



Evolution of customer communication management over the decades

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Abstract

Customer communication management (CCM) software tools are designed to create and deliver personalized, multichannel communications. It provides business organizations with secure, cost-effective, efficient, and reliable solutions for managing customer communications. CCM tools fit into customer engagement needs in various domains such as insurance, banking, utility, and healthcare. In this article, we will look at how customer communication management had evolved from its early days when the industry was focused on just the composition and management of documents to providing the best-personalized customer experience for today's techno-savvy customers

Key words: Customer communication management, customer experience, Artificial intelligence (AI), cloud management, delivery solutions

History of CCM

Customer communication management (CCM) has come a long way. Its primary purpose was to compose and distribute printed communication. With technological advancements, today's customers demand clear, consistent, personalized, and timely communication with interactive capabilities. Customers focus on brands providing customized experiences and retain using products based on satisfaction level. CCM tools incorporate various technological advancements to fulfill this aggressive need to provide personalized and interactive communications. With the help of complete digitization, CCM is adapting to meet customer needs to deliver customized communication across multiple channels.

Time-based history of CCM

Below is the timeline of CCM evolution.

Mass Communication time 1980s

This era began mass communication between an organization and its customers. During this time, organizations started utilizing the capabilities of legacy systems, such as mainframes for processing communications and printing communications letters and statements using conventional line printers. Print channel development and Fax technology allowed businesses to send documents to customers quickly. Data was still not centralized at that time, resulting in communication challenges.

Digital time till the 2000s

The rise of CRM software allowed customer data management by streamlining and centralizing data while adding more personalized communication. With the expansion of Internet technologies, organizations began communicating through online forms and emails. Organizations started using emails, SMS, and chat services for omnichannel communications. This is where modernization and centralization of data began.

Multichannel time till 2010s

At this time, businesses have become more proactive and careful when providing CCM solutions. As social media was rising, new social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter emerged, which made it easy for businesses to communicate with customers in new ways. It created a faster way for companies to advertise and communicate with customers. Still, at the same time, businesses started becoming more diligent as customer feedback was broadcasted easily on social media.

AI time (2020 till today)

Today, AI plays a significant role in CCM. Companies increasingly rely on automation to manage large volumes of customer interactions. Companies now use integrated communication platforms that combine various channels (email, social media, SMS, chat, etc.) into one system, ensuring seamless communication and omnichannel deliveries. There has been a shift from purely transactional communication to a focus on customer experience (CXM). CCM now emphasizes building long-term customer relationships through consistent, personalized, and meaningful communication.

Shift from CCM to CXM

CCM handles companies' customer communication through various channels, emails, letters, or messages. CCM aims to make these interactions personalized and meaningful to meet customers' unique needs and preferences. The goal is to build strong relationships and ensure that customers feel valued and understood.

Successful businesses know that putting customers first is the key to success. For years, customer communications management (CCM) has played a vital role in delivering on this promise. However, while modern CCM is still necessary, it's not enough to power the current era of customer experience (CXM).

Many businesses encounter the challenge of having separate customer communication and experience systems across various departments that don't integrate. This lack of integration creates a big gap between customers' needs and obstacles to creating integrated customer centricity. Many time in big organizations, there are multiple departments, and each department has its own Customer communication

strategies and tools used; as these departments are disconnected using different platforms for CCM, the resulting customer experience fails to give a unified customer experience. This ultimately impacts customers' loyalty.

To solve this problem, the industry is moving towards customer experience management (CXM) from communications management (CCM) address. Companies are increasing their digital customer interactions to meet the growing need for personalized and engaging communication. The goal is to provide a smooth and connected experience across all channels, ensuring customers receive consistent and relevant messages at every point in their journey.

Disadvantages of conventional CCM

1)Working with legacy systems today leads to maintenance fees to keep outdated systems and infrastructure running. Legacy systems may not integrate well with newer technologies, causing delays and process inefficiencies. This can impact productivity and require additional time and effort from employees.

2)When the organization is rigid to run on a legacy system, it increases the burden of running the systems smoothly. Older systems typically require more manual interventions, frequent troubleshooting, and specialized knowledge. This leads to higher labor and support costs. Complex and insufficient old processes often require businesses to hire employees and pay overtime to manage the extra workload, leading to unnecessary labor costs. Duplication of efforts, such as double-checking work or using multiple tools to complete a task, wastes resources and increases operating expenses. Over time, legacy systems become a bottleneck, limiting the ability to scale operations quickly or respond to market demands. This may disturb business expansion or innovation. The workforce gets occupied with making the system work rather than learning new technologies and adapting to new product strategies.

3)Legacy systems may not receive regular updates or patches, making them vulnerable to security breaches. Dealing with data breaches, legal liabilities, and reputational damage can far exceed the cost of upgrading to the latest technologies.

Advantages of CCM Modernization

Modernizing the Customer Communication Management (CCM) system offers several key advantages for businesses.

These benefits improve operational efficiency and enhance customer satisfaction and long-term customer relationships.

Revenue increase

Upgrading the CCM setup to incorporate newly developed technologies provides consistency across all communication channels. The CCM system ensures that customers receive unified and relevant messages across various platforms (email, social media, SMS, chat, etc.), delivering a seamless and integrated experience.

Efficiency

CCM systems offer automation for repetitive tasks, reducing the overhead of monotonous activities from staff and allowing staff to focus on more productive activities. This increases the efficiency of employees and satisfaction as they can dedicate their time to higher-value tasks that require human expertise and problem-solving.

Cost

As CCM adapts to the automation services options, it reduces the need for a large customer service team, leading to cost savings. As the system runs on automatic services, it is prone to fewer errors, and streamlined processes cut down on operational inefficiencies.

Better Data Analytics and Insights

Modern CCM systems provide valuable data about customer behavior and preferences. This data can be analyzed to improve communication strategies and identify areas for improvement. With built-in analytics, businesses can track customer interactions in real-time, allowing for quicker decision-making and more informed strategy adjustments.

Customer Retention

Businesses can use customer data to contact customers with reminders proactively. Personalized, responsive, consistent communication strengthens the business's and customers' relationship, increasing loyalty and retention.

Compliance and Security

These systems use encryption and secure channels for communication, ensuring that customer data is kept safe and secure.

Scalability

A modern CCM system is based on modern technologies. It can quickly scale as a business grows, allowing it to handle increased customer volumes without needing a complete code change process. Businesses can easily add new communication channels to their system, adapting to changing customer preferences.

Collaboration Across Teams

Modern CCM systems enable better communication between departments like sales, marketing, and customer service, ensuring everyone can access the same customer data and communication history. As the data is centralized and accessible to all the teams, these systems ensure all team members are on the same page, preventing miscommunications.

Improved the customer experience

CCM platforms enable real-time, cross-channel, interactive communications, resulting in a better customer experience. Creating highly personalized, relevant communications across any channel allows faster delivery of the right messages to customers. Additionally, it makes creating a seamless onboarding experience easy with pre-populated digital forms and electronic signature capabilities. Centralization enables a better customer experience since designs are created uniformly and pushed to customers via their channels of choice. Consistent experiences build trust among customers, resulting in retention of customers.

Preparing for transformation

Upgrading to new technologies and moving away from legacy applications is a significant decision that requires a strategic plan to manage potential risks, address daily changes, and build a stronger path forward. CCM leaders in the industry follow a step-by-step approach. Preparing for the transformation requires various prechecks to be completed to understand the impact on the current business and its employees. Identify key priorities for development and plan key activities to implement new technologies successfully.

Analyze current state

The first step towards transformation is the current stage. Starting with a thorough assessment of current business and technical needs, objectives, challenges, and technology use. Subject matter experts from CCM technology then deliver future state business and technical recommendations to address the organization's unique needs.

Adopt and manage

Experts from CCM build a custom modernization plan based on the features to be derived at every stage. Experts collaborate with an organization's staff to deploy enterprise solutions that maximize returns and reduce costs for ongoing administration.

Decommission

The first step in Decommissioning is finalizing the archiving plan for the current architecture and systems. Retiring legacy applications successfully requires careful planning to minimize risk and disruption. CCM experts help organizations build a strategy to decommission legacy communication systems. Decommissioning won't happen overnight. It also needs a detailed plan and happens in stages.

A comprehensive plan based on use cases, pain points, potential impact, and benefits, paired with strong business justification, prepares businesses to think big.

Case Study:

This case study shows how CCM tools upgrade technologies to support changing needs. Exstream Software evolved in the last 2 decades to fulfill the continuous demands of the industry.

In 1998, Exstream software originated with a primary focus on creating, managing, and delivering both electronic and print deliverables to customers and clients. At that time, Software innovation achieved much appreciation, and every year, numerous companies adapted to implementing Exstream to streamline their business. Exstream continues adding new functionalities to meet the customer's needs, such as providing multi-language support and adding compatible software, taking the first steps towards modernization.

In 2008, HP acquired Exstream, and it continued advancements to improve overall customer experience by integrating with web services to streamline document creation and produce personalized communications of all types of delivery through print/mail and online channels. The later releases continued to add more advancement and release those features and solutions in the market in a short turnaround time to make various industries use the features. These new versions ensured that the added capabilities met more customer satisfaction. One innovation that was added was the editability feature, where business users can add last-minute content to ensure the document remains personalized and

relevant. Capabilities like containers increased the support for various device sizes, creating a comfortable user experience.

When OpenText acquired Exstream in 2016, vast functionalities were added to ensure it's the leading CCM Software in the industry. The newest version of Exstream brings customer-generative AI, high-output print capabilities, and a new user experience (UX) to help manage the customer journey and design tool performance enhancements.

Exstream from CCM to CXM

Exstream continuously evolves and eventually connects the dots between Customer Communication Management (CCM) and Customer Experience Management (CXM) by offering a centralized platform. This platform allows businesses to design, personalize, and deliver customer communications across multiple channels. As a result, companies can create consistent, personalized, and relevant customer experiences throughout the entire customer journey, integrating the functionalities of both CCM and CXM.

This case study shows how various features are added to a CCM tool to make it relevant to current industry needs and standards.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have briefly visited the history of early customer communication management, which started from essential, one-way communication to a recent more complex, multi-channel, and personalized approach. It has transformed from handling simple transactional messages to becoming a strategic tool for improving customer experience and driving engagement. Embracing CXM can be the key to unlocking customer loyalty, growth, and success.

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