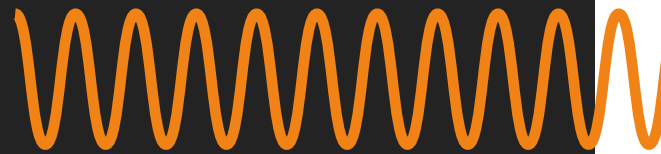


WHAT WILL PROGRESSIVE BRANDS BE DOING IN 2020?





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**There is no such thing as a typical contact centre.
Each leadership team is on its own evolutionary track.**

But there is a general sense of where we should be in 2020. For instance, we should be using cloud services. We should be omni-channel literate. We should have aligned our CX and contact centre agendas. We should recognise the close bond between customer experience and employee experience.

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SO, IF WE ARE UP TO SPEED ON ALL THAT, WHAT'S NEXT?

Here are a few ideas that have caught the attention of many audiences I've engaged with over the last twelve months. Some are controversial. Are they vital for 2020? That depends where you are on your own journey. At some point they are likely to become the norm. As we know, some brands like to arrive before the rest by being early adopters. Maybe you will end up being one of them this time.

Prediction One

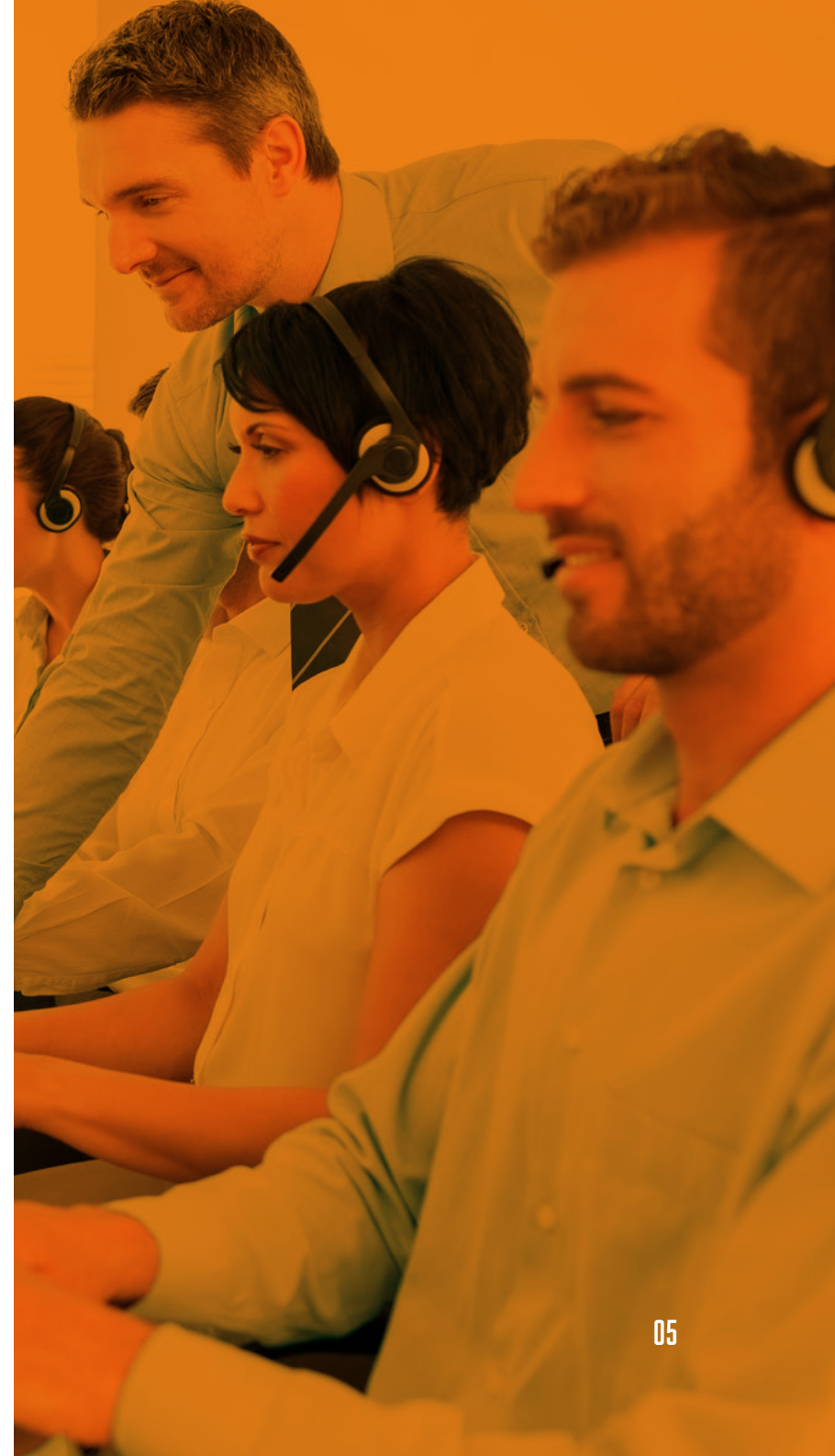
FROM HIGH OCCUPANCY TO HIGH ENGAGEMENT

If there is one thing that is held sacred in contact centres, it is the use of time. You don't get to muck about with how you spend it. Every second counts. And indeed, is counted.

However, the current high occupancy model, universally adopted by the contact centre industry, is not compatible with the aims and expectations of either customer or employee engagement. Expecting people to reflect the productivity patterns of machinery is crazy if we also expect them to be creative, present and engaged.

Non-stop repetitive work forces people into a state of low motivational, habitual behaviour. Humans switch off in these conditions. 2020 customers and employees expect more and will seek it out.

It is now time to question the value of pursuing high occupancy as a prime indicator of customer service productivity. It is corrosive to human centered culture. Moreover, it is becoming redundant as automation and conversational AI refocuses advisors onto high value engagement.

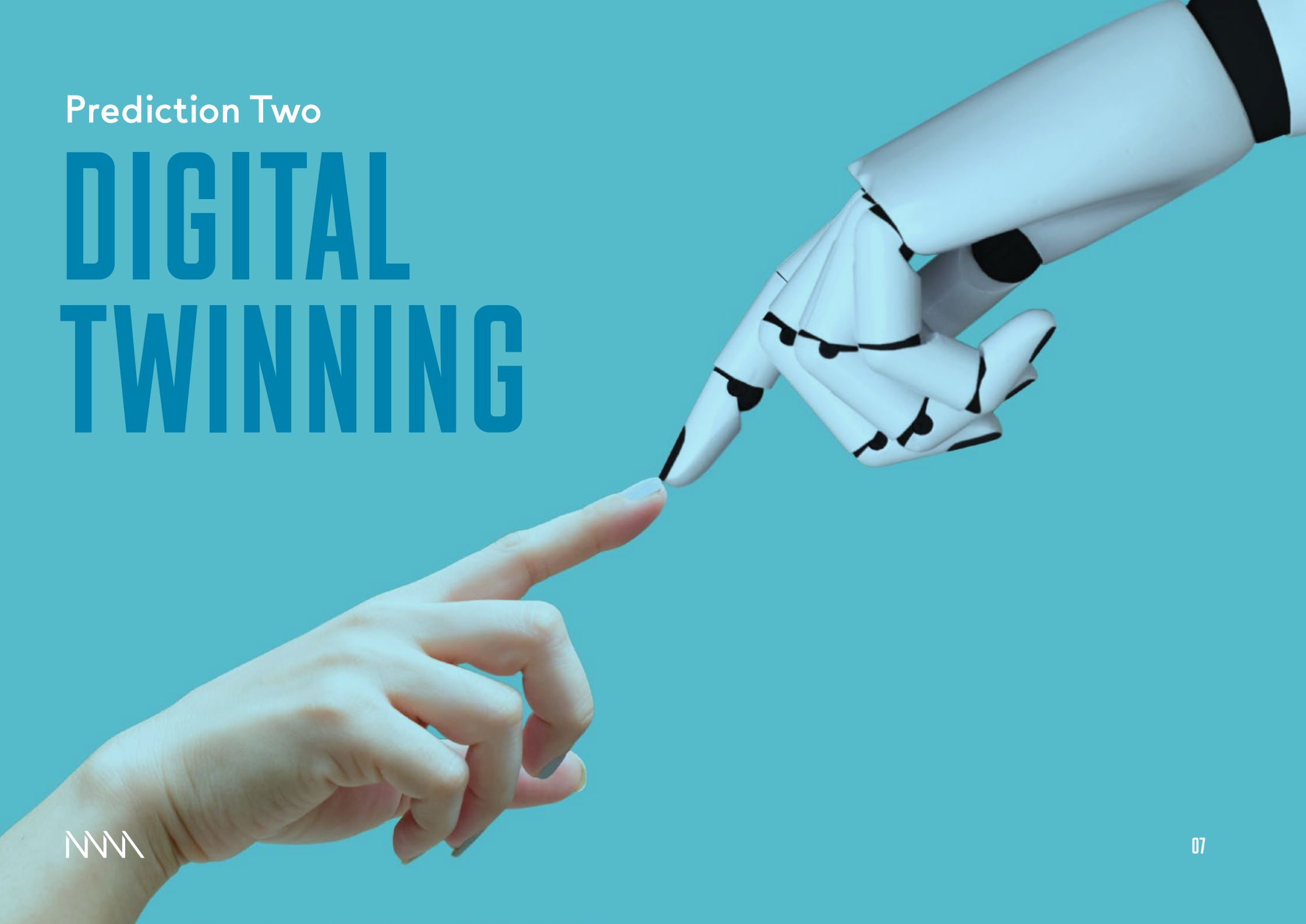


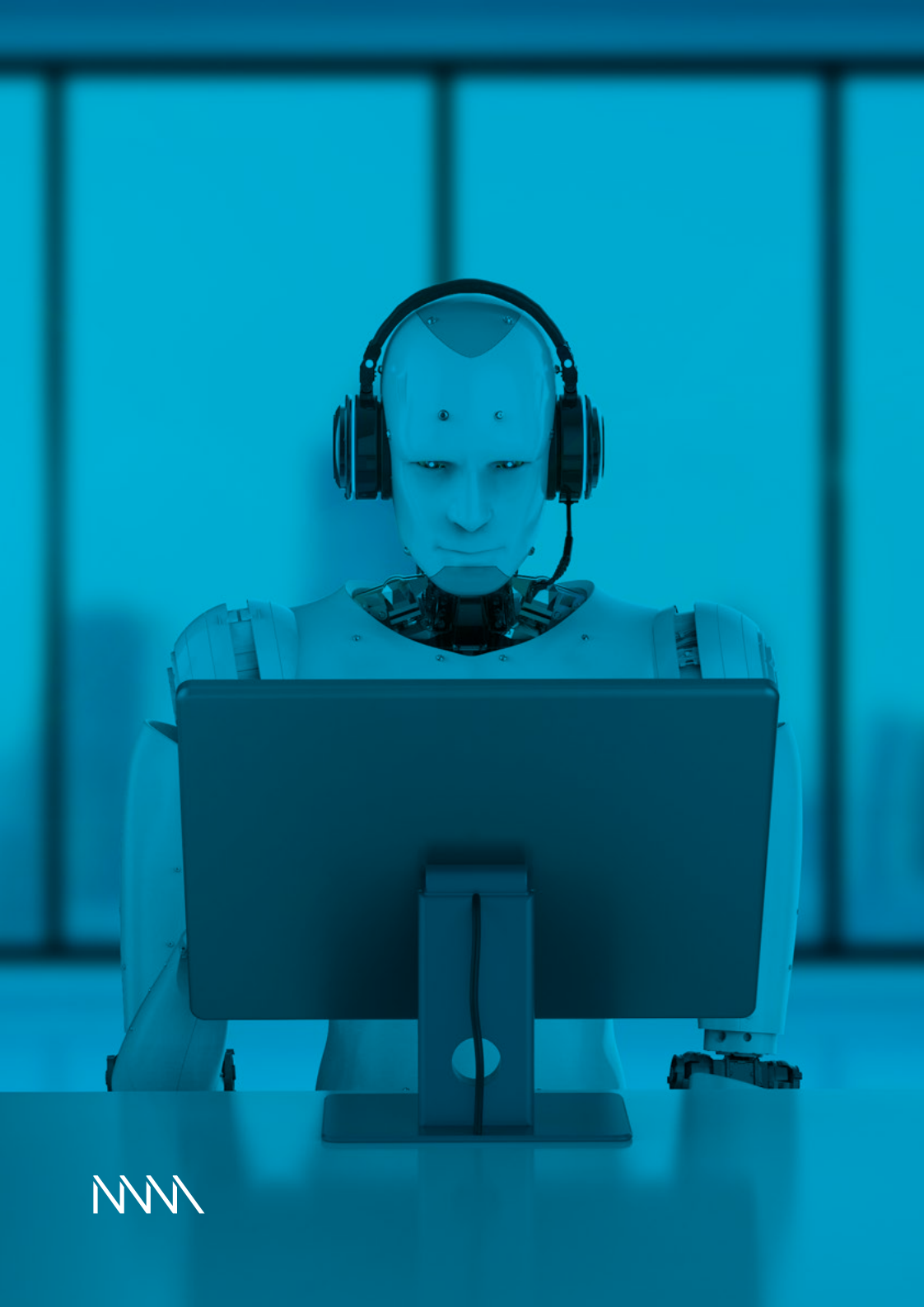
This form of high performance has its own rhythms. Sometimes an emotionally challenging conversation requires a few minutes to recharge. Maybe listening and staying alert to the nuances of each customer needs sharpening through regular investments in micro learning throughout the working week. Can we tap more effectively into advisor insight to drive improvements since they are witnessing new opportunities every day. In short, are we brave enough to reconsider how we use time?

We need to rethink what generates the best outcomes. High occupancy, just like average handle time, should not be a target. It is useful as one of many planning assumptions. But we need to loosen up our ideas on what we recognise as productivity and how we support it.

Prediction Two

DIGITAL TWINNING





A digital twin is a digital replica of a living or non-living physical entity. It is becoming core to the way in which the Internet of things operates. For instance, the performance and condition of connected devices can be compared against their digital replica to monitor, troubleshoot and heal.

We are on a similar evolutionary track in customer services. Right now, we have come to recognise that a virtual assistant needs to connect with a human equivalent. Bots and conversational AI can fall short for many reasons – an unrecognised intent or an inadequate response. These can still happen even when self-service works most of the time.

We are still learning how to make the escalation of customer intent and context as easy as possible. The current solution is to have that information visible on screen for the advisor to maintain the continuity of conversation.

But this is only the start. Virtual and human assistants can be matched more closely and designed to work together within customer journeys. Instead of one-way escalations, we should be thinking about blended teamwork.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE.

The relationship part of onboarding a new customer is fronted by human assistance because of the emotive connection and as a signal to the customer that they matter. Once the human bonding is achieved, the digital twin is introduced to help the customer complete the administrative part of the process and introduce their ongoing value to the customer.

In this scenario, the virtual assistant becomes a customer access point for future personalised service. The customer's engagement history and communication preferences live here. It becomes the way in which the customer is able to re-establish contact with the same human advisor using asynchronous messaging or by requesting a voice call back if preferred.

Digital twinning optimises the benefits of omni-channel by blending both human and virtual assistance based on the nature of each task within a single customer journey. If we recognise this as the next step beyond one-way escalations, is it too soon to start designing virtual assistants that are modelled their human equivalents?

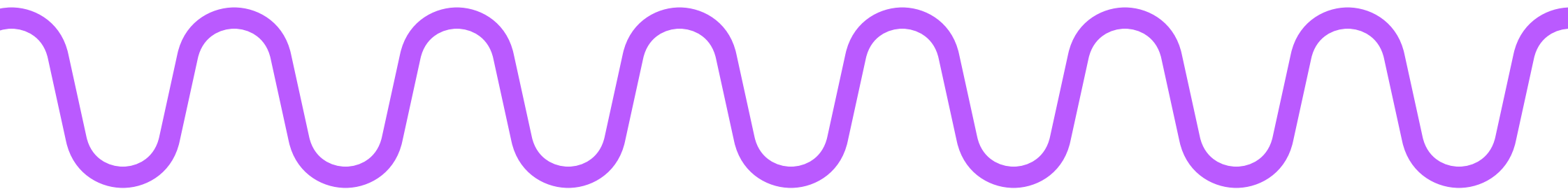
Prediction Three

FLEXIBLE RESOURCING



The lifestyle choice of how we work continues to expand and be facilitated by technologies that connect us. For instance, cloud-based contact centres enable home working for both full-time and part-time staff. They also enable gig economy workers to be plumbed into increasingly flexible schedules via third party providers. All this helps staff more easily balance their work and personal priorities which is increasingly expected from employers.

There are many reasons why contact centres need innovative solutions to have the right people at the right times. We know customers continue to expect access to live assistance. This tends to grow with the severity of problem. Emotional and complex issues drive the desire to connect with live assistance. Sometimes even the timeliest proactive message will not stop customers seeking the reassurance of another person.



So how do you rise to meet this challenge, especially when it only lasts for a short period of time? It could be driven by known patterns of demand such as seasonal peaks in retail, travel or the clearing house frenzy for high education places.

Or it could be based on the unexpected. For instance, increasingly extreme weather causes mass flooding and disrupts many aspects of daily life more often. Maybe there is a significant power outage that stops cooking, WhatsApp and Netflix. So demand for immediate service goes through the roof.

For dealing with expected demand, home working transforms recruiting options. Both in terms of where to look and the type of person who is attracted to shorter shift patterns that fit around their other commitments. In contrast, a pretrained gig economy workforce can be on stand-by for those periods of unexpected demand when speed and scale of response matter most.

More flexible resourcing to meet short term bursts of human to human contact is a growing challenge that experience orientated brands are beginning to address.

Prediction Four

MOBILE MINDSET





Do you know how many customers engage via mobile? You should if you don't. I've been asking organisations for many years and the feedback says that the numbers are now mainstream for those who are not counting.

Smartphones enable new forms of engagement. For instance, computer vision is a sub-set of AI that can access a smartphone camera in order to recognise

something that the customer is having a problem with. Let's imagine it's a security system they need to install. Guidance appears on an AR layer in front of the smartphone showing the customer what to do. This ability to visually reach into the customer's world transforms the time, cost and effort it would normally take to fix an issue.

Smartphone use also creates a new customer mindset. More expectant of instant low effort outcomes. Think about shoppers using them in-store to check product reviews, compare prices or find other store locations. Who right now is making that a service differentiator? The arrival of 5G services will only fuel expectation for instant personalised assistance.

SO, HERE COME THE QUESTIONS.

- Do you have detailed insight into how smartphone use is changing your customers' behaviour and expectations?
- Is mobile engagement making your current service capability outmoded?
- Mobile experiences need to be intuitive and simple - how do you compare?
- Have you re-imagined the way you could be delivering services using the embedded capability of mobile devices?



Mobile customer engagement is not an incremental issue. The best brands are going back to the drawing board.

Prediction Five

MEMORY MAKING MOMENTS



Outcomes matter. So is the way we remember them. The contact centre is now recognised as a touchpoint that plays a huge role in broader customer experience ambitions. Loyalty, goodwill, advocacy, propensity to buy more are all influenced as a result of every interaction. Sometimes even a single episode is decisive.

What we remember about events is a curated version of reality. This is our brain's approach to only storing what it considers to be the important stuff. Negatives are noticed such as emotion and feelings. Outliers are picked up such as peak points during a conversation and how it ends.



In fact, how things end tend to colour our memory of the complete episode. This means how a customer ends up feeling about an interaction becomes their dominant memory of the whole event. There's no free falafel for guessing that positive memories encourage the desire to do more with an organisation while negative ones do the opposite.

So tuning contact centres into the language and practices of emotive CX is another hot topic for 2020.



IN CONCLUSION

I started out by saying there are several well discussed points that tend to get trotted out for most prediction lists. AI, omni-channel, cloud and the like. Given their familiarity, I decided to go a different route this time and look at things a little differently.

I chose five topics that matter in terms of how contact centres are evolving. I hope I've provoked you to ponder on a few of them. Please debate them with your teams and decide what value you can find and apply.

Thank you for reading and all the very best for 2020.

ABOUT NEWVOICEMEDIA

NewVoiceMedia, a Vonage Company, is a leading global provider of cloud contact center and inside sales technology that enables businesses to create exceptional, emotive customer experiences to serve better and sell more.

Its award-winning platform joins up all communications channels without expensive, disruptive hardware changes and plugs straight into your CRM for full access to hard-won data. With a true cloud environment and proven 99.999% platform availability, NewVoiceMedia ensures complete flexibility, scalability and reliability.

NewVoiceMedia's 700+ customers include Canadian Cancer Society, Ebury, FCR Media, FlixBus, JustGiving, Kingston University, Lumesse, Paysafe and Vax.

In November 2018, NewVoiceMedia was acquired by Vonage (NYSE:VG), a business cloud communications leader.

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