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Bridging the Empathy Gap

Three practical ways to use AI to infuse empathy into the customer and employee experience
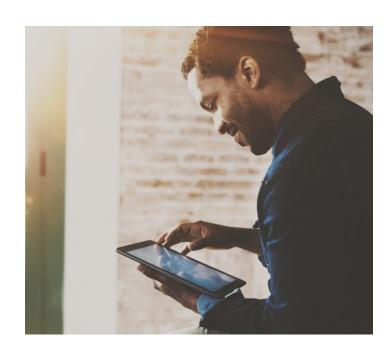
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Introduction

Having empathy for your customers and employees is more important than ever. According to a **recent Gartner survey** on the top consumer and cultural trends for 2022, 66% of consumers had difficulty making long-term plans or life changes at some point during the pandemic. Among their most common challenges included adapting to limitations on personal freedoms, and maintaining physical health and mental and emotional well-being. Beyond the pandemic alone, persistent societal and economic uncertainties demand a whole new level of empathy.

Even so, there is a real empathy gap between customers and the brands with which they interact. Half of consumers **surveyed by Accenture** said "the pandemic caused them to rethink their personal purpose and reevaluate what's important to them in life." Of those consumers, half said that they were disappointed by companies' level of support and understanding of their needs during this time. Most businesses are still falling short of demonstrating the empathy customers seek. While **68% of customers** expect brands to demonstrate empathy, just 37% say they experience it.

While it may sound like a soft skill, empathy can be a real business differentiator. The top 10 most empathetic public companies from the **Global Empathy Index** increased in market value more than twice as much as the bottom 10 and generated 50% more earnings (defined by market capitalization).

Beyond customers alone, empathy makes a big difference to your employee experience. According to **a recent study**, 93% of employees would stay with an empathetic employer, while 82% of employees would leave their position to work for a more empathetic organization. Considering the high cost of employee retention and trends like **the Great Resignation**, empathy can be invaluable.

As a result of recent advances in AI, technology can now actually help increase your organization's capacity for both customer and employee empathy.

What is conversation intelligence?

Conversation intelligence is often an AI-powered solution that enables organizations to analyze 100% of customer interactions across every channel. This level of analysis helps brands extract key trends about their customers and personalize the experience to them, regardless of the channel they're using. Conversation intelligence can be combined with survey data to develop a complete picture of VoC, CX, and more.

AI enables organizations to extract meaningful insights from unstructured data (customer conversations) to drive action, such as improving contact center agent performance and an organization's overall operations.

What's unique about conversation intelligence platforms is that they marry all data from every channel into a single view to understand conversations both in real-time and post-interaction.

This data includes not only customer interactions, but also metadata around those interactions, including who called, date and time, interaction ID, if they've been a customer before, etc. As a result, your organization can get a better understanding of what's going on across your customer base, because you gain a complete view of every interaction in an omnichannel environment.

1: Take the time to understand your customers' (and employees') sentiment and emotions

As a basic working definition, **emotions are the combination of sentiment and intensity**. Think of sentiment as the number of stars you might give in a review on a website. Sentiment is how we feel about something.

Emotions are how we broadcast that sentiment. In sharing with the world, we do this with intensity. The intensity of our emotional response ranges from high to low. Low intensity is a milder response and high intensity is a more drastic response. A category of technologies known as conversation intelligence solutions can identify the ways customers show emotion and sentiment to create a baseline.

For example, CallMiner creates this baseline across a range of data sets to identify the components of a wide swath of emotions.

From there, organizations can tune this baseline to fit their definitions and business use cases. For example, a retailer can define customer emotions to their sensitivity, a debt collection company can set anger and frustration signals to where they find them valuable, and a healthcare organization can look for joy or elation where it is important to them. Empathy scorecards, supplemented with coaching and training, can help improve agents' capacity to handle these emotions.

Unearthing trend data on the employee experience

HR leaders don't have to feel overwhelmed by their employee experience efforts. Listening to the Voice of the Employee can create a workplace culture that makes employees feel involved, engaged and empowered. Beyond HR surveys alone, there is a wealth of opportunities to collect and analyze employee feedback using conversation intelligence: including voice and video conversations with customers, IT tickets, and more.

Using these employee insights, HR leaders can tailor programs and initiatives across departments that support productivity and improve job satisfaction. For line of business leaders and managers, these insights can help them make departmental improvements that ultimately increase retention and impact the bottom line.

For example, a recent report from **Forrester**[1] recommends implementing employee experience initiatives in the contact center, such as addressing the underlying cause of burnout and fostering career development for agents. AI can help with these efforts. Forrester cites, "Simple engagements, like a weekly highlight of top performers, can help incentivize agents and simultaneously disseminate best practices."

Providing the right career development is also essential. Seventy-five percent of contact center agents **stay two years or fewer**, due partially to difficult customer interactions that inhibit long-term skill development and keep agents in high-churn roles. **Forrester** says[2], "In 2022, customer service leaders will take critical steps to support agent career development. They should first align the goals of the contact center with those of the broader organization so agents can tether their performance to business-critical objectives."

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1. Forrester, The Three Customer Service Megatrends in 2022, March 15, 2022: **https://learning.callminer.com/c/whitepaper-forrester-megatrends-2022?x=CFl8z6&lx=amFxJO**

2. Forrester, The Three Customer Service Megatrends in 2022, March 15, 2022: **https://learning.callminer.com/c/whitepaper-forrester-megatrends-2022?x=CFl8z6&lx=amFxJO**

2: Provide empathy coaching to customer support teams

Conversation intelligence can deliver both real-time and post-interaction feedback to agents, equipping them to respond with empathy and improve the outcome of the interaction. These solutions can help managers monitor agent performance by identifying patterns, giving them the ability to offer specific, pointed feedback. In addition, agents can self-assess and use the data to help improve and develop the empathy skills they need.

According to a recent **Forrester Consulting study**, commissioned by CallMiner, training for empathy is difficult, as customer service representatives (CSRs) struggle to anticipate customer needs (57%) and consider, interpret, and even measure a customer's dynamic emotional state (56%). To address these needs, the study says, "Through the power of AI, CSRs can quickly and accurately gauge customer emotion and be guided in real time with next-best-action advice. Supervisors can drill into key areas of improvement to help CSRs navigate customer conversations, as well as ensure customer service success metrics align to CX and other enterprise KPIs."

Here are a few examples of how this dynamic plays out in the real world.

For healthcare provider **Kelsey-Seybold Clinic**, patient experience is not just how an employee or contact center agent interacts with a patient; it's also about the patient's process of getting to what they want and need. Conversation intelligence enables Kelsey-Seybold Clinic to receive an automated post-call report that applies to every conversation, offering truly meaningful and actionable insights.

By leveraging these post-interaction analytics, Kelsey-Seybold Clinic effectively identifies specific keywords or trigger words that drive escalations. The post-interaction reports offer deeper insights into what needed to be addressed as a result of those keywords or phrases. This helps the Clinic determine if they need to coach the agent for future conversations or if there is a process issue that makes it hard for the patient to get to the desired end result.

Additionally, since Kelsey-Seybold receives 22 unique types of calls within the contact center, all of which operate differently, it is important to accurately measure success. Conversation intelligence provides Kelsey-Seybold Clinic the flexibility to adjust their performance scorecards to accommodate the different types of calls they receive.

Agents are trained to understand the call scorecard across five key metrics as it relates to those unique call types: politeness, empathy, ownership, speech understandability, and percentage silence.

For real-time feedback, agents are trained to recognize the benefits and to see the feedback as an opportunity to take full control over the conversation. For example, if a patient is calling to schedule a regular appointment, but mentions having chest pain, the agent can be prompted to immediately and appropriately route the call to a nurse for the patient's safety. This doesn't just deliver a better patient experience, it has the potential to save lives.

Similarly, revenue cycle management company **Hollis Cobb** uses KPIs and scorecards to improve patient satisfaction and payment outcomes. Using data from their conversation intelligence platform, HR records and the client management system, the team created a set of KPIs to determine collector effectiveness, as well as external factors that impact how quickly a payment is made.

For example, the team added a courtesy scorecard to detail which agents were displaying politeness and empathy to patients' circumstances. "It doesn't work to just call and ask for a payment," said Diana Carter, business systems analyst at Hollis Cobb. "The more courteous our agents are, the more open patients are to speaking about their issues."

In a sensitive field like healthcare collections, it's critical that agents demonstrate empathy without crossing personal or legal boundaries. With conversation intelligence, the Hollis Cobb team gathers data on agent performance as it relates to empathy, giving managers and supervisors the tools they need to provide concrete feedback on refining or improving their approach.

Beyond customer interactions, measuring and understanding agent emotions is also important to boost employee happiness, fulfillment and ultimately, productivity and retention.

3: Identify and support vulnerable customers

Many contact center agents are likely to encounter **vulnerable customers** who have a greater need for empathy. Conversation intelligence can identify words, phrases and acoustic qualities that demonstrate vulnerability, and help deliver guidance to agents.

Here are three important things to look for.

1. Monitor for and flag specific words and phrases that insinuate vulnerability, with close attention to hardships such as job loss, illness, and abuse.

2. Screen for non-compliant language such as harassing statements, raised voices and other risky behavior that depicts emotional instability.

3. Look for signs of stress and agitation in consumer and employee voices to help confirm vulnerability using best judgment.

Next, benchmark the common elements that signal vulnerability so you can more quickly and accurately identify vulnerable customers in the future. Once you can listen and identify vulnerability, deploy a real-time conversation intelligence alerting system that automatically informs employees when they are dealing with a vulnerable customer Vulnerable situations require a careful approach and sensitive language – and few people are properly trained to manage these situations appropriately. Employees are only human and will likely struggle when working with a vulnerable customer. Here's a quick, practical checklist of what you can do to improve these outcomes..

• Equip customer service teams with background information on the customer, such as previous touchpoints, issues, personal info and more.

• Provide real-time alerts and in-the-moment guidance on how to communicate with vulnerable customers.

• Give direction to ensure agents stay compliant, as well as recorded, objective documentation to respond to audits and complaints.

• Deliver meaningful and fair feedback on their performance during the customer engagement to power improvement and learning.

• Provide post-interaction training to support and drive better customer outcomes in future interactions.

Leveraging AI to improve customer outcomes

As we know from customer experiences, not every conversation between a customer and a brand is going to involve a human. More customers are turning to self-service options, such as through interactive voice response (IVR) systems, chatbot and others. And it's critical that organizations not only use AI to better support agents in human-to-human interactions, but that their self-service systems (i.e. AI systems) are also communicating empathy.

Here's how it works:

- Detect the emotion of the target (i.e. customer). This can be done using a variety of inputs, such as facial recognition, voice (acoustic) analysis and natural language processing (NLP) of written or spoken language.

- Display an appropriate emotional response. For visual AI systems, this could be a change in facial expression. A chatbot, on the other hand, may present a predetermined response, like "I'm sorry to hear you're experiencing that."

- Take actions that attempt to mitigate or intensify the customer's emotion, depending on the scenario.

Learn more about how AI systems can exhibit empathy.

An empathy blueprint for the future

Empathy is a powerful way for organizations to connect with both customers and employees. AI-fueled solutions like conversation intelligence can help you benchmark and understand customer and employee emotions more effectively.

Used properly, these benchmarks can inform a coaching and training program that helps front-line customer experience employees empathetically handle these emotions, which is particularly important with vulnerable customers. AI can even improve your organization's ability to respond to customers on digital channels.

Finally, conversation intelligence can inform the employee experience and help management teams become more empathetic. Both HR and line of business leaders can develop specific training strategies based on employees' feedback – both solicited and unsolicited. These powerful strategies can help retain talented employees and improve morale, shielding companies against some of the undercurrents driving the Great Resignation.

CallMiner

About CallMiner

CallMiner is the global leader in conversation intelligence to drive business performance improvement. Powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning, CallMiner delivers the industry's most comprehensive platform to analyze omnichannel customer interactions at scale, allowing organizations to interpret sentiment and identify patterns to reveal deep understanding from every conversation. By connecting the dots between insights and action, CallMiner enables companies to identify areas of opportunity to drive business improvement, growth and transformational change more effectively than ever before. CallMiner is trusted by the world's leading organizations across retail, financial services, healthcare and insurance, travel and hospitality, and more.

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