

10

to Have More Meaningful Customer Conversations

Advice from industry thought leaders & Smart Communications customers, partners and experts



Communicate more meaningfully. Scale the conversation.



In 2018 customers are going to have even more control. They are going to insist that you communicate with them in a way that makes them feel like an individual. It is going to be critical that you learn as much as you can about their preferences and channels of choice and then turn that data into actionable insights and more meaningful conversations. But the catch is, you have hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions, of customers with whom you need to communicate. You must be as efficient as possible, while also maintaining accuracy and security. You must scale the conversation!

It is possible! To help, we've assembled advice from industry analysts and influencers and Smart Communications customers, partners and experts. Here are ten suggestions for approaches you can take in 2018 in order to have more meaningful conversations.

**they choose to be
communicated with...”**

1 Recognize that each individual customer not only wants to be treated as an individual, but wants to feel valued. Make sure that you are able to communicate with those customers in the way that they want to be communicated with. If they want content that is relevant to them sent as a PDF via email - do that. If they want it as plain text via SMS and they've asked you for that in an email - then do that. Be prepared to communicate with your customers in the way that they choose to be communicated with - and recognize that this may change from day to day, week to week. Make sure that the individual customer gets a personalized response or personalized offer that shows that the business knows enough about them to provide with that kind of answer. This goes a long way in keeping the customer engaged with you. Even if you have millions of customers, you'll find that between the technology that already exists and the analytics that provide the insights into the individuals,

you can personalize at scale. Finally, make sure that your more fundamental communications - the ordinary day-to-day ones, are kept flawless - meaning “you have to keep the ordinary, ordinary.” Don't make mistakes on the simple requests and queries. Get them taken care of via human interaction or automated processes and rules. Once you've mastered that, you can go above and beyond and delight the customer - on occasion. Not all the time.

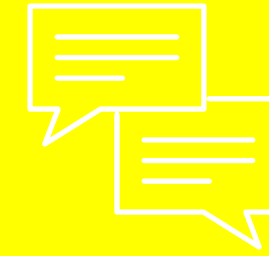
— **Paul Greenberg**
Founder & Managing Principal
of The 56 Group, LLC

2

“... focus on improving operational efficiency.”

To have more meaningful conversations, you should first focus on improving operational efficiency. For example, instead of running new business upload batches every couple of weeks, during which time your risk profile may change, look to implement solutions that give you greater visibility of new business the moment it's placed, allowing you to understand your exposure in real time. And it's not just about speed of administration. With real-time online systems, the correct forms are selected automatically, eliminating the potential for human error and further mitigating risk.

— **Brad Lontz**
Senior Vice President & Chief
Information Officer, Nautilus Insurance



“... enable two-way intelligent, real-time communications...”

3

Enterprises must enable two-way intelligent, real-time communications with their customers using the power of data and natural language processing. In a few years, virtual assistants will be as ubiquitous as websites and mobile apps to today's leading enterprises.

— **Phil Devillers**
Sapient Consulting

4

Forget the demographic “who,” focus on the “what,” “when,” “why,” and “how” of your messages.

Demographic-based CCM strategies offer less efficacy than those that speak to more critical questions of targeting according to our research. What is the purpose of my message and why is it relevant to the recipient? Is the message timely and communicated through the preferred mix of channels? If you can confidently answer these questions, then your communications will cater to the much more rewarding personalized “who” rather than the generalized demographic “who.”

For example, presumptuous CCM strategies that only communicate with millennials through digital channels miss the mark on a large share of that segment. Physical mail is still a popular channel also by millennials. Many within that segment prefer a mix of print and digital channels, primarily because they like having the hard copy for their records that print offers. Regardless

of generation or other demographic segmentations, your customer communications will be more meaningful if you commit more time and resources to sending messages that are relevant, timely, and accessible through preferred channels.

— **David Stabel**

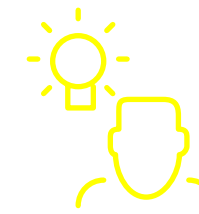
Director, Customer Communications
Advisory Services, Keypoint Intelligence



“... commit more time and resources to sending messages that are relevant, timely, and accessible through preferred channels.”

forward- thinking

5



Businesses need to be forward-thinking when it comes to customer communications. With text messaging, chatbots, and voice enabling interactions increasingly becoming a trend for customer communication, companies should look at how to adapt internal processes to take into account these new or different communication channels. How do you manage a text message conversation internally? What needs to be changed?

Mindset is another challenge for many businesses. For example they may decide they don't want to use instant messaging because they prefer to talk to the consumer in person – but really it's the consumers' preferences that matter. Businesses must listen to the customer or risk losing a valuable client relationship.

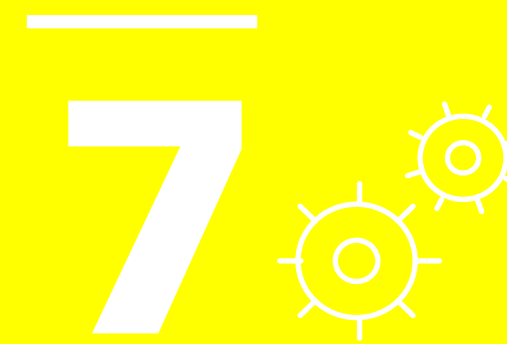
— **Steve Anderson**
Insurance Industry Thought Leader

6

In 2018, organizations that have traditionally not been technology-led will need to start implementing and promoting it as an inherent part of their business model. Technology will force organizations to rethink their strategy when trying to be more customer-centric. Associated with this will be the challenge to communicate changes effectively and responsibly to customers and partners.

With GDPR, and the Second Payment Services Directive (PSD2), and many other regulations coming into force in 2018, it's going to be a regulatory maze for customer communications. Businesses will need to communicate responsibly and safely so customers trust them with their information. And that will affect not only direct marketing companies, but all organizations across all industries. During the next year it will be interesting to watch how companies will scramble to get ready for the regulatory onslaught that's coming their way.

— **Neira Jones**
Independent Advisor
and International Speaker



Don't forget about the prospects you want to convert into customers. Formalizing sales communications is key to improving sales productivity. Today, many businesses still lack a structured sales process, with salespeople cutting and pasting data into old proposals. More effectively managing customer data and proposal creation can help you more quickly achieve revenue targets and deliver more meaningful conversations that consider all the data you have on each prospect. Centralizing customer and prospect communications can be a positive development for the entire business.

— **Louis Mazzola**
IT Support Associate,
Schernecker Property Services

“Formalizing sales communications is key to improving sales productivity.”

8

Technology has already impacted customer communications and this will continue in 2018. If we look at how we have

communicated with customers in the past – for example, insurance companies or banks – we sent hard copy letters or had physical meetings in-store, and later via the telephone. But now customers want to communicate via email and chatbots, and they want to have access to their data. Companies must stay up-to-date with their communications otherwise they will get into deep trouble very soon.

For traditional companies, the biggest challenge in 2018 will be to integrate IT legacy systems into a more modern IT infrastructure, so they can provide customers with real-time omni-channel data and communication services.

Right now, a lot of customers are forgiving but expectations are changing. Companies that are communicating in the traditional

way will need to do their homework soon, or customers will change their provider. We have already seen this with Amazon Prime – people are willing to pay money for a great user experience and convenience, and if companies cannot provide this they will soon find themselves in hot water.

— **Robin Keira**
Thought Leader on
Digital Transformation and
Founder of Digitalscouting.de



9

“For customers, cloud implementations allow for more personalized communications to be delivered more quickly.”

Consider moving your customer communications solution to the cloud. To keep up with increasingly complex customer demands, customer communications management technologies are evolving from supporting static, one-way message distribution to delivering dynamic, multi-channel experiences on-demand. To accomplish this efficiently and cost-effectively, more companies are turning to multi-tenant SaaS environments. This change ultimately benefits both businesses and their customers. For the business user, it streamlines the process while also saving costs. The cloud is much faster and more efficient than on-premise, with quicker implementation and time to market and easier integrations. It's also more cost effective, both in terms of data center and maintenance costs. For customers, cloud implementations allow for more personalized communications to be delivered more quickly.

— **Simon Tindal**
CTO, Smart Communications

Don't wait—let 2018 be the year of customer communications transformation. When it comes to creating more meaningful conversations with your customers, I think the following three questions will be highly relevant going into 2018:

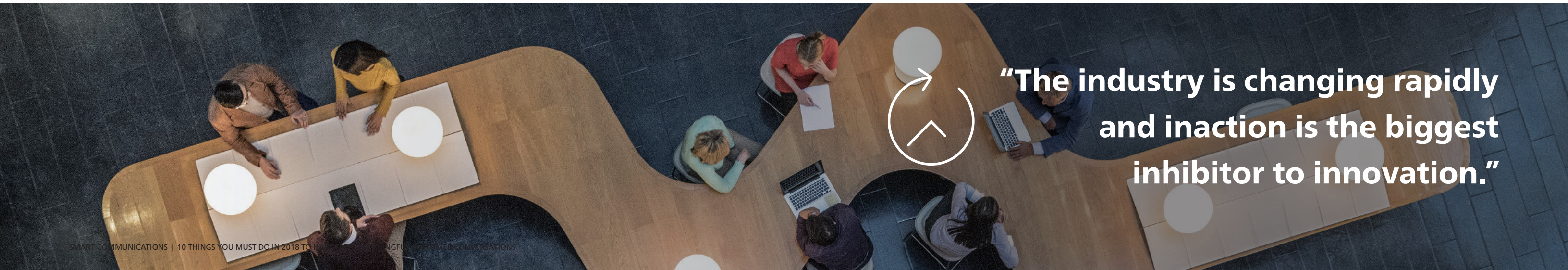
1. Is your digital strategy based on putting the customer first?
2. Is your technology platform future-proof?
3. Are you agile enough to innovate faster than the pace at which your customers are changing?

In recent years, we have seen a tremendous focus on digital transformation among enterprises, and many have started to realize they need to rethink how they communicate and interact with their customers. The challenge however is that many businesses still have a high degree of legacy and well-established ways of working, which often restricts true transformation and leads to inside-out thinking. Only companies that really put the customer front and center, and then redefine tech, people and processes around it, will be able to be a match against new start-ups and innovators that are starting to disrupt established industries. This requires strong leadership, an understanding of new best practices, and often involves a culture change as well.

More important than ever will be the need for modern platforms that are scalable, integrate quickly with other systems, and that can be managed and reconfigured by the business. In 2018, expect to see more interest in multi-tenant cloud solutions, cloud-to-cloud integrations using APIs and microservices, content automation, machine learning and analytics, mobile messaging networks and chat bots, and, lastly, tools to help stakeholders in the business orchestrate messaging in ways that meet the evolving needs of their customers as well as the business. We also see a stronger interest in connecting customer communications with customer experience economics.

My tip for you is not to wait. The industry is changing rapidly and inaction is the biggest inhibitor to innovation. A survey from Progress Software earlier in the year showed that 85% of enterprise decision makers feel they only have a timeframe of two years to make significant inroads on their digital transformation before falling behind their competitors. With that, why not start 2018 by assessing how meaningful your current interactions are, and what you can do to stay relevant to your customers?

— **Kaspar Roos**
Founder & CEO of **Aspire Customer Communications Services**, a boutique strategy consultancy firm specializing in **Customer Communications Management (CCM)** and **Customer Experience (CX)**



“The industry is changing rapidly and inaction is the biggest inhibitor to innovation.”

