

# Traditional contact centres still crucial amid rise in digital channels

In today's digitally driven world, it is safe to say that businesses and brands who do not invest in digital channels are at risk of losing market share and relevance as 90% of consumers look for a seamless omni-channel experience.



Mathew Conn, group CRO at Merchants South Africa.

When it comes to customer service specifically, a recent survey carried out by business process outsourcing (BPO) solutions provider, Merchants South Africa, found that 62% of South Africans prefer speaking to an agent despite the rise in digital channels available in this regard.

This is especially true when it comes to problem-solving. The survey found that when customers had a complaint, they were more likely to use e-mail as a means of communicating this.

“For many years, people have believed that the rise in digital customer service channels would mean an end to the traditional contact centre, but it is now evident that this is certainly not the case,” says Mathew Conn, group CRO at Merchants.

*“ In South Africa alone, the BPO industry attracted R4bn in investments during the past financial year, and currently provides employment opportunities for more than 260 000 individuals. The rise in digital channels has certainly changed the way people interact with businesses and brands and has created a space for the traditional contact centre to shift into something more. ”*

As products, services and pricing continue to converge, customer experience (CX) is the most important differentiator for businesses today. Combined with the current state of lockdown being experienced in South Africa and many other

countries, face-to-face interactions between businesses and their customers are on the decline – putting channels like the contact centre in the spotlight.

The Merchants South Africa survey found that customers were most satisfied when a contact centre agent was assisting them in a problem-solving capacity, and were doing so quickly and efficiently, with excellent knowledge of their products and services. Additionally, 48% of respondents said that dealing with a contact centre saves them time, 41% said it educates or informs them and a further 30% said it supports them when they are stuck online or using a digital channel.

“Digital platforms like web chat, social media and e-mail provide a further opportunity for contact centre agents to use their knowledge and expertise to assist customers through the use of these channels specifically, and have been instrumental in ensuring South African contact centre agents are equipped with digital skills while ensuring that customers have a choice of channels and are in control of their experience with the business in question,” says Conn.

“While they make use of digital and social channels for things like complaints and comments, when customers are looking for first contact resolution for a pressing problem, they will get in touch via telephone and look to speak directly with an agent.

Essentially, when they most want to feel understood and heard by a business, they will prioritise that human connection,” says Conn. He explains that, in his experience, South African contact centre agents are brilliant problem solvers – and this has played an undeniable role in the success of the country’s BPO sector during the Covid-19 pandemic specifically.

“As the business landscape continues to shift, it has never been more important for contact centre agents to be seen, and trained, as part of the business in question, rather than just an outsourced service provider. Businesses need to ensure they are prioritising CX, and one important aspect of that is having the right BPO partner,” concludes Conn.

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