

# Cool Vendors in CRM Customer Service and Social, 2012

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Heads of customer service worldwide are demanding improvements to customer service, yet underlying applications often lack the flexibility to respond to changes in customer demands. Gartner looks at the new crop of customer service and social vendors.

## Key Findings

- The Engage121 solution evolved out of existing customers' need for a social business solution, which enabled them to communicate with customers not only through Facebook and Twitter, but through industry-specific pages, all within the Engage121 console.
- Over 90% of all Web-based self-service is via written channels. GeoFluent provides on-the-fly language translations for Web chat, email response management, SMS, knowledgebase articles, etc., alleviating the need for multilingual agents.
- Interactions offers a speech-recognition-enabled self-service that is backed up by live agents that provide human interpretation when the speech engine can't recognize what's being said. This makes for a much more conversational interaction with the self-service applications.
- KomBea offers a product that enables contact centers to provide agents with prerecorded audio clips that can be played to callers at specific points in a call to improve compliance with internal and/or industry-regulated processes by making sure that the information communicated and process followed is exactly correct.
- Using no download Web services, Qlika only uses SMS to link to mobile devices and provide information from formal knowledgebases or any desktop out to the consumer or technician.

## Recommendations

- Set aside time to target key technologies that can enhance the customer experience on channels such as the Web, mobile and social.
- IT organizations should work with the service organization to develop the value proposition for targeted cutting-edge projects to improve service.

- All customer service interactions of low complexity will eventually migrate to self-service. This leaves the most-complex questions for the customer service representatives (CSRs).

## Analysis

*This research does not constitute an exhaustive list of vendors in any given technology area, but rather is designed to highlight interesting, new and innovative vendors, products and services. Gartner disclaims all warranties, express or implied, with respect to this research, including any warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose.*

## What You Need to Know

Businesses expend tremendous amounts of money and energy on marketing and sales, yet lose customers by providing inferior service experiences. A new breed of service-oriented business applications, most delivered as a business service (software as a service [SaaS]), is giving customer service designers the ability to show greater agility in keeping pace with changing customer behaviors. This research describes several vendors that offer innovative approaches and technology for improving the customer experience during service interactions in traditional, as well as social, channels.

## Engage121

Norwalk, Connecticut. ([www.engage121.com](http://www.engage121.com))

*Analysis by Jenny Sussin*

**Why Cool:** Engage121 gives multiple social CRM stakeholders within an organization the opportunity to engage with clients on an array of social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, as well as industry-specific review sites. A large part of Engage121's customer base consists of companies with distributed sales locations, like franchises, as Engage121's content management system allows clients to share their collateral for localized content publishing. Communication approaches are also shared through Connect121, the internal collaboration piece of Engage121's application.

In addition, Engage121 allows for employee outbound communication permissions to be set, creating a content review workflow for organizations needing to adhere to industry guidelines, such as those from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) and Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

**Challenges:** Engage121 is operating in a highly competitive space with aspects of its product overlapping offerings by companies such as Hearsay Social, salesforce.com's Radian 6, Oracle RightNow CX, Buddy Media and Sprinklr. Engage121 evolved into a social CRM tool following requests for functionality by existing marketing and communications customers, and, as a result, the company has not been heavily marketed to the breadth of potential customers in the way its competitors have.

Along with its competitors, Engage121 will need to further integrate with legacy CRM offerings and contact center offerings in order to provide a single view of the customer to remain a valuable customer service asset.

Engage121 is now charged, as are its competitors, with grabbing the largest share of the market while delivering applications within a similar product set to solidify its positioning as one of excellence.

**Who Should Care:** Customer service, marketing and IT managers who are charged with developing social media or social CRM strategies that would entail customer engagement on Facebook, Twitter and industry-specific review sites should consider Engage121. Distributed sales organizations, including those in highly regulated industries like pharmaceuticals or financial services, may even find Engage121 functionality to be best in class. Engage121's notable clients include Philips, Amtrak and Madison Square Garden.

## GeoFluent

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Waltham, Massachusetts ([www.geofluent.com](http://www.geofluent.com))

*Analysis by Johan Jacobs*

**Why Cool:** Over 90% of all Web-based customer service is via written channels as opposed to spoken channels. When dealing with customer service across geographies, contact centers require multilingual abilities, and all documents and interactions need to be in the customer's language of choice. GeoFluent provides immediate language translations for Web chat, email response management, SMS and knowledgebase articles, etc., alleviating the need for multilingual CSRs. In addition, GeoFluent enables self-service support by enabling multilingual conversations in support and other community forums. This results in huge cost savings, not only in terms of eliminating many foreign language CSRs in the contact center, but also in reducing the volume of documents stored electronically.

**Challenges:** Electronic language translation technologies have been around for quite a long time, but, similar to voice recognition software, the translation technologies had to be "trained" with every implementation in order to properly understand the text and the nuances associated with written communication. Advancements in natural-language processing, semantic understanding and decision tree technologies, as well as increased processing power from back-end devices, are now delivering viable language translation solutions, resulting in a relevant response level of above 97%. An English speaking CSR can now engage in a Web chat session with a French, German, Spanish or Italian customer. The customer types his question in his native language and GeoFluent translates the question into English. The CSR will respond in English and the response is translated back into the respective language. The same approach is taken when documentation is provided in one language, but consumed in a different language.

**Who Should Care:** GeoFluent's solution provides a very different way of solving the traditional challenge of having CSRs skilled in multiple languages available in the contact center. It delivers automatic language translation services at a very low cost, as opposed to using offshore

representatives to conduct similar services. The solution delivers a consistent quality of service, as opposed to the often poor-quality written communications received from offshore agents whose native language is not the same as the language in which the service is being provided. Contact center managers, recruiters, Web developers and customer service officers should take note of this technology and use GeoFluent to assist with cost savings by reducing the number of representatives requiring specialized language skills and by increasing the geographies where service is provided. In addition, any community forum site owner who wants to eliminate language barriers to customer engagement and participation can use GeoFluent to translate forums, blogs and other user-generated content in real time.

## Interactions

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Franklin, Massachusetts ([www.interactions.net](http://www.interactions.net))

*Analysis by Drew Kraus*

**Why Cool:** Interactions leverages human-assisted understanding to supplement automated speech recognition in customer service speech recognition applications, enabling more conversational speech-based self-service interactions and improving the experience while enabling greater call completion rates within those interactions.

Offered as a service, Interactions' applications communicate with end users through open-ended dialogs. The applications leverage automated speech recognition in combination with Interactions-provided human assisted understanding. When the speech recognition engine encounters difficulty interpreting spoken input, the Interactions system will stream a snippet of the caller's input to a live Interactions agent to interpret the input and feed that interpretation back to the application, allowing the call flow to continue. Using this approach, call flows can be created in a way that allows a more open and conversational interaction, rather than forcing callers down a rigid set of paths or being either explicitly or implicitly directed to use a limited set of words that the application is ready to interpret. Calls that are not completed via self-service are forwarded to the client company's customer service agents along with call flow data and customer input gathered up to the point that the customer leaves the application.

While natural-language speech applications have been available for many years, these applications are very expensive and time-consuming to develop, test, tune, deploy and maintain — often taking nine months to a year to deploy. In contrast, Interactions' applications can usually be deployed in approximately 12 weeks. The service is billed based on a percentage of transactions successfully completed in the speech applications, thus limiting the upfront costs to its customers and leveraging a "shared goals" relationship to encourage both Interactions and its customers to look for ways to further improve performance.

**Challenges:** Despite their wide deployment, customer service interactive voice response (IVR) and speech applications are generally perceived as "necessary evils" by customers, and as such, many organizations are loath to invest in these applications beyond their use for basic call routing. This means that a similarly healthy dose of skepticism is heaped upon companies such as Interactions that purport to change the dynamics of those applications. As a result, Interactions faces an uphill battle in gaining enough trust to even get a chance to present its story to prospective clients.

Prospective clients must also be willing to then consider an "x as a service" (XaaS) model for some or all of their self-service applications — a pricing model that is still in the early stages of adoption in contact centers.

**Who Should Care:** Contact center planners and architects in companies that look to use differentiated customer service, including phone-based self-service, as a competitive advantage should consider Interactions' solutions, particularly where the company is open to an XaaS acquisition model for customer service solutions.

## KomBea.

Lehi, Utah ([www.kombea.com](http://www.kombea.com))

*Analysis by Jim Davies*

**Why Cool:** KomBea's solution enables contact centers to automate repetitive processes and provide agents with prerecorded audio clips that can be played to callers at specific points in a call in order to improve compliance with internal and/or industry-regulated processes by making sure that the information communicated and process followed is exactly correct. Doing so enables companies to lower costs associated with agent training, the work associated with incomplete information (e.g., checking warranty status before authorizing a return) and fines for noncompliance, among other things. From the customer's perspective, the caller is engaging with a human rather than a machine, but the interaction is blended with relevant personalized recordings that provide the right information in a clear and succinct manner, such as details of a flight that the customer has just booked or the delivery time of an order just placed. From the agent's perspective, agents are less fatigued at the end of the day and can relax more, knowing the process is correct. As a result, customer satisfaction is higher and agent churn is reduced, as KomBea helps overcome the repetitive and exhausting aspects of the agent's role.

**Challenges:** KomBea is a small organization (less than \$3 million in annual revenue) and has fewer than 10 customers using its subscription-based offering, which starts at \$199 per seat, per year. As a niche vendor in a market teeming with large software vendors with extensive R&D and acquisition budgets, it is likely that any one of several vendors could add this functionality to its portfolio within a short time frame, thus diminishing KomBea's value proposition. In addition, the experience is not totally seamless for customers. Although technically possible, each agent does not record his or her own scripts due to the time and cost involved. Instead, KomBea records a handful of different male/female voices for the prerecorded audio, and the organization chooses which of those sound most like each particular agent. While the conversation does move back and forth between the live agent and the prerecorded audio, KomBea claims customers have not expressed any associated concerns.

**Who Should Care:** KomBea's solution provides a very different way of managing the customer/agent interaction and one that potentially has a lot of benefits to process-intensive customer service centers where consistency is key. It can also help with aspects such as PCI (automating the capture and playback of a credit card number without the agent's intervention) and order approvals by capturing and playing back the voice signature of the customer. Managers and executives within

customer service organizations where consistency and compliance are paramount should explore KomBea's ability to partly automate customer-agent interactions. Business process outsourcing (BPO) service providers that need to deliver greater levels of automation, process consistency, compliance and data security should take interest. Collection agencies might be particularly interested, due to the importance of both high productivity and compliance with national and state debt collection laws. With rising labor costs, security issues, the ongoing issue of accents and the drive toward better performance metrics, KomBea's solution provides an appealing value proposition.

## Qlika

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Tel Aviv, Israel ([www.qlika.com](http://www.qlika.com))

*Analysis by Michael Maoz*

**Why Cool:** Qlika is a cloud-based software technology that allows a business to leverage a smartphone or tablet (such as the iPad) as a means of providing customer service or field service support through rich media that could include video, static images or text data. It requires zero download to the user's device, yet generates an interface that is consistent with the specific smartphone or tablet. Media is not stored in the cloud, but rather on the client's systems. The simplicity of a quick add-on product to make the customer (or service technician) experience more effective versus buying an entire application or development stack is what is interesting about the offering.

**Challenges:** As a very young startup that has only recently received a first round of funding, Qlika will face the usual challenges of growing a sales force and marketing a differentiating message. Because the technology is cross-functional, the company will need to demonstrate that there is something sufficiently compelling in a specific business case to overcome the lack of a functional footprint.

**Who Should Care:** Any company that is looking for a fast and easy way of supporting the customer or field sales technician with instructions will benefit from looking at this functionality. In use cases ranging from how to set up a new television, to how to find your way around a new bank, shopping mall or cruise ship, to helping field technicians visualize a new piece of equipment and its repair, this is an easy way to leverage investments in smartphones and tablet computers.

This is part of a set of related research. See the following for an overview:

- Cool Vendors 2012: The Nexus Alters Business and Consumer Strategies

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