Multichannel vs. Omnichannel

Understanding the CX World’s Most Elusive Buzzwords

An InMoment White Paper
Overview

A SHIFT IN CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT
Business leaders are aware of “multichannel” and “omnichannel”—and recognize the importance of each strategy—but few brands are actually taking necessary steps to offer a more seamless and consistent customer experience. As technology advances and customer expectations climb, the way brands engage with customers is changing.

MULTICHANNEL VS. OMNICHANNEL
“Multichannel” and “omnichannel” are industry buzzwords that get used and abused like an office microwave. But what do they actually mean? Call Center IQ (CCIQ) surveyed various industry experts and professionals and shared their results, so everyone can understand the differences between the two terms and start speaking the same language.

EVOLVE YOUR BRAND’S CX APPROACH
No shortcuts exist on the road to omnichannel customer engagement. Your organization has to crawl before it can walk, and it needs to walk before it can run. By combining an omnichannel strategy with successful execution, you’ve got everything you need to get a leg up on the competition.
A Shift in Customer Engagement

MEETING THE DEMANDS OF TODAY’S CUSTOMER

Call Center IQ (CCIQ) surveyed various professionals across customer experience (CX) and customer service organizations to gauge industry perception of “multichannel” and “omnichannel.” The survey found that although business leaders are aware of the terms—and recognize the importance of each strategy—few brands are actually taking necessary steps to offer a more seamless and consistent customer experience.

In an attempt to improve customer experience, many brands take the route of adding channels willy-nilly to accommodate the customer. On paper, more channels seems like a good thing. In practice, more channels usually leads to less customer support and more opportunities to disappoint.

We live in an era where brands need to be smarter than ever in the way they go about customer experience strategy. As technology advances and customer expectations climb, the way brands engage with customers changes. Businesses must now understand every customer detail, however insignificant it may seem, and develop a strategy that makes this information available in real time to agents in each customer engagement channel.

Multichannel vs. Omnichannel

LET’S START SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE

“Multichannel” and “omnichannel” are industry buzzwords that get used and abused like an office microwave. We’re glad they’re on everyone’s minds, but are they terms you can readily explain?

If you ask around, you’ll probably get different answers. We know we have. Any time you have an important business strategy with shifting definitions, you’ve got the potential for problems. We believe the first step to implementing a solid multichannel or omnichannel strategy is to have a firm grasp on what they are.

WHAT THE HECK DOES MULTICHANNEL EVEN MEAN?

In relatively convincing fashion, 44% of CCIQ survey respondents agreed on this definition of multichannel.

Multichannel adjective

1. Allowing a customer to simultaneously communicate via multiple channels
More than omnichannel, businesses are familiar with the concept of multichannel. This customer engagement strategy is generally seen as more than just adding feedback channels. Multichannel serves both customer and organization by offering more preferred feedback channels and providing a greater level of overall convenience.

An organization cannot truly claim to be a multichannel enterprise until it fully supports multiple customer engagement platforms (emphasis on supports). Simply creating an additional feedback channel doesn’t do anyone any good—except possibly your competitors. By offering an inadequately supported feedback channel, your brand is susceptible to slow response time, miscommunication, and customer defection.

**WELL, WHAT THE HECK IS OMNICHANNEL THEN?**
In slightly less convincing fashion, 39% of business leaders surveyed by CCIQ agreed on this definition of omnichannel.

Omnichannel  
**adjective**
1. Seamless customer experience across all channels

Seamless is the operative word in this definition. A brand implementing an omnichannel customer engagement strategy connects all of its feedback channels, creating a unified customer experience. However, according to 12% of professionals surveyed, as long as the customer experience is seamless, support across all customer engagement channels is not necessarily a requirement.

An omnichannel engagement program generates a comprehensive view of each customer—rather than relying on information from a single transaction. A customer has past, present, and potential brand interactions. Omnichannel organizations see the customer from all of these perspectives and provide individual customer support exactly when it is needed.

Omnichannel engagement programs shift organizational mindset from that of the provider to that of the customer. They focus on the experience a customer receives rather than the type of service the brand provides.

*Omnichannel is two way. It involves capturing and also reaching out and getting the information. Omnichannel is more strategic and more about the experience. It is a consistent experience at every moment of the process.*

— Lonnie Mayne, President, InMoment
Evolve Your Brand’s CX Approach

MAKING THE OMNICHANNEL “LEAP”
Movies usually aren’t the reliable well of knowledge we wish they were, but in What about Bob?, Dr. Leo Marvin hits the nail on the head with his whole “baby steps” philosophy.

Omnichannel isn’t a leap. Nor is it a sprint. It’s a gradual, calculated process that your brand accomplishes over time. Only after thoughtful planning, training, and equipping agents with proper tools and dashboards will your organization be prepared to walk the omnichannel walk.

For all you Dr. Marvin skeptics out there, here are some words from a man who’s been around the CX block more than a few times:

The crawl, walk, run strategy is an important one, because if you’re going to be good and call yourself omnichannel, you need to be great at whatever you know are the critical touchpoints... There is a cost to going too far down the path.

— Lonnie Mayne, President, InMoment

STRATEGY REQUIRES EXECUTION
Brand evolution cannot begin until every part of the organization commits to the cause. Every tool must be designed to capture actionable customer data and inform employees in real time. Every employee must be indoctrinated with a seamless, macro approach to the customer experience.

When advanced technology and invested people combine, omnichannel engagement becomes less idealistic and more like an achievable reality.

TRAINING
Contact center agents interact with customers every day. This aspect of your business is constant. The way your agents interact with customers, however, is always changing.

For organizations aspiring to offer omnichannel customer engagement, employees must view the customer experience from the perspective of the customer—not the provider. Once this mindset has been adopted across your organization, you are then tasked with identifying agents who specialize in specific channels and positioning them accordingly, so your brand can deliver an outstanding customer experience at every touchpoint.

By placing agents in channels they excel in, your brand eliminates seams and reduces friction as customers move from channel to channel.
Putting the right agents at the helm of a customer engagement channel is only part of the omnichannel equation. Without the right technology, the best contact center agents in the world won’t make up for seams in the customer experience.

Customer data silos are enemies to omnichannel engagement. They create lapses in the customer experience and disrupt company communication and operations. To be effective—and omnichannel—contact center agents require access to proper tools and dashboards. This technology is crucial to an organization because it not only supplies transactional customer data and context, it provides actionable customer insights that allow agents—at any channel—to resolve an issue in real time.

The thought of transitioning to an omnichannel engagement program might be giving you ulcers. Don’t let it. As far as we know, no one has mastered this strategy yet.

The customer experience is evolving, but it’s not yet evolved. Customers may want your brand to offer omnichannel engagement, but at this stage in the game, it’s certainly not the expectation. So, relax. Right now, your organization is sitting at the corner of knowledge and opportunity.

About InMoment
InMoment helps businesses improve customer retention and increase profits through listening, understanding, and sharing customer stories. Our Voice of Customer (VoC) solutions arm brands with real-time, actionable insights for customer experience (CX) improvement at all organizational levels. We are a full-service partner, providing leading-edge technology, strategic guidance, market insights, predictive analytics, dashboard reporting software, and an unparalleled social media advocacy solution to more than 300 top brands. Our international presence covers more than 80 countries and 45 languages.