

Social care in the Cloud

by Dennis Juul Poulsen, CEO, Tweakker

Subscribers support centres are a large cost element in any carrier's balance sheet. The recent growth of more complex smartphones is accompanied by increased pressure on customer care, but allowing the service to deteriorate is a sure way to lose market share. For this reason, mobile and virtual operators are seeking to move customer care to the Cloud. Internet-based, intuitive 'self-care', with a community of interacting users, is far more cost-effective and trendy. In the APAC region, where mobile Internet is set to rise by more than four times by 2015, online customer care is essential.



Dennis Juul Poulsen is CEO and co-founder of Tweakker established in 2009. As a business development, sales and management oriented executive, Mr Poulsen has broad experience within the mobile industry including international B2B sales at executive level. His focus revolves around developing disruptive Cloud technologies and products for the mobile provider and consumer space. He enjoys working with start-ups and established companies that aim to capture market share or seek to broaden their market scope by re-positioning their brands and products.

Why the Cloud?

The cost of traditional customer care centres is crippling the mobile industry and hampering innovation. With the drive towards greater data usage, thanks to the latest generations of smartphones, carriers are becoming increasingly dismayed at the mounting costs of getting customers connected to their networks.

On average, a smartphone user will make three calls to a care centre before getting sorted and the carrier's cost of providing that service represents a loss of at least one month's ARPU during the lifespan of a standard 12-month contract.

The stress levels and real anger that call centres create also cannot be underestimated. On average it takes a call centre six minutes to answer a customer call. Recent statistics show that 70 per cent of complaints are still made over the phone, even though the amount of email, web and social media complaints are on the increase.

In Britain, YouGov has reported that only 4.1 per cent of people have a good experience when dealing with a call centre. In fact, four out of five people say they have lost their patience and hung up when faced with a long call centre queue, while 69 per cent have had their opinion of a company or service permanently damaged after poor customer service.

Further, 50 per cent have advised family and friends against a company or service that they've had a bad experience with, and a quarter have terminated the contract with the company or a service that has kept them waiting too long.

Fast track to success

The case for maintaining customer care centres is damming and forces the mobile industry to look for new solutions and Cloud computing has emerged as the most viable solution going forward. It's been established that companies headed for Cloud computing will naturally become more innovative, become more profitable and create more jobs if they turn their

back on spending significant amounts of time and money on maintaining legacy IT equipment such as in-house server systems and IT software suites. By focusing their resources on online equipment and SaaS services, companies can concentrate more time in improving their existing products and developing new products.

Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs) are prime examples of this. They have spent the last decade on building complex in-house customer care departments to administrate and distribute knowledge about mobility and mobile customer behaviour. It is evident today that more and more MNOs and MVNOs are establishing or looking to establish their customer care services in the Cloud as self-care services or social care services, and it's easy to understand why.

A large part of the current generation of smartphone users are raised in the Cloud and have no interest in spending 30 minutes on a guided tour on the phone when they can help themselves or interact on issues with other users in a beautifully designed and intuitive self-care interface on the web or in an app.

Care in the Cloud seems to be the only valid way forward and a direct line to business success. Not only do MNOs and MVNOs save money and time, they also improve their business simply by adjusting their products and communications approach to match the expectations of their audiences.

Today, some MVNOs have subscriber bases composed of more than 90 per cent smartphones, making care in the Cloud an obvious choice for one very simple reason. The phones are smart! They have big screens, great web-browsing capabilities and can facilitate interactive media via applications designed and provided to the customer by the MNO or MVNO.

Giffgaff.com, a successful MVNO in the UK, has built its services almost entirely in the Cloud. Driven by the idea that customers are capable of caring for themselves and each other with the technology available today, giffgaff are pioneers in driving mobile business away from the physical platform and into the Cloud.

The services of giffgaff are not desired by some users, who are reluctant to change from the old-fashioned land-based support services, but there is little doubt that giffgaff's strategy and business model will generate more revenue than operators that hesitate to evolve along with consumer behaviour and technology.

Cloud in Asia-Pacific

Cloud care fits like a glove for MNOs and MVNOs in the Asia-Pacific region with the prolific behaviour of the new mobile Internet and social media-addicted generations and the diversity of smartphones being bought in the region and used in their networks.

Let's look at the numbers. According to research firm Ovum, the Asia-Pacific region will dominate the mobile Internet market in the years ahead, growing from 119.1 million users in 2011 to a forecasted 518.4 million users by 2015. Aside from the high mobile-only penetration rate of 34 per cent among Asian web users, this tremendous trend towards mobile Internet is being brought about by the lack of fixed-line broadband facilities in highly populated countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Fifty-six per cent of the world's phone-owning youths live in Asia and 84 per cent of Chinese youths use mobile phones to access the net and social networking sites. Similar mobile web access and trends are being seen in other parts of Asia. Japan is another perfect example with 60 per cent of its youth accessing social networks through their mobile phones. In the Philippines, mobile operators are expecting that 70 per cent of their revenues in 2012 will come from mobile Internet accessed through smartphones.

Customer care in this region will become more complex going forward and the simplest, most effective and economic solution is undoubtedly the Cloud.

Conclusions

When building Cloud-based care services, it is essential that operators spend several iterations on mastering the actual interfaces that customers will interact through. Features are less important as the intuitiveness of the system will be the main driver on the path to creating a

successful care platform in the Cloud. Never forget that Facebook became a success by simply creating a Cloud-based reality that friends could utilise to communicate with one another in a fast and non-complex manner. Network operators need to create the exact same reality when they build their care services in the Cloud. ●



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