown applications.

Given the importance of customer experience management, retention and regulatory compliance, these challenges can no longer be ignored. With advances in technology, companies can now apply the human touch without sacrificing quality or productivity. This year, look for organizations to improve interactive communications on five fronts: personalization, speed, control, accuracy and efficiency.



GET PERSONAL: After meeting with a sales rep or speaking with a live person over the phone, that last thing a customer wants to see is a form letter that does not reflect the information previously shared.

Personalization is more than a name, address and account number. Companies must find ways to tailor individual communications to the specific needs of the interaction. When communications reference recent conversations and personalized messages, it demonstrates the value a company places on the relationship.

Most organizations have a lot of information about their customers, including demographics, transaction histories and prior purchases. Finding ways to access this data and integrate personalized content into documents and correspondence can help improve loyalty, retention and cross-sell.

DELIVER IT NOW: Today's consumers presume immediacy. The idea that someone needs to wait for a piece of correspondence or proposal seems odd in the age of instant messaging and Twitter. The expectation is that you can deliver documents instantaneously, through the customer's preferred delivery channel.

There are reasons why companies should want to step up to this challenges. From a marketing perspective, you want to strike while the iron is hot to close deals and sell add-on services at a time when the customer is open to making a purchase. When dealing with time-sensitive transactions or situations involving potential fraud, the immediacy of interactive communications can help improve the quality of service and mitigate risk. Creating processes where individuals can reply quickly can be advantageous.

“Customer experience management, retention and regulatory compliance are just a few of the business drivers that have shifted the focus of communications from structured to interactive output.”

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The human touch

Interactive communications

MAINTAIN CONTROL: As employees and customers interact in ways that emphasize personalization and immediacy, organization will need to address the issue of control.

Your company has invested heavily in a brand image—one that was easy to maintain when the majority of customer communications were mass-produced by back-end business systems. In addition to brand consistency, these interactive communications also need to comply with any legal or regulatory restrictions.

To mitigate risk, offer business users templates that define the branding elements of the document and any protected content. Provide reps with an ability to auto-select content to increase productivity. Interactive data prompts, content options and free text entry features should provide for the right amount of flexibility.

FACILITATE ACCURACY: Customer-facing staff are often inundated with requests, and look to complete transactions quickly so they can serve other customers.

When you make it easy for reps to create and review interactive documents, it can help eliminate errors and costly mistakes. An interface that allows representatives to create correspondence simply by entering customer data and selecting the appropriate content from a menu can simplify document creation.

Leading-edge applications will also incorporate WYSIWYG document editors so front-line users can create communications in-context of the document itself. Reps are prompted for information relative to the document that is immediately populated, without having to go to other locations to preview. That way, documents are viewed in advance just as the customer will see them.

PROMOTE EFFICIENCY: Of course, any approach to customer communications should also be cost-effective.

By relying on a combination of functions that reduce preparation time, organizations can accurately respond to more customer inquiries in a shorter time frame, and reduce production printing and mailing costs. Taking it one step further, some companies strive to improve business process automation with built-in document management, workflow, Web services and optional archive for easy integration in existing systems such as SAP, claims systems (insurance) or loan processing systems (banking).

In either case, when it comes to productivity and efficiency, the right analytics and metrics will make it easy to track how templates are used and how documents are ultimately sent to your customers—providing opportunities to identify further improvements.

ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMERS INTERACTIVELY

Most every organization requires interactive solutions to meet the growing demand from customers and business partners:

- Insurance providers handle claims, policy holder correspondence and underwriting communications
- Financial services firms produce customer service correspondence such as credit card notifications and decline letters
- Government agencies process various tax and benefit documents
- Telecommunications and energy companies provide customer assistance through customer service and collection processes

In each of these cases, the ability to generate real-time correspondence can save time, reduce costs and improve customer service. Pitney Bowes Business Insight can help. Solutions such as EngageOne™ Interactive offer an efficient and effective means to generate personalized correspondence, new business applications and negotiated documents, so you can replace error-prone, costly and hard-to-maintain systems.

Whether your organization is looking to add personalization, speed, control, accuracy or efficiency, Pitney Bowes can help you locate new opportunities, connect with customers and communicate more efficiently. To learn more about trends in interactive communications, contact Pitney Bowes Business Insight at 800.327.8627.