

# Placing messaging at the heart of your customer engagement strategy

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## 1. Messaging core to successful customer engagement strategies

For customer experience professionals busy crafting multi-channel journeys for their customers, it's critical that actual consumer usage patterns are placed at the heart of any strategy.

Recent Deloitte research, for example, found that 22% of smartphone users had already stopped using their devices to make calls – a proportion that has doubled since 2012. At the same time, Deloitte found that the use of instant messaging had almost tripled from 27% in 2012 to 59% last year. And in terms of messaging platforms, SMS remains the most popular, closely followed by instant messaging, email and social networks.

Deloitte's Mobile UK Consumer survey particularly highlighted the momentum behind Instant Messaging, with 46% of respondents already using IM services – a number up 15% on the previous year. As consumers we know that when we reach for our smartphones it's to check messages, social media updates or emails. It's become an almost instinctive impulse, and – consequently – one that means that effective messaging needs to sit at the heart of any successful customer engagement strategy.



## 2. Exponential growth in global messaging

By any measure, traditional SMS messaging is still a major communications channel, however there are now clear signs that global text traffic is peaking. According to IBM Marketing Cloud research, 8.6 trillion SMS messages are sent each year on average. And because consumers typically carry their mobile devices with them 24x7, SMS has always proved an effective communications channel for organisations looking to engage with their customers. Indeed mobileSQUARED research that reports that 90% of all incoming SMS texts are read within three minutes suggests that messaging – particularly when integrated with other campaigns – can prove a catalyst when seeking a customer response.

However, the global scale of SMS is now dwarfed by the growth in instant messaging platforms and the volume of IM traffic now being sent. Facebook reports that its two messaging platforms – WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger – together now claim almost two billion users. WhatsApp alone already handles some 30 billion messages every day – 50% more than global daily SMS volumes.

It's not difficult to understand why platforms such as WhatsApp and Messenger are taking off exponentially. It's easy for users to add the apps to their devices, messages are effectively free as part of their monthly cellular data contracts, they don't require a mobile signal, and also offer much greater basic functionality in terms of features such as file sharing and group chats.

While Facebook's messaging services continue to attract the most attention, it's important not to overlook the impact of other key global players including Chinese services such as QQ Mobile and WeChat (with 900 million and 853 million active users respectively), Google with 425 million Google Chat users on Android, and Apple with 400 million mobile iMessage users. These networks now significantly out scale more traditional service providers such as Skype (300 million) and BlackBerry Messenger (100 million).

Research firm Activate estimates that by 2018 around 90% of the world's Internet-enabled population will be registered to use at least one messaging app. Today's exponential growth in global messaging users would suggest that this is likely to happen even sooner.

## 3. More than just a messaging app?

With global SMS usage slowing down, it's often reported that it's the US giants such as Facebook and Microsoft that have led the charge in terms of messaging innovation. However, the reality is that it was Chinese services such as WeChat – known in China as Weixin or 'micro letter' – that effectively set the agenda for more comprehensive messaging platforms.

Initially launched in 2011, WeChat was designed from the ground up for mobile usage. Along with its standard communication features, the service provides users in China with the opportunity to access services to order food delivery, purchase movie tickets, play games, check-in for a flight, hail a taxi, get banking statements, pay a utility bill, send money or book a doctor's appointment. All within a single, integrated mobile application.

With over 10 million 'official accounts' approved for access to exclusive API services for functions such as payments and location, it's easy to see why so many Chinese users find platforms such as WeChat fit so easily into their daily lives. If they're already



busy on WeChat, why go elsewhere to another platform to engage and transact with the many different organisations or services they use?

It's services such as WeChat that have created the template for what's actually possible when organisations take a mobile-first approach. And it's this model that has helped show how messaging apps can extend to become broader developer-centric platforms where providers can introduce real value for customers. Facebook's VP of Messaging, David Marcus, credits WeChat and the other Chinese messaging platforms, saying: "the Asian paradigm has shown that there's a there there". So how are companies such as Facebook now working to take messaging forward?

## 4. Engaging with customers through communication threads

To gain some sense of the sheer scale of development and acceleration in the messaging space, in the last year alone Facebook Messenger has introduced video calling, the ability to customise conversations with colours and nicknames, Businesses on Messenger, the ability to send and receive money from conversations, photo sharing and direct support for services such as Uber. The company has also starting testing its M digital virtual assistant, and in early 2016 encouraged its developer community to populate the Messenger environment with a new generation of AI bots has added fuel to the current collective vision of a bot-driven customer engagement.

Central to the Messenger philosophy is a determination to help its hundreds of millions of members manage their daily interactions with people, businesses, and services more seamlessly than ever before. The core idea of Businesses on Messenger is that businesses and customers get to communicate through conversation threads known as 'interactive bubbles'. For example, KLM has launched on Facebook Messenger, and when a customer books a ticket they get a clearly structured message from KLM with an itinerary, an interactive bubble when it's time to check in, your boarding pass, and updates on gates or delays.

Instead of just talking about making a reservation, they can actually do it there and then within the messaging environment. And when you start to interact with a business, you open a messaging thread that remains live - never losing context.

With approaching a billion signed-up users, services such as Facebook Messenger – which already support voice and video messages – have the ability to generate huge volumes of interactions for major consumer brands. And with voice and video communications support already built in, the new messaging platforms certainly have the potential to disrupt traditional telephony markets. That's why it's essential that your organisation is not only ready to engage with the increasingly large percentage of your customers that are already busy messaging on these platforms, but that you also have the right customer contact infrastructure in place to allow you to process Messenger-style interactions alongside your existing voice, email, webchat, SMS and mobile app channels.

Clearly businesses are looking at this from both an economic and a customer experience perspective. Some analysts see significant potential cost reductions with the Messenger model – particularly in terms of post-order service as all the relevant details will already be captured within interaction threads. There are also expected savings in key areas such as reduced contacts in other channels and shorter and more effective interaction times.

## 5. Messaging at the core of next generation conversational interactions –

*key role of technologies such as Virtual Reality, Intelligent Assistants and AI Chatbots in driving best practice messaging engagement*

With many brands predicting that more and more interactions will now take place in Messenger-style threads, organisations will inevitably compete to make sure they're offering the best experience in their conversation bubbles.

Organisations are already putting intelligent virtual assistants to work, moving beyond first generation VA deployments to deliver an impressive conversational performance. The latest deployments are like having a webchat with a live agent, highlighting the need for effective design and dialogue skills when it comes to developing and deploying self-service solutions. Vendors such as Nuance have also emphasised the key role that machine learning will play in supporting next generation interactions. With its HAVA Human Assisted Virtual Assistant technology, for example, Nuance has demonstrated how ongoing machine learning will enable automated virtual assistants to effectively front the entire customer messaging conversation – but with the intelligence to reach out for live support when it becomes necessary.

We're also now seeing an escalation in terms of next generation AI assistants – indeed the team that created the original artificial intelligence underpinning Apple's assistant Siri has just introduced Viv – a device-agnostic AI platform that aims to be the intelligent, conversational interface to everything.

Facebook has also introduced M, its virtual personal assistant that sits within Messenger. Again, the idea of embedding intelligent virtual agent support right at the heart of the digital customer service journey can provide valuable support, albeit with Facebook still supporting its M service with a scalable team of 'M Trainers' to support the pilot service.

Perhaps, more significantly, we're also seeing an increased focus on the growth of AI chatbots to support next generation messaging. Both Microsoft and Facebook have been actively promoting the use of AI chatbots, describing them as the new 'apps' and highlighting the need to infuse all customer interactions with bot-enabled intelligence.

Clearly the bots are coming, and it's important that customer engagement teams understand their impact and get better at reaching out to firms such as Facebook and Microsoft to gain a better understanding of how they need to be working together. Obviously, if AI chatbots can help reduce efforts for customers then that's great – but organisations also need to understand how to balance engagement via major social networks such as Facebook with their existing multi-million pound Digital Front Door investments.

Customer journey designers will also have to think hard about how they evolve their current customer contact strategies – not just to make the most of this emerging generation of bot-powered interactions, but also with regard to how they manage messaging interactions alongside their other text-based interactions.

Whether messaging environments such as Facebook Messenger will manage to supplant the existing customer engagement apps infrastructure remains to be seen. However it's clear that the messaging model has the potential to reach out to potentially billions of customers, and brands need to be prepared. Organisations certainly need to factor this potential shift into their digital strategies, particularly as they'll never be able to successfully manage customer demand levels unless they have control over their digital front door.

## 6. Enabling an agile Digital Front Door strategy that embraces multiple messaging approaches

Given that messaging platforms such as Facebook Messenger have the inevitable ability to disrupt existing customer journeys, it's important that organisations work to evolve their customer contact processes to support both current and emerging engagement channels.

While it's likely that social messaging platforms will play an increasingly important role in future customer engagement strategies, it's still essential that these interactions form part of a joined-up integrated customer contact approach. Customers will of course appreciate the reduced effort of being able to engage via a service such as Messenger – however they will still be frustrated if their ongoing engagement isn't informed by their interactions across other channels such as voice, email, or SMS.



Recognising that platforms such as Messenger have the capacity to bypass or even undermine existing an organisation's current Digital Front Door strategy will place an increased emphasis on engagement strategies and customer journeys that successfully embrace new platforms.

Today's smart organisations acknowledge that developing true UX-based roadmaps always needs to be an iterative process, requiring a continuous focus on identifying and resolving customer frustrations. That's why mapping the user experience needs to become an integral part of the continuous improvement process, effectively fine-tuning journeys to keep on addressing residual customer effort and frustrations.

For some this may involve the intelligent deployment of proactive SMS-enabled outreach to reduce inbound call volumes and free-up contact centre agent resources. For others the focus might be on supporting webchat with intelligent virtual assistants, or trialling Messenger-style projects and the latest AI chatbot technologies. All approaches have a valuable role to play – the key is to create a structured messaging environment that remains focused on customer needs and effort rather than internal processes.

## 7. Adopting a more proactive approach to customer outreach


Organisations across a broad range of market sectors increasingly finding that adopting a more proactive approach to outreach can prove a highly successful way of both engaging customers and deflecting incoming contact centre demand volumes. Automated notification applications, particularly, offer an excellent channel to complement existing live agent resources – whether it's for airlines dealing with flight status updates and travel alerts, financial service providers bringing new customers on board or managing renewals, appointment reminders, reminding customers when payments are due, retailers offering order status and delivery notifications, or utilities alerting customers to service outages.

Whatever the application, outbound and inbound notification channels - such SMS, email or traditional voice and video – work best as part of an integrated engagement strategy – particularly as the majority of customers now use multiple channels when contacting organisations.


Solutions such as Avaya Proactive Outreach Manager (POM), for example, can help link outbound notification activities with core customer databases, order management systems, accounts and billing systems. This allows organisations to design focused Proactive Notifications to address specific customer concerns. Two-way interactions can also be supported, allowing customers to message directly, reducing inbound calls. Outbound notifications can also provide support at key engagement touch points, unlocking significant operational savings by deflecting demand from your already busy contact centres.

Effective proactive notification deployments can also provide organisations with a more effective, closed-loop approach to campaigns. Too many SMS initiatives are still based around single broadcasts. To remedy this, contact centres can provide marketing departments with a much more intelligent SMS approach – providing a return channel that can immediately connect customers and prospects to their preferred channel.

Opening up a return communications path via SMS can prove effective in terms of optimising marketing spend or outreach programmes. Customers are able to respond immediately to SMS reminders.



**CASE STUDY**



### Improved customer engagement and a 12% reduction in call volumes across key customer touch points

At BGL Group, the major financial services business, Sabio has successfully deployed outbound SMS messaging to provide proactive support for customers at key touch points where, previously, they would have had to contact the company themselves. The use of outbound SMS confirmations across brands such as comparethemarket.com has not only benefited customers but also helped unlock a 12% reduction in calls from customers wanting to confirm the status of their no claims insurance documentation. Sabio conducted detailed repetition analysis for BGL to help identify specific areas where challenging contact centre demand via SMS was appropriate, and these have proved to work well for both BGL businesses and their customers.

To support this and other outbound and two-way messaging projects, Sabio works with technologies such as Avaya POM to support the creation and management of outbound and blended campaigns and customer communications. This approach offers several advantages that help organisations maximise outbound communications effectiveness, agent productivity and a project's return on investment.

Avaya Proactive Outreach solutions use industry leading call detection and the most advanced, patented dialing algorithms for optimising customer service and agent productivity. When these capabilities are combined with flexible inbound and outbound blending and a proven track record of over 99.9% system uptime, the results can quickly impact contact performance. These solutions can run either as a standalone campaign management application or integrate with your existing Avaya Aura® Contact Centre platforms.

## 8. Putting proactive messaging at the heart of your contact strategy with Sabio

When it comes to developing intelligent messaging strategies that strike exactly the right balance between customer effort and cost-effectiveness, you need to be working with a specialist partner that's able to address all your business, usability and technical challenges.

At Sabio we understand the key role that operational messaging technologies such as SMS outreach, webchat and social messaging play in impacting the customer experience. However, no matter how impressive the different messaging technology approaches involved, these can only prove successful if they're part of an intelligently crafted customer journey that's consistent across a mix of channels.

That's where Sabio can help. Our track record as a leading Avaya Platinum Partner means we're ideally placed to help integrate key proactive contact technologies such as Avaya Proactive Outreach Manager with your core telephony and contact centre systems infrastructure. Having also worked with Nuance, the leading natural language speech provider, since 2005, we're also well placed to support messaging and chat applications with more innovative transformational solutions such as intelligent assistants and AI-enabled chatbot support. We can also work with you to accelerate messaging-based engagement projects in your Customer Experience labs, deploying approaches such as Avaya Breeze and Sabio-developed Snap-in applications to ensure you get to market fast with messaging initiatives focused directly on your customer needs.

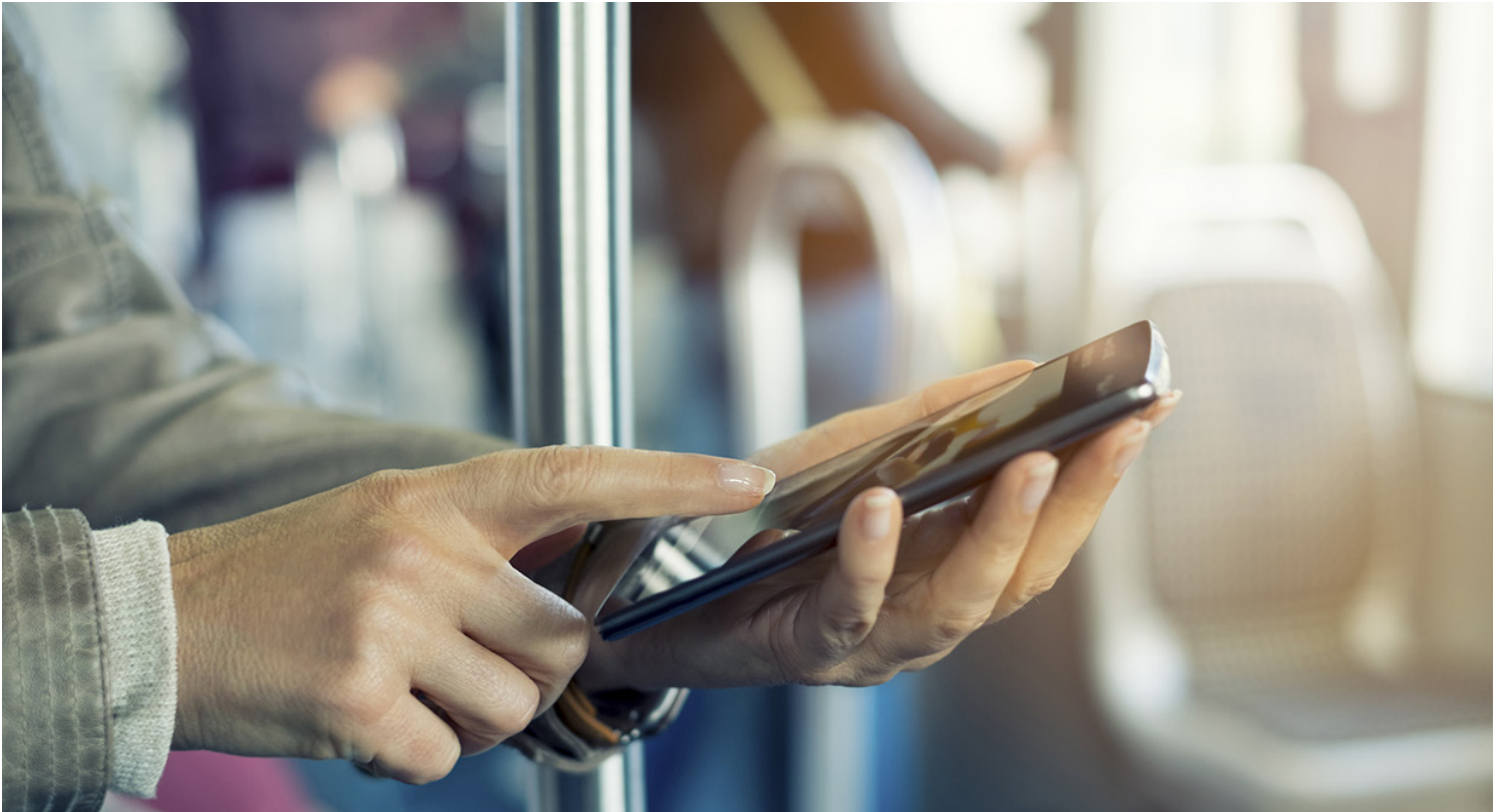
So whether you're looking to deploy an operational SMS-based two-way proactive notification project, or are looking to embed an integrated Facebook Messenger capability within your Customer Journey, Sabio has the in-depth business, user experience and conversational design and technical skills to help you now.

With a track record of over a decade delivering successful messaging-enabled solutions to leading organisations, Sabio's market-leading team of Avaya professionals, self-service experts and customer experience design specialists is ideally placed to bring best practice expertise to your evolving messaging projects.

To support its deployments, Sabio also combines world-class cloud-based technologies - from vendors such as Avaya, LivePerson, Conversocial, Nuance, Verint, Semafone, Gamma, RMG Networks and others - that are available as Sabio OnDemand hosted solutions. Our cloud offerings are all backed by a comprehensive, end-to-end services wrap that covers business consulting, customer journey design and testing backed by our in-depth UX/UCD framework, systems integration, training and managed services components.

When customers engage with Sabio they benefit from our end-to-end capabilities, as well as a significantly less complex supply chain as we assume full responsibility for all aspects of our deployments.

**For more information about Sabio and our Messaging capabilities, visit [www.sabio.co.uk](http://www.sabio.co.uk)**



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