Get the Right Information to the Right Person at the Right Time

The Power of Customer Service Knowledge Management (CSKM)

KANA Software, Inc.

Prepared for KANA by Info-Tech Research Inc.
Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 3
The CSKM Platform Market ..................................................................................................................... 3
  Multi-Channel Customer Service Strategy .......................................................................................... 3
  Mobile Self-Service Tools .................................................................................................................... 4
CSKM Best Practices .............................................................................................................................. 5
  Initial Knowledge Base Creation ......................................................................................................... 5
  Tier-1 Customer Service Agents ......................................................................................................... 6
  Dedicated Knowledge Manager ........................................................................................................... 6
CSKM Platform Selection Criteria ......................................................................................................... 6
  KANA’s Market Position ....................................................................................................................... 7
Conclusion .............................................................................................................................................. 8
Introduction

Organizations around the world face market pressures that make providing excellent customer service a necessity. The ability to quickly and accurately address customer issues is a prerequisite for ensuring customer satisfaction and retention. To effectively and efficiently resolve customer issues, companies must leverage the organizational knowledge they gathered practicing customer service. The stewardship – capture, retention, categorization, and dissemination – of such information is known as Customer Service Knowledge Management (CSKM). In essence, CSKM is about getting the right information to the right person at the right time.

Not having effective practices for Customer Service Knowledge Management can prove to be detrimental. Organizations need to give consistent resolutions to queries and problems across all channels, from self-service to assisted-service. The lack of a common knowledge base leads to inconsistent and uneven solutions, which in turn frustrates both agents and customers. The cost to serve increases as resolutions to the most common problems aren’t readily available and agents have to waste time manually hunting for answers. This also undermines the service organization’s credibility and damages brand equity, thereby increasing customer defections and retention costs. A standalone CSKM platform can remedy many of these concerns by providing a unified knowledge base, and advanced search and resolution workflow capabilities.

The CSKM Platform Market

Nowadays, basic CSKM has become a commodity feature of CRM and CSM platforms. However, the market demand for high complexity service needs of larger organizations is strong and is being reinforced by social collaboration and the use of mobile devices as interactive service points. Convergence of self-service and assisted service at the smart phone level is the next big trend that will impact CSKM, and will require agents to have access to a customer’s self-service history before escalating to assisted service.

Multi-Channel Customer Service Strategy

There are two approaches to CSKM content management. Organizations can utilize search indexing of external sources or use a built-in CSKM knowledge base. The former, however, is unsuitable for any company that considers customer service to be a core activity. Without a central knowledge base, authoring can only be done at the individual source level, leading to inconsistent information.
Fragmentation of the information source became a bigger problem recently due to the number of customer interaction channels available, such as mobile and social media. As more customer interaction channels emerge, organizations must ensure that all channels are aligned into a cohesive multi-channel strategy. For customer service, this means allowing customers to seamlessly transition between different channels for migration and escalation purposes. For instance, it would frustrate customers if they had to reiterate the same issue each time they jump channels. Companies can avoid this highly inefficient process by establishing clear points-of-integration between channels through a unified CSKM platform.

With a unified CSKM platform that fits into a multi-channel customer service strategy in place, resolutions will always be pulled from a common source. This “one version of the truth” for every channel ensures solution consistency, efficiency, and high customer satisfaction. It also makes authoring, updating, organizing, and retiring content a straightforward task, since articles in the knowledgebase are managed in a single place.

**Mobile Self-Service Tools**

Among all customer service channels, Info-Tech has found mobile self-service to have the highest customer service success correlations (see Figure 1). That is, those who are using mobile as a customer service channel were significantly more successful with their CSKM practices.

However, Info-Tech also found that only 15% of companies are using CSKM tools for mobile service. The remaining 85% are missing out. This will most likely change in the near future, as more vendors are beginning to recognize mobile as a rapidly emerging area of customer service and are extending their offerings to account for it. Some dedicated mobile applications have already entered the market, and more are on the horizon.
Initial Knowledge Base Creation

Creating the initial knowledge base well is the first step towards great CSKM practices, and it should be done by setting content boundaries, priorities, and time limits. The initial content the CSKM will draw from will be taken from both internal and external sources.

Organizing the internal knowledge base involves setting content boundaries, revising and structuring, and tagging. First, fit existing articles to templates and couple with metadata (e.g. product model, version, symptoms, etc). In the process, the articles must be checked to see if they need rewriting. As the articles will be treated as “one version of the truth,” it must be made sure that they are comprehensive enough for all agents to follow. Terminology familiar to a certain group of staff may be baffling to other agents, or worse,
customers. Afterwards, create a forward-looking taxonomy and fit the structured content into it.

Setting boundaries on crawlers collecting external information can be more difficult. However, there is one golden rule: never allow crawlers to draw on marketing, sales, PR or investor material as that will be of no interest to a frustrated customer.

Tier-1 Customer Service Agents

There is a common mistake that numerous companies make with their CSKM practices: they design their practices around tier-1 customer service agents as if they are knowledge workers. In fact, they are process-centric workers requiring a platform that embraces this reality and enables rapid problem identification and solution retrieval.

Some customer service cases may be escalated to traditional knowledge workers, but most cases are handled by process-driven tier-1 agents. Thus, traditional enterprise knowledge management and search solutions, designed for researchers, are inappropriate for CSKM. A specialized platform designed to support quick transactions is required. The goal is to provide process workers with the embedded tools they need to resolve customer service issues.

Dedicated Knowledge Manager

Creating and maintaining a professional knowledge base requires a specific skill set above that of the tier-1 customer service agents. Organizations that need a CSKM platform also need a full-time Knowledge Manager. That is, if a company cannot justify dedicating a full-time resource, then it should reconsider the entire project.

The Customer Service Knowledge Manager’s responsibilities will include the following.

- Collect, synthesize, organize, and manage corporate information and information services for business units providing internal and external service support.
- Ensure that the storing, archiving, and taxonomical layout of information resources is consistent across and throughout the organization.
- Develop and implement cataloging systems, as well as preserve the freshness and accuracy of cataloged items.

CSKM Platform Selection Criteria

Standalone CSKM platforms offer a variety of features aimed at facilitating quick resolutions to customer problems. There are five broad feature categories that are included in most CSKM platforms that includes content repositories, advanced search and indexing, resolution workflow tools, reports and analytics, and social and mobile tools. Figure 2 shows a detailed list of basic and advanced features that Info-Tech used to
evaluate CSKM vendors. Basic features are table stakes that every product must have, and advanced features are the ones that go “above and beyond” what is offered in Customer Relationship Management platforms.

**Figure 2: CSKM Features**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Basic/Adv.</th>
<th>What we looked for:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Repository (Knowledgebases)</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Native knowledgebases are present in the platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Knowledgebases support rich media; content syndication capabilities present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Search</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Able to search the platform’s knowledgebase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Able to index and search other content repositories (for example, SharePoint).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxonomic Navigation</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Content repositories organized by specific taxonomies (administrator or user-defined)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Ability to actively refine search results through taxonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution Workflow Tools</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Guided search results are provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>More symptom capture tools, such as decision trees and service wizards, are provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorship and Editorial Controls</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Ability to define authorship and editing permissions by user level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Support for advanced editorial and approval workflows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting and Analytics</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Provides reports demonstrating knowledge gaps and content utilization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Real-time analytics and an interactive dashboard is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Involvement and Peer to Peer Support</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Customers are able to rate and comment on individual pieces of content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Forums and communities are provided where customers can help each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Portals</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>The platform supports customer-facing and agent-facing portals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Portals are highly customizable; they can be tailored to user needs (i.e. search histories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Mobile Support</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Provides a mobile-optimized site; provides social sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Provides access via dedicated mobile applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalization</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Applications are available in multiple languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Search engine and knowledgebase can support multilingual content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Info-Tech Research Group*

**KANA’s Market Position**

Info-Tech Research Group’s Vendor Landscape on the CSKM market has positioned KANA in the “Champion” category. Champions score well across most evaluation criteria, which are focused on the product/solution (i.e. features, affordability, usability, architecture), and the vendor itself (i.e. viability, strategy, reach, and channel). KANA’s ranking was the result of high scoring for features, usability and affordability.
Providing amazing customer service requires a concerted strategy for leveraging relevant knowledge throughout the organization. Customer Service Knowledge Management (CSKM) is about facilitating timely solutions to customer service problems by getting the right information to the right person at the right time. Best-of-breed CSKM platforms can improve a variety of key customer service metrics, such as customer retention and cost-to-serve. Larger organizations with significant customer service operations and deep product lines are the most likely to realize a high ROI from adopting a standalone platform that is integrated across all service channels.
Info-Tech’s products and services combine actionable insight and relevant advice with ready-to-use tools and templates that cover the full spectrum of IT concerns. Our practical approach is designed to have a clear and measurable positive impact on your organization’s bottom line.

Info-Tech serves more than 21,000 clients at 8,000 organizations around the world. Since 1998, we have focused on making the work of IT professionals easier – and on helping them achieve greater personal and corporate success.

For a free trial of our practical research – including our series on Asset Management – please visit www.infotech.com.

Mailing Address:
Info-Tech Research Group
43 Front St. East, Suite 200
Toronto. Ontario
M5E 1B3
Toll-Free: 1-888-670-8889
Website: www.infotech.com