

# Self-service: Perception Versus Reality



## Executive summary

The mention of self-service frequently evokes mixed reactions within the contact centre industry, perhaps more so on the part of customers. In fact, responses can be both emotional and extreme. The proposition of an interactive voice response (IVR), or automated speech self-service system often meets with resounding negativity. Over recent years, the pace of technological change has seen many organisations rushing to implement what are in fact excellent systems. That said, poor deployments – rather than poor technology – have become commonplace. Instead of spending time on careful design, many organisations are prioritising technological presence at the cost of customer satisfaction, and that has clouded the value self-service systems can have on the enterprise.

In contrast, more users than ever are actively using self-service and telephony IVRs have become a globally accepted standard. Consumer appetite for and access to web self-service have helped it become established as the most popular and most widely utilised self-service channel (ahead of established IVR and speech offerings). Increasingly it's a channel falling within contact centre operations.

Encouragingly, organisations are beginning to appreciate the value and understand the mutual benefits in providing customers with an effective self-service choice. Findings from the Dimension Data 2011 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report show an emerging desire to refresh previously criticised telephony self-service flows, as results indicate a shift in focus and greater emphasis on improving customer satisfaction – replacing cost reduction as the top priority consideration for self-service deployments.

Despite the growth levels and extended channel choices being offered, less than half of organisations surveyed in the Report believe that their existing self-service has met expectations (even web traffic is 50% short of forecast) and an alarming 84.1% of contact centres indicate that their self-

service efforts overall, are either behind, or at best, comparable with the competition. There's clearly a significant opportunity for organisations to better serve their customers' needs, potentially reduce costs and, for those already ahead of the curve, solidify a clear service differentiator that will also provide opportunities to migrate much higher volumes of traffic for enhanced returns on investment.

## Perceptions and the reality

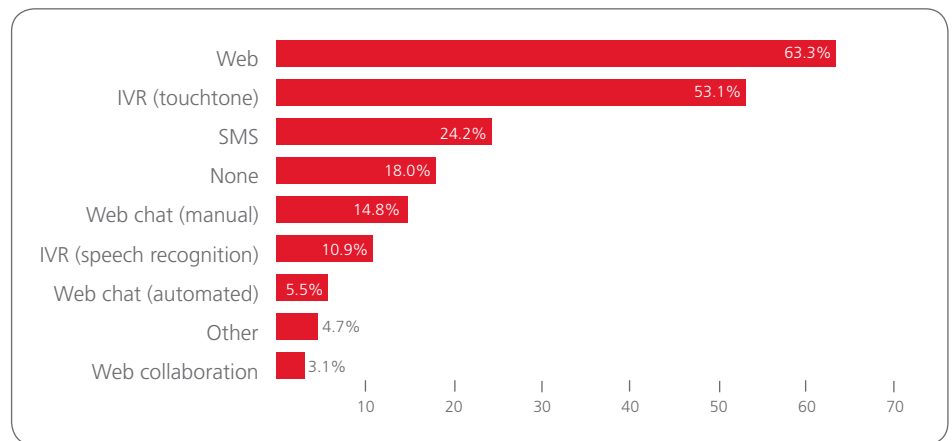
Mainstream media is often one of self-service's most vocal critics. The tendency to attack badly implemented solutions, particularly within certain business sectors, is made all the easier by an abundance of negative experiences from poorly executed self-service deployments. However, as processes are refined, user acceptance is growing in conjunction with the increasing priority placed by contact centres on self-service. In fact, results from the 2011 Report now show 'encouraging customers to use self-service' to be the single most important trend affecting contact centres.

The perception remains that self-service technologies are implemented to drive profits for those organisations providing them, with no benefit to customers or contact centre staff. But is this fair? And more significantly, is it reality?

Self-service, whether provided via telephone IVRs, speech recognition, Internet, SMS or e-mail, is designed to enable choice and improve user access. The fact that it reduces costs and allows a service to be provided at a much lower price should surely make the concept more attractive. So why is there such a level of negativity around it? This has become one of the big contradictions within our industry.

In reality, more users than ever are choosing self-service options to conduct their business. The provision of self-service telephony has become an accepted norm, particularly within the more developed regions and business sectors that continue to prove its contribution to achieving a competitive edge.

## Methods of self-service and assisted service currently utilised?



Source: © Dimension Data's 2011 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report

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Increased choice and functionality is allowing customers to dictate how and when they engage with their chosen service providers.

Consequently, web self-service has enjoyed a huge surge in popularity as it emerges as the most widely provided self-service channel, and is an expected default choice across all business sectors. The fact that web is now the frontrunner in terms of usage (ahead of longer established IVR and speech offerings) proves that in the right circumstances, a well-designed system will indeed be used – if not demanded – by customers.

### A changing landscape

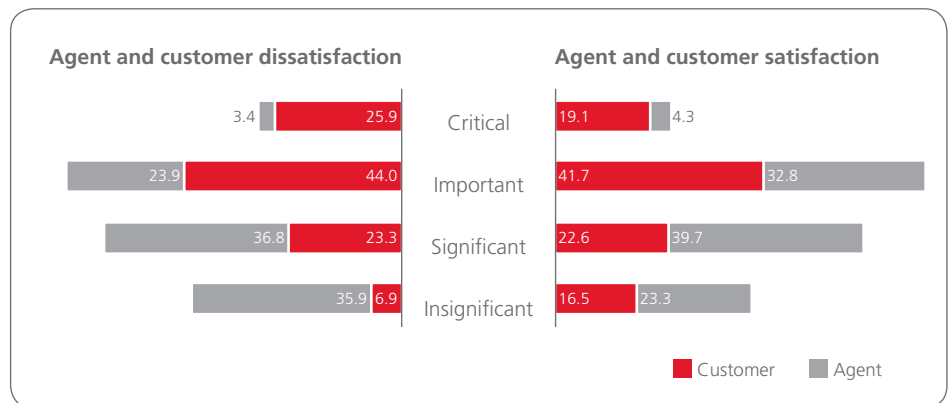
New technologies are the driving force behind an ever-changing marketplace. Increasing numbers of consumers are electing to use mobile devices such as computer tablets and smart handset devices in both their business and personal lives. Wireless connectivity is available even in the most remote locations, and is enabling all sorts of choice and changes to the mix of contact channels. Consumers have come to expect immediate accessibility and channel choice as standard and they are increasingly dictating how and when they engage with their chosen service provider. This is fundamentally changing the shape of tomorrow's path towards effective contact management.

### Adopting an holistic approach

It's important to acknowledge that from a reputational perspective, there's a consensus that self-service has a greater potential to damage customer satisfaction levels rather than enhance it. Conversely, when it comes to agent perception the impact is reversed as we see a greater emphasis being placed on the value a positive self-service experience can have on agent satisfaction, versus the negative impact caused as result of poorly implemented solution.

The findings shown on the importance of self-service to both agent and customer satisfaction provide the clearest indication yet of the pace at which the contact centre industry is migrating towards managing a multi-channel customer experience. Specifically, 93.1% of organisations surveyed understand the impact self-

### Importance of self-service in delivering satisfaction and dissatisfaction



Source: © Dimension Data's 2011 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report

service has on the customer and see it as significant, important or critical. Over 83% also see the customer benefits arising from a successful application deployment.

Not only has the landscape changed, we're also noticing a distinct power shift. Today, the majority of emerging technologies, user applications and complementary web capabilities more often than not pass navigation rights and perceived control back to the user.

Intuitive flow, aesthetics and consistency is critical to web usage and success – more so if it is used to drive the user towards the provider's desired outcome. So, what if this same control was applied across telephony self-service? Using these lessons to inform best practice, we can remedy the inherent flaws and provide consistency.

This is where the self-service paradigm shift begins. If so much consideration and management is being invested into web uptake and the results show it is working, why aren't the same process flows, design efforts and levels of funding being invested into telephony self-service? A possible reason is that web self-service has benefited from an identity (and consequential deliverables) of its own, whereas telephony-led channels have traditionally been wrapped into the overall call centre arena, even if they are administered elsewhere.

A general focus towards the largest overhead, that is, the agent-led customer experiences has resulted in the less visible self-service segment being ignored by too many business leaders. For self-service to work, organisations have to assign more clear ownership and dedicate management resources to drive an appropriate focus on enterprise level self-service objectives. As

### Holistic self-service management



we dig even deeper to understand the user experience, we can build upon the success of web self-service. We should acknowledge and understand the behavioural pattern differences caused by reactive hosted solutions and proactive CRM opportunities. This might mean improving the design of outbound automation (including web chat) via pre-set triggers, or focusing on more effective contact management through the emergence of social media to better inform the customer base.

Whatever the choice, social media presents an opportunity for more proactive service on the supplier side. Some verticals have a more obvious path to success and are securing more immediate benefit in this area. For others, the use and application advantages are not as clear – with many organisations choosing to pursue a social media presence without having thought through any strategy on how to best leverage this new channel.

Proactive self-service will only work if every contact point is mapped out and segmented properly with customers across the entire customer lifecycle. From winning and retaining their business to eventually growing the relationship, organisations have to take a targeted approach.

As enhanced customer profiling and developments in near field communications are also considered, the role of our industry will become more important than ever in driving a customer relationship that fits the needs of the customer. This is an exciting time and the success of the enterprise will become even more dependent on this integration of customer channels.

### Telephony self-service

There is no denying that customers experience frustration with traditional self-service systems for a host of reasons. Most common examples on IVR and speech solutions are lengthy menu options, the infamous IVR maze (or 'jail') or a recognition system that doesn't actually recognise your accent. Add to this a lack of integration, resulting in repeat relaying of information when callers opt out, or poorly designed menu trees with inconsistent structures, and you can understand why some users are reluctant to use it.

The good news from this year's Report is an emerging desire by providers to improve telephony self-service, with results showing a shift in focus and greater emphasis on improving customer satisfaction – replacing cost reduction as the top priority consideration for self-service deployments.

To deliver higher levels of satisfaction, you need to have the correct metrics in place to manage problem areas and issues via improved access to robust (and preventative) management information. It's hard to understand how a business area that is able to deliver so much return (an IVR call minute is at least 80% cheaper than an agent-led interaction) can continue to be ignored, but our survey results show, customer satisfaction is not even being measured in almost a third of all cases. Measuring task completion rates (equivalent to FCR in agent-assisted calls) for each interaction is a solid starting point towards better practice, as is the implementation of a user satisfaction mechanism to help identify problem areas and 'opt out' hot spots.

The Report's findings have highlighted that best practice awareness levels are rising along with some easy quick wins as far as system design and process basics are concerned. Those organisations that build upon these 'back to basic' opportunities, in conjunction with greater best practice competencies, will secure distinct advancements in the short to medium term.

The challenge around integration is less straightforward. Only a quarter of web and telephony systems are currently integrated. This impacts negatively on the delivery of a more coherent customer experience through improved agent access to detailed customer profile information. This is largely owing to the struggle over ownership responsibilities for service and technology

items that have been historically spread across contact centre customer services, marketing and IT. Until ownership issues are remedied and business objectives are both clarified and measurable, progress will be slow and solution inconsistencies will remain. Successful contact centres will be those that have an aggressive plan to extend their service scope over the full customer management spectrum.

### Web self-service

The key message in the uptake and success of web self-service is choice. Most websites will offer a fallback telephone option, should a link be broken or if a user's needs cannot be easily serviced using the website's capabilities. Ensuring systems are in place to monitor customer reasons for replacing their web session with a call, e-mail or chat, will help identify improvement areas and contribute towards continuous improvement.

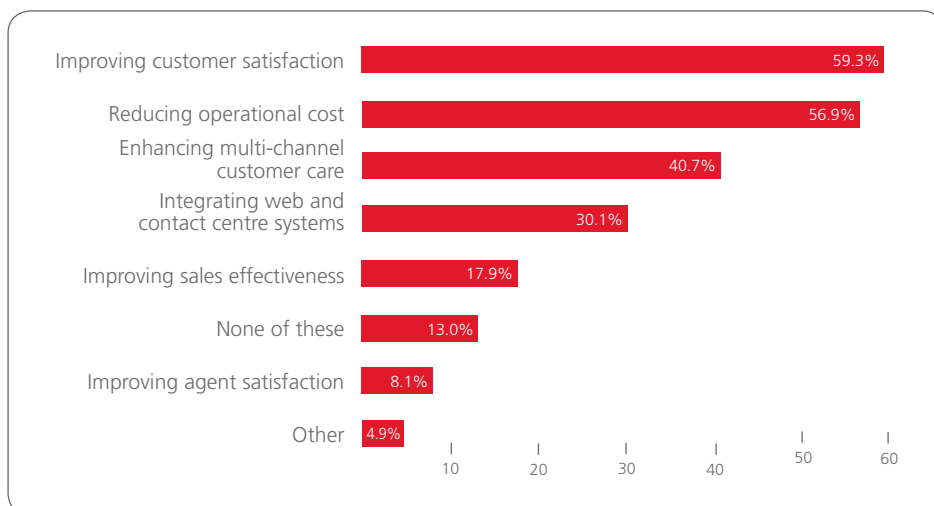
Web chat capabilities in the right environment can also be used with great success to help provoke a live 'chat' (text or even telephone call-back) that facilitate sales and prevent loss of customer interest at pre-defined stages of an Internet search. Well thought through reviews on customer behaviours and their buying processes allow this feature to be offered at choice moments, and for the user to decide whether they want to exercise the option – again, more choice. Similarly, more organisations are providing an e-mail channel option to their customers as standard. This leaves customers to decide about the nature and urgency of the transaction, and whether they are prepared to wait a day or so for return e-mail, or whether they'd prefer to speak to someone immediately.

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The increasing impact of the web will itself create implications, requiring online self-service offerings to be increasingly rich and include:

- 'How do I do that?' simple interactive videos (much easier to learn how to do things by watching and listening than pure reading of a manual)

### Top priority factors driving the organisations use of self-service



- Effective web chat (if you get stuck)
- Plus, when required, a telephone solution aligned to the web experience

There are clear signs that web self-service will continue to grow (not least as a cause of the proliferation of smart devices) and the percentage market share of IVR self-service may decline. Countering this is the overall increase of enterprise activities being channelled through the contact centre, creating sustained medium-term growth volumes over all primary contact paths.

## New devices

Mobile and smart devices are rapidly creating entirely new behavioural patterns through their enablement of new levels of connectivity – whether through the telephone, Internet, SMS or the more recent ‘mobile app’. Internet access has been available on mobile telephones for some time, but hasn’t always been practical or easy to use, with web page format incompatibilities on small devices with slower speeds.

The arrival of the mobile application is changing all this. The speed at which applications have entered everyday life is accompanied by service providers hastily seeking ways to provide information.

Transactional capabilities are only being held back by fears around security – and even that’s changing – as security providers are stepping up to the challenge. At the same time, the anticipated advancements of more intuitive speech integration with smart phones could result in a resurgence of (speech) user acceptance. Though it might perhaps be in a different guise, its more reactive arrangement will give users choice over the settings. As speech becomes more widely used, it will become more accepted and there is a great opportunity to get the basics right and ensure solid back-end processes to support implementations.

## Conclusion

The future is looking bright for the customer, the business and service agents. Broader, enhanced self-service solutions are providing more options than ever before. Customer experience levels will only improve, as will accessibility, allowing extended contact hours and 24x7 services. More intelligent, better-qualified routing will ensure a more personalised outcome for the consumer as opt out calls are transferred more productively with readily available, pre-qualified customer data. Taking these tedious and menial elements away from the agent, while removing duplication, will enable them to place more focus on the actual enquiry to ensure happier customers (and agents) – which ultimately helps drive shorter calls and better return on investment for the business.

Given the dynamic nature of this industry, it’s easy to forget how relatively young it is, how new the technologies are, and how prevalent change is becoming. Products unheard of a few years ago are becoming game changers. Just consider how quickly the ever more affordable smart phones have become a mass-market choice. Mobile friendly tablets have also arrived (sales of tablets are predicted to exceed

PCs / laptops by 2013) and are a real alternative to the PC/laptop. Coupled with the advent of 4G it will be much easier to access the Internet from anywhere, at any time, from an assortment of mobile devices.

Recognising this stretch on resources it’s to be expected that organisations don’t always get it right first time, every time, and as technology continues to advance, there is a very real danger of rushing in to keep abreast of changing demands, and that basics may be neglected.

That said, there is clear evidence that mistakes are being learnt from and while immediate challenges remain in the short term, particularly around consistency across channels and the depth of integration, improving quality levels will ultimately improve the customer experience.

Self-service has truly reinvented itself and is well on its way to becoming universally accepted. Successful organisations will be those that balance emerging and existing technologies, and have a well-considered and structured project plan to tackle their implementation.

As products become commoditised, service is undoubtedly a key differentiator and self-service is playing a vital role in this change. That is the reality.



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