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Digital

Contact Center

COVID-19: Respond, Recover, and Thrive

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Introduction

COVID-19 has brought challenges to citizens, health care systems, governments, businesses, etc. which few have experienced in their lifetime. Contact centers must also be responding to challenges presented by the global crisis.

Deloitte's Contact Center practice leaders have defined a path forward to help executives address changes in contact center operations and customer expectations.

We have defined three phases of actions to address the likely impact of COVID-19 on the contact center which executives should consider:

Respond:

This phase consists of day-to-day problem solving often times dealing with unexpected and significant impacts to the contact center function such as the near-immediate loss of access to some offshore contact center resources and capabilities, the closing of physical contact centers in the US and beyond, dramatic increases and/or decreases in contact volumes, etc. There is no true playbook for this phase but structure, speed, and communication can help.

Recover:

As the Respond phase concludes, we anticipate equally challenging times for contact center executives. Scenarios may include the need to rapidly reopen facilities and integrate resources to a "new normal" where customer engagement channel and contact type mixes have substantively changed, having unforeseen impacts on staffing needs. For some industries and BPOs majorly impacted by COVID-19, this phase may require significant speed to scale. If not handled appropriately, it could negatively impact business outcomes (e.g., revenue recovery, customer retention).

Thrive:

The final phase represents a true "new normal" where contact center leaders will need to redefine Service Delivery Models (SDM), consider right-shoring strategies, expand virtualization capabilities, improve operational and technical flexibility, increase speed toward advanced capabilities in automation, insights, and AI, etc. We expect this phase to anchor contact center strategies for the foreseeable future.

Phase 1: Response

Phase 1 focuses on stabilizing the contact center environment and dealing with day-to-day challenges, many of which may be unforeseen.

Practical actions for the Respond phase may include:

- Establishing a multi-disciplinary, virtual war room to manage day-to-day challenges in an immediate fashion with sound governance procedures.

- Rapidly deploying and strengthening Work at Home (W@H) capabilities.

- Leveraging advanced collaboration tools including video conferencing, virtual team rooms, etc.

- Encouraging employees to demonstrate empathy in customer engagement and monitoring, measuring and rewarding behaviors that elevate the human experience.

- Establishing a community for leading practices across industries to understand what's working and what's not.

- Deploying / focusing analytics to understand what's impacting contac center (e.g., social listening, voice / text analytics).

- Prioritizing the essentials of your business so stressed contact center resources can support the most important things.

- Limiting hours of operations and deploying call deflection messages in the phone system.

- Rapidly deploying omni-channel bots to engage customers or employees during high volumes periods or to address FAQs and process simple requests.

- Rapidly deploying cloud-based capabilities (e.g., CCaaS tools) to support and flex response efforts.

- Considering non-traditional sources for contact center agents (e.g., industries hit hardest by COVID-19 may have excess capacity which could be utilized in industries needing capacity).

- Leveraging third-party resources to fill in resource / capability gaps in other key contact center areas.

- Leveraging excess capacity to document processes, to create videos and other electronic training tools, etc. - this will enable and expedite the Recover and Thrive phases where additional staff may need to be onboarded quickly.

PLEASE CONSIDER

Many business continuity and disaster recovery (BC/DR) plans did not contemplate the extent of the COVID-19 impact. Leverage existing BC/DR plans but understand there are likely gaps.

Establish a PMO to manage Phase 1 with a focus on structure, governance, and effective communication. Capture gaps, best practices, decisions made, etc. during Phase 1 to update BC/DR plans at the appropriate time.

Teams should take inventory of longer-term capabilities needed to support a likely "new normal" as Phase 2: Recover and Phase 3: Thrive come to light.

Phase 2: Recover

Phase 2 may likely be a transition from the relative uncertainty of Phase 1: Respond to the "new normal" in Phase 3: Thrive. During this transition phase we anticipate a very dynamic contact center landscape.

Contact types and volumes may dramatically shift from what companies see in Phase 1 as the market re-engages. Contact centers may need to support a wide range of scenarios supporting everything from rapid market regrowth to continued market uncertainty. Further, business value chains and eco-systems supported by the contact center may evolve, placing new requirements on the contact center (e.g., a major virtualization of the market and capabilities may be part of the "new normal").

Activities to consider when preparing for Phase 2: Recover may include:

- Continuing Response phase activities related to PMO, governance, communication, etc. These activities could support a dynamic Phase 2 which turns the focus to handling the normalization of business activities.

- Conducting a Response phase post-mortem with stakeholders ranging from executives to representatives and creating insights to apply toward future actions.

- Extending, optimizing, and/or institutionalize what worked well in Phase 1. For example, the virtualization of resource can continue at a larger scale than prior to COVID-19, bots and other alternative servicing solutions should remain and scale, etc.

- Reprioritizing strategic plans, activities, and investments. As you'll see in Phase 3: Thrive, we believe a new wave of priorities may hit many contact centers. Taking assessment of your Recover phase priorities may prove valuable now so priorities, investments, resources, etc. are allocated appropriately.

- Balancing speed to market with other business considerations (cost, leading practices, etc.). Defining investments needed and communicating costs and related implications early to key stakeholders will support recovery efforts. As possible, take the time to incorporate leading practices as you ramp up contact center activities.

- Considering capacity planning in anticipation of Phase 3, ensuring preparedness for the need to scale up to meet demand.

- Accelerating "Future of Contact Center" initiatives such as moving to the cloud, automation, AI, analytics, etc.

- Incorporating potential positives such as likely reduced turnover, lower real estate costs, benefits of further automation into your plans.

PLEASE CONSIDER

With rapid scaling and dynamic contact center environments comes a higher likelihood of unintended consequences; think through plans and assess potential implications.

Update BC/DR plans based on lessons learned in Phase 1 and consider ongoing testing.

Phase 3: Thrive

Phase 3 may require significant change as we move to the "new normal" with areas such as:

- Virtualization: The contact center SDM may need to reconsider the balance of physical locations vs. virtual capabilities.

- Right-shoring: Much like other global supply chain issues, leaders may increase the ability to shift demand within networks faster by diversifying sourcing, building up reserve burst capacity, and developing capabilities to enable agents faster.

- Flexibility: This may take on many forms including, the acceleration of timelines to move contact center capabilities to the cloud (e.g., CCaaS), solutions to flex resource capacity, and focus (e.g., contact handling), etc.

- Security: Closely tied to many of the topics above, security concerns and strategies will be a major priority.   There has been a rise in cyber-attacks and balancing flexibility and speed with security is essential. Engaging cyber specialists as your contact center planning unfolds is essential.

- AI, Automation & Analytics: Advanced capabilities in these are on most contact center roadmaps, but we believe the leaders of tomorrow will move to realize these capabilities faster than originally planned.

- Digitization: Similarly, accelerating digital engagement capabilities for customers, employees, leaders, eco-system partners, etc. will only increase in priority.

- Managed Services: Many companies may look to third-parties to manage more aspects of their contact center. This ties closely to the Flexibility / "move to the cloud" topic above.

- Cost / Revenue: While cost control and revenue enablement have been tenets of contact center responsibilities for years, managing these elements will only rise in visibility and importance. Any changes may increase cost requirements, but may also be essential for retaining or recapturing market share and revenue for the business.

- Human Experience: Perhaps at no time previously has the importance of effectively and empathetically engaging with humans (customers, employees, partners, etc.) been so essential. Incorporating human-centered design practices, new human experience metrics and measures, and enabling new cultural philosophies may prove to be a competitive differentiator for those companies that thrive.

PLEASE CONSIDER

Staying close to business strategy and executive guidance during this phase. We expect significant change, and stakeholder alignment remains essential.	Preparing for contact center fundamentals to change. It may make sense to design new capabilities, Service Delivery Models, metrics, etc. against the customer and employee experiences.	Acknowledging you are blazing new territory. Consider engaging partners who will help guide you through this journey by incorporating best practices and agile transformative approaches.

Bringing it all together

These times are truly unprecedented, and we believe the contact center is entering uncharted territory. We also believe that contact centers and effective human engagement will be critical for companies to thrive in the new normal.

Deloitte is a global leader in contact center advisory, transformation, and managed services with a wide range of capabilities, assets, accelerators, and skills to help you through this journey.

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