Top 3 macro-trends in customer operations in 2020

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Today, Customer Analytics Italia (CAI) launches its "Thought leadership" section on its new website. The aim is to share insights from thought leaders and consulting projects on the constantly evolving world of customer operations.

In the last months, CAI has interviewed three top managers focusing mainly on the impact of Technological Innovation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) on customer operations and interactions, a theme that acquired even greater importance after the recent COVID emergency.

Luca Sartorello, former Global Head of Customer Operations at Philip Morris International, Paolo Pecchiari, former Head of Direct Sales at Alitalia, and Giuseppe Busacca, Executive Director of Customer Value and Customer Operations at TeamSystem shared their opinions on the topic. The full interviews are accessible on YouTube at this link.

In this article, the summary of these discussions is presented as the top 3 macro trends in customer operations in 2020.

1. COVID-19 accelerated the digital transformation across every sector of the economy

Digital transformation has already been underway for several years, but with significant differences across industries. Conversely, COVID really had an impact on all the sectors of the economy.

In the context of customer operations, it accelerated the transition to remote interactions with customers, boosting remote sales, and support. It has been a turning point for the Financial Services industry. In Europe, every insurance company and bank are now heavily investing in remote interaction solutions such as chatbots, and this trend is expected to continue in the medium- to long-term.

Digital transformation comes with its challenges. Customer operations leaders will face increased complexity in managing remote interactions and finding the optimal balance between the cost of serving their customers and the quality of the service offered.

Best practices in managing customer operations are changing. Thus, it becomes crucial for companies to start developing their innovation capabilities from now, investing internally, or looking for external support and competencies.

2. Artificial intelligence and big data can already generate value for business

AI can already support organizations' human capital to be more efficient and effective. It generates the highest value in simple customer interactions, as for customer requests that fall into the company's knowledge base and that can be automated. It still struggles with more complex interactions (e.g., elaborate troubleshooting procedures) where the machine can hardly replace the human operator.

Used in combination with big data, AI can support businesses in four other important directions. First, it allows companies to understand why customers typically interact with them in a deep and analytical way. Second, this information can be used to improve products or services in order to prevent the need to call customer service in the first place. Third, advanced analytics can anticipate “customer crises”, i.e. churn prediction, and contribute to recovering lost clients. Finally, this technology frees human operators from repetitive tasks so that they can spend their time on more gratifying and value-adding activities.

3. Human capital is still the beating heart of every company

AI is a powerful support and not an alternative to a business' human capital. The rise of machines is not something that could happen in the next few decades.

Managers in the customer operations field should try to innovate with these types of technologies but they must not forget the transformative power of their human capital.

Among the three trends discussed, the importance of an organization’s human capital in transformation projects is what we believe is the most relevant and, also, what plenty of managers fail to recognize in their innovation plans.

About Customer Analytics Italia

Customer Analytics Italia (CAI) is a boutique consulting firm specialized in customer operations. CAI has worked in 30+ countries, serving 100+ clients operating 330+ contact centers. With over 20 years of combined management consulting experience, our team of McKinsey and BCG alumni is ready to address your critical challenges and support your transformation.

Media Contact

Customer Analytics Italia

a.deangelis@customeranalytics.it

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