

# Getting better connected



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Customer communications management, or CCM, is a relatively new technology, but it promises significant improvements in the quality and efficiency of the way many large and medium-sized organisations interact with their customers.

According to Lisa Sutrick, director of product management at CCM specialist Pitney Bowes Business Insight, the CCM process stretches from data acquisition and cleansing, through dynamic document generation and multi-channel output, to providing a permanent archive (or 'vault') and account management for customer self-service.

Many organisations are already using CCM for high-volume 'batch' transactions, although they can extend this by the addition of carefully tailored marketing or informational messages. However, they have not focused as much on their on-demand and interactive initiatives from a holistic CCM perspective.

For example, CCM can make it easier to produce one-off documents on demand. If a customer buys a carpet in a shop and wants a finance contract, this can be generated and printed on the spot. If someone buys a concert ticket on the web and needs a personal identity card to gain admission to the venue, this can be emailed to them for printing on their home printer. The same principles can be applied to all manner of documents, from extended guarantees to insurance quotations.

For interactive communications with the contact centre, the user interface must be easy to use and efficient – perhaps automatically selecting the right template, pre-filling as much as

is available from the back-end system, then only displaying exactly what is needed as the template unfolds before the user's eye. It should be possible for the interface to be designed by, or in consultation with, the actual users, says Sutrick, so that their efficiency is increased, not impaired.

According to a study, Turning Customer Interaction into Profitable Relationships, by independent analyst firm Quocirca, "Equipping call centre agents with accurate information to service calls ensures that call handling is prompt and reliable, while by integrating information captured by call centre agents with business systems such as customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise content management, CCM ensures that customers receive timely and accurate communications based on a complete knowledge of their interactions."

Research by McKinsey & Company suggests that, by reducing the average time it takes agents to retrieve or update information from back-end systems, CCM can cut service costs by up to 25 per cent, while customer self-service (for example via the web) can reduce transaction costs by 99 per cent (eg from £10 to 10 pence). In addition, by allowing agents to quickly access customer data for up-sell and cross-sell opportunities, CCM can increase service revenue by up to 35 per cent.

"With CCM," says Sutrick, "the contact centre agent's life is made easier, the business knows that communications are properly branded and conveying the right message, and the customer gets a better, more consistent, more relevant service. So everybody wins."

## ▶ STAGES IN THE CCM PROCESS MAY INCLUDE:

- \* Verifying that customer contact details are correct and consistent, and adding demographic and personal data to help understand customers' past behaviour and predict their future needs.

- \* Creating relevant, personalised, content-rich communications that increase the likelihood of the customer making a purchase; improve customer satisfaction, cross- and up-selling opportunities; and enable the business to provide a faster and better response to queries.

- \* Selecting the customer's preferred delivery channel. For example, older customers might appreciate a phone call while teenagers would prefer a text message – or even, in future, a posting on a social networking site.

- \* And recording exactly what's been said, by whom, when, and how. "In today's increasingly interactive, multi-channel world, if you don't archive communications across all possible media you don't have a single customer view anymore," says Sutrick.