POWER TO THE PEOPLE

OPTIMISING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Roger Camrass
CIONET UK

Power to the People – optimising the customer experience

A discussion dinner was held on the 23rd February, sponsored by Infogain and attended by senior executives from the retail, financial services, telecom, media, search and education. The title of the event was 'Power to the People – optimising the customer experience' and was moderated by Roger Camrass, *director of research for CIONET International.*

For so many years organisations both public and private have talked about putting the 'customer first' but as consumers we continue to experience delays in accessing call centres, navigating complex websites, and processing tedious paperwork. This causes frustration and can challenge brand loyalty. Digital natives are taking full advantage of such shortcomings.

Infogain has built a global reputation in helping to enrich the customer experience from the design of software products through to simplifying day-to-day customer interactions. Its clients enjoy greater brand loyalty and rapid innovation. Here is a summary of the discussion.

Providing a context for the discussion

Each delegate gave specific areas of interest to drive the subsequent discussion. These included:

- How can we address the total experience of the customer through the life cycle?
- Where does product availability feature within the overall customer experience?
- Will new technologies and platforms such as 5G and Cloud overcome current constraints?
- Can OpenAI provide the tools necessary for sentiment analysis and further insights into customer needs?
- Does the employee count as a customer, and how might we improve experience here?

Vivek Sharma, CEO of Infogain in Europe and his colleague, Nishith Mathur, Chief Strategy and Solutions Officer added their own views to the discussion. They see data as a growing source of powerful customer insights. Connected machines and supply chains give further information to frontline staff about product availability. They see cloud as a powerful enabler for business transformation, especially at the front end. Vivek added that with the advent of startup ecosystems and emergence of unicorns, AI is rapidly transforming consumer experiences, organizations, industries and even the public services. The disruption, which in most cases, is positive, is the enhancing the expectations rapidly. The adaptability of the pace of change for organisations will be the key to survive and thrive.

The growing power of OpenAI

There was unanimous agreement that OpenAI and associated ChatGPT tools will have dramatic effects across all businesses, especially at the customer interface.

Some delegates see ChatGPT as a key tool to accelerate automation across end-to-end processes. Current attempts to deploy robotic process automation (RPA) tools has been far too slow and addresses only a small part of process improvement. OpenAI gives a genuine prospect of citizen development taking place soon. It is quite conceivable that every person in a large workforce will be able to apply ChatGPT this year.

In the case of telecommunications and media, the imperative is to improve profitability and grow revenues by reducing churn. One delegate said that OpenAI could help identify unprofitable customers who can be encouraged to leave the service. This would have a direct effect on profitability. Applying OpenAI to the entire customer journey could speed up conversions and help retain profitable customers.

In the retail sector the pandemic had a transformational effect. In just days in March 2020, online sales increased from 20 to 100%. This imposed a massive load on systems and staff. Although physical stores are now back in action, consumer preferences remain geared to 'Online' channels. This presents a challenge for process improvement that may be addressable by ChatGPT beyond just Chat Bots in call centres.

Nishith Mathur empathised the urgent need to demystify OpenAI and associated ChatGPT tools. His concern was how best to embed such capabilities into existing workflows with minimal disruption. He saw a need to address critical business pathways such as client engagement by sorting out key bottlenecks such as the customer interface (UX) and back-office systems.

Escaping legacy

Legacy was a common issue and constraint for all delegates. In the case of banks, insurance companies and retailers, the core systems in use today often date back to the eighties and nineties. According to one delegate, the past three years have been the best in history for mainframe sales. Few organisations have the resources or risk appetite to undergo modernisation of core transaction systems.

Delegates discussed two options – keep the legacy systems alive and build around them or take a greenfield approach to developing separate digital businesses. Both appeared to be practical, although the majority favoured a 'surround' strategy that involves integrating Software as a Service products to the core. The key asset for all delegate organisations was the data that resides in the core systems.

In a cloud world, one delegate stressed that 'Access is more important than ownership' with respect to data assets. Accessing such data and combining it with external sources is the main challenge and opportunity in business today.

Infogain is helping a leading reservation system to modernise its core systems by building new cloud-based applications. This will enable them to compete with digital natives by speeding up product innovation and transforming the customer interface. Nishith Mathur added that the real trigger to take the plunge to move away from old but reliable mainframes was the opportunity for this travel company to emulate a retailer selling a much larger portfolio of products to its captive customers.

Reviewing the economic landscape

Current economic uncertainties provide an excellent environment for business transformation – the essential burning platform to persuade the 'C' suite to take action. Sales over the Christmas period were strong, but the retailers and media delegates recognised that revenues are dipping in the first quarter due to economic uncertainty and lack of consumer confidence.

The silver lining for 2023 is the opportunity to acquire new talent, especially in data sciences and AI, whilst Big Tech is reducing its own workforce. This is especially true in Silicon Valley according to Nishith. The next six months will be pivotal as central banks continue to raise rates and inflation begins to decline. There is also likely to be a boom in acquisitions due to the crash in many equity valuations.

What should CIOs do next?

The discussions and input from Infogain illustrated three important actions in the coming 6-9 months:

- Run an education campaign on OpenAI and ChatGPT at senior management levels.
- Evaluate how ChatGPT could accelerate Citizen Development and conduct pilots on critical business processes.
- Review plans to upgrade legacy systems in the light of OpenAI and decide on an appropriate choice of strategy – surround the legacy or create the new.

Roger Camrass
Lead researcher

A pioneer of today's Internet as an ARPA research fellow at MIT in the seventies, Roger has spent over forty five years helping corporations harness the power of new technologies such as cloud, mobile communications, e-commerce, voice recognition and satellite. He was a partner at EY responsible for e-commerce during the dot.com boom. He is a graduate of Cambridge University and MIT, and a visiting professor at the University of Surrey.

See **rogercamrass.com**