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# Rethinking Customer Interaction Channels

As consumer preferences shift toward a wider variety and greater complexity of communication methods, companies may want to rethink the structure of their current customer relationship management (CRM) systems.

Forrester's Q3 2011 Healthcare Online Survey gathered some valuable feedback that sheds light on evolving customer service demands. As reported by 1to1 Media, Forrester survey respondents indicated that they interact with healthcare providers across an average of 3.6 channels. Although contact center agents remain the first line of customer communication, more than half of customers reported using the company's website or interactive voice response (IVR) utilities.

According to 1to1 Media, the research also indicated that fewer than half of respondents were satisfied with the customer experience offered by IVR, mail, email, and instant messaging services.

This discrepancy should raise eyebrows in customer service departments across all industries. According to Forbes, clients are clearly looking for alternatives to the traditional contact center experience, yet service providers are not offering rewarding experiences on the emerging channels.

For a variety of reasons, Forbes bluntly recommended that contact center agents "get off the phones." Alternative channels are not only more important to customers; they are also typically less expensive than phone systems. This approach may also help businesses become familiar with new technology as social CRM continues its march toward the mainstream.

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