

Contact Centre AI, Customer engagement

# Looking back and ahead at contact centre best practices

[Nuance Guest Blogger](#)

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2020 required multiple hard pivots for enterprise contact centres that served as critical business and information lifelines for concerned consumers, businesses and organisations. The best-practices advice we gave then still applies. It's since been augmented by a few key learnings that you can use to guide your business decisions especially as digital transformation and advances in cloud-based conversational AI continue and accelerate and new opportunities emerge.

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A year-and-a-half ago I described [three simple steps to address COVID-19 demands in your contact centre](#) to help customers who were urgently and drastically transforming their contact centres to operate remotely in a matter of days. The third of those three steps was "Monitor and Reassess," a general rule of design to revisit system changes after you've allowed them to "sit" in their environments – IVR, mobile, or web – for a few weeks or months.

We've followed that piece of advice ourselves to determine if the recommendations we gave back then still apply today. By and large they do primarily because they're "tried and tested" best practices. They included using advanced AI and machine learning, having backup voice talent handy, and strategically placing new information relevant to customers to prevent important messages from getting lost. The passage of time also enables us to augment those recommendations with a few key lessons learned from deployments during 2020 and 2021, amid the global pandemic. Here are a few:

## Lesson #1: External changes and developments can be just as important as your own company's messages and responses.

Most of our clients delivered information about COVID-19 limitations, requirements and service disruptions. For example, banking and insurance providers added messages about lobby closures, longer hold times and other changes. However, just as people grew accustomed to new routines and the changes in their contact centre experiences, state and federal relief programs began. That's when more customers began inquiring about stimulus checks, saying things like "where's my cheque?" or "stimulus" in response to voice prompts.

The takeaway: The AI platform you build upon matters. It's important to choose your AI vendors carefully. You must have a flexible, AI-driven approach to maintaining menus, grammars and responses to recognise key phrases related to external developments that are unrelated or indirectly related to changes at your organisation. Consider implementing software that learns with each customer engagement, ensuring the system will recognise the best next action for the next person who inquires about a new topic.

## Lesson #2: Simple Phrases – Multiple Meanings

In 2020, retailers had to nimbly adapt to occupancy restrictions. For grocery stores, curbside pickups grew from a boutique niche to a significant percentage of sales. For other businesses, online shopping relied on curbside sales to move products. As more customers were mentioning "curbside pickup" when contacting companies, what it meant grew more complicated. Some customers were quite literal and meant "I'm here — outside — for my curbside pickup." Others were asking about pickup procedures or even the availability of additional curbside services tangential to order pickups. And all these queries came in through various channels including your IVR, chatbot, or messaging. It's important to have AI that spans engagement points

The takeaway: Ensure you're aware of how customers will understand your offering based on how it fits within broader market trends. Do call listening as soon as changes are deployed to see how callers are interpreting them and enlist the power of advanced contact centre analytics to help you best gather knowledge about the ways customers are referring to new services, and what inquiries typically emerge so your best positioned to solve for those effectively.

## Lesson #3: "Monitor and Reassess" is a dynamic and accelerating process — and an opportunity

As I mentioned above, reviewing logs and reports to determine how recent system changes are performing is a standard practice during "normal" times that becomes even more important during periods of disruption and shifting market conditions. In some ways, the more frequent monitoring, assessing, and adjusting that we've seen during the pandemic is a preview of a "new normal" defined by the accelerating pace and scope of digital transformation, advances in conversational AI, the availability of tools to develop customised solutions, and rising consumer acceptance of virtual assistants, bots and biometric authentication. This is true not only for traditional consumer brands but also for vertical markets with specialised compliance and security requirements like healthcare and financial services.

In the end, the lessons of the pandemic have created opportunities for contact centres to think more expansively about ways to deliver more efficient, flexible, secure and personalised brand experiences. What's clear is that the changes made out of necessity in early 2020 were not just temporary adaptations. Instead, they set the stage for exciting new areas of innovation and growth of the contact centre as a competitive differentiator.

The takeaway: Be ready to accelerate your monitoring processes. Depending on the scope and magnitude of your changes, you may find your standard annual or biannual "full tuning" of your application, which was fine in a pre-pandemic world will not suffice, and a sooner assessment may be needed. Look for [flexible solutions that provide DIY tooling](#) in addition to professional service options so you can ensure your team is ready to implement changes in the contact centre quickly without needing to contact third party companies, while maintaining expert external insight and customisation where necessary.

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