CUSTOMER STORY

How aligning goals, employees, and technology can transform your customer experience

Q&A with Ruben Lowenstein, Samsung Benelux

Customer centricity is a cornerstone of many enterprise companies. However, several obstacles can hinder success. You might struggle to justify the financial investments required, or you may be too focused on solving today's problems instead of identifying tomorrow's innovations. Sometimes, your internal teams might deliver excellent service, but partners bring down your standards. These issues lead to the same outcome: preventing organizations from achieving exceptional customer and employee experience.

This exclusive Q&A with Ruben Lowenstein, Manager of Customer Care at Samsung Electronics Benelux, gives you first-hand insight into transforming your work culture to prioritize effective partnerships, drive innovation, and unlock unwavering customer centricity.

To discover the full Samsung Benelux story, make sure to watch our on-demand webinar.

1. HOW HAS YOUR SERVICE AND SUPPORT STRATEGY EVOLVED OVER THE LAST EIGHT YEARS?

To gain a better understanding of our strategy's transformation, I will break it down into four distinct stages:

2015 — Our customer service primarily consisted of **70% voice and 30% email and chat channels**. Our service management was reactive then, resulting in **low Net Promoter Scores (NPS) and high Average Handling Times (AHT)**. The contact center had a basic configuration and suffered from high attrition rates, compounded by the traditional hierarchy we had in place.

2017 — We took proactive measures to enhance our customers' experience by implementing various changes in our operations, such as using **messaging services like SMS and Facebook Messenger** instead of email, introducing surveys and interaction analytics to gather information and insights, and utilizing a chatbot to handle common customer queries quickly and efficiently.

2020 — We shifted our contact center operations to prioritize data-driven value with a strong emphasis on digital tools. We adopted a **messaging-first strategy** and introduced **chatbot AI with natural language processing (NLP)** to assist with customer interactions and knowledge management. We also integrated brand communication efforts to have a single-panel view of all customer interactions and implemented voice-to-messaging technology to enhance the overall customer experience.

2022 — Our success relies on technology, analytics, and process excellence. We have introduced new roles and skill sets, such as interaction analysts, conversation designers, and machine learning trainers. Additionally, we have implemented **a chatbot that supports two languages and over 1000 flows**. Our chatbot has an NLP training model that resolves 20%—25% of customer issues. Our customer experience and engagement center uses **machine learning to assist agents and leverages AI for training** and micro-learning.

2. WHICH PART OF YOUR BUSINESS HAS BEEN IMPACTED MOST BY YOUR SUPPORT STRATEGY EVOLUTION, AND HOW?

Our organization has significantly improved its contact center operations in the last 10 years, increasing efficiency across all departments. We started by building a **strong foundation with simplified goals and basic KPIs** by department so we could innovate and improve the overall service operations.

It's essential to find the right people to form a "collective brain" to maintain the chain of connections and accelerate growth. We prioritize only the best for the tools, people, technology, and partners. We believe in **failing fast and learning** to guarantee positive results. In the past, implementing new processes or technologies would have taken us months or even years. Now that we have overcome the learning curve, we are in a prime position to on board new technologies within weeks instead of months.

3. SHOULD THE USE OF GEN AI, 'BOTS,' OR AGENT ASSISTANTS BE CONSIDERED AN OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY OR MANAGED AS PART OF A CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE TEAM'S ROLE?

The customer experience team should primarily manage these. Although these technologies have operational implications across departments, their primary function is to enhance and streamline the customer experience. Therefore, a **dedicated team overseeing their implementation** ensures a consistent and seamless integration into the customer journey. However, collaboration and communication with other departments, such as IT or marketing, are crucial to align the use of these technologies with broader organizational goals and operational processes.

4. IS THERE GROWING SCRUTINY OF TEAMS THAT SUPPORT THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE? HOW DO YOU APPROACH ANSWERING THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI) FOR CUSTOMER SUPPORT AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE EFFORTS? ARE THERE ANY KEY METRICS OR KPIS YOU USE?

There's an increasing focus on teams responsible for enhancing the customer experience. With customers becoming more discerning and competition fiercer than ever, businesses are realizing the crucial role of customer support and experience in retaining customers and driving growth.

When it comes to determining the ROI, we take a multifaceted approach. We closely monitor **customer satisfaction and Net Promoter Score (NPS)** to gauge overall sentiment and loyalty, and then we track metrics such as customer retention rates, churn reduction, and customer lifetime value to assess long-term impact. We're particularly keen on analyzing the efficiency and effectiveness of our operation processes, so average resolution time, first contact resolution rate, and customer effort score are also important.

We're increasingly leveraging **qualitative feedback through surveys**, focus groups, and social listening to gain deeper insights into customer preferences and pain points. Matching this data with our quantitative metrics provides a more holistic view of the customer experience.

5. HOW CAN LEADERS CULTIVATE AN INNOVATIVE, CUSTOMER-CENTRIC, AND DIGITALLY TRANSFORMED CULTURE WHILE FOSTERING A FUN ENVIRONMENT?

At Samsung, our customers are the most critical factor driving our growth. They are our top priority, and we ensure everything we do enhances their lives. Every employee, from top management to bottom-level employees worldwide, shares our commitment to our customers. We face fierce competition from big players in all our product lines and must prioritize customer-centricity to stay ahead and remain competitive.

Having a **diverse team** with different personalities is very powerful. To help our team bond, we conduct workshops, which help us get to know each other better. Creating an **innovative atmosphere** where people want to work is essential, but more importantly, enjoy the ride and make it fun!

6. WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR OTHER TEAMS OR COMPANIES TACKLING PROBLEMS SIMILAR TO YOURS?

Fix your basics by acknowledging the challenges, internal processes, and stakeholders. **Get alignment on the major topics** and set clear roles and responsibilities internally and with your partners. Provide clarity regarding the vision and objectives. People need to be able to make their own day-to-day choices based on the direction set by senior management. That is what I call the compass. If everybody knows that we are moving north and they have the compass (enablement), you will end up north.

7. WHEN SELECTING A SOFTWARE PARTNER, WHAT KEY QUALITIES SHOULD BUYERS PRIORITIZE?

In the current business environment, salespeople may promise to fulfill all your requirements; everything looks good on paper. However, as a buyer, you must be clear on what you want before purchasing. The vendor is responsible for proving the feasibility of a concept, which is why it's crucial to define your goals beforehand. Manage your expectations and realize that **building a solid partnership** will take time. If they share your vision and objectives to be the best in the industry, the real human-human relationship will flourish.

I strongly advise leaders to understand that **success is a team effort**, not an individual achievement. People often try to take all the credit for the team's success, but it is important to realize that we can only be successful as a team, and if we don't work together, we won't achieve anything.

We are one of the largest corporate organizations globally, and everyone has opinions. This culture exists in every corporation in some shape or form. However, a good partnership can help you see the bigger

picture and enable you to test and prove a concept before presenting it to a larger audience. We have successfully implemented small tests within a small environment with our partners. It seemed impossible initially, but now we can show the results to the world.

When achieving a big goal, it's better to work collaboratively with a partner with the necessary expertise instead of trying to do everything alone; in other words, don't try to boil the ocean. Recognize your partner's values and integrate them fully into your ecosystem. The key to building a successful partnership is to plan for the future while focusing on the present. This allows you to be more responsive to innovations, trends, and opportunities you may not have noticed otherwise.

8. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT SAMSUNG BENELUX'S UPCOMING PLANS FOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OR SERVICE INNOVATIONS? IS THERE ANYTHING YOU ARE PARTICULARLY EXCITED ABOUT?

We are exploring most of the trends everybody else is focusing on, like generative AI in all its forms and possibilities, smart routing and channel management, and enhancing human resources with technology. The current landscape offers many opportunities and innovations, and with this comes great responsibility, so we are always careful and mindful when sharing customer service innovations in the premature phase. Let's all wait and see what the future will bring.