

Exploring the Evolution of Omni Channel Commerce & Digital Assisted Sales and Service in Telecom

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Summary

Softwarization has been a key driver for telecom sales, enabling the industry to break-free of its trademarked rigidity and bolstering newer strategic approaches, like omni-channel commerce and digital assisted sales. These approaches are driving the sector towards a modern, dynamic and customer-focused future. However, numerous challenges impede this journey. By following best practices, telecom companies can enhance their omni-channel and assisted sales strategies, enhancing competitiveness in the long run.

Way back in 2011, Marc Andreessen, a prominent entrepreneur, technologist, and venture capitalist, famously claimed that “software is eating the world.” If ever there was a statement that encapsulated the future of telecom, this was it.

Technology has dramatically altered the face of telecom sales today, which has rapidly progressed beyond traditional channels to more integrated, customer-centric and omni-channel approaches. These serve the multi-fold vision of enriching customer experience while simultaneously streamlining infrastructural frameworks and strengthening operations. Both omni-channel commerce and digital assisted sales are two sides of the same coin, and we will independently examine how they have evolved over the last few years.

Let’s start with the journey of telecom over the last decade.

The wave of softwarization hit the telecom industry in the early 2010s, accelerating its evolution from hardware pure play to semi/fully software-driven frameworks. This change was much needed in an environment that was constrained by monolithic hardware and manual configurations, resulting in rigidity and slow adaptability. With software-defined networking (SDN) defining and controlling infrastructural setups, the virtualization of network functions, microservices, cloudification, containerization, edge computing and hyper-automation have percolated to the telecom grassroots, drastically altering its fundamental structure. The resulting fluidity allows for greater flexibility, scalability, and rapid deployment of services.

All of this has further accelerated communications service providers’ or CSPs’ transformation “from telcos to techcos” and fueled the rise of new paradigms within the industry, such as cloud-native automation and orchestration, zero-touch

provisioning, full stack observability, self-healing networks and more. Thus, telecom providers today can swiftly respond to market demands and offer highly personalized services and enhanced customer experiences like never before. The evolution of omni-channel commerce and digital assisted sales are rooted in these paradigms.

Omni-channel commerce in telecom

Omni-channel commerce represents a significant evolution from its single- and multi-channel counterparts, which often operate in silos. Omni-channel is all about delivering a seamless and cohesive experience across all customer touchpoints. It integrates physical and digital sales channels, providing a unified and consistent customer journey, from push/pull marketing to communication & collaboration, billing, digital account management and customer support. Therefore, it is heavily dependent on data collection and integration between every customer touchpoint. Without an effective CRM system in place, this can be a tall order for telcos,

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whose multi-geographic customer base spans to millions.

Key traits of omni channel commerce include:

- Enhanced customer experience: By integrating various sales channels, customers enjoy a seamless buying experience, whether they are online, on a mobile app, or in a physical store. Most customer requirements, such as purchasing add-on data or switching to a new data plan, have moved well beyond physical channels and can be simply achieved over a mobile phone interface on the go.
- Data-driven insights: By leveraging data analytics, telecom companies gain valuable insights into customer behavior, preferences, and trends, enabling more personalized interactions and customized offers to be made for a specific user.
- Unified CRM system: A central CRM system integrates all customer interactions across channels, providing a 360-degree view of the customer and ensuring that sales and support teams have the information they need to offer tailored solutions.

Digital Assisted Sales and Service

Although closely connected to omni-channel commerce, digital assisted sales specifically refers to the utilization of various digital channels and tools to enhance sales processes, including upsell and cross-sell, in addition to customer service. This approach combines the convenience of digital interactions with personalized experiences, creating a hybrid model that caters to diverse and unique customer needs. The pillars of digital assisted sales and service include:

- Streamlining the sales and service processes, making it faster and more convenient.
- Offering tailored recommendations and support based on customer insights.
- Providing accessibility at any time and from any location through context-sensitive, high-usability and self-help solutions, making customer the center of the focus and in control.
- Building a customer 360 view for your assisted sales and service personnel to be able to view cross channel customer journeys, the friction or failure points to be able to provide Next Best Action/Offer (NBx) that meets your customer needs at that moment.

In the modern-day telecom universe, online consultations using AI chatbots and virtual assistants for complex troubleshooting, and tech-enabled assistance for guided purchases, detailed product

explorations and informed decision-making, are all key enablers to assisted sales and service. Key characteristics include:

- Increased convenience: Digital channels streamline the sales and service process, allowing customers to easily place requests, make purchases, leverage self service tools, and receive support online.
- Advanced technologies: As outlined earlier, AI chatbots and virtual assistants provide real-time assistance, guiding customers through transactions and offering personalized recommendations.
- Some of the best practices for modern-day assisted sales & service, and omni-channel frameworks.
- Consistent branding: Ensure that your brand image and messaging across all touchpoints remains consistent to build trust and recognition.
- Seamless accessibility: Allow customers to effortlessly switch between channels (pause and resume) without losing context or information, enhancing their experience.
- Data analytics: Let data be your guide to personalize interactions, track customer journeys across channels, and innovate and improve offerings.
- Tools and technologies: Use AI and automation to streamline routine or volume tasks and augment customer support, freeing up IT staff and customer service representatives for more complex interactions.
- CRM integration: Integrate CRM with 360-degree channels, including sales and marketing, to maintain a comprehensive view of customer interactions and historical data.

Trends and challenges

Several trends are shaping the future of omni channel commerce and digital assisted sales. Already, the rollout of 5G is enhancing the speed and quality of customer interactions. AI is becoming more sophisticated, enabling deeper personalization and more efficient automation almost in real time, thanks to edge computing and telecom modernization. Additionally, augmented or virtual reality is being used to create immersive customer experiences, such as virtual store tours and interactive product demos.

As exciting as the future is, practical implementation comes with several challenges. As always, data integration remains a major issue. Combining data from multiple sources to create a unified view can be complex and resource intensive. This can be compounded by numerous issues on the data privacy,

compliance and security fronts. Technology-enablement of channels also means these technologies will require constant upgrades, calling for recurring and oftentimes substantial investments in addition to a nimble, loosely coupled future-proof architecture. Additionally, as with all paradigm changes, training and change management are crucial, and requires a major shift in employee/management mindset and organizational culture, which can be an extensive exercise.

While these challenges can seem overwhelming at first (especially in a conventional telecom set-up), they do become more manageable over time by following best practices, adopting a top-down

approach, and securing buy-in across all stakeholder levels. By leveraging these strategies, telecom companies can enhance customer experience, streamline operations, and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market. After all, the payoffs are terrific, and consistently proven in the industry by leading players like AT&T and Verizon who have successfully set benchmarks through their transformative omni-channel and assisted sales approaches. Emulating these achievements will not only help telcos meet current customer expectations but also pave the way for future growth and advancements.

