

insideARM

Think Differently

Transcript of conversation between Stephanie Eidelman, CEO of The iA Institute
and Louis Summe, CEO of Livevox
Published June 2, 2020

Stephanie Eidelman

Hi, I'm Stephanie Eidelman, CEO of insideARM and the iA Institute. I hope you're all safe and healthy. One of the things I spend a lot of my time on is managing our Innovation Council. Even before the pandemic, organizations in the Innovation Council understood that their ability to survive would depend on collaboration, thinking differently, and being at the forefront of communications, analytics, payments, and compliance technology. Last fall, we started an article series called Thinking Differently, to feature thought leadership by our staff and by members of the council. We've now expanded this series into a video format, as I interview various members of the council to share with you how they're thinking differently about their businesses today and about the future of the industry. I hope you'll listen in.

[Brief video animation introducing "Think Differently"]

I'm here today with Louis Summe CEO of live Vox and a member of the iA innovation council. Louis, thanks so much for taking the time to visit with me today. I'm looking and looking forward to the conversation.

Louis Summe

Thanks Stephanie. I appreciate it.

Stephanie Eidelman

Terrific. I think most people in the industry are familiar with Livevox, but just in case and for those three people who may not be, why don't you start by just giving us an overview of what you guys do and who you do it for.

Louis Summe

Sure. Livevox focuses on servicing the contact center and to do that we bring digital and voice channels. We also bring performance analytics, performance management applications as well as some data management CRM applications. And we bring it together in a little bit of a more integrated bundle than has typically been available. We've grown up providing these services to operations that are fairly well, heavily centered, I would say in financial services, one way or another. We have a good number of BPOs that are clients. We have a good number of enterprises as clients and the majority of them have some connection to financial services one way or another. As a byproduct of that, our historical kind of need was to do well and to meet the needs around compliance and security. So in general I would say we have clients that are in highly regulated industries. So financial services, healthcare, telecom, things like that.

Stephanie Eidelman

Got it. And I personally remember about, gosh, I think it was around five years ago when you were introducing your business analytics tools and we had our first CRC round table on that topic. I remember you were one of the first to introduce that capability.

Louis Summe

Yeah. That tool's worked out well. And, you know, our philosophy is to help our clients get access to tools more easily. And so one of the things that we did with that analytics package to just make sure that when you got to the analytics platform, the BI tool, that your interactions data was already loaded there, saving that integration step. And that continues to be our philosophy as we add more features, just make sure that the data is flowing across all the applications so that when as a context in our operator, you're going to turn up and add a new application, you've spent less time worrying about how to get the data into it and to engage in those integration activities.

Stephanie Eidelman

Yeah, I know that's a big challenge for many in the industry. So as it relates to today, you serve quite a few customers in a fairly broad range of types of businesses. What are you seeing? What are you hearing from your customers and what are you seeing people do that's been successful or not successful? Obviously not naming any names.

Louis Summe

Yeah, well everybody had to switch from being in center to work at home. That's not a news flash to anyone. And, you know, that was more or less difficult, in part, depending on geography, of course. I think the U.S. agent population did move to work at home a little bit more easily than the overseas populations due to a little bit more mature infrastructure. So I think that has played out to some degree. A fair number of people have moved and they've grappled with some challenges that they've done that, right? So moving from in center to work at home, the first thing you're doing is making sure you've got a good enough connection.

Then the second thing that you're thinking about is security. You know, can we operationalize work at home with the same level of security that we need and that we had in center and that we need to service financial services clients. And so a lot of people have gone through those kinds of questions and those steps. And now some of them are thinking about, okay, well now that I've addressed some of the basic connectivity and they've got the security in place, to a degree that seems workable, you know, what does it take now to optimize and what kind of tools or what kind of capabilities do I need to make it work well in a work at home environment?

Stephanie Eidelman

Yeah. I know our Innovation Council and the Consumer Relations Consortium is thinking through those, the work from home, go forward structure that is workable, that can make sense and that can pass muster with audits for regulators, for clients. And we're trying to think through all those details for sort of best practice.

Louis Summe

Yeah. Well, and when you're in a work and home environment, you lose some of the pieces of the physical environment. Of course you don't walk the floor and you don't see people coming in. And so there is a reduction in contact and then frankly there's a reduction in interactions and feedback. And so when you go into a work at home environment, steps need to be taken to increase the degree to which you're monitoring, the degree to which you're coaching, the degree to which you're providing feedback.

And again, I don't think I'm really telling the audience anything they don't know, right? I mean they're doing this right now and they're experiencing this. I think the piece that kind of stands out for me is, now that you're in this mode where you know you're going to have to do more of these performance management activities, how are you going to do it? And there are a suite of tools that have been built up over over the years to do this. And so things in what would be historically referred to as quality management, you know, some sort of quality management tool, screen capture, BI speech analytics. There are tools out there that can ultimately help you do this performance management, quality management, more efficiently now that you have to do more of it, there are tools out there that help you do it more efficiently. And so I think a key question now is, now that you're in a work at home environment, how can you take advantage of these tools and use them well?

Stephanie Eidelman

Yeah. So, the theme of this series is thinking differently and I'm wondering whether, either as a continuation of that or pivoting if you've got another thought, how are you thinking differently about your business these days, and, or how do you see clients thinking differently about their businesses in ways that are making them more successful?

Louis Summe

Well, we've gone through the same type of journey that our clients have gone through to some degree, right? We were, I would say, probably 50,-75% in center and offices, and now we're a hundred percent work at home. So we've shifted our employees to work at home. So we have experienced a little bit of what our clients are going through. But I think for our clients it's a little bit different. Our performance management is not exactly the same as it is inside of a contact center. So I think that their job's a little bit different. Frankly, it needs to be more scalable. I mean they're thinking more about the ratio of agents to supervisors, and is that the same in center versus work at home? The answer is, well, it can't be the same as work at home if you have to do more QA, unless you've got more tools and more capabilities to make it more efficient, more effective.

Stephanie Eidelman

Okay. So they're thinking, how can I leverage technology to make the work at home model viable?

Louis Summe

I mean, I saw some are and some are not. But I think that that's a good question to ask yourself. And frankly, even if you are going to dip your toes in the water on technology, you should

always be experimenting with it, even if it's on a small scale. Because as a BPO, your clients expect you to be a knowledgeable user of technology and to be able to make good decisions and deploy technology efficiently, and know what really works and what doesn't. And so a work at home environment is different. The tools you're going to use are different. You should be experimenting with them at a minimum.

Stephanie Eidelman

And how about you and your business, other than just getting people working from home. Are you thinking differently about your strategy or where you're headed?

Louis Summe

I think that this does push Livevox a little bit more towards digital in terms of where we are, in terms of creating and providing our services. Not that we are walking away from our voice roots and our voice applications. Voice is important, but I think this does accelerate the adoption of digital. I'll give you another example. We've been talking about work at home and how performance management could be a way to help do that more efficiently. In addition to that, most people are aware there's an increased number of phone calls, inbound phone calls. And so there are many organizations trying to figure out, how can I handle effectively this increased volume of inbound calls? And one of the answers that is there, of course, is to use more digital channels and to encourage consumers to engage in a digital model first on inbound, and then maybe use the phone as more of an escalation rather than the first spot, right?

So, you know, those are two of the bigger things as a byproduct of the pandemic. First and foremost, being shifting to work at home, increased performance management. And then the second thing being, well, okay, how do we handle increased inbound volumes and what kind of role can digital play? And of course if you're going to deploy digital, you've got to do that well. If you deploy digital poorly and people get trapped in silos and blind alleys, they're just going to pick up the phone and call anyway. So you won't have accomplished anything. You'll have deployed a digital channel, but you end up with the phone call anyway. So the question is how can I deploy the digital well, so that the consumer has a good experience and it's more of a channel of choice. And then when that isn't working well, how can the consumer relatively easily escalate out of that channel to get to an agent?

Stephanie Eidelman

It certainly accelerates the focus on consumer experience, which has had already been something we were talking about, but it was a nice coming trend and now it's more of an imperative.

Louis Summe

Yeah. I think one of the exciting things right now for a lot of BPOs is that the work at home and the managing the inbound volume, these are challenges that all contact center operations are facing. So to the extent that you embrace that, and to the extent that you build competency around it, you can sell around it. I think that there's a lot of opportunity to win business if you can project strength around your ability to use digital to offload inbound volume and use performance management to drive excellence and work at home operations.

Stephanie Eidelman

All right, I think that's a good conclusion for us to end on. So, once again, I thank you for visiting with me today. It was great and I look forward to seeing you around at the Innovation Council as well.

Louis Summe

Yes, thank you Stephanie.

Stephanie Eidelman

I'll talk to you again soon.