Reimagining a Futuristic Customer Experience Center

CMI

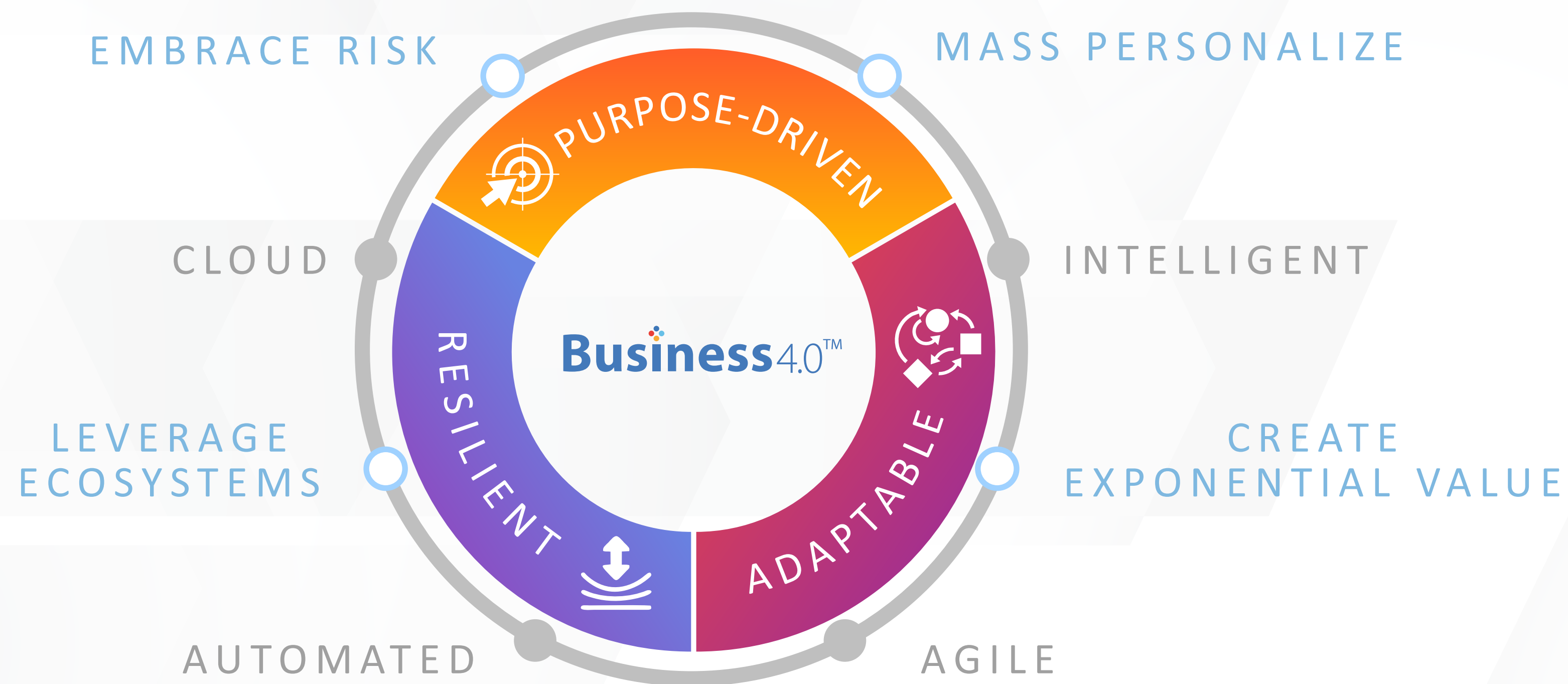PURPOSE-DRIVEN   RESILIENT   ADAPTABLE

Executive Summary

The world around us is changing by the day. Business models, supply chains, as well as customer expectations, are undergoing a fundamental reset. In such a hyper-dynamic environment, companies across all industries have accelerated their efforts to enhance the customer experience. The Adobe Annual Digital Trends 2020 report[1] highlights the importance of focusing on customer experience, noting that companies doing so are three times more likely to exceed their business goals. The role of the contact center becomes critical in this context.

Amid accelerated technological disruption and persisting business uncertainty, there is an imperative need to futureproof the customer support function with the adoption of a flexible technology architecture. Enterprises should evolve their contact centers to be integrated customer experience centers that place a premium on bespoke engagement, and seamless interactivity across digital touchpoints. It is not just about meeting but exceeding customer expectations.

[1]https://www.adobe.com/content/dam/www/au/pdf/Adobe-Digital-Trends-2020-APAC.pdf

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Beyond the Obvious

It is well known that customer expectations are rising and that connected customers are even more demanding. With access to several offline engagement channels being restricted, companies need to use technology to deliver a truly differentiated, interactive, and personalized customer experience. Be it a bank, streaming media outlet, broadband internet provider, or an ecommerce company, every customer-facing brand needs to engage with customers proactively. What exactly does this mean? How can companies build resilience and redesign themselves to provide a superior customer and agent experience? How can they transition their customer support functions from being a reactive cost center to be an experience-driven profit center?

As companies rethink their value propositions, they will need to rearchitect the contact center around two dimensions. First, companies should identify up-selling and cross-selling avenues for enhanced revenue generation. Second, improve the customer experience.

Achieving this requires improving the agent experience. It includes enhancing the capabilities and experience of their customer-facing support staff, through technologies, tools, and training. If done well, it can reduce agent attrition and improve operational efficiency and revenue growth. Given the substantial overheads involved in onboarding and nurturing agents, organizations must deal with agent skilling and training in a focused manner and evolve it to be more than the regular staffing function.

The Technology Tangent

To address current and future customer expectations, companies require a flexible architecture to facilitate the integration between systems for an enhanced customer service. Moreover, it must be able to adapt to the changing business needs. Such a system will leverage tools such as AI, automation, analytics, chatbots, and remote agents to transform internal processes for future-readiness. Moreover, enterprises must also invest in business intelligence (BI) and analytics. Omnichannel support via seamless, end-to-end, engaged service provisioning, is another imperative that companies cannot ignore. At the same time, businesses will have to ensure they comply with various data security and confidentiality regulations while using customer data.

In conjunction, the level of context-driven personalization will have to move beyond anonymous, scripted agents providing tailored offers to customers. Empowering agents with data-based insights around customer behavior and preferences will help them to not only address explicit requirements but also identify opportunities to improve customer experience through AI-based conversations.

However, focusing solely on technology implementations that enhance customer experience, without taking into consideration the agent experience, will not suffice. A two-track approach is required to design a futuristic customer experience solution. First, companies need to undertake technology upgrades that improve agent experience and service provisioning. Simultaneously, they should carry out technology overhauls that orchestrate positive customer   journeys across various engagement channels including social media.

Making the Shift

To deliver highly personalized and contextual engagements, contact centers will need to maintain an omnichannel presence. Customers should be able to smoothly communicate with the brand via calls, messages, emails, mobile apps, social media channels, and websites. More importantly, each link in the omnichannel engagement network should talk to each other, wherein all the touchpoints seamlessly share relevant customer-related historical and emerging data.

Customers should also have the flexibility to choose between self-service and agent-assisted support. Equipped with social media listening tools, the contact center should proactively reach out to customers, and solve their problems. For instance, by setting up real-time alerts for mention of brand names on a social channel, companies can respond to customer queries quickly before they are escalated or trend online.

To further enhance customer experience, companies could integrate contact centers with virtual personal assistants to help connect or send instructions to the brand's support staff. For instance, customers of a telecom operator or utility provider should be able to switch their tariff plans easily by giving a command to their smart home devices. Another solution businesses could explore is the usage of extended reality (XR) alongside augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) in their customer experience function. For example, organizations can set up guided installations of new devices through AR, eliminating the need to talk to an agent for manual assistance. Such measures could drive interactivity higher, bringing customers closer to the brand.

Finally, companies should keep in mind data protection and security rules across geographies and implement robust data governance practices to ensure customer privacy.
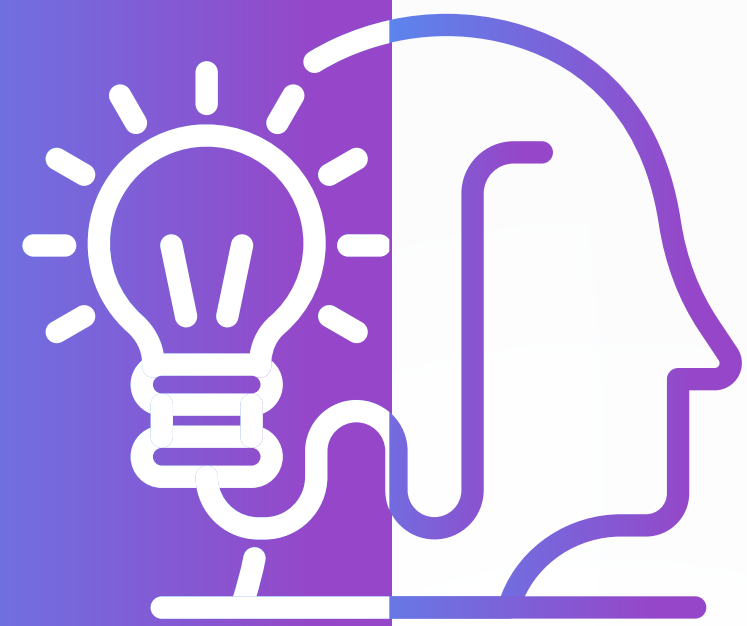
Enhancing the Agent Experience

For providing proactive, superior services to end customers, companies must empower their agents with productivity enhancement tools, and provision granular data-driven insights. An intuitive agent desktop comprising a single-screen application with all features and channels embedded will be a key requirement. The application should render a 360-degree customer view with personalized, contextual recommendations around services and solutions.

Provisioning instant customer ID verification using voice recognition and biometrics and facilitating fast connect with 'customer buddy' or agents previously spoken to, will be a valuable addition to omnichannel linking. Meanwhile, automated call-recording and speech/ emotion analytics, combined with advanced text and speech analytics, can help detect words, context, sentiment, and unearth different behavioral patterns. Such predictive tools can also raise red flags for escalations or proactive interventions designed to stop customer attrition.

Organizations must also explore ways of saving agents' time by automating various repeatable, rule-based workflows so that they can focus on higher-value, core activities. For example, chatbots and voice bots, based on AI and machine learning can be used to swiftly respond to customers' queries. These tools can automate query resolutions for commonly cited customer inquiries, thereby boosting operational efficiency.

Customer experience centers should also support remote contact center agent facilities which allow agents to provide service from anywhere, anytime, via any device. This will especially come in handy during periods of uncertainty triggered by business disruptions or natural disasters such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Unifying customer service with the marketing, sales, and campaign management teams is another way by which enterprises can make agents more productive. By informing agents of current and upcoming marketing campaigns, organizations can help agents drive higher conversions. Finally, the use of data analytics and BI for delivering personalized solutions to customers will be a definite value-add.
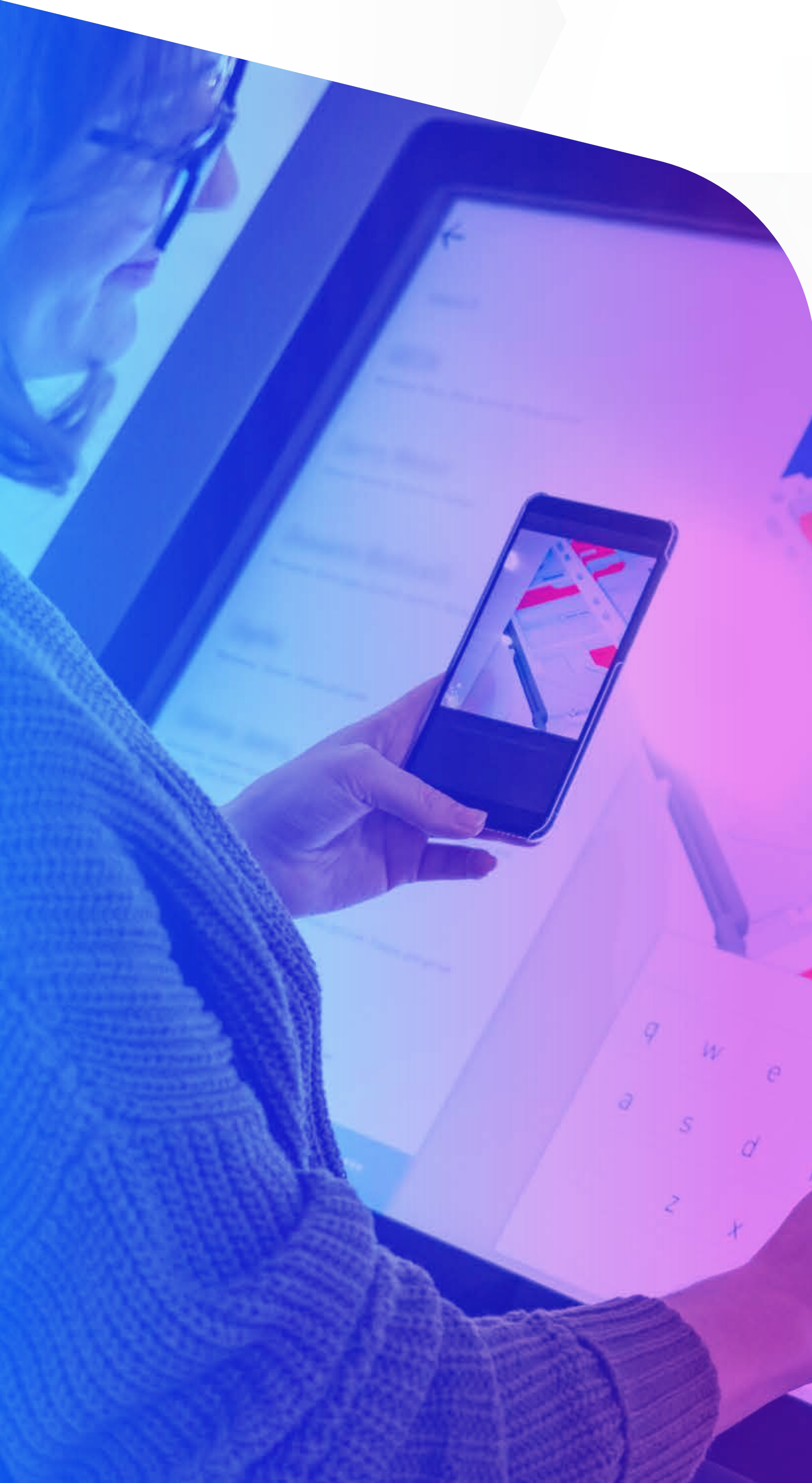
Conclusion

In an era of smart virtual assistants, wearables, apps, and algorithms that deliver proactive personalized recommendations on what to read, watch, eat, and buy, contact centers need an urgent reboot. As the irreversible trend of digital transformation accelerates, forward-looking businesses must strengthen their competitive advantage by adapting and transforming their contact centers into customer experience hubs.

In fact, contact centers can be the new profit center and front-office for brands in many ways. By proactively solving customer issues through innovative use of technology while enhancing customer and agent experience, companies can sustain profitability and growth.

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