Best Practices Series


# CRM Megatrends to Watch in 2019:

## Predictions from the Top Leaders Driving Change

It's probably not a surprise that our contributors have all identified technologies and solutions that enable more intelligent ways to serve customers. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotic process automation, and a renewed role for CRM are the big trends this year.

It seems that converging technological advancements have brought us to a point where we are poised for a tremendous cycle of innovation. Big Data, analytics, natural language processing, and other fundamental building blocks are ready to support the AI tools that will accelerate the digital transformation of sales, marketing, and especially customer service.

Our January Megatrends installment always provides an interesting measure of the zeitgeist among thought leaders, solution providers, end users, and media coverage, but this year all indications point to 2019 bringing an explosion in the practical applications of smart, self-learning technologies.

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# Success Starts In The Contact Center: AI and Data Analysis Drive Enterprises to New Heights in 2019

*By Abby Monaco and Matt Reading of NICE Nexidia*

Over the last few years, Big Data has become more than just a buzz word. Across industries, organizations have built sizable teams to collect and analyze data on every step of the customer journey. Whether it's financial services or healthcare, more organizations are conducting real-time analysis of their data to keep up with evolving customer demands. Big Data teams have been tasked with analyzing this data meticulously and dissecting every interaction to get a comprehensive view of what drives consumer behavior. However, simply acquiring this data and analyzing it isn't enough anymore – organizations are ready to take action.

In 2019, with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI), enterprises will take data analysis to the next level. In fact, according to PwC, 59 percent of executives say that Big Data at their company would be improved through the use of AI. With the Big Data market projected to grow from $17.1B in 2017, to $99.31B in 2022, Big Data teams have come to the stark realization that the contact center is the primary reservoir of information when it comes to analyzing the data responsible for impacting customer service. With the help of AI and innovative technologies such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), organizations can now dig deeper, analyze new data that they weren't able to before, and get a richer view of the customer journey, instead of letting terabytes of data fall by the wayside.

Here are several ways Big Data and AI will help the customer service industry in 2019:

## Organizations Will Rethink How They're Using Their AI Toolset

The first step to driving actionable insights from Big Data is looking at AI as a set of tools rather than a foolproof process. Implementing AI and NLP in the contact center without fully understanding its value is useless. AI is a toolset and a way to augment results via human reasoning and logic – not a standalone technology. Now that AI is out of the 'testing phase,' it's important that organizations take advantage of the data present in contact centers so that they can mine this data and multiply its impact. We are seeing new toolsets that already utilize AI algorithms become more available. Meanwhile, organizations can use machine learning and AI techniques to build out smarter ways to lift insights out of vast amounts of information. For example, organizations are using AI to track competitor mentions and to assess the sentiment of each interaction in which a competitor is mentioned. This creates a scenario that can be built into a predictive customer churn model. Agents can be coached in real-time to give an unhappy customer a special offer to tip the loyalty scale back in the organization's favor.

## Unusable Data Will Become Powerful

As AI tools become more comprehensive, organizations will need to re-examine their datasets to ensure they're using every piece of valuable data. To do this, they need to come to the table with a hypothesis or an end-goal. This will help them sort through the noise and understand what data is actually valuable. Thanks to new AI solutions, organizations are able to analyze previously unusable data formats such as voice recordings to reveal crucial insights about consumer behavior. Data that was siloed in different areas of the organization will suddenly become relevant as businesses begin using AI to aggregate more data sources across an entire organization. One example of this is stitching together customer journeys that include visits to retail centers, touchpoints on the website or mobile apps, as well as any interaction with contact centers.

## Organizations Will Strive to Overcome Past Perceptions on Analytics and AI

As Robotic Process Automation (RPA) and Customer Journey Analytics are adopted by companies looking to augment customer service, and know more about the customers they serve, there are also organizations resistant to change. Many believe that AI will only replace jobs and oust human reasoning. Moving forward in the age of AI, it'll be increasingly important to overcome the automation and analytics fears in your organization and get C-level players on board. In order to overcome this fear, it's imperative to communicate that AI will only make human agents smarter – enhancing the types of data that can be analyzed, the speed in which it's analyzed and the accuracy of how the data is utilized. AI will only up level human reasoning, empowering customer service agents to draw valuable insights from Big Data.

## Data Analytics Will Become Accessible to the Masses

Over the past few years, we've seen a rise in data scientist hires across the customer service industry. These individuals specialize in analyzing and assessing data, bringing extensive education and experience to their organizations. And while their skillsets have been invaluable, the data scientist wave has hit its peak. In 2019, technology will finally catch up to the data scientists and bring data analytics capabilities to the masses. Technology vendors have focused on ease-of-use, accessibility and flexibility so that a wider population of individuals can act as data specialists for their organization. Solutions are now available to connect the dots across all different customer channels, allowing a larger population of employees to utilize and understand customer journey analytics. And as more companies adopt this technology, we will also see a rise in cross-organizational data architects. These are individuals that examine a company's internal and external data sources, with the ultimate goal of designing a plan to integrate, centralize and manage all the incoming data.

## AI and Analytics Will Help New Industries Undergo a Customer-Centric Shift in 2019

While some industries have understood the value of data analysis from day one, others have been slower to get on board. For example, the healthcare industry is discovering there is more to optimizing cost when it comes to customer service. Healthcare organizations are focusing on understanding and capturing a holistic customer journey from start to finish – rather than just a piece of it. For example, customers would have to seek guidance from providers to reconcile claims. In 2019, we will see more providers coming directly to their customers to proactively help and answer questions and they will use customer journey analytics to execute this. The overall healthcare customer experience is becoming more targeted, more personalized and more segmented through data-driven technology solutions.

In 2019, AI will make Big Data reservoirs more digestible and present new opportunities for contact center employees to help customers. As a result, organizations will be able to make adjustments in the customer experience strategies based off of data-driven insights. As customer demands continue to evolve, organizations must keep pace with technology to grow with customer demands, sort valuable data, create new jobs and deliver winning customer experiences. ■

ATTIVIO®

# Intelligent Answers & Insights Become the Focus of Customer Support

*By Allyson Barr, chief marketing officer, Attivio*

Improving and simplifying the customer service experience – both internally and externally – will be a focus for business leaders in 2019. In today's environment, access to global markets, relatively cheap computing power, and digital storage are lowering the barriers that have traditionally protected business' competitive advantages. With more agile and responsive competition, shorter product life cycles, and innovation tougher to find, executives are looking towards their customer support and experience teams as a way to win and retain business in the coming year.

This new emphasis on customer support to become a differentiator and revenue-driver is juxtaposed with the focus on "shifting left." Simply put, companies are reducing support costs by relying less on direct human interaction and instead leaning more on technology to shoulder the load of inbound support inquiries. Successfully scaling support operations while maintaining high-quality performance remains a major hurdle for many businesses.

To address the need, customer support organizations of all types and sizes are exploring new technologies and analyzing this year's trends to facilitate a more intelligent and efficient support experience.

## SPOTLIGHT BRIGHTENS ON INTELLIGENT AND EFFICIENT SUPPORT OPERATIONS

Many of the new technologies that engineering and IT groups, and to some extent sales and marketing teams, have used for the past few years will be introduced into support organizations in 2019. Support teams will have access to technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and natural language processing (NLP). For some organizations, these technologies will be integrated directly into the products they use every day to get work done. For others, adoption will inevitably be slower as they take a piecemeal approach.

While undoubtedly these new technologies will add to the *coolness* and modernization of support organizations' CX stack, adding these will also fundamentally improve a support organizations' efficiency and allow agents to more effectively do their jobs while simultaneously providing a better, more satisfying experience for the end user.

Attivio is leading this push by making it simple for customer support organizations to use these powerful technologies.

## CONTENT UNIFICATION

Many of the gains in productivity that support teams will achieve in 2019 will be the result of finally being able to unify their disparate sources of knowledge. After employees, information is the most important asset in any customer support system. This makes the delivery of high-quality support a fairly simple equation. The faster support teams can resolve issues, the higher the customer satisfaction levels.

The problem in doing this is that, more often than not, the information that a support agent needs to access in order to successfully resolve a problem is locked away in information silos. Not only does the agent need to know where to look for the information, but they also need to know where to find the keys to access it. The added variable of navigating this problem with an impatient or unhappy customer on the line makes their job incredibly tough and presents the risk of unhappy customers and higher attrition rates.

The solution to this problem lies in connecting and subsequently ingesting, indexing, and analyzing virtually all the information that exists within an organization. This includes looking at traditional knowledge bases, such as corporate intranets, CRM or ticketing platform, and support content. It also encompasses unstructured, previously untapped sources of information like emails and chats. Making the best answer available to a support agent no matter the format is one of the most impactful ways support organizations can being to operate more efficiently. Additionally, by understanding what already exists, support teams can make better usage of existing resources (i.e., not recreating the same answer over and over) and also identify existing gaps in their knowledge base in order to proactively address potential problems.

When information silos are dissolved, support teams can easily discover resolutions through a single pane of glass, rather than a hunting and pecking exercise that is ultimately no better at surfacing the correct answers. This frees up support team's time to focus on resolving the problem at hand instead of conducting fruitless and unproductive information searches. This idea is known as "reducing the swivel."

## BETTER SELF-SERVICE WITH NLP, TEXT ANALYTICS, AND MACHINE LEARNING

We've all had the experience of searching a website for the solution to a problem we're having with a company's product or service. We've filled in all the information asked of us, and what comes back is a generic FAQ response that doesn't quite do the trick. Or we've attempted "chatting" with a support bot. And, while friendly, they often fail to understand even the most basic questions that are asked. Sometimes they don't even work at all. This leaves us feeling frustrated: we've just wasted valuable time, and now we have to go through the process again, only this time with a human.

Companies have the opportunity to differentiate themselves from competitors by bridging the gap between customer needs and company support resources with technology in an effective way.

### AI-POWERED SEARCH IMPROVES CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Many of the failings with existing self-service functionality can be solved by layering NLP, text analytics, and machine learning on top of customer interactions. These technologies allow a user to communicate with a machine in a way that is natural for the user, which, of course, is not natural for the machine.

A good illustration of the importance of having this technology in a support organization is demonstrated by this typical search scenario. When you search for directions to a restaurant, the first result is a map, not a list of restaurants. Taking it a step further, you can ask that question in hundreds of different languages. You can misspell the entire thing. Or you may use a similar question.

Technology like NLP understands that when you type "how do I get to..." it is the semantic equivalent of "where is" and "I can't find." And if the machine doesn't understand a query, you'll often see, "Did you mean?" followed by a list of alternate queries. That's much more satisfying for the user than a "no match" response. This is really important in the self-service experience, particularly when the problem, and resulting query is complicated.

When text analytics and NLP are put together, the true nature of the query is understood – leading to vastly better answers to the problems posed that are delivered in a more efficient manner. And, over time, machine learning improves the entire process by understanding which questions are most common and which content is most effective at resolving an issue. With each repeated use, there is an increased relevance, convenience, and confidence in the results.

This dramatically improves the outcomes for the end-user as the platform is anticipating questions and delivering answers that are not only useful, but also tailored to the individual.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The benefits of integrating these technologies into existing support organizations are far reaching. One benefit that seems to be driving adoption are recommended actions. By using machine learning, the system is able to recognize connections between data points that otherwise remain hidden.

One way the discovery of hidden connections is manifest are recommended actions. As the name implies, recommended actions are using this knowledge to proactively recommend next steps for both agents and end-users. This can take the form of a suggested reading, a similar problem and answer sets, or a knowledge graph detailing who within an organization is an expert on a given topic if there remains a need or desire to continue further. Having recommended actions also helps improve mean time to resolution (also known as MTTR) and call deflection rates since the technology is proactively suggesting solutions to problems. By anticipating problems and providing solutions the end user is more likely to be satisfied with their experience.

### THE BOTTOMLINE

Customers and employees alike are demanding high-quality support experiences at every interaction. To meet this expectation support organizations will need to continue to adopt new technologies and lean on them to scale and improve their existing support capabilities. ■

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# CRM²: Mastering Data Interactions for Maximum Relationship Insight

It's no secret that strong customer relationships build thriving businesses. But it's also the most people-centric aspects of our organizations (sales, marketing, service) that generate the kinds of data that are the most difficult to capture, and are most essential to managing successful relationships.

Although the value of your interaction data is easy to appreciate, collecting that data can be difficult to manage. As a consequence, many organizations (perhaps yours included) fail to capture complete and current customer records, fail to give their teams the comprehensive insights they need to reach their goals, and fail to aggregate, analyze, and communicate the reports necessary for executive oversight.

Fortunately, there is a better way to collect and distribute interactions data *without* adding time-consuming burdens on your staff or managers. In fact, this better way involves platforms you are already familiar with, tools almost everyone in your organization already understands.

## Your Objective: A Better Data Process

Customer interactions are not merely a matter of personal relationships, but a data issue of interest to everyone in your organization. Similarly, managing interactions data is NOT the exclusive domain of IT, but of critical concern to your customer-facing teams and their managers.

After all, your customer-facing teams not only need rich data to sell or provide service, they are the ones best positioned to collect much of it:

- They may have **correspondence** with customers, via email and text, that includes key information on desires, needs, requests, purchasing timeframes and more;
- They're engaged in **conversations**, by phone, chat, or in-person, that may include information that can update and inform your customer's profile and/or buying history;
- Like canaries in the coal mines, they're among the first to hear the **requests, complaints, and demands** that shape customer satisfaction – information that's vital to sustaining your relationships over the long haul.

On the backend, team managers need access to current interactions data that can be aggregated, analyzed and compiled for a variety of administrative responsibilities:

- Sales and revenue **forecasting** based on the cumulative sales-cycle information captured by the data;
- Marketing and service center **analytics** that help drive market targeting/segmenting, budgeting and investments, and the identification of risks and opportunities;
- **Numerical analyses** for both individual and aggregate account management and the appropriate assigning of resources;
- Reporting that serves as a foundation for strategic **relationship measurement and management** – understanding which accounts merit priority attention and dedication.

**Yet…who has the time?**

Busy, customer-facing employees do not have the leisure to gather critical customer data that may be lodged in a handful of different applications and databases. Already under pressure to meet sales or service targets, they certainly do not welcome more pressure to fulfill what often feels like "busy work" made more cumbersome by:

- Scattered data repositories and silos that make information difficult to find;
- Lack of easy, timely ways to capture notes from various one-to-one conversations;
- Frustration with multiple applications and platforms that require multiple log-ins, passwords, authorization requests, etc.;
- No time or appetite for rekeying or redundant cut-and-paste efforts.

Given the context in which interactions data is collected and applied, the consequences are clear: frontline buy-in is essential for success. **An effective system for managing interactions data *must* anticipate the needs of customer-facing teams and be prepared to accommodate them.**

## Make Your CRM the Core of Your Data Collection

Consider the necessary requirements for an effective system. It must simultaneously apply technology that makes it easier to gather data (e.g., meeting notes) and distribute data (e.g., sales reports) while integrating organically within your ordinary, daily business processes.

In fact, your organization probably already has the core of an efficient interaction data management system: your customer relationship management (CRM) platform.

With the appropriate integrations of various platforms, including mission-critical applications and data repositories, your CRM can be the ideal foundation because:

- CRMs are common, popular, and widely accessible. Most sales and many marketing and service professionals are already familiar with the platform, reducing training expenses and minimizing complexity.

- As the dominant screen on your team's devices, your CRM is the ideal pillar for active data collection on the fly. With the introduction of appropriate prompts, alerts, pop-ups and single-click activations, your CRM can easily become the native dashboard for interactions data collection.

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- Once integrated into other critical systems that hold customer data, your CRM becomes a powerful platform for pulling both individual records for immediate interactions, and for compiling reports based on interaction data.

## Bridging the Gap: Moving from the CRM You Have to the One You Need

On its own, your CRM is a powerful relationship platform; with the right integrations and use cases, it can become an even more rewarding system for leveraging interactions data across your entire enterprise. Consider the following best practices:

### Assess First, Design Second

Put the horse in front of the cart by determining your data needs – contact history, sales and purchasing data, product catalogs, demographics, etc. – *before* you begin investing in technology and platform design. Your system should be built around *your* needs and working processes, not the other way around.

Example: Air Animal Pet Movers, a company that specializes in safely transporting animals across even the vastest differences, found that its growth was stymied by its manual method of logging incoming queries. They wanted to revise their CRM to accommodate more automated communications relevant to a digital world. Subsequent investigation into their leads and workflows revealed that European clients, in particular, vastly preferred to communicate by text. **By incorporating SMS into its CRM, Air Animal boosted European inquiries by 50%.** Says owner and founder, Dr. Walter Woolf, "Instead of taking three to four days to respond, we proactively respond to most inquiries in 24 hours."

### Drive Adoption Through Careful Attention To The Interface

Your success depends entirely on your teams' willingness to embrace your new interactions processes. Encourage their enthusiasm by designing an interface that is not only easy to use, but actively empowers users with the abilities and tools they can instantly appreciate. These may include:

- **Productivity assistance** through role-based layouts that anticipate the end users most likely needs by surfacing the data most necessary for them to complete their assigned tasks.
- Direct user attention: actively **highlight fields and tasks** that draw user attention to the most high-priority activities.

### Support Urgent Initiatives

For example, a W-Systems client pursued a "Focus 15" policy in which their representatives were required to contact their most important customers at least once every 15 business days. In its CRM, the company established a two-tier alerting system for ensuring compliance. When fifteen days had passed without contact, the assigned representative would get an automated reminder. If another week passed without contact, a similar alert would go out – to the representative's manager. In this way, the company used its CRM's interactions data management powers to reinforce the quality and value of its key customer relationships.

### Use Your Data to Prioritize Sales Calls and Marketing Targets

One of the greatest virtues of your improved CRM is its ability to inform your priorities, allowing you to direct time, talent, and money to the relationships that matter most – as demonstrated by the evidence revealed within your interactions data.

### Share the Value

Few things discourage your colleagues more than seeing their work – the data they collect – simply vanish somewhere deep within your systems, never to be heard from again. Distribute reports; share the insights you've formed through their data to show that their efforts are meaningful and appreciated.

## Why Leave Money on the Table?

Successful relationship management depends on superior data management: capturing and accessing a complete data picture informed by all your customer interactions.

Today, you have the power to remove the last obstacles to capturing that data. New technologies (and frankly, more intelligent management of common workflows) can turn your CRM into the platform that helps you collect, analyze and apply the data insights you need to realize the full value of every customer. Without creating more work for customer-facing teams. And with automation that users are eager to adopt.

There's no reason to wait. W-Systems helps clients transform transactional data into lucrative insights, using the CRMs they already know and understand. Move ahead by not leaving crucial intelligence behind: Contact a W-Systems expert to reap the full value of your customer interactions. ■

**W-Systems** is a top national provider of transformational sales and marketing technology. We are business analysts and developers and want our solutions to fit your organization like a glove. Put us to the test, we love a challenge.

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# The Progression of the CRM: Why Your Data Quality Needs to Catch up

For progressive readers, we have disappointing news to share: no singular "*megatrend*" will define the CRM space in 2019. Any "*evolution*" will require a shift in focus back to the CRMs original purpose: to serve as the foundational element for reaching the nirvana of Salesforce Automation, a concept involving streamlining sales and marketing processes for an enhanced workflow.

"*Not us, we're pushing forward!*" you defiantly say. Maybe that's the case, but let's outline a different scenario: In 2019, organizations looking to expand their current data strategy may lean towards artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities – shifting their focus around its progressive services, and analyzing how the "*dream team*" of machine learning and AI can enhance their company's growth strategies.

To accomplish this analysis, C-level stakeholders will undoubtedly opt to deep dive into what's been deemed "*the single source of truth*" within B2B organizations: the company's CRM. Unfortunately, as meetings unfold, the same C-level staff will discover what internal leadership in sales, marketing, and operations already knew: In terms of CRM implementation and ongoing use, we've lost our way.

Make no mistake, the collective "*we*" isn't limited to one guilty party. This will reveal itself when every report reviewed comes with a workaround to its creation, a caveat to its output, and an overall skepticism toward any definitive insights.

In order to move forward, organizations must address these two questions: *What happened, and how will organizations improve CRM ecosystems as we enter the next decade?*

## What Happened—Retrospective Analysis of Diminished CRM Effectiveness

To get where you're going, you must understand where you've started. At its core, a CRM is supposed to help track and manage the customer lifecycle. However, the buyer's journey has evolved at a faster rate than CRM optimization has matured.

## Engagement to Enablement—The New Role of Marketing

In today's world, B2B buying and procurement committees have grown to include an average of seven stakeholders. The sheer increase in stakeholders alone complicates CRM utilization, let alone the fact that 3:1 B2B buyers prefer researching products and services prior to sales intervention. With heightened expectations on funnel optimizations, the CRM took a back seat.

Moreover, because marketing leaders were tasked with more revenue-based KPIs, organizations opted to combat sophisticated buyers with equally sophisticated campaigns. This resulted in an exploding sales and martech landscape - a cornucopia of emerging channels, applications and services, all of which plug information into a CRM to function properly.

Unfortunately, B2B organizations scaled and scaled (*and scaled*), putting potential quality issues of incoming and existing prospect and customer data aside.

## Waste Management—the Problem with Garbage In, Garbage Out

Let's pretend a CRM's existing database is perfect. The ways in which new, incoming information enters its system is problematic. Between sales, customer success and operations, manually inputting records yielding incomplete information, a CRM – and technologies relying on its data – can quickly lose value.

Now, let's embrace the hard truth: data decay in a CRM is natural. According to Gartner, data decays at a rate of 12% per year. The driving cause of data decay is the change in a contact's information. This is likely the result of a change in job title, function, company, location, and more.

For marketing leaders, without complete firmographic and demographic fields, any dreams of personalization and segmented messaging (developed by your marketing team) will disappear.

Even worse, lack of quality against existing contact and account data can derail an entire lead-to-revenue process. Distribution through lead scoring and routing models will eventually suffer. Furthermore, for sales teams, reaching out to contacts with the wrong information results in more time researching than trying to connect, prospect, and cultivate more meaningful conversations.

## S.O.S—How Organizations Will Modernize the Enterprise CRM

First things first, to improve data quality, it is wise to recognize the "*data first*" approach – one that can be implemented in numerous ways. Actionable steps include utilizing both demographic and firmographic information, with real-time and periodic data enrichment, to improve the CRM's information as it ages within the database.

## Making the Grade—Create a Framework for Data Quality to Evaluate Your CRM Database

Overall, data quality needs to strive for a framework that is correct, complete, and consistent.

- ***Correctness:*** A non-starter for any evaluation of data quality is the correctness of contact and account data. Fortunately, data correctness leaves no room for grey areas. Thus, simple connections to the ways marketing develops, executes, and measures its campaign are tied to correctness.
- ***Completeness:*** Complete datasets require collecting all the data needed for measurement and usability for sales and marketing activities.

- ***Consistency:*** Consistency of datasets primarily impacts the measurable activity throughout a CRM. Reporting functions are useless if organizations do not foster relativity within datasets through standardized fields.

In short, organizations should combine these concepts into attributes by connecting corresponding use cases to illustrate the impact on ROI.

## The Data Hero's Journey—Capturing Information that Matters

One of the more common methods of marketing campaign optimization is through the concept of *Associate Rule Learning* (ARL). This process is used for revealing key patterns amongst buyer personas and behaviors. This helps B2B organizations in spearheading effective marketing campaigns and sales outreach. Uncovering trends is key for targeting the right people and bringing in the right leads.

However, data collection methodologies vary from manual to automated, based on which sales and marketing activities caused its displacement within a CRM. It's common for manual uploads to contain mistakes in their contact information. When records are manually inputted, human error naturally occurs. To avoid these mistakes, a standardized data capturing process should be implemented.

## Crossing the Threshold—Sales Productivity and Data Management

When it comes to the sales pipeline, data plays an important role in sales effectiveness and its process. If the correct information is available, it avoids complicating the sales team's workflow. For example, consider territory management. Territory management assigns sales people to their targeted areas. For this reason - accurate, complete data is key for sales success and reliable forecasting.

How do sales forecasting and territory management go hand-in-hand? To start, forming a good sales territory ignites the process for sales forecasting. This helps sales reps determine areas which can account for successful prospecting. Forecasting can help determine the number of prospects in an area. Again, both these processes hinge on dependable CRM data. More specifically, location and targeting are both factors in reaching the right people to generate leads.

## The Breakthrough—Lead-to-Revenue Management

There are many studies that attempt to pinpoint the cause of sales and marketing friction. B2B organizations have a lead-to-revenue management system that carefully integrates metrics and buyer's data around the customer buying cycle. This process allows sales and marketing professionals to engage with more prospects and customers via lead scoring and routing. By leveraging this information, it increases the success of sales prospecting.

Friction is caused when marketing feels sales intervention is necessary and sales fails to follow up on qualified leads. Before pointing fingers, sales and marketing must examine whether or not they have complete data within the organization's CRM.

## AI Fueling Sales & Marketing Decisions and Results

Implementing a data management strategy will empower organizations to modernize its CRM into a lifecycle management tool that, through both AI and machine learning, can not only communicate insights the C-level suite is looking for, but act as a dynamic roadmap with recommendations that expedite growth.

As previously stated, the prospecting workflow is one that comes with individualized challenges. In 2018, over 40% of sales representatives agreed prospecting was the most challenging part of their job. This challenge can be combatted with AI. With an optimal database, the sales team is able to attack existing territories and identify new high-value prospects based on buyer behavior.

Meanwhile, the same AI-based capabilities can be used to foster behavior from marketing channels. While most marketing strategies rely on triggered workflows to deliver its next campaign, AI can bypass required behaviors and deliver automated-progressive profiling.

The best part? As AI is implemented, its use-case effectiveness should grow with time and be applied while penetrating new markets, as well as existing markets, by identifying lookalike high-value accounts to target.

## In Brief

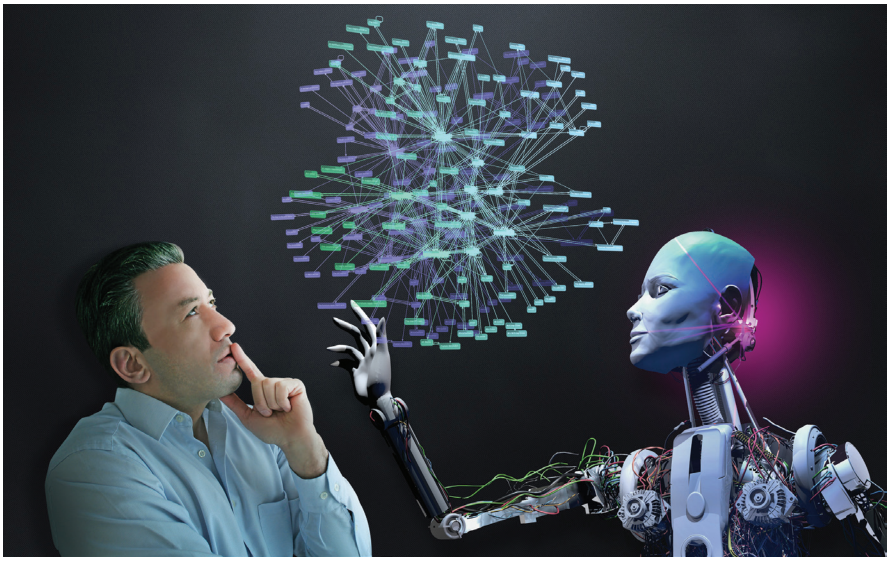
The impact of technology on businesses is an integral part of a company's success. And, while revitalizing your CRM, it's possible to take two steps back in order to take ten steps forward. Expansive adoption and the use of AI within a CRM to maximize sales and marketing initiatives is coming. Therefore, the investment of AI will be seen throughout 2019.

The capitalization of those investments mandates companies to incorporate a data strategy providing checks and balances in order to maintain accurate, dependable, and enhanced information within its CRM. Then – and only then – can the CRM be viewed as the single source of truth. ■

VERINT

# The Hybrid Workforce Owns the Future of Engagement

The future isn't in 2030 – it's already here. The contact center of tomorrow is a future of augmentation, enhancement and optimization of human potential, and we're just beginning to see the results. In this new era of engagement, advanced artificial intelligence (AI) and robotic process automation will drive the human experience, rather than the artificial one, to be the key factor to brand differentiation and trust. The age of digital transformation has ignited a massive shift in our collective world – how we do business, engage with customers, as well as how and why they chose to consume our products and services.



## Robots are your new best friend

Before you panic about your job being automated, consider this:  Humans and bots will soon co-exist to create the hybrid workforce of the future. Robotic process automation will take over the mundane, tedious tasks and let agents focus on what matters: *the customer experience*. Data is the new currency, and AI will help contact center workers access and automatically process customer data across multiple channels simultaneously to deliver an unprecedented speed of service and customer experience (CX).

Robotic process automation will also enable agents to deliver the highly personalized service that customers will expect: contextual, intelligent, and most importantly for businesses—predictive. Automation and AI won't be the only tech changing the game in the future, however. Customers will routinely be utilizing advanced chatbots, biometric verification, and intelligent virtual assistants like Alexa to engage how and when they choose.

## Employee experience will be as critical as customer experience

It's a given that engaged, motivated and informed employees are critical to providing the best CX. For organizations to attract and keep talent as well as reduce attrition rates, they'll have to give employees what they want. The agents of tomorrow will expect to work anywhere, anytime, and across devices, just like customers. As automation allows contact center employees to eliminate tedious, repetitive processes, they can focus on the more complex and rewarding tasks. These tools will enable agents to resolve customer issues rapidly, via self-service or first contact, providing them the satisfaction of working smarter, not harder.

## Preparing for the contact center of tomorrow

The nature of the contact center itself will completely change in the future. New contact channels will continue to emerge, and organizations will have to keep pace with consumer demands for omnichannel, digital engagement. As the enterprise goes all in with the cloud, the contact center will transform into a highly specialized, virtual machine where having agents in a physical location will be a thing of the past. As quality management solutions advance, contact center leaders can intelligently measure and coach teams of remote employees, providing instant feedback and automated quality management.

These advancements won't come without complexity, of course—organizations will remain increasingly under pressure to provide transparency in how they collect and use customer data. The customers of the future will be far savvier than previous generations about how their personal data is used. Earning their trust will be a balancing act shared by humans and bots alike to drive brand loyalty and deliver the optimal customer experience. As we march forward into the future with intelligent machines at our side and in our applications, the rise of the hybrid workforce has already begun. ■

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