

# Technology is great but employees always have the last word

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Translated from the [original article](#) in Dutch.

**Investing heavily in technology better supports employees with their responsibilities. That's what Cygnific, a subsidiary of KLM and one of the largest Sales and Service Centres within the Air France-KLM group, does, with offices in Amsterdam and Enschede in the Netherlands and more than 1000 employees.**



## Freedom and Responsibility

"We are fully focussed on employee empowerment. That means training and coaching and then trusting and letting go. We empower our employees to answer questions and resolve problems. After that, it becomes personal and you can really touch the heart of customers," says Ramón Delima, CEO of Cygnific. "Seven years ago we started using Lean 6 Sigma as a system. We are so enthusiastic about it that we have presented a lot about it. That made other brands ask us to carry out their customer service. These are brands like Rituals that are just as obsessed with customer experience as we are." Cygnific found that focusing on the 'ease of doing business' through many self-service options is no longer enough. 'Emotional convenience' provides the necessary added value and distinctive character with empathetic, authentic, proactive, and personal contact. "With Covid-19, it has become even more apparent. There are far fewer flights, but we are busier than ever. Customers want to be

sure of the rules and procedures for flights and destinations, and therefore they require more contact, consultation and confirmation.'

## New platform

This approach requires flexibility and the ability to innovate, so there was a need for a new platform for telephony and all other channels. A cloud platform that could be rolled out worldwide within Air France-KLM. "We took the time to make the selection. It is not only important for an organisation to make a good inventory of its own requirements, but also to see what the market has to offer. In the end, three suppliers were selected on the basis of logical considerations such as specifications and finances, and Odigo was ultimately chosen. An important, decisive factor was the relationship. They have the same vision for the future, are enthusiastic about our ambitions and are also a challenger in the

market, just like us. We share our corporate culture and ambitions. That is a good basis for a partnership, after all, you are choosing a long-term relationship with substantial investments from both sides. Then you want to make it really work together. My own experience from the Netherlands is also very positive, I have even spoken extensively with their CEO, Erwan Le Duff. That says something about the commitment of their entire organisation.”

At the moment Odigo is still busy setting up the platform and from the beginning of 2021 it will be rolled out to all 25 customer service centres around the world. “Traditionally, customer service centres such as Cygnific are designed to handle separate channels, but we are now in the transition to a more market and language-oriented approach. One department or group is then responsible for all channels within their work area. Omnichannel and blending are then necessary. That means less time for administration and more time and attention for the customer. And more flexibility. An example: if there is suddenly fog at Schiphol Airport, our contact centre will experience a peak of phone calls and social media from stranded travellers for whom solutions must be found. Only after a few days do we see the effect in the complaints department. In the future, we will be able to deal with both peaks with the same larger group of employees. And the tools facilitate that.” Another advantage is that Cygnific will soon share the platform with sister organisation Bluelink, part of Air France, thereby encouraging mutual learning and collaboration. The most important channels are telephony, email, chat and social media. This will soon be orchestrated by Odigo and the ongoing conversations that consist of interactions of the same customer on different channels can be seen.

## ‘Augmented agents’

“Technology is an important aspect for our services. On the one hand, we want to ensure that customers don’t actually need us because we can quickly solve a question based on automation without human intervention. But we mainly believe in the hybrid form – ‘augmented agents’ where the system automatically formulates an answer, but the employee can use it as they see fit. An employee always hears more. I recently overheard a conversation with a stranded passenger at an international airport. The system suggested the alternative flight with the shortest travel time over Heathrow London with a layover of 5 hours. But my coworker made a better offer: “I hear a small child with you – would you rather go to a hotel now and take the direct flight home tomorrow?” That’s real customer service.”

## Don’t test on customers

“Looking to the future, we would like to see even more clients from within and outside the aviation industry with the same passion for empathy and quality in customer contact as we do. And we continue to invest in technology to support the employees (augmented agents). For example, by presenting information in real time during conversations based on keywords. This saves research time for employees and gives even more room for contact with the customer. That technology must be mature enough; we will certainly test it internally first. But absolutely not on our customers, who are our most important assets after all.”



The original article, in Dutch, can be found [here](#)