Knowledge 2020 Digital Experience
Customer Service Insights

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Introduction

Dean Robison, Senior Vice President, Global Technical Support, ServiceNow

The ServiceNow Customer Service Insights program launched for the first time as part of our Knowledge 2020 Digital Experience. The invitation-only event, hosted by Dean Robison, senior vice president of global technical support at ServiceNow, brought together nearly 70 customer service executives to examine critical business continuity and service operations challenges and how to thrive during the new normal brought on by the global pandemic.
It’s no secret that organizations everywhere have been thrown into a new normal the past few months as COVID-19 has swept across the world. In this session, Dean explored with his panel guests how this global public health emergency has spurred innovation and how critical it is to digitally enable your business so you can shift fast and be productive in remote and work-from-home environments.

No organization was truly prepared for a global pandemic

Dean observed that ServiceNow recently held multiple roundtable discussions with many customers, but in all the conversations, he didn’t find any company that was truly prepared for COVID-19. Organizations had to quickly change business continuity and disaster recovery plans to fill in gaps.

At Shutterfly:

Mark Cordeiro, head of customer services, BorrowLenses Division, at Shutterfly, relayed that his team is bi-coastal, so his original business continuity and disaster recovery plans were crafted with the idea that one coast might go down during a natural disaster. With the pandemic, Shutterfly faced having to execute plans for both coasts at the same time.

“We didn’t really factor in things like home interruptions, such as childcare or multiple people working from home,” he said.

Mark worked with his team to re-balance workloads, considering the availability of everybody. Some projects were reassigned to keep work flowing, and some work processes normally conducted at the office had to be rethought. It was also critical to address psychological issues, including anxiety about COVID-19, feelings of isolation, and concern about job security.

At FICO:

Chris Ivey, head of customer service at FICO, reported that the company’s workforce was already laptop-enabled and used tools such as Microsoft Teams and Okta Verify, so employees could already get to applications they needed working from home.

However, there were challenges when COVID-19 hit. FICO has operations around the world, and Chris and his team hadn’t foreseen issues with accessing a virtual private network or Internet connectivity in some regions. They had to quickly provide hotspots to employees and leverage phone tethering.

“We had some problems with our continuity plans. We’d planned for one region to go down. Certainly not the entire world and having everybody go home within a week,” he said. “We had set up some success with digital enablement, and that allowed us to adjust quickly.”

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– Chris Ivey, Head of Customer Service, FICO
At Microsoft:
According to Heather Pfluger, partner group manager at Microsoft, her company strives to enable everyone on the planet to achieve more with its productivity tools and cloud offerings. It’s a top goal for Microsoft to be ready at any time for a global event so that the biggest enterprises in the world can continue to be productive under any circumstance.

She reported that Microsoft continually drills for “a day without Hyderabad or Redmond,” which is where the company’s primary core services and engineering resources reside, but even for her company, having the whole world work from home all at once was unprecedented. It’s been important to make sure that employees have the right workspaces to be healthy and productive with the right ergonomic furniture or computer equipment.

Companies report positive and negative surprises with employees working from home

At FICO:
One of the biggest positive surprises for FICO has been the huge rise in productivity due to employees working from home and eliminating long commutes. Even employees with small children have found time to work sometimes in the early morning or late at night. Employee satisfaction is also up markedly. FICO had just happened to complete a customer satisfaction survey.

“We are happy with what we have, but also the leadership from our executive team, communication throughout all levels, really reinforced how well the company was reacting and how well we’re taking care of our people,” said Chris.

One negative impact of working at home is the loss of informal employee interactions with each other at the office. FICO has replaced “watercooler chat” with Microsoft Teams and Zoom calls, but it doesn’t completely replace human contact.

At Microsoft:
Heather reported similar productivity gains at Microsoft, but another surprise is the overall change across the workforce to connect on a different, more human level.

“Rather than just running to a meeting and diving straight into the business at hand, everyone is spending time checking in on how you’re doing, checking in on the dog, making sure you have toilet paper, all the things that are just essential to being a great human being,” she said.

On the negative side, the global pandemic is causing emotional stress, and Microsoft has been very proactive reaching out to make employees aware of available support programs.

At Shutterfly:
Mark observed that employees have maintained a high level of professionalism, and there have been productivity improvements, which is a boon for the company. However, some employees have experienced personal internet issues, and Shutterfly has also had to contend with logistical issues. For example, customer service folks punched timecards working in an office, but it’s easier for them to forget now that they have to go online to log time.
Ways to support the work-at-home workforce

At Microsoft:
Heather revealed that seemingly small efforts have had a big impact. For example, meeting times have been adjusted from 30 to 25 minutes or from one hour to 50 minutes to give people breaks. Microsoft is encouraging people to take more time off to disconnect, and they’ve doubled down on a “Day of Learning.”

“You cancel all your meetings, and then we point people to different training resources. They have a whole day to work on a new tech or to take security training,” explained Heather. “We’ve had really positive feedback.”

Moving forward even if things return to normal, Heather said she expects meeting adjustments and Day of Learning practices to continue because of their positive impact on the workforce.

At Shutterfly:
Mark indicated that Shutterfly has really stepped up meetings to help keep staff connected. There are weekly staff meetings on Zoom where everybody can see each other. He said, “Just having the visual, where you see a lot of smiles, a lot of laughter among the team has been a huge benefit.”

There is also a daily Zoom “watercooler meeting,” where there is no agenda and people come in when they want and talk about everything non-work-related, including favorite movies. The team also makes a point to share resources to help support personal wellness. It’s little things that are keeping people engaged and communication open.

At FICO:
Chris observed that the focus at FICO is about caring and taking care of everybody as a family. He said, “I think we’ve almost become more than a family as the walls have broken down. Seeing people with their families makes everyone more human.”

Virtual happy hours on Zoom are happening on a regular basis, and Chris also reaches out to individual team members for personal interactions on a daily basis.

“There’s no playbook for this, nothing we can refer back to. Just remember the human side of it. For my team, coming to work virtually is the highlight of their day. Focus on keeping them engaged.”

– Mark Cordeiro, Head of Customer Services, BorrowLenses Division, Shutterfly
Lessons learned in the new normal:

At Shutterfly:
Mark offered, “There’s no playbook for this, nothing we can refer back to. Just remember the human side of it. For my team, coming to work virtually is the highlight of their day. Focus on keeping them engaged.”

At FICO:
Chris said, “The biggest takeaway is communication is king. For leaders at every level, the amount of communication, the openness, the honesty, the transparency during the crisis is key.”

At Microsoft:
Heather projected toward the future when she mused, “We’re still going through this, and we need to not lose those learnings when we go back to a more traditional workforce. We don’t know what our work environment is going to look like in the future. For senior leaders, this is the moment we’ve been waiting for. We have a tremendous opportunity to embrace the uncertainty and to really start innovating.”

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– Heather Pfluger, Partner Group Manager, Microsoft
By now we all know that the world has changed, and the way we do business has changed practically overnight. So now, more than ever, the imperative to digitally enable your business is absolutely critical—not only to maintain continuity, but to flourish.

Like our customer around the globe, ServiceNow has had to adapt to the new normal. In a conversation with Rob Garzilli, vice president of Customer Service Management sales at ServiceNow, Dean outlined some of the steps his organization has taken.

Fortunately, because of the effectiveness of the ServiceNow Now platform, the switch to a work-from-home environment was quick. Normally, there are nine ServiceNow support centers around the world co-located with cyber liability engineers and the cloud operations team, but now staff is working out of over 900 homes and apartments.

“We haven’t missed a beat,” said Dean. “Our productivity is really, really high. We haven’t dropped the ball in executing our mission because the solution we use is incredibly adaptable. We can use it anywhere.”
Enabling collaboration
Today, Dean and his staff are working beyond normal support boundaries to address cases, and a big factor contributing to success is the ability to collaborate with colleagues in development and cloud operations. Rob observed that collaboration is an important problem to solve not only for ServiceNow’s support staff but also for customers.

“Being able to assign, route, and track tasks across different departments to resolve customer problems is really critical,” he said. “And being able to do that all on a single platform to ensure that things don’t fall through the cracks is what allows you to get to the position where you have an all-weather solution.”

Leveraging new technologies
In this era where everybody is working from home and constantly attending Zoom meetings, the last thing that Dean and his staff want to do is keep a customer tethered to a laptop waiting for an update on their support case. So, the company has launched a support solution on the Now mobile platform.

“Our customers can step away from the computer and watch TV or they can have their mobile device next to their bedside and receive notification updates, update cases, or create new cases, all from that mobile device,” said Dean.

Companies all over face increasing demand for support services and are depending on self-service capabilities to cope. ServiceNow support engineers rely on the company’s knowledge base and service catalog to automate, so self-service can be used to manage the simple and more mundane service requests.

“When customers truly need one of my talented support engineers for the hard things, that’s what gets through,” said Dean. “It’s a win for support engineers who can focus their time and expertise to deal with the most critical support issues.”

“Mobile solution designed for flexibility”

“...because the solution we use is incredibly adaptable. We can use it anywhere.”

– Dean Robison, Senior Vice President, Global Technical Support, ServiceNow
The Tennessee Department of Human Services is in the middle of an extensive, four-year enterprise system modernization project. This laser focus on digital transformation has been a boon for the organization because it recently grappled with both a tornado and the COVID-19 global pandemic. Far from derailing, the agency has taken advantage of new, flexible digital technologies to pivot and serve clients more efficiently and effectively than ever.

**Automation helps streamline applications for benefits**

According to Tony Mathews, deputy commissioner and chief operating officer at the Tennessee Department of Human Services, on March 3, a tornado completely demolished the department’s field office in Nashville, TN. Right at the same time, the organization had to address the impact of COVID-19. Tony and his team moved quickly to stand up technology so staff could work remotely until they could figure out where to physically relocate the office—and determine who would be required to return to an office environment.

Because the Tennessee Department of Human Services was already using ServiceNow, Tony and his staff were able to work with his ServiceNow partners to set up a light touch application to manage cash assistance and supplemental nutrition benefits.

“The application had built-in intelligence where it could determine right away if you were applying and didn’t have children, which was a qualifying requirement,” said Tony. “The app would immediately send you a notification that you didn’t qualify for benefits or if you exceeded income thresholds.”

The benefit to the agency was huge because it had such a high volume of people calling in and applying for benefits for the first time right after the tornado. With automation, the app could automatically screen out people, keeping volume out of the system and enabling the staff to focus on the applications that did need to be processed.

ServiceNow’s functionality also enabled DHS to cope with second-level inquiries with all the people checking in on the status of their applications. Clients no longer had to check a website or call the office. Instead, they simply logged into ServiceNow and went to a portal to check their status. ServiceNow also facilitated reporting, which enabled the Tennessee Department of Human Services to provide the metrics in real-time day to day, to track how many people were affected and how many applied for benefits.

“Whether it was the governor’s office, or the legislature, or the media calling to get a metric, we were able to do that very quickly,” said Tony.
Returning to the workplace and the new normal

When the agency began considering how to transition staff back to the workplace, Tony saw it as an unexpected opportunity to implement operational changes to enable the workforce to work differently. He and his team worked with department leadership and leveraged the pandemic response to demonstrate to employees and customers, alike, that change would be doable. Employees could get their work done and customers could get the benefits they needed—all without stepping foot into an office.

“We said, ‘Don’t think about how things used to be and how you might make tweaks for a post-pandemic environment. Think about the way things are now as the new normal.’” Tony relayed. “Let’s talk about who really needs to come back to the office, and who can stay right where they are because it’s working really well.”

Lessons to apply going forward

Communication is always important, and Tony and his team recognized that it was urgent to communicate early and accurately with the public because so many were suffering housing losses and unemployment. However, he wishes his team had taken more time to be more proactive to answer secondary questions because it could have further alleviated frustration and stress. Tony also believes that how his department has embraced change and the new normal is a positive demonstration project that can be leveraged going forward for other federal partners.

“You know what? Loosen the reins a bit. Let us be innovative,” said Tony. “Let us do some things that are more efficient and effective. It helps to get benefits to the people who need them.”

The road ahead:

The innovation embraced by the Tennessee Department of Human Services is an inspiration to organizations, everywhere, transitioning to the new normal and going back to the office, but Dean and Rob both believe the harder part is still ahead.

“It weighs on me. Our support centers and contact centers, it’s all people based. It isn’t just technology. You’ve got to take care of these people. It’s going to test our leadership and people skills like nothing we’ve ever seen,” Dean observed.

The complexity of every single city, county, state, and nation having to abide by regulations and guidelines to address health needs, productivity requirements, mask-wearing and spacing out offices is definitely daunting. And these issues must be addressed and solved in the coming days and weeks.

ServiceNow has talked to customers around the globe to assist them with managing the next phase, and it is offering a new set of applications for employee readiness surveys, employee health screenings, workplace safety management, and personal protective equipment inventory management.

Rob reflected, “I think it’s going to take the collective wisdom of all of us to manage through it.”
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