

CXFO Travel & Leisure Industry Council Report

Summer 2022

Report by



**CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
FOUNDATION**

Event hosted by



CXFO Travel & Leisure Industry Council

Post event report

(Event date: 5th July 2022)

Attendees:

Keith Gait, CXFO
Alf Rodway, Airfrance-KLM
Martin Howard, Great British Railways
Nick Hodder, Imperial War Museums
Chris Sly, HGS
Andrew Hall, Quantanite
Gareth Jones, Concentrix
Parisha Patel, AmexGBT
Luke Butson, Expedia Group
Samantha Williams, ChatLingual
Laurie Mascott, ChatLingual
Najib Al Asham, ChatLingual
Sarah Hunt, CXFO
Isobel Rogers, CXFO



Introduction

The Travel sector was one of the worst, and most immediate sectors, affected by the pandemic, and the last to return to service post global lockdowns. It now faces the triple challenge of meeting customer expectations, staffing challenges, multilingual communication methods and technology advancements.

For the first of our CXFO Industry Councils for the Travel and Leisure sector, we invited leading brands to discuss a variety of topics which are affecting the sector right now. These insights and sharing of best practice will help to change the future of CX in the sector.

In this report we have highlighted the key topics which were discussed during the roundtable event and the thoughts of the attendees, as well as any outcomes which have followed.





Attracting the employees is not the problem however, it is retaining them



Q. How do we support colleagues and customers in their native languages?

Gareth Jones (GJ), Director of Sales & Account Management at Concentrix, began the discussion, commenting that there are a number of challenges in this area for customer contact and service businesses. One of the biggest challenges is in automation. There is also particular difficulty in hiring German, Dutch and Flemish speakers. People are demanding better pay rates in nicer locations with multilingual hubs being set up in the summer months, such as Portugal and Spain, to accommodate the demands of the workforce.

Jo Regan-Iles (JRI), Chief People Officer at Ventrica, concurred that German and Dutch hiring is proving to be very difficult, and that this was even worse prior to the virtual world becoming

more prevalent. They have found that by becoming more involved in the communities in London, having team leaders whose native tongues are those of the employees, recruitment and retention are more effective.

Attracting the employees is not the problem however, it is retaining them. Although hubs are built, people such as the Dutch speakers often want to go home for the winter.

Chris Sly (CS), Digital Solutions UK & Europe at HGS, added that the volume of dual language speakers is very valuable, but retention can be challenging. For dual language speakers' employee opportunities are high, which can be both a privilege and a curse to employers regarding retention.

Keith Gait (KG), Leader of the Customer Experience Foundation queried whether this is a particular problem in the UK, or does it apply to offshore centres too? "It's tricky" GJ responded, "one thing found to

be quite effective is Campus operators have proven to be highly successful". He noted Nordic employees are willing to travel all over the world for work, fully immerse themselves in the country and set up a whole life anywhere.

Andrew Hall (AH), Chief Commercial Officer of Quantanite, spoke of German and Dutch employees always being on the list for the required work force, and that the selection criteria often changes. The location of the languages and language sensitivity has become part of the selection criteria.

GJ stated "If sickness, absence and attrition are issues, by definition, the service levels have been failed. It has been found German employees can be the most challenging and the most HR issues come from these employees. Customers just want to know 'how quickly can you resolve my issue and get me 30 more people to answer the phones'!".



Parisha Patel (PP), Programme/Product Owner at AmexGBT, added that in Asia, the calls tend to be taken in-house and in Europe, the calls are outsourced. There is a combination of various factors, with a lot more integration and a lot quicker responses. New technology means less verbal communication is needed. Their consumers require less touch but quicker responses.

Laurie Mascott (LM), Head of Enterprise Sales EMEA at ChatLingual, added that there is now much more acceptance of digital communication. Minimal but effective customer service touchpoints are the priority. Consumers have the expectation of quicker resolutions due to technology advances, such as delays or cancellations of flights or hotels, which can be challenging, but digital advances make them easier and quicker to resolve.

It can sometimes feel like "Chasing the bottom of the ocean". AH quoted from a LinkedIn post, which stated customers (meaning those hiring outsourced agents) still want cheap products. As long as customers still want cheap products, it is up to the Travel & Leisure industry to source that.

He gave the example of being stuck in Brazil for five months due to the communication issues with Latam Air over the phone. They didn't have many, if any, multilingual speakers to assist customers. When taking long haul trips, it may be advisable to get agents with multilingual skills or have technology with the ability to assist international customers.

CS commented from a consumer's perspective: "From personal experience, prices are not attractive enough. There is now a large choice of airlines. Security and service level sways his choice on which airline to choose. Multi sourcing from the employer's point of view makes the consumers' lives easier."

GJ detailed the priorities of the digital landscape:

- 1st Attributes: Digital Eco Systems and Digital Infrastructure
- 2nd Attributes: Digital Resources, driving down prices without driving down the quality, human interaction and Service Levels.

If businesses can get the digital eco systems correct and maximise the strength of digital

agents, costs can be kept down. Speaking to someone is often the last option as issues should be resolvable digitally or online. This offers the lowest cost.

Franck Arnold (FA), Managing Director & Regional Vice-President of The Savoy, offered an opposing view: "Artificial Intelligence is limited to planning in their way of dealing with issues. AI will not replace human touch. Some aspects cannot be replaced, such as serving, preparation and delivery of food. In the hotel industry, the human aspect cannot be replaced.

The Savoy has suffered difficulty in staffing, and if staff cannot be provided the full service cannot be provided! Since Brexit and the pandemic, the service industry finds it more difficult to find staff. At The Savoy, there are still over 50 different nationalities including British staff.

In order to command an emotional interaction, there is a compromise of having staff with lower standards of English. Digital assistance can be used to help staff develop language barriers in order to get the right calibre of staff.



“ In the hotel industry, the human aspect cannot be replaced ”





Two thirds of people still refer to outsourcing hubs as call centres. By using the wrong description, it demotes the importance of the role.



Differentiating by language is not the key. Getting the staff to a level where they can trigger emotion, where they are able to interact on a human level can be more important than being able to speak the language.

Q. What strategies are Employers deploying to recruit. Is it all about pay?

“Employers are no longer using traditional sourcing methods” FA stated. “The freedom of movement has changed this all over the world, but the UK has been affected differently as we are unable to attract talent as previously. Salary, conditions of work and flexibility are all factors.”

FA informed the panel that recruitment is an issue across the world and attracting talent is part of the issue. For example, within the service industry in France alone, there are currently 200,000 summer job vacancies.

The Savoy provides experiences and memories whilst the staff work to make this happen. The Savoy are having to adjust

to compensate to retain talent whilst working unsocial hours. This must be addressed as an industry. Mutuality has been brought to the forefront and it affects how people look at work and the conditions they work under.

AH commented that he had recently attended a forum at South Africa House. There, they have a vested interest in ‘getting it right’. Two thirds of people still refer to outsourcing hubs as call centres. By using the wrong description, it demotes the importance of the role, this affects retention and career opportunities.

From a recruitment and potential employee point of view “The travel and service industry are not the sexiest!” Success lies in the ability to position yourself as wanting to develop the skills of the work force, so they can continue to help create moments and memories. Learning languages from colleagues within the industry can also be attractive.

However it is marketed, outsourcing hubs (or call centres) are still seen as the service industry. Exposure,

lifestyles, influencing, and retention are all factors affecting the industry.

Samantha Williams (SW), Director of Partnerships at ChatLingual, added recruitment has involved looking for a combination of language and skills. Now the ‘right person’ has to think and behave like the consumer. SW worked in the service industry as a teen which has given her a better understanding and appreciation of the industry. She has great memories and thoroughly enjoyed her time. There is difficulty attracting this generation and employing passionate people.

AH queried why some have made it a career and some not? For many, the path was not their chosen field, but they evolved into it. Young people now choose roles differently.

“Those who want to stay in the industry, show signs upfront” PP added. “They indicate where they want to go. How is the career path growing? Career progression opportunities need to be shown to the employee.”



GJ informed the panel that around the world this does happen. In China for example, universities collaborate degrees with EPO's (Education and Public Outreach). They enter into partnerships with local companies. Lectures and content leads to commitment and passion.

Q. Recruitment and Retention - is technology to blame and how do we make the change?

Before Covid 19, the most effective way was to change the way in which people came into the industry.

JRL queried about when was the last time calls were listened to? She had been to listen to examples of flight, train and utility calls which had all been outsourced. Team leaders are so important. They have a better understanding of the individual employees and how difficult the roles are. It is really important there is a level of awareness and support for colleagues.

From a tech perspective, agent experiences can be horrid!

KG added due to the tech issues, contact centres are suffering as they cannot recruit the right staff.

JRI noted the railway industry are dealing with HNWI (High Net Worth Individuals) and have Customer Service still calling people 'cases' and not people.

The tech in that industry is very good, but there is no empathy, which has become a disaster as there is no human touch to balance.

Q. How can Technology help the industry going forward?

Alf Rodway (AR), General Manager at Airfrance-KLM commented that "Companies such as Air France are catching up with tech, but how far can it go?"

"All the way until there is a negative impact" stated AH.

There are still organisations not believing it can work, but it must be embraced. Tech is transitional. There is a long way to go, but capabilities are being missed at only minimal points.

MH queried "How does it work? 10% Tech – 90% People. Big tech projects fail. We Implement tech, rather than look at the problem." Alf queried about how organisations cater for the need when human interaction is still needed: "Don't start with tech!"

The problems need to be understood before they can be solved. Chatbots aren't always helpful.

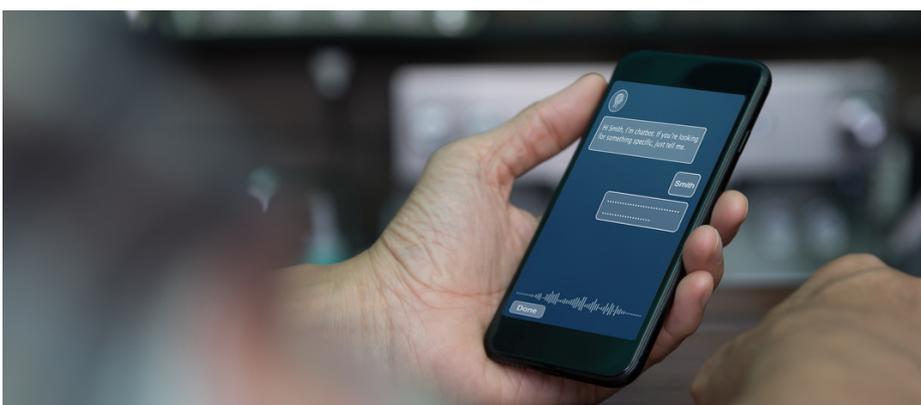
It was agreed that there have been pluses and minuses which have come out of the industry relating to Tech post covid.

GJ added the customer journey must be understood to be able to develop machine intelligence. Sometimes technology is implemented, but never reviewed.

There are still limits to tech and it still takes a human to create the systems. There are niches a Bot or system won't be able to understand. This can be absolved by design and collaborations, but in some cases 90% of enquiries could be automated.



The customer journey must be understood to be able to develop machine intelligence





AH spoke that when it comes to working in silo legacies, there are three examples:

- Pillars – high volume of people banks
- Middle steerers
- Disruptors – Organisations such as app only banks and Uber taking customer service to a new level whilst driving low price points.

As an example: Companies have different transformational needs. DP Bank were one of the lowest performing customer service operators until L&D introduced an agile framework. Within two years, they turned around their results to be a top performer.

"GOS is so old! Systems such as Amadeus and Omega are difficult legacy systems used by the travel industry."

Steven Dole (SD), Business Development Manager at Ventrica understood that it would be difficult for some agents to go back to working in the offices after working from home during covid, especially if they have the comfort of working from home alongside

great systems – but we have to consider retention and training /development.

There has been a power switch from the employer to the employee. Slowly people are wanting to come back to the office. Isolation is an issue for some, so hybrid working may be the way forward, but how is this catered for?

It was also commented that location is important. Lives have changed and the challenge is now getting workers back into the office when there is so much reluctance.

Q. If modern tech is the answer, then what is the issue?

AH stated: "A lot of the tech is centred around avoiding speaking with an agent... ChatLingual can support this! As popular as Chatbots are, Chatbots cannot do everything, and the human touch is still needed."

AR listened in to calls at Air France to get a better understanding of how both

customers and employees were dealt with. It became apparent the issues were with Diversity and Inclusion, Mental Health and Wellbeing. Air France used this information to change their strategy. They had been using the same systems for over 20 years. Getting corporate sign off to make changes makes it extremely difficult and to make the updates and changes it has to go through many levels of authorisation.

CS spoke of culture and tone being important to consumers, but without speaking to an agent, there is no 'tone' or human touch. Technology provides layers to empower the customer and make them feel as though the decisions they've made were their actual choices.



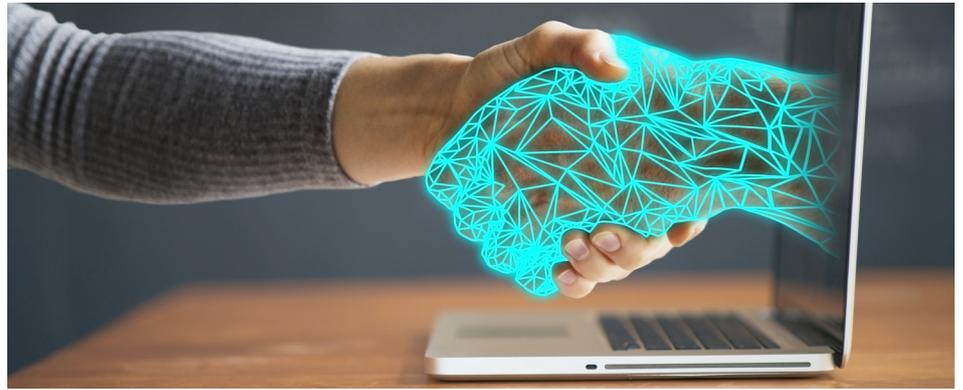
Without speaking to an agent, there is no 'tone' or human touch



Boards should listen to those who will use the systems day to day. By listening to the feedback and sharing the findings more can be done to improve going forward. Covid brought frontline staff to the forefront, and it was a great time for collaboration, but slowly working styles have returned to pre-covid behaviours.

AH commented that the idea of many is reducing the volumes of humans. Tech helps with this. Outsourcers thrive from 'bums on seats', offering no incentives to the employees keeps the investors happy. However, there will be no collaboration as long as this mentality exists. During the pandemic, the NHS used many outsourcing centres, often paying up to £40ph!

Najib Al Asham (NAA), Customer Experience Specialist at ChatLingual, said that during the pandemic, there were more complaints. This created a knock-on effect as agents didn't want to answer the phones to be abused or shouted at, therefore creating longer queues and more frustrated consumers.



Covid brought frontline staff to the forefront, and it was a great time for collaboration, but slowly working styles have returned to pre-covid behaviours



Closing points for the discussions

Below is a bite-sized synopsis of the outcomes from the roundtable discussions...

- Demand for languages and native speakers has never been higher, and expectations of the workforce have never been greater
- Conditions of work and flexibility are big drivers of employee choice
- Retention is now a bigger challenge than recruitment
- Technology has its part to play in solving these problems
- Start by understanding the issues, problems, and journeys
- Customers are accepting of digital touchpoints, when done well
- In some industries and service areas the human cannot be replaced





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We are run by CX practitioners, and our aim is to learn, understand, share, and promote best practice across all areas of Customer Experience and Contact Centres.

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