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27
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Also In This Issue:

- The Importance of Quality In a Recessionary Economy
- Sixteenth Annual MVP Quality Award Winners
- Top Tips To Build and Keep Customer Loyalty With CRM



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Nadji Tehrani, CEO, Technology Marketing Corp.

The Importance of Quality In a Recessionary Economy

"Companies that sacrifice call center quality for short-term savings in operations end up losing customers in the long run."

— Source: Infocision Management Corporation

Since 1982, as the contact/CRM center industry's first and pioneering publication, this magazine has dedicated itself not only to provide outstanding editorial coverage to help the industry grow, but also, to recognize outstanding performances by many vendors who have also helped the industry achieve many milestones.

In this special MVP Quality issue, which has been a tradition of Customer Interaction Solutions® magazine for the last 16 years, I would like to once again stress the enormous importance that quality plays not only in customer care and customer retention, but also in the very survival of any corporation.

The Aftermath of Offshoring Madness

Around the turn of the century, as I predicted in a number of my editorials, many companies decided to take their call centers offshore primarily for one and only one reason, "cheap labor."

Companies ignored myriad problems associated with offshoring, which included lack of experience, over promising and NOT delivering, poor attitude, rudeness, cultural hurdles, and the poor communication skills of offshore agents.

I predicted that the companies who go offshore primarily for cost reasons, will eventually lose many customers and unavoidably, after losing millions of dollars, will learn the expensive lesson that if you like to do it right, you need to keep your call centers in the United States or near-shore or in an area where communications, experience, quality and cultural similarity exists. Yes, one might save a few dollars by offering lower compensation to an offshore agent, but if that situation causes the company to lose a \$100,000 per year customer, then that is no bargain.

When I predicted the eventual return of the companies, people thought I was crazy. But today, I can share with you that with a few exceptions, many of the offshore companies have decided to return to America, and in fact that has been a key reason for the continued growth of the contact center industry in America. A great example of that is Infocision Management Corporation, who provided us the following information, which I think is relevant to our comments:

"Some offshore contact center businesses are returning

Congratulations to all of The MVP Quality Award winners recognized in this issue.

I'd like to take this opportunity to extend heartfelt congratulations to all the honorees of the 16th annual MVP (Marketing Via Phone) Quality Awards. This year's winners exemplify the search for excellence. They have demonstrated to the editors of Customer Inter@ction Solutions their ability to build a feeling of community within their companies, while providing the best they can give to their clients.

These contact centers exist to get the job done while respecting the wishes and serving the needs of both the business world and the consumer world, providing both the technical and human sides of customer care. I know how difficult it is to win this coveted award, given the amount of competition, both domestic and overseas. We recognize and appreciate your major contributions to the growth and prosperity of our industry.

In my judgment, you are the cream of the crop and it is always a great pleasure to work with you.

— Nadji Tehrani



to the U.S., no question about it. There has and will continue to be a real shake-up of the Indian market. A call center is the voice of your company, so it's crucial to have mature, experienced professionals on the phones who can truly understand the regional and cultural nuances of your customers. Companies that sacrifice call center quality for short term savings in operations end up losing customers in the long run. Ultimately you want to look at the same things as you would on any outsource decision, paying special attention to important metrics such as talk times, wait time, reporting, security and lifetime value of the client interaction."

To do a good job of customer service, one must know the customer's business, they need to know the customer's preferences, one must provide appropriate services and technologies to the customers and above all, if customer care is not your company's core competency, then it is highly advisable to outsource your teleservices and customer care function to a reputable teleservices agency.

Quality is the Only Sustainable Competitive Advantage

As we all know, competitive advantage among many other things is another vital tool necessary for survival and growth of any company. One must not underestimate the necessity for the highest possible quality in any service or product offering because **outstanding quality leads to customer satisfaction which also leads to customer retention.**

As indicated in my January 2009 editorial, customer retention is a vital ingredient of remaining in business. One of the greatest things that I learned early in my career was that, **"Companies live or die from repeat business."** This makes it crystal clear why we need to focus not only on quality, but also customer care, CRM, etc.

For Doing a Good Job

To do a good job of customer service, one must know the customer's business, they need to know the customer's preferences, one must provide appropriate services and technologies to the customers and **above all, if customer care is not your company's core competency, then it is highly advisable to outsource your teleservices and customer care function to a reputable teleservices agency,** preferably company that is a member of Customer Interaction Solutions® (CIS) Top 50 Teleservices ranking and preferably a Top 50 company that has been a recipient of CIS's MVP Quality Award. Infocision Management Corporation is one such company, having exclusively earned 15 consecutive MVP Quality Awards. When it comes to quality teleservices, Infocision is in a class by itself.

As indicated in the December 2008 Buyer's Guide issue of CIS, we asked two leading companies to offer their opinions relating to the above discussions and here are their invaluable comments:

Nice Corporation

"The greatest technological need in the contact center right now is for solutions that will help transform the contact center into a value-added profit center, rather than a cost center. To achieve this critical goal, contact centers need comprehensive solutions that integrate quality management (QM) integrated with interaction analytics, agent coaching and a post-call customer feedback solution. This integrated approach enables call center supervisors to dramatically improve service levels, resulting in increased customer loyalty — one of the requirements for sustainable profitability."

Convergys

"Companies must understand customer preferences and utilize the right technologies to make this transition to a value-add model. It requires understanding why a call was made or what the drivers are for initiating a query or complaint.

To provide a proactive and seamless customer experience, companies need to know their customers and their pattern of behavior over time. So, it's important to have analysis of customer behaviors and intimate knowledge of call types and customer segments. How that information is deployed to agents at point of service is also very important."

In short, to be successful in any economy, you need to combine all of the above guidelines and follow them religiously. **CIS**

As always, I welcome your comments. Please e-mail them to me at nadjitehrani@tmcnet.com.



Call Center Software Online Community

<http://call-center-software.tmcnet.com>

In today's complex global environment of new technology, product sourcing, and labor markets, Five9's call center software is at the forefront of accelerating call center performance.

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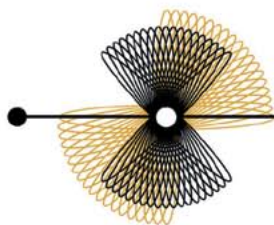
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Rich Tehrani, *Group Publisher, Technology Marketing Corp.*



Call Centers are Hidden Hiring Gems

Throughout past recessions, call centers picked up the slack and hired what amounted to millions of Americans to make and take calls. From 1990 onward, economic development agencies worldwide began to court contact centers to help them solve their job loss problems.

Typically they recruited outsourcers from the [TMC](#) Top 50 Teleservices list as well as smaller, faster-growing companies.

Now 20 years later, the call center climate has changed dramatically. IP communications allows agents to be located anywhere — even outside our borders. In addition, the Internet (e-mail, etc) is a viable marketing alternative to speaking on the phone.

And let's not forget outbound telemarketing, a practice that employed millions, has been wiped out by do not call regulations and with it billions in commerce and millions of jobs.

Remember — there will always be the need to speak over the phone when buying products — regardless of whether these calls are going over IP or not.

The inbound side of the contact center industry continues to grow and although there are obviously layoffs in the contact center space, I have seen precious little hiring anywhere besides a recent announcement that [IBM](#) will hire 1,300 support center agents in Iowa.

In addition, General Electric plans on hiring 1,400 new people in Guatemala for a new call center in that country.

And economic development agencies are beginning to realize once again they need to focus on contact centers to get people employed rapidly. As opposed to manufacturing where there are substantial water and electric demands, any office building with sufficient broadband can serve as a contact center location.

In addition, you can get a call center up and running in a matter of months — not 1+ years like other jobs/industries.

If you ask me, the best way to get hiring going in this country is to give tax breaks to companies adding domestic call center agents. Moreover — as unpopular a topic as this is — I say we should repeal the do-not-call list so we can have a shot at hiring a million telemarketing agents who can increase commerce and get people employed.

One final point — let's get the Federal government involved in promoting the domestic call center industry. In 1991, I was assigned to write an article about the Irish call center industry. [IDA](#) Ireland invited a few journalists to their country to see a number of contact centers and to interview the people running them.

As part of the tour we learned how Irish workers are highly social, speak multiple languages and are relatively cheap compared to their peers in Europe. We also learned Guinness doesn't travel well and tastes best in Dublin — but this is a subject best left for another time. Finally we learned that the country suspended corporate tax until the year 2000 in an effort to get companies to move to there.

The result? Ireland got a large share of the contact center market and other industries moved to this country as well. More recently Ireland has seen competitive pressure from places like Western Europe where costs are lower but for almost two decades they used common sense and savvy marketing to improve the employment situation in their country.

I would advocate the U.S. do the same thing. We should abolish corporate taxes until 2015, start an ad campaign focused on the benefits of hiring American workers and finally invite journalists the world over to come and tour our magnificent country. Start in New York, then D.C. and move on to LA and Silicon Valley.

These simple ideas are common sense to any PR professional or businessperson with marketing savvy. The question is, will our new administration take these ideas and run with them.

Sure, the term "shovel-ready" sounds great and all but not everyone wants to work with their hands or outside in the freezing cold. Contact centers can certainly be the indoor alternative to the shovel-ready projects we keep reading about.

President Obama... Are you reading? Do I need to send you a link so you can read this on your Blackberry? ;-)



Forwarding International Numbers

Global **Online** Community

TMCnet has joined with the industry's leading provider, TollFreeForwarding.com, to educate businesses about the benefits of utilizing international toll-free and local phone numbers.

TollFreeForwarding.com provides businesses with virtual toll-free and local phone numbers in over 75 countries, and 800 cities. Calls to these numbers are forwarded to each customer's call center or office. In addition to this, TollFreeForwarding.com offers related services, such as time profiles and virtual PBX functions.

Visit the Forwarding International Numbers Community for the resources and the latest news on:

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- International Calling
- International Toll-Free and Local Numbers, and telecommunications
- Capturing and serving new customers in foreign countries
- Establishing a virtual presence without a local call center or office

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Asset Acquisition: Smart Outsourcing For Hard Times

Call center outsourcing is more than just hiring a company to handle your overflow. It's a complex and intimate relationship. The core of that relationship is the tension that exists inside a lot of companies who come to realize that though their customers are their most important asset, handling their interactions is way beyond their core competency. That's when you bring someone else in, preferably an expert with robust infrastructure and solid experience.

In recent years, outsourcers have been growing larger. The biggest ones sport broader geographic footprints, many more agent stations, and a wider range of services offered beyond simple call handling. Of late there is also a new collaborative model emerging that brings outsourcers even closer to their clients: asset acquisition.

Asset acquisition is simply the purchase of one company's non-core functions by another. In the outsourcing world, that means that a large and well-financed outsourcer would literally buy part of its client: the call handling infrastructure, including facilities, technology and staff. In an asset acquisition scenario, that means that the outsourcing partner buys a company's call center, wherever it is located, and then operates it as an on-site adjunct to the client's business. It may seem extreme, but it has several advantages for both parties.

On the client side, the primary benefit is cost savings. Not only are they offloading the process of the interaction, as they would in a traditional outsourcing relationship, but here they are offloading an entire cost-structure, complete with salaries, benefits and site costs. And on top of that, the asset is actually monetized: the outsourcer is paying for the call center. In difficult economic times, that injection of cash can be very useful.

Dallas-based ACS has been a pioneer of asset acquisition as a strategy for growth. Darin Wright of ACS told me that his company has engaged in asset acquisition projects with some major clients, including Motorola, GM and GE. In Motorola's case, ACS took on more than 700 employees and about 16 global locations from that company. It monetized some HR functions that were outside the tech company's core focus and made process improvements.

He says that one of the advantages for Motorola was that they could eliminate those functions and see the benefits from Day One, because they were getting paid by someone who would run the facilities, instead of having to pay to shut the units down.

The second major benefit is what many companies look for in the first place from an outsourcer — relief from the cycle of buying and upgrading technology to stay competitive. Outsourcers, by definition, have a greater investment in having leading edge tools at their disposal. For them, since handling customer interactions is their core business, it's a competitive necessity. And the scale on which they buy that technology across multiple centers and thousands of agents means that they can support a higher

level of tools than their clients can. For the clients, asset acquisition represents a serious CapEx avoidance.

And the outsourcer benefits just as firmly. Outsourcers need capacity, but they don't need the uncertainty and risk of having to build greenfield capacity in hopes that there will be business to support it. In this model, they buy the assets that they know they can use (spurring client lock in along the way). And once bought, the call outsourcer can use their expertise to optimize the center's processes and leverage the center for more than just that one client.

Even the staff of the acquired center can benefit. Instead of being part a tangential, non-core group at a company where there may not be a career path or a future, they become embedded in a company that is expert at doing the things they have chosen to do; the managers and supervisors become peer professionals in a company devoted to the global, horizontal practice of what they do.

Wright says that the practice helps his company cope with growing demand for ACS' services. He cites another deal with the client was trying to rationalize the call center assets it had, and considering consolidations. "We were able to say rather than you trying to figure out how to do that, or having us come in and shut it down and migrate offshore, a better solution was why don't we come in, deploy our best practices, and our technology and processes." He says that ACS bought the 500-seat capacity center, where 400 agents were working.

Through process improvements, ACS reduced the client's actual requirements to about 250 seats. "That let us take 250 additional seats and bring in another client from our portfolio who had been needing a domestic call center, and back-fill in," Wright says.

This model is reminiscent of the practice seen in the 1990s where an outsourcer would try to win a client by building a call center in close proximity (or onsite with) a client. There were instances where service providers would locate airline reservation centers on the main airport of the client, in or near a headquarters. The new model has a lot more going for it. For one thing, it's a lot more collaborative. And for another, it has a slimming effect on the client, rather than a bulking up.

Being able to monetize the process very quickly can make a big difference to a company that's struggling with resource allocation issues — and in a way that doesn't compromise service quality. That's a win-win for everybody, including the customer. **CIS**



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- Every second in delay for website visitors to access pages costs firms customers according to new research by [Aberdeen Group](http://www.aberdeen.com) (www.aberdeen.com), a Harte-Hanks Company. The study revealed that business performance begins to suffer at 5.1 seconds of delay in response times of web applications. The research also revealed that every additional second after that could cause a decline in overall customer satisfaction by 16 percent, page views by 11 percent, and conversations by 7 percent.

Aberdeen cited higher customer expectations and lower tolerance for performance issues, along with new underlying technologies and usage patterns that are becoming more difficult to predict. To prevent or minimize customer dissatisfaction it says best-in-class firms manage measure application performance from an end-user perspective via passive monitoring. Meanwhile average and what it calls 'laggard' organizations predominately rely on internal monitoring of enterprise infrastructure and end-user surveys.

- Only 11 percent of companies garnered a rating of 'excellent' in the 2008 Customer Experience Index of large U.S. firms by [Forrester Research](http://www.forrester.com) (www.forrester.com) while 38 percent ranked as poor or very poor.

Barnes & Noble topped Forrester's ranking, while Charter Communications received the lowest score. Compared with the 2007 survey, banks made the largest improvements, led by U.S. Bancorp, SunTrust, and Citibank. Meanwhile Time Warner Cable, Charter Communications, and Blue Shield of California had the largest decline. Across verticals hotels and retailers topped the index while medical insurers and TV service providers ended up at the bottom.

- Customers of Interactive Intelligence's (www.inin.com) solutions who also use [Cisco's](http://www.cisco.com) Unified Communications Manager can take advantage of both vendors' systems without the need for costly and complex middle-ware layers. Interactive Intelligence has completed the Cisco interoperability

verification testing for the Unified Communications Manager solution using the session initiation protocol standard. The firm has participated in Cisco interoperability testing since 2001 when it offered integration via Cisco's telephony application programmer's interface.

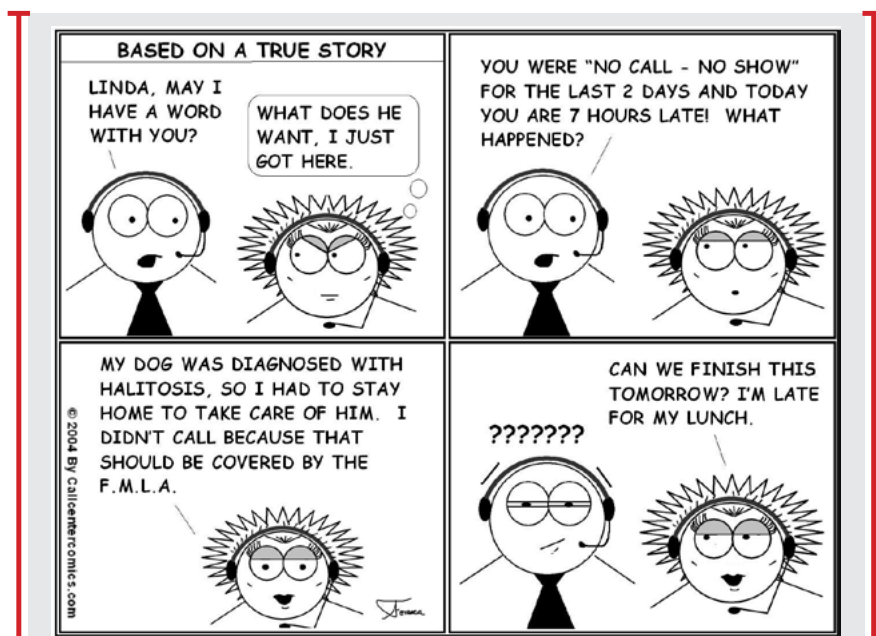
- Small/mid-sized firms who have customers living in other countries and who want to enable these buyers to reach them affordably can tap into Phone.com, which has selected [Voxbone](http://www.voxbone.com) (www.voxbone.com) to supply DID (direct-inward-dial) numbers outside of the U.S. Phone.com users can choose telephone numbers in those countries that when dialed will ring to their Phone.com 'Virtual Office.' The service's customized auto attendant then can ask for the called person's extension number and complete the calls.

With Phone.com and Voxbone foreign-terminating calls are local to callers; Voxbone carries them over its managed IP network to Phone.com, which routes them to end-customer with no perceptible delay. Phone.com customers pay a flat monthly rate for each DID. The numbers can also be directed to

ring home phones or cell phones, and to change routing by time-of-day rules. DIDs can be ordered for all included cities and countries through Phone.com's self-service web site, and paid for, like all of the provider's services, with a credit card.

- [Salesforce.com](http://www.salesforce.com) (www.salesforce.com) now offers a single source for trying, buying, and deploying native Force.com applications. The new solution, Force.com Checkout, permits integrated commerce and interacting with a single vendor for both their [salesforce.com](http://www.salesforce.com) and partner subscriptions.

Applications available through Force.com Checkout include: productivity tools from Appirio, compensation management from Callidus, financials and accounting ERP from CODA, non-profit constituent relationship management from Convio, and fleet management solutions from Datasul. Additionally Checkout offers Salesforce CRM administrator tools from DrivEnable, order management ERP solutions from Glovia, a subsidiary of [Fujitsu](http://www.fujitsu.com), staffing solutions from Jobscience, and recruiting, real estate, and customer reference tracking from Riptide.





• Teleservices firm Thomas L. Cardella & Associates (TLC&A) (www.tlcsociates.com) has been growing rapidly with new and expanded facilities and new hires in Cedar Rapids, Coralville, Keokuk, and Marshalltown, Iowa. It also has at-home agents.

TLC&A has been focusing and experiencing strong growth serving the direct marketing needs of Fortune 500 clients in the financial services, insurance, publication, specialty retail, technology, telecom, entertainment, utilities, and travel industries. One of these clients, Office Depot, has contracted with TLC&A to provide B2B teleservices,

which led it to announce that hiring will begin immediately for 60 new full time Office Depot account manager positions in Coralville and Cedar Rapids, paying up to \$14 per hour.

- West Interactive has selected [PerSay](http://www.persay.com) (www.persay.com) to provide hosted voice biometrics to authenticate callers and customers. Biometric speaker verification technology uses the power of voice to provide the critical component in an effective multi-factor authentication solution. Like a fingerprint, each person can be identified by the distinct features of their vocal characteristics and

speaking patterns. Voice verification is the process of comparing a voice sample with a stored, digital voice model, or voiceprint, for the purpose of verifying identity.

PerSay's flagship product, VocalPassword™, is accent/language independent, standards-based and seamlessly integrates with existing VoiceXML platforms. By verifying a caller's identity in real-time, using a simple spoken passphrase, VocalPassword provides a convenient, secure method for enabling self-service transactions in the IVR or cost-effectively authenticating a caller to an enterprise's contact center.

Verint Impact 360 for Public Safety Powered by Audiolog

Verint (www.verint.com) has come out with Impact 360 for Public Safety Powered by Audiolog. This is the next generation of the firm's proven call recording, quality assurance (QA), retrieval and archive solution aimed at emergency service operators such as 9-1-1 contact centers. It features integrated workforce optimization, quality assurance, training, and public feedback applications.

Verint Impact 360 for Public Safety has been written in response to changing and growing needs from emergency operators such liability (and cost) reduction, incident reconstruction, investigation facilitation, and improved effectiveness. It supplies a single platform across IP, TDM and radio, integrated QA, a multi-channel player for incident replay, screen recording, and instant recall for playback of current and recent calls.

Key Features and Components

- **Multimedia Recording.** Captures telephone and radio interactions and related data—including phone numbers and locations—and helps increase immediacy, accuracy, quality and overall service. It also provides the option for capture of console PC screens
- **Quality Assurance.** Enables efficient call review and scoring to ensure 9-1-1 agent proficiency, skills enhancement, and supply regular performance feedback, in compliance with state and agency standards. Flexible form creation, embedded call playback and dynamic reporting provide maximum impact from invested QA time
- **Incident Reconstruction and Analytics.** Permits call searches and makes the retrieval of important recordings easier through 'Application Event Triggers' by tagging calls with key informa-

tion, such as CAD incident ID or call taker name. The result is the potential for better investigative insights

- **eLearning and Coaching.** Delivers learning and timely communication to agents' desktops, addresses skill gaps, and helps increase productivity and staff retention
- **Performance Scorecards.** Empowers 9-1-1 agents and dispatchers to view personal performance in relation to agency goals
- **Citizen Survey.** Provides outbound surveys as follow-ups to citizen calls, thereby introducing a proactive approach to quality reinforcement and citizen satisfaction, and helps to build citizen confidence, and support

System Requirements

System Compatibility: Voice Recording: Analog, Digital stations, T1, E1, VoIP, and Trunked Radio systems. Desktops (Screen Recording): Windows 2000, Windows XP, Windows Vista. Audiolog Servers: Windows XP-SP3, Windows Server 2003.

Pricing

For example, 24 seats of Impact 360 for Public Safety Powered by Audiolog, including software and hardware, starts at \$23,000. **CIS**

By Tim Searcy



Time to Talk

As the legislative season gets into full swing, the volume of complaints about teleservices are climbing to a dull roar. I do not have all the answers. As a matter of fact, I am not certain I have any answers. However, what I do have is a lot of questions. Unfortunately, these are not my questions. Instead consumers are asking for answers from the teleservices industry and from policy makers. Here are several question areas which demand our attention:

Jobs — Lou Dobbs rails against companies (including customer care) that choose to locate labor fulfillment offshore. The Obama administration is receiving pressure to create tax incentives and tax penalties to force firms to bring jobs back to the United States. With a price differential of greater than \$10 per hour, it is hard to imagine an incentive or disincentive package sufficient to overcome the transition costs and ongoing financial benefit of locating centers offshore. However, businesses are facing a growing frustration with poor service attributed to offshore contact centers. Consumer activism coupled with government efforts may combine to create a backlash against offshore, which will be difficult to ignore. The dialog that continues to find its way into industry conferences and conventions revolves around the concept of “right sourcing.” Each firm has made business decisions related to sales, service and support by telephone and depending upon business goals and needs, determines where to locate their contact centers. The conversation used to be about first call resolution, customer satisfaction and service delivery, and which country or populace could do the best with the least. For offshoring to remain viable, it will be necessary to change the focus of leverage to which location can do the best. Period. Firms that want to use offshore centers may ultimately have to prove that the choice is not “just as good as American,” but rather it is better.

Consumer Relevance — The old reference to companies trying to sell siding for the home to consumers living in apartments is by and large gone. Companies target their marketing efforts better, and data analysis has made many of the simple mistakes of misdirection disappear. However, the outbound contact center is better equipped to manage preference than inbound centers. Many companies are desperately trying to turn their cost centers into profit centers by making their service centers sell during service calls. It is not unusual to contact your credit card company or make a call for technical support only to have the end of the call turn into a sales discussion on an unrelated product or service. These sales presentations are often germane and interesting, but they are certainly outside of the intent of the original call. Additionally, phone calls made for the purpose of purchasing something from a catalog

company or from DRTV turn into multiple up-sell opportunities. Many of the products being promoted have nothing to do with even the product category of the initial call. Consumers and regulators are fed up with the overwhelming use of the up-sell. What is the prudent level of ongoing sales effort after the initial business of an inbound call is complete?

Consumer Convenience — The Do-Not-Call registry was in many ways more about convenience than the concept of privacy or intrusion as stated by the government. Most of the arguments in support of the DNC could be boiled down to annoyance. This same line of argument is being leveled at both technology and personnel issues in the contact center industry. Currently customers resent being put on hold without a queue announcement to alert them to how long they will be on hold. As a matter of course, consumers will often press “0” to try to reach a live operator. Consumers receive a second bit of frustration when the attempt to reach a live operator on an automated or a long hold call fail. The other consumer convenience issue relates to first call resolution. In the utility industry and other monopoly or near monopoly industries, rate increases and fines have been tied to service levels including hold times and first call resolution. By demanding that companies train and empower call center representatives, it is proven that a higher first call resolution can be achieved, and therefore consumers will not have to call again to address a problem. It is inconvenient to have to call back multiple times on the same issue, and consumers are unwilling to continue the practice.

At times, these issues only inspire anger on the part of business and the assumption that the government or consumers “just don’t understand” or are bent on our destruction. This is not universally true. Instead, the inquiries are based on the hope that some accommodation can be made among the major constituent groups of business, consumers and the government. It is the goal of the ATA’s Self-Regulatory Organization to provide a forum for all parties to discuss the proper balance of interests. If you would like to join the dialog, please contact me at tim@ataconnect.org, and I will get you connected. **CIS**



Sixteenth Annual MVP (Marketing Via Phone) Quality Award Winners

This is the sixteenth year Customer Interaction Solutions magazine has brought you the winners of its MVP (Marketing Via Phone) Quality Awards. In the ensuing years since we introduced the awards in 1993, we have been impressed by the growing sophistication of the quality measures that have been introduced to the contact center by the leading-edge companies that apply for our MVP Quality Award. Over the years, we have seen new technologies adopted and the standards for a quality interaction refined and improved. Each of the following companies has demonstrated, through its MVP Quality Awards application, a true commitment to high ethical standards, stringent policies and challenging goals.

On a 16-point essay, entrants described a specific teleservices program and its results, and explained their overall policies and procedures, including human resources, technologies, customer services, ergonomics and public image that are used to establish, sustain and measure the program's quality. We've shared some of the most compelling items on the winners' application essays with readers. Congratulations to all of the winners. **CS**

— The Editors



GOLD AWARD WINNERS

APAC Customer Services, Inc.
b-to-b and b-to-c inbound
Bannockburn, IL
www.apaccustomerservices.com

Q. State your policies on quality and your company's philosophy/motto on quality.

A. At the heart of all APAC's quality programs is a cultural commitment to continuous improvement that is evident within all levels of the organization. Our quality mission is to be recognized as the industry leader in progressive quality solutions and valued by our clients as critical business partners delivering excellence in customer service and innovative, insightful market intelligence.

Cross Country Automotive Services
b-to-b and b-to-c integrated inbound/outbound
Medford, MA
www.crosscountry-auto.com

Q. What do you do for customers that gives them the impression of quality and high ethical standards?

A. Cross Country Automotive Services (CCAS) is a metrics driven organization. We measure every key aspect of service delivery and drive for continuous improvements in quality and cost. As the touch point to the customer, the performance of our CSRs is a key to customer satisfaction. When hiring CSRs, CCAS utilizes a competency-based selection and structured interview process to determine which applicants are most qualified. Competencies are the sum total of the required knowledge, skills abilities, and experience to perform the job. The competencies were identified specifically for CCAS by the HayGroup, HR consultants specializing in talent acquisition.

InfoCision Management Corp.
b-to-c integrated inbound/outbound
Akron, OH
www.infocision.com

Q. What do you do to demonstrate your commitment to staff quality?

A. InfoCision demonstrates its commitment to quality in all of its daily operations. Perhaps the best evidence of our



commitment to quality, however, is our Communicator training and development cycle. Our Communicators are the core of every successful program we provide for our clients; therefore we offer numerous, extensive opportunities for their professional development. InfoCision recruits, trains and tests Communicators based on the types of clients they will serve. In addition, dedicated QA trainers provide all management staff with the same training Communicators undergo. They also train the Communicators and QA staffs to ensure that quality is held paramount during the training process. Our account, operations and QA staffs stay in constant contact with each other during this process, in accord with our commitment to quality.



SILVER AWARD WINNERS

eTelecare Global Solutions
b-to-c integrated inbound/
outbound
Scottsdale, AZ
www.etelecare.com

Q. State your policies on quality and your company's philosophy/motto on quality.

A. eGS has become a leading international provider of high-quality call center services through our strategy of "Invest to Outperform," which focuses on making the right investments to ensure we outperform all other outsourcers used by our clients, regardless of geography. Quality is a significant element of this strategy, helping us deliver superior service that reduces costs by cutting average handle times, increasing first-call resolutions and improving customer satisfaction.

Hamilton Contact Center Services

b-to-c inbound
Aurora, NE
www.hamiltontm.com

Q. What elements make it easy to do business with your firm?

A. One of the distinguishing features of our company is our direct affiliation with sister companies in the telecommunications and computer industries. This relationship gives us a distinct advantage on terms of technology, flexibility, and responsiveness and gives us the ability to respond to unique program needs quickly and easily. We have the necessary resources to modify systems and programs, develop or secure

the development of new technology, and implement new programs in order to satisfy client needs.

NCO Customer Management, Inc.

b-to-c integrated inbound/outbound
Horsham, PA
www.ncogroup.com

Q. How do you ensure a consistent message of quality across various contact channels?

A. NCO's commitment to quality and focus on consistency in our training programs is maintained through internal meetings and training sessions for evaluations. NCO evaluates the effectiveness of our training programs by directly tying the training process to our quality assurance initiatives. The training program instructs agents on topics they will be graded on through the quality assurance program. Similarly, the quality assurance program helps NCO gauge the effectiveness of our training programs. All training programs and quality metrics are approved by our clients.

NOVO 1

b-to-b outbound
Laurel, MD
www.novo1.com

Q. How do you handle complaints from your clients' customers?

A. When communications involve complaints, reps assigned to handle them are trained to rectify surface level issues. However if the issue escalates, the call is routed to a well-versed supervisor. Supervisors may consult customer records or review taped conversations of the sale and verification to arrive at an understanding of the problem. If the supervisor is unable to resolve the matter or provide the customer with complete satisfaction, the call is documented and referred to the Client Service Principal for resolution with the customer and subsequent feedback to the client.

Synergy Solutions

b-to-c inbound
Phoenix, AZ
www.synergysolutionsinc.com

Q. What are your monitoring practices?

A. Monitoring is conducted by Quality Coaches, Supervisors, Account Managers, Center and Senior Management. We conduct weekly, live, listening sessions with the client and we conduct live sessions with our



internal team. Each CCR is monitored on a daily basis and will have two completed monitoring forms each week. Each completed monitoring form consists of the monitoring of three complete presentations. The call monitoring critique form is customized per each client and completed by a Quality Coach. Quality Coaches schedule feedback sessions daily with the CCRs. Calls may be digitally recorded for further review.



BRONZE AWARD WINNERS

ACCENT Marketing Services, LLC
b-to-c inbound
Jeffersonville, IN
www.accentonline.com

Q. How do you measure customer satisfaction?

A. ACCENT recommends to all clients the use of a third-party customer satisfaction survey provider to measure customer satisfaction. The independent provider contacts customers within 24 hours of a customer care interaction. CSR-level scoring and verbatim customer comments are provided back to ACCENT for deep dive and root cause analysis. ACCENT also gathers customer feedback through self-assessment surveys, which are provided to customers via email or IVR upon completion of a customer care interaction.

Aegis BPO Service Limited

b-to-c inbound
Irving, TX/Mumbai, India
www.aegiscomgroup.com

Q. Describe all efforts to promote the quality image of teleservices to the public.

A. Aegis believes that the End Users who interact with us are our biggest advertisement. We believe that each interaction with an End User is an opportunity for us to add another promoter of our clients brand, our brand and our services. In pursuit of 100% reference-able interactions, Aegis has invested in sufficient staff so that customers experience an ease of access; recruited best in class personnel with the Right Aptitude, Attitude, Knowledge and Skills; instituted a four-week long intensive training program that prepares employees in the fine art of customer service; and defined processes with an accent towards customer sensitivity and courtesy.

The Connection

b-to-c integrated inbound/outbound
Burnsville, MD
www.the-connection.com

Q. What is special or unique about your staff that contributes to quality?

A. At The Connection, we have unique values and ideas regarding our staff that greatly contributes to our overall quality. We strongly believe in service values and employee-focused cultures that can often be found in rural communities. Another unique attribute of our staff is our Bilingual capability, which allows us the opportunity to provide a significant level of Spanish-language support to our clients. We have Team Supervisors and Supervisors fluent in Spanish who evaluate CSRs in their own language.

Intelenet Global Services

b-to-c inbound and outbound
Mumbai, India
www.intelenetglobal.com

Q. Explain how quality has evolved in your contact center, how it is measured.

A. Since its inception in 2000, Intelenet has always remained dedicated to its vision of 'quality through continuous process improvements'. Intelenet embraced **COPC** as a strategic initiative in early 2003 and since then it has grown to become the minimum capability that any of our processes need to deliver to. In January 2006, Intelenet became the first company in the world to achieve COPC version 4.0 Gold Standard Certification. In 2007, our processes were re-certified and now cover over 1,300 people making it one of the largest entities to be certified in version 4.0.

TELUS International

b-to-c inbound
Singapore
www.telus.com

Q. How do you handle complaints from your client's customers?

A. We view customer complaints as an important issue and key area of improvement for us. In the event of any customer complaints, depending on the severity of the issue/cascading effects it might have, we initiate Six Sigma projects to address the same. By doing so, we systematically dissect the problem, identify the root causes, address them effectively and put in a sustainable/preventive mechanism in place.



Presence: The Next Generation of Customer Interactions



When you walk into a business with a sales counter, like an auto parts dealer or an electrical or plumbing supply house, the counter person will attempt to answer your inquiries and/or find the products you want. If they cannot assist you, they will yell, page, text, or call the most best available expert for the answers or if need be to assist you directly.

That is the notion behind presence management, or presence: to replicate this same positive customer experience in contact centers. If the agents cannot provide the answers, resolve the issues, or complete the sales they can reach out to others in the enterprise that are available to assist. The agents get the information and get back to the persons with it or they can hot-transfer the calls or texts, or they can conference in the experts.

Presence is different from escalation, long used in tech support/help desk and in complex sales. Escalation entails transferring contacts and any supporting documentation such as trouble tickets to ever-higher formal teams until resolution. Presence cuts through these rigid layers by reaching out to on-hand professionals, who do not have to speak with customers directly or see the information unless they wish.

Presence then is arguably the next generation of customer interaction. Implemented correctly, it can boost sales, customer satisfaction and retention and loyalty, and lower costs. Even more importantly, presence can unite and focus your entire organization, and your resources, on meeting the needs of the most important entity there is: your customers.

Presence evolution

Presence has been around and has been practiced informally in contact centers for at least 10 years. Agents who could not answer inquiries would call, e-mail, or IM the questions to someone in their organizations who had helped them in the past or would get their name from colleagues or supervisors, then get back to callers.

Yet this informal presence created inconsistent and slower assistance to customers. Agents would not know who was available and would be forced to return calls when they had the answers.

These failings created the need for formalized presence where agents could reach out to experts systematically; they would know their availability. It was first attempted in the later 1990s, using CTI according to Ross Daniels, Director, Unified Communications Solutions Marketing at Cisco. With these applications experts were

required to sign on to a slightly modified agent desktop, as this was the only way to track presence or availability at the time.

“The problem was that experts had refused to sign into the applications because this was outside of their normal manner of conducting their daily work,” recounts Daniels.

Thanks to an evolution in communications technology, and to new software and methods, formal presence has become practical. It relies on IP-enabled unified communications (UC) applications. UC allows experts, or anyone else in the organization, to let others know of their availability and how they like to be contacted: voice, IM, SMS, or e-mail without having to log into an ACD or CTI or have their client apps. Specialized applications clusters experts, agents then pick the group they need, the solutions finds one that can take the inquiry and supplies them with their channel choice, and the agents then pose the customers’ issues, questions, and needs. ACDs and routers have becoming integrated with UC applications. These developments have minimized though not eliminated the issues with informal and with formal CTI-based presence.

SMS has one of the strongest potential both externally and internally as both a presence and communications tool thanks to widespread use via smartphones and by Gen-Yers who are entering the workplace and becoming adult consumers, and buying decisionmakers. For these reasons Interactive Intelligence recently introduced SMS on its CIC router.

“We use SMS in our system to control a user’s presence,” explains Joe Staples, Senior Vice President, Worldwide Marketing, Interactive Intelligence. “As an example, if I’m out of the office and want to change my status from ‘in a meeting’ to ‘available, follow-me’ I can do that with a simple SMS message to our CIC system.”

Presence benefits and drivers

The key benefit of presence is that it can significantly prune or in some cases axe escalated and followup calls which may increase higher first contact resolution (FCR) rates and result in greater customer satisfaction and retention and at the same



time reduce costs. Maintaining and increasing FCR is becoming challenging as customer have become more demanding thanks to having gone through self-service and because they feel more empowered; it is a buyers' not a sellers' market.

"Calls that are getting to agents are by nature more complex, requiring greater levels of expertise," explains Daniels. "Yet it is not realistic to train agents to become experts at every topic or have the skills to handle complicated problems or sales."

Lawrence Byrd, Director, Communications-Enabled Business Processes, [Avaya](#) sees presence as being key to present a consistent attractive brand image through delivering uniformly high quality customer experience via their branches as well as through contact centers.

"Enterprises need to adjust their viewpoints from unified communications to unified organization, of serving the customer regardless where they are in those firms," says Byrd. "Presence enables this through their employees via their branch desktops."

Presence can also be used to manage call and contact spikes and sags, with informal agents filling in the gaps. This application permits excellent service by knowledgeable people while avoiding the costs of outsourcing contact handling to handle the responses.

Ultimately presence enables your entire enterprise to be the contact center, enabling to shift the focus back from treating customer service as a department, which has happened in too many organizations, to looking at it as your core. For without customers you do not have an enterprise.

"Presence allows over time the enterprise to become part of your customer service operation," points out Bern Elliot, Vice President and distinguished analyst, [Gartner](#). "Instead of presence as an add-on go to for subject matter experts it becomes the core routing and with it you can have anyone in the enterprise support to contact center."

The benefits of presence can add up. One of Aspect's customers, a major airline receives 45,000 contacts per day, mostly voice, has been looking into Aspect's new presence/UC solution (see box). The air carrier estimated that over 10 percent of their inquiries require further calls. With studies showing that the typical voice interaction costs \$6 that adds up to over \$25,000 per day.

"If this airline can drive down the amount of followup calls by five percent that means huge cost savings, better customer service and retention for them in a highly competitive market that is under major cost constraints," explains Michael Kropidowski, product marketing manager, [Aspect](#).

These benefits are becoming felt at the enterprise level. Forrester Research found an increased adoption of UC solutions, with 83 percent of enterprise respondents to a recent study evaluating, piloting, and implementing these applications.

"Most UC decision-makers are aware of the value these solutions bring to their business operations and understand how to justify their business case," explains Forrester Senior Analyst Natalie Petouhoff. "We found that 86 percent of enterprises indicate they can make a good business case for UC."

Presence Solutions Sampler

There are a growing number of highly capable presence/UC solutions both standalone and partnered:

- [Aspect](#)'s Aspect® Unified IP™ 6.6 offers a new Ask-an-Expert feature that utilizes the instant messaging and presence technology available in Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007. Ask-an-Expert functionality, combined with routing and prioritization capabilities, enables contact center agents to engage any appropriate and available expert to assist with the customer inquiry
- [Avaya](#)'s Intelligent Presence solves the challenge of integrating diverse sources of presence information from different vendor platforms using multiple protocols. It does so by aggregating telephony, desktop and application presence information from Avaya and from other firms such as IBM and Microsoft. It bridges industry standard protocols including SIP/SIMPLE and XMPP
- [Cisco](#) Unified Communications System Release 7.0 extends unified communications features such as dial via office, presence, and corporate directory look-up to mobile workers. It also has new time-of-day rules that enable mobile workers to easily adjust single-number-reach settings when they are traveling or do not wish to be disturbed
- [Nortel](#) Converged Office integrates Nortel's CS 1000 IP-PBX or CS 2100 IP-PBX and Nortel Application Center with Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 and Microsoft Office Communicator. The Nortel solutions provide voice, messaging, IVR, and web integration. The Microsoft applications powers presence, uniting employee contact information stored in the Active Directory with the ways they communicate. They manage all real-time communications and provide the user interface
- [Toshiba](#)'s Strata ACD IP Call Center Suite can be combined with its Net Phone 6.0 to provide presence. These include an IM or chat feature that enables agents to instantly text message other users, and which can be applied throughout the organization or limited as defined by the enterprise. It also shows real-time status of other users, including by phone i.e. idle, busy, or do not disturb, status message such as 'in meeting' as well as text entered by the user, and chat/IM status: if the application has been launched and the agent is online to accept chat requests



Small/mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) can also benefit from presence/UC because it permits more effective tapping of employee expertise that can help them survive and grow against often bigger competition. SMEs are arguably a natural fit for presence because they are entrepreneurial, flexible, accustomed to multi-tasking and customer-focused.

SME-oriented suppliers are now seeing more inquiries from their clients on these solutions. For example inContact (formerly UCN) has begun to roll them out on its hosted contact center platform. inContact provides both voice/data networks and hosted solutions aimed at smaller (under-100 seat) contact centers.

"You can argue that SMEs don't really need presence by definition but sometimes their contact center agents do not have the breadth of knowledge and training as those in larger firms," says Aspect's Kropidowski. "Presence gives them that edge by connecting customers to those who do in their firms by giving them the ability to leverage everyone."

Presence challenges

The biggest challenge to formal presence remains obtaining and keeping expert buy-in. Though the UC technology is less intrusive than the CTI applications of the past, there are still cultural barriers that have to be overcome before experts sign on to presence.

The expert pool, made up of highly skilled and experienced individuals such as accountants, engineers, logistics specialists, and senior IT personnel usually do not mind helping out on occasion. Yet they can also very busy and at times they can be abrupt and occasionally gruff.

"The technology side of presence is the easy part," explains Daniels. "Then there is HR and management side: educating employees on the importance of customer satisfaction to the enterprise and to their careers to get their buy-in, compensation changes, and people-skills training. Also, calls need to be distributed equitably among experts to ensure fairness."

Another challenge is integrating different UC applications used by others in the expert pool such as consultants and partners to ensure interoperability. There are various UC solutions widely used including Cisco's Unified Personal Communicator, IBM SameTime, and Microsoft Office Communicator. Yet common standards for presence and IM are still emerging, so tying together presence and IM solutions from different vendors requires some due diligence.

There are also potential integration challenges to be aware of when deploying presence/UC solutions in contact centers with existing routing solutions, reports Roberta Mackintosh, who is executive director, Verizon Business's Global Voice unit. These arise because contact centers and enterprises traditionally use a different set of products. The contact center's need for sophisticated call routing solutions and integration of telephony with back office systems through the CRM layer creates a different set of requirements than the enterprise.

"Delivering a common presence solution across these varied contact center and enterprise systems is challenging, but possible, though no single vendor seems to have the ultimate solution yet," says Mackintosh. "Those systems that enable integration to external solutions with open APIs for clean integrations will be able to successfully bridge the gap between the enterprise and the contact center."

Setting Up Presence

To make presence work experts need to get credit whether in compensation or in job description. Means must be found to find ways to allocate calls fairly, such as using random order within a particular skillset to avoid overloading and turning off experts.

The presence tools must be set up to allow experts define how their specific knowledge skills, how they want to be communicated and when. Expert groups must be set up in a similar fashion to agent skillset groups on ACDs, with defaults to voicemails or the agents.

Presence/UC Security

There are security risks entailed when using presence/unified communications (UC) tools. For example attackers can create spoofed Caller ID or IM identities to fool employees and systems into giving up passwords, setting the stage for future assaults. Denial of service attacks could disrupt the UC infrastructure by swamping or crashing devices, networks or applications.

In response, Siemens Enterprise Communications has enhanced its OpenScale Services and solutions portfolio with several new products and services. These include:

- Compliance Services, including audits, health checks and policy creation such as Instant Messaging policy, tracking and control with a UC environment
- Identity and Privacy Services, which provide business processes, policies and technologies that enable organizations to facilitate and control user access to critical online applications and resources. These cost-effectively protect confidential personal and business information from unauthorized users
- Threat Mitigation and Data Security Services including secure design, implementation and testing of infrastructure and applications which are extended to cover UC solutions. Siemens can provide data encryption and VPN solutions to prevent interception plus provide perimeter and content security applications to protect against threats inherent to real-time applications



"If you do not take people who are not contact center people and utilize them in a controlled fashion you end up abusing and misusing your resources," Gartner's Elliott points out.

Aspect's Kropidlowksy recommends meeting and working with other business units and departments to ensure their buy-in and that the tools work the way they were intended.

"If you have so many people available from different departments they need to understand that they will be called on, which means coming to agreements that they are going to assist with ask the expert capability," he says.

Tight cooperation with presence/UC and routing vendors is a must to ensure that the solutions work well together. Be prepared to spend some IT time to make this happen.

"It's important to check with the technology providers that will make up the solution within the enterprise," says Daniels. "Also make sure that you understand the interoperability capabilities available as you do your due diligence on vendors."

Presence performance must also be measured right, to gauge how effectively the application is being used. Daniels says that

calls or e-mails that end up in experts' mailboxes should not count as FCR because the issues are still open.

"Accurately measuring FCR and customer satisfaction has been fairly elusive because the reporting systems in contact centers have been focused on agent performance only," says Daniels. "Tying in presence-based routing to ensure that calls are being answered and addressed by the right person inside or outside the contact center—and implementing a system that has been designed to measure expert performance as well—gets us much closer to accurate measurements for FCR." **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Avaya
www.avaya.com

Cisco
www.cisco.com

inContact
www.incontact.com

Interactive Intelligence
www.inin.com

Nortel
www.nortel.com

Siemens Enterprise Networks
www.enterprise-communications.
siemens.com

Toshiba
www.toshiba.com/tai

Verizon Business
www.verizonbusiness.com



MIND THE GAP

Between what you want and what you can do lies a solution

If you have big dreams for your call center, but a meager budget that stands in your way, take heart. Automated communications can bridge the gap.

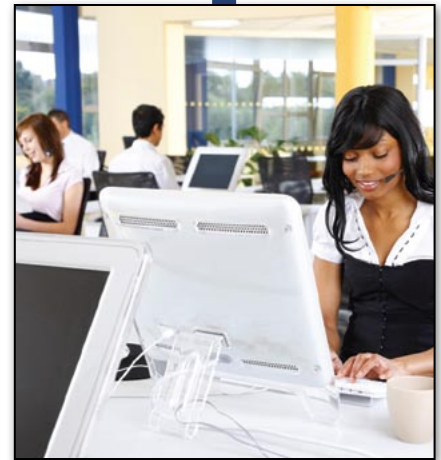
Varolii's automated solutions open up the possibilities, even during tough economic times. Reach more people, affordably, while maximizing your call center and IT resources.

Varolii will show you how to get
a better Return on Interactions.



Performing (and Exceeding) Expectations

Managing contact center performance has never been more challenging. Not only are operations facing even more pressure to cut costs amidst a difficult economy but are often also being asked to maintain service levels and to cross sell/upsell to retain customers and grow revenues.



Many of the solutions to these needs lie in the data contact centers collect. It can be used to identify problems from customer information such as spikes in calls, find out what is going on, then report issues to prevent or limit rising costs and customer churn. It can also help improve sales and collections (see box). The insights that can be gleaned from them can help justify existing and possibly budget increases and investments in new solutions.

The sources of this data are in the vast amounts of reports: from ACDs to call recording, CRM, CTI, predictive and progress dialers, and workforce management (WFM) that contact centers receive. Yet these sources are too often rarely if ever consolidated to give that clear picture.

"You can't understand what is going on if you've got 25 reports sitting on your desk," explains Jim Davies, a research director with Gartner. "You need to have that single view so that you can then start to dig into data and look for trends, patterns, and correlations between the different applications and data streams."

Enter performance management

That's where performance management (PM) software comes in. These tools enable contact centers, like yours, to optimize their productivity by assembling and drilling down through vast repository of data to find the information you and your colleagues need to make decisions. These can include typical operations metrics such as average handle time and wait times. They can, and are increasingly include customer-retention related metrics, chiefly first contact resolution (FCR).

Performance management software is the next evolution from simple scorecards that mash up one or two metrics and fire them to supervisors and agents either to notice or reward them for superior performance or for coaching. With PM you now have a full view of your operations.

PM applications can and should be integrated with quality monitoring and WFM applications to enable optimal agent, team, and contact center output. It can be coupled with powerful analytics applications that inform you of what is happening and why. With analytics you can find out who is calling back, most often, and who is and who is not using self-service and offers reasons for their actions. You can also use them analyze sales effectiveness including agent and offer performance for different customer types and to put together agent profiles to find out which ones are most likely to stay or to leave.

You can in addition use PM to control facilities costs by determining how often seats are actually occupied. This information can help you develop a hot-desking strategy that reduces the space you need or allows you to add more capacity or consolidate centers or offices on the same floorplate(s).

For such and similar reasons more enterprises are deploying PM tools, integrated with other solutions. For example WestJet, Canada's low-fare airline will shortly begin relying on the NICE SmartCenter for WFM and performance management. The PM application will aggregate data from WestJet's critical contact center solutions, such as the WFM and its ACDs, to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the business through the unified view.

"We strive to provide our guests with an amazing experience," says Todd Peterson, Director of Operations for WestJet's distribution team. "The NICE SmartCenter solutions will enable us to further enhance the experience we provide, while lowering costs and promoting continued success for our people".

Tapping the right metrics

To enable PM to optimize your contact center's productivity you need to decide which specific metrics: whether operational, service, sales, collections you are going to source from your reports and analyze for further action. These metrics a.k.a. key



performance indicators (KPIs) should also be aligned with your organization's goals so that what happens at the contact center level, including changes made in response, can be translated into overall corporate results.

Rajeev Venkat, Director, Solutions Marketing, [Verint](#) Witness Actionable Solutions recommends selecting from an extensive set of predefined KPIs, creating a successful blend or combination of preset KPIs with ones developed specifically for your line of business. As each goal is accomplished, KPIs can be reevaluated and revised to take on a new set of center challenges and opportunities.

"When put together well, effective KPIs illuminate problems that were previously hidden or unsuspected," explains Venkat. "For example, the KPI 'unavailable time as a percent of staffed time' can reveal previously unknown shrinkage problems. It might be useful to dive into this data in order to further refine the nature of the problem."

The key debate in contact center metrics/KPIs is between concentrating on operations-focused data, such as average handle time and calls per hour, and enterprise-focused data, such as FCR as it leads to customer satisfaction, and retention. Yet the answer to this depends on the C-suite-set priorities of your organization: pure cost containment to stem losses or a balance between expense control and revenue enhancement.

"Contact centers have been focused, and their actions have been based on 'we're not meeting our operational targets rather than 'we're not meeting our customer goals targets'," says Davies. "Instead of having that blinkered view contact centers need to take a step back and look at what their businesses are trying to achieve and what their goals are, and select and monitor the right metrics like FCR and act on them."

At the same time you may require sales oriented metrics such as revenue and margin per agent and win/loss ratios for managing cross-selling/upselling and for blended inbound/outbound agent programs and functionality. With this economy you also probably need to look at collections metrics such as promise-to-pay and promises-kept.

Mark Gally, Director of Marketing Merced Systems sees more firms wanting to move to a blended service and sales environment to ensure customers stay with them, as well as increase revenues and customer lifetime value while managing costs. More contact center agents will be providing both functions either inbound or outbound.

The performance management platforms enable contact centers to look at these seemingly conflicting metrics and make business decisions based on corporate priorities. For example does it give a business higher value to be on the phone longer with customers to make sure they stay loyal? Is it better to de-

flect a future call or reduce average handle time on each interaction to increase immediate productivity? Should an organization focus more on retaining customers through better service via FCR or should it instead drive for more sales and revenues through cross-selling/upselling and outbound sales calls?

"With performance management platforms organizations for the first time are able to better look at that balance and make a determination how best to drive that overall customer interaction," says Gally.

Even more importantly, your organization should take the information collected and analyzed via performance management tools and use this to implement and sustain a broader corporate strategy, such as increased customer satisfaction. For example if a new bill comes out and it starts to drive increased call volume, this strategy will require your contact centers to communicate with the billing department to see about changing bill presentment to deflect calls.

"While metrics such as FCR are very practical, there is often too much focus on individual metrics as the ultimate answer to meeting corporate needs," explains Gally. "Instead, operations need to look at how the right balance of metrics supports broader strategies such as customer satisfaction to obtain increased revenues, lowered costs, and greater short-term and long-term profits and returns. This is a better approach than pinballing back and forth between different individual metrics that are not viewed in a bigger overall context."

When assessing agent performance from the different functions and channels they handle avoid trying to be too granular in analyzing how well they did with what. Instead focus on the net results.

"Say a customer is on a three minute service call with an agent, and somewhere on it they resolve a service issue and transform it into a cross-sell upsell," says Bob Kelly, vice president of Aspect's PerformanceEdge group. "There is no way of knowing within that three minutes where that point took place, which makes it hard to apportion the call handle time between customer service and the cross-sell/upsell. Yet if the agent achieves good FCR and sales results then does it matter where that crossover occurs?"

Multichannel Performance Management

Complicating the ability to optimize contact center productivity is the growth in voice and web self-service, e-mail, chat, and SMS. These channels have led to a complex series of interactions. A customer may choose to call from a landline then follow up by e-mail or then sent a text message from a smartphone and later on go on your website.



Some of these channels can improve performance. For example agents can handle more customers with multiple e-mails or chat sessions compared with live calls but this depends on the response rates to these interactions. It takes less time to impart the same amount of information verbally compared with keying or in the case of SMS, thumbing this in. Also text-based communications requires much stronger grammar and spelling skills than voice.

"There is still no such thing as a universal multichannel agent, at least not the wages contact centers offer," explains Gartner's Davies. "Some are best at phone only while others are much more adept at text-based responses. That requires separate queues for each interaction type."

Consequently contact centers often cannot compare the service experience from one channel to another. They may not be tracking key customer experience metrics such as cross-channel FCR.

"Contact centers must understand channel preference for customers, and provide information to agents if a customer typically uses another channel or has tried other channels to resolve the issue," says Ronald Hildebrandt, founder and senior vice president of marketing at Enkata. "While they are striving to provide the same level of service with each channel, the customers' experience is only as good as the weakest link."

Keith Dawson, senior analyst, Frost and Sullivan, recommends a combination of channel-appropriate metrics and agent training to measure and maintain performance for the different kinds of interactions spawned by e-mail versus voice. These will not be the same as voice calls.

Aspect's Kelly recommends using metrics such as completion rates, customer zero outs, time spent on the applications, call pickups, and calls generated from these applications. You can also track FCR in self-service applications.

"You want a holistic view of the interaction with the customer," says Kelly. "You want to know how effective both your self-service is, how many times calls were transferred or made to live agents and their effectiveness once they get those calls. You also want to know how successful your direct voice, chat, e-mail, SMS interactions were, how long they took and how much agent time so that you are driving both efficiency and effectiveness from these channels."

Merced's Gally says performance management can help drill down into channel choices to determine which one is best at handling certain interactions to meet customer satisfaction as well as productivity goals. For example if it is less expensive to

encourage customers to use e-mail for billing disputes rather than live agents will that ultimately prompt more, angrier, and longer calls resulting in higher customer churn? Or does e-mail maintain perhaps even customer satisfaction because it prompts customers to think through and outline issues resulting in clearer answers?

"While you have to look at these channel issues from the individual agent skillset perspectives, you also need to have sophisticated analysis to look at overall channel performance and its impact on the business," says Gally.

Making performance management happen

To make performance management tools work most effectively contact centers, like yours who buy them/light them up need to set them with all of their reports so they can obtain a single view of their operations. That will require some serious integration work with the many different applications so that the data moves smoothly in the PM solution.

To fully utilize the capabilities of performance management software, you need to use it daily, rather than clicking on it to look at the occasional report. You should also set up adherence-based triggers so that if the performance drops below defined levels the software triggers alerts to supervisors and management.

Finally you need to act effectively on the data supplied by the tools. For live interactions that means coaching and talking with the agents to bring their performance to where you want it to be. Also make sure that you are managing right by measuring supervisor performance including ensuring consistency of management across the operations, and agent schedule adherence turnover; good supervisors engender loyal staff; who are then willing to do more to boost results.

"If I as an agent fall below a specific threshold don't just send me a dashboard with a little icon but trigger a coaching or eLearning session," recommends Gally. "If as a manager I want to make sure my supervisors do their jobs effectively; automated workflows within PM applications allow me to track supervisor activities and measure the impact of their coaching sessions. By identifying positive supervisor best practice behaviors, automated workflows allow me to spread these best practices throughout the organization to improve overall performance."

Lastly, but most importantly you should evaluate your human capital: agent selection, new-hire training, job assigning, and retention process, and ensure that your managers have team, leadership and people-management skills to make you attract, pick, and keep the right staff. Empower



your agents to help customers rather than buck up their inquiries to supervisors or overuse presence/unified communications tools (see related article) to get expert advice. Your contact center performance, and the results collected by PM software is as only as good as your people whose experience and knowledge, and their ability to assist are your keys to success.

“Contact center agents show up to work and want to do a good job... but too often the old paradigm of cost center holds reign over doing what these centers need to do to empower agents to do their best,” Natalie Petouhoff, Senior Analyst, Forrester Research points out. “And because agents provide the most direct and influential contact with a company, anything less than great service is like throwing money out the window.” **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Aspect (PerformanceEdge)
www.aspect.com

Enkata
www.enkata.com

Merced Systems
www.mercedsystems.com

NICE Systems
www.nice.com

Verint Witness
www.verint.com

Engage the Mind and Performance Will Follow



performance. perfected.

Downtime has transformed into learning time. Agents are continuously improving their skills. Supervisors have the tools to effectively coach, measure, and manage performance. You've actually balanced productivity, quality, *and* the bottom line. And your agents have the clear, triumphant look of complete comprehension. You've got Engage Coach, part of the Engage Contact Center Suite from TelStrat.

The Engage Suite combines the award-winning power and technology found in TelStrat's CallParrot Call Recording product line, with an array of best-practice product technologies from across the contact center industry, yielding an integrated, single-source, total contact center solution. From capturing customer interaction to forecasting and scheduling, Engage optimizes each major aspect of contact center operation. With its modular design, every component augments and enhances the next, so your organization can start with call recording and add capabilities as your needs change. Engage means you grow at your own pace. Within one suite. From one source. TelStrat.

Engage Suite Components

- Call Recording
- Screen Capture
- Agent Scoring & Reporting
- E-Learning & Performance Tracking
- Scripting & Call Automation
- Workforce Management

See Engage Contact Center Suite in the TelStrat booth at:

Spring DAC & VoiceCon 2009 Orlando Booth #1516

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from

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www.telstrat.com

ATA Self-Regulatory Organization Moves Forward

The more individuals and firms look over their own shoulders and make sure that they comply with both the spirit and letter of laws and regulations the less need there will be for governments to do this for them.



That is the thinking behind self-regulation, and the American Teleservices Association (ATA) has been taking steps to achieve that goal. The ATA Self-Regulatory Organization (ATA-SRO), set to encourage and enable compliance self-management in the teleservices industry, has gone fully live with its SRO auditor certification program. It has also certified its first contact center.

The first group of these certification training courses took place in late 2008 at the University of Akron's Taylor Institute for Direct Marketing. ATA Corporate Counsel Mitch Roth, an attorney and partner with Williams Mullen led the instruction.

Ten people received Certified Auditor status from the ATA-SRO and can now conduct compliance reviews for companies seeking formal industry accreditation. These individuals are Ted Bernard ([Influent, Inc.](#)), Matt Cagle (Compliance Point), Bernard Goulet (Call Compliance Inc.), Rob Marshall (360CRM), Angela Morris (Quality Contact Solutions Inc.), Paul Santry (360CRM), Michelle Shuster (MacMurray, Cook, Peterson & Shuster, LLP), Mary Kay Simpson (The Allant Group), Ken Sponsler (Compliance Point), Dave Sutcliffe (360CRM).

The ATA-SRO auditors certified their first teleservices firm, The Charlton Group, which is based in Madison, Wis. The company was presented to the ATA-SRO Board of Trustees for final validation and subsequent accreditation.

"It was a real honor to be selected as the first teleservices firm in the United States to go through the rigorous process and to pass the test," says Charlton's Director of Compliance Mick Bennett "We made a conscious decision five years ago to embrace compliance and to turn it into a core competency. We believe the accreditation demonstrates our focus on high quality and consumer friendly services. We also want to commend the ATA for its leadership and foresight in establishing the SRO. We have no doubt that it marks a significant and positive inflection point in the way our industry operates."

The ATA plans to conduct more auditor certification classes throughout 2009. Preliminary scheduling indicates that there will be a minimum of two more auditor certification classes

conducted at the Taylor Institute. This facility and staff has proven to be an ideal location for the auditor training classes, says the ATA. It provides a locale that is both centrally located in the country and offers conservative travel expenses (Cleveland's Hopkins Airport is 45 minutes away).

Also the ATA SRO will unveil the newest enhancements to their program in Washington D.C. "ATA Summit" in April 2009. The next auditor certification class will likely follow in May.

The growing interest and popularity of the ATA SRO program is well-justified. The SRO has set standards displayed on the ATA SRO website, www.atasroconnect.org that ATA members and non-members can certify to. These standards and protocols not only meet but in some cases exceed the regulatory requirements mandated by state and federal governance. Compliance is assured through record auditing by a Certified Auditor, utilizing compliance auditing software specifically designed for the ATA-SRO. The ATA hopes that its program becomes the definitive litmus test of compliance in the contact center industry. Its goal is to design a system based upon legislative requirements whereby companies can both empirically self assess and seek external evaluation on best practices and risk minimization.

The ATA SRO, its audit methodology and supporting software turns what has been a somewhat subjective compliance protocol into an easily adoptable blend of compliance observation and mechanized evaluation of adherence to best practices as dictated by governmental guidance and industry leadership. What has been absent from the contact center industry for far too long, says the ATA, is an centralized measuring tool whereby managers can ensure that their operations are effectively risk managed by both self assessment and independent auditors; these two stages that are inherent in the ATA SRO audit process.

In creating the ATA SRO the ATA expects that many companies will attempt to adhere to state and federal guidelines, however until such time as some form of universal compliance model exists they may or may not know if they are reaching best practices benchmarks. The ATA in conjunction with ATA SRO Trustee companies (including Fortune 500 and

smaller enterprises) has recognized the absence of this universal benchmark. They have delivered the first authoritative auditing process for compliance in many respects similar to those assurance audits in other professional fields.

Taking components from other professional licensing models, the ATA SRO certifies its independent auditors for limited periods of time after which they must renew their certification. Equally important is the nature of the ATA SRO accreditation process to companies. Not unlike a financial accounting audit, companies that achieve the ATA SRO seal of accreditation receive that award subject to the audit performed at that point in time. It is imperative to the SRO that both the auditors certified and the companies accredited remain educated and continuously compliant. Therefore, and as should be expected, the ATA SRO has crafted a plan to deliver authoritative, unbiased processes and tools with ongoing compliance as a universal industry goal.

The scope of a firm's audit is up to the company itself, based on selecting either inbound or outbound channels for audit or both. Companies can even send their internal compliance officers or staff to be trained in the auditing process and support tools.

How can the SRO process be of benefit? The ATA says that corporate executives or managers saddled with risk management responsibilities tied to contact center operations should have external tools whereby they can obtain unbiased and report driven status of their compliance protocols. This is the exact purpose of the audit software. Have staff trained in policy, trained in the SRO analytic software and self assess to determine where your company is vulnerable. Firms may then enlist the independent auditor to evaluate it, deliver conclusive findings to the ATA SRO and be potentially accredited by the organization.

There are no hard and fast costs and timeframes for the ATA SRO audits and certifications owing to the great diversity between companies and the scale of contact centers. So much is determined by the size of audited operations as well as the geography involved. Nevertheless, the ATA says the process is designed to be comprehensive, relatively non-operationally constrictive yet performed as quickly as those involved can devote to the exercise.

The SRO program continues to mature. 2008 could be viewed as the 'beta' year for the initiative. Deployment with successes in both certifying auditors and accrediting a company has proven that the ATA SRO is a viable tool. Originally focused on expressly for independent auditing, the past year has revealed a desire for internal staff of companies to have the benefits of the SRO procedure, thereby providing further evidence of ATA SRO program's merit.

Might the program expand beyond and conduct training elsewhere? That will be determined as the ATA SRO grows in adoption. Consider any of the now familiar professional licensing programs. They, too, started with noble initiatives to administer the benchmarks of professional business conduct. The ATA SRO aspires, in years ahead, to be the recognized facilitator of this conduct for the contact center industry.

Have home-based agents? Ask them to recycle/ e-cycle their old computers, printers

Computers and other electronic items do wear out. Instead of tossing them into the trash, where their toxic materials can poison the water supply as well as create huge landfills, ask your home agents when they are faced with buying/obtaining from you new units to recycle old ones instead.

There are now more opportunities to become part of the solution through e-waste recycling or e-cycling. Two more states, Oregon and Washington began e-cycling on Jan. 1 for computers, monitors, and TVs though for not other devices such as cellphones, mice, and printers. Oregon also has a prod; beginning in 2010 it will be illegal to dump computers and TVs.

There are now 17 states with similar programs; the National Center for Electronics Recycling www.electronicrecycling.org tracks such laws. It estimates that just under-50 percent of the U.S. population is now covered by such measures. They should be making a dent in the mountains of electronic garbage created in the U.S. in 2007 Americans generated about 232 million units of computer and TV-related e-waste, of which only 18 percent was recycled.

Washington State estimates that it will collect and process over 20 million pounds of electronic waste in the first year of operations; the state has about 6.4 million residents. It has set up network will include over 200 individual collection sites, in every county in the state and in every city or town with a population greater than 10,000.

Yet unlike in other states that have set up similar programs, such as California, where consumers must pay to dispose, Oregon's and Washington State's are paid for by manufacturers and free to consumers. Officials say that provision will give incentives to participate. The states also say they will closely monitor the programs to make sure the toxic boxes and pieces do not get dumped in other countries where e-waste disposal controls and methods are comparatively lax.

The Oregon and Washington State plans make sense because they adopt the polluter-pay principle, which if followed logically by manufacturers, will prod them to make more adaptable, longer lasting, and versatile products made of less nasty materials to limit waste and pollution. It should to kick them into making and reusing 'nonintelligent' items such as keyboards, keypads, and mice. **CIS**



Top Tips To Build and Keep Customer Loyalty With CRM



Loyal customers are, in general, your most valuable patrons (see this issue's Logout for a more intensive discussion on loyalty). They provide sales and income at marginal marketing and retention costs, and at a fraction of the expenses entailed in acquiring new buyers. Loyal buyers, in many instances, also help you attract others for no additional outlays through word of mouth advertising. And in today's challenging economy, with many competitors for limited customer dollars, ensuring their loyalty is key to survival, and future prosperity.

Customer relationship management (CRM) methods and solutions can aid you in keeping your most valuable customers and in doing so bring in others. Properly implemented i.e. enabling you to spotlight on the top tier buyers that generate the most revenues while meeting the needs of the most of your market base, CRM can make your loyalty strategy successful.

Here are the top tips on using CRM to keep your customers provided by several leading expert firms. A similar feature with advice from a select group of CRM suppliers appears on TMCnet.

ClickFox (www.clickfox.com)

Marco G. Pacelli – Chief Executive Officer

• One Experience Does Not Fit All

The first tenet of customer loyalty is about serving customers according to their preferences. Different customer segments tend to have strong interaction preferences—choosing, for instance, to speak to a live agent or to log on to their account via mobile browser to check account balance. Similarly, by analyzing customers' past interactions, you can tailor the customer experience as well as avoid potential points of frustration or annoyance, such as marketing products that they already own. The caveat: to truly know thy customer requires a holistic, cross-channel perspective. For example, one financial services provider found small business customers were much more likely to utilize self-service options whenever possible and only speak with a live agent when absolutely necessary.

• Treat New Customers With Kid Gloves

You can only make a first impression once. Start the relationship on a bang by exceeding their expectations, not by asking them to jump through hoops. When was the last time you've walked a mile in your customers' shoes? Case in point: a financial services company found that new customers didn't have enough time to enter their newly opened account number after being prompted. Increasing the window of time drastically boosted the percentage of successful interactions as well as the likelihood customers would continue to utilize self-service in the future. By looking through the lens of the customer and tracking when and why they interact

with your company, you can find opportunities to streamline processes to make it easier for customers to quickly get past the learning curve...and kick off the relationship on a high note.

• Don't Wait, Anticipate

Related to the first tip, this means capturing the right customer data to anticipate the needs of individual customers or customer segments. Again, this requires a sophisticated cross-channel understanding of your customers in order to make it quick and easy for them to do business with you. For example, a leading telecom company determined that about a third of customers making a payment via IVR followed that interaction by checking their account balance using their mobile device. Proactively sending their new, updated account balance via SMS text /e-mail would have delighted customers while at the same time eliminating an additional contact. Similarly, if you know that certain customers always prefer a certain interaction channel for certain interactions, offer it as a default option.

• Be Wary of Channel-Specific Metrics

Good internal metrics don't necessarily mean that it's good for customers...or the business as a whole. Look at the big picture to truly understand the overall impact of operations, processes, and policies. For one telecom company customer satisfaction with the automated IVR dropped, resulting in the incorrect assumption that the application had gone 'out of tune'. However, after linking the customer satisfaction scores with the interactions, the company quickly learned that the drop in customer satisfaction was in fact due to higher service restoration times for customers with outages and had nothing to do with the IVR.

• Strive For "First Experience Resolution"

In the contact center, we know that "1st contact resolution" is a key metric. But how well are you doing across all of your channels? A customer might try to resolve an issue or complete a transaction by first logging on to their account from their computer or BlackBerry, before later calling into your contact center to speak with a live agent. How do individual customers navigate through your service delivery system? Where are the gaps in your customer experience? A



leading telecom company found that customers were searching in vain for product support help online before eventually abandoning their search and picking up the phone to speak with a live agent. By focusing on quick issue resolutions—and constantly being on the lookout for opportunities to simplify and streamline customer-facing processes—you'll go a long way to winning over the hearts and minds of your customers.

Comptel (www.comptel.com)

Robert Machin, Solutions Director

- **Respond fast to critical interactions**

Customers typically interact with an organization at two key points: when they buy products or services, and when they need help. Meaningful and effective communication at these points is critical, but many CRM systems only provide a shallow view of the data that would really support a quick response, meaning problems often get passed down the line until a scarce and costly expert source is found to help the by-now frustrated customer. The answer is to integrate CRM closely with fulfillment and inventory systems so that 'real' data can be fed to customer service in a transparent and easily accessible way.

- **Learn from Main Street**

Historically, the utility services that telecom providers offered, and the relatively closed nature of the industry, meant that the customer experience was a less-than-critical factor in customer retention. Not any more. Ever-expanding portfolios of digital services from an increasing number of competitors mean that providers need to work harder to keep customers on board. Just like GAP or Wal-Mart do, telecom providers can benefit from implementing systems that are flexible and allow a real-time response to customer needs and behavior. Charging systems, in particular, should come out of the back office and onto the shop floor.

- **Keep the market interested**

Industries like automotive and consumer electronics learned long ago that they needed smarter and more cost-effective ways to keep the product set fresh. Again, telecom providers can learn a thing or two here. Applying

automation to the design process through formal product lifecycle management (PLM) and product data management (PDM) allows telcos to create and adapt products rapidly using reusable components. These systems also enable better internal collaboration with partners to get products to market more quickly. Response to customer queries is greatly improved too, as product data becomes more rational and easier to understand without advanced engineering skills. Expect PLM and PDM to become increasingly common success factors for next-generation telecom providers.

Dimension Data (www.dimension-data.com)

Ali Khan, business development manager, Dimension Data North America

- **Really get to know your customer and listen to their concerns**

Research shows that the resultant 'service smile' after dealing with contact centers has a huge impact on whether customers make future purchases or recommend the company to others.

- **Offer customers multiple options for contacting your organization**

The phone is no longer the preferred channel for many customers, especially the millennial generation who are starting to comprise a significant market for many organizations. Today, almost all large organizations offer customers the choice of calling, e-mailing, sending a text message, or mailing a letter to ask a question or obtain information.

- **Employ the personal touch**

Everyone likes to know they're special. When a contact center agent seems to have empathy for a problem and has the facts readily available to them, customers often feel more favorable toward the company.

- **Implement a caller segmentation program**

Even small actions can improve service. For example, if a Caller Line ID (CLID) can be matched against a database before sending the call to an agent, talk time can be reduced and customer service improved.

Quite a few people have written to me in regards to **Multimedia Queuing (MMQ)**. They all wanted to know whether or not investing in the new "gotta have it" was worth it.

A **ZCC Unified Contact Center** provides your agents with a smart multimedia solution that can cope efficiently with large numbers of inbound inquiries by email, fax, web chat, or phone.

For example, your agents are delivered emails only as they are ready to deal with them. Agents who are logged out, on a break, or already dealing with calls, are not delivered emails until they become available. Once the email is delivered, if the agent takes too long to open the email, the Zeacom software pulls it back and puts it back into the **Email Queuing** mailbox.

Fax Queuing delivers directly to the appropriate agent so they can view and/or print the fax at their discretion.

With **Web Chat Queuing**, you can direct customer chat requests to specific individuals or departments that are best equipped to respond to them. And, did you ever think how great it would be if your contact center agents could 'show' a customer exactly which web page they are referring to during a chat session?" With Web Chat, agents have the ability to 'push' a URL directly to online customers, providing a significantly higher level of customer service.

Do you have a question for Andrea? Email marcom@zeacom.com



Andrea Kerr is an Engineer at Zeacom. For the past 8 years, she has deployed solutions for customers across the country.


zeacom
communications center

800-513-9002
usasales@zeacom.com



- **Collate customer information and feed it back into your CRM system**

Use customer knowledge to see how to best relate to your customers in order to determine which groups of customers to nurture, grow, maintain or divest. For customers that should be retained, choose the optimum approach.

The rule of thumb for great customer service today is: Little things mean a lot, so by really understanding the nuances of the customer support operation along with the needs of the customer, thousands and sometimes millions of dollars can be saved, and the customer experience improved.

Each and every customer interaction is a test of not only customer service, but of the entire organization and the brand as well. So understanding why a customer is calling, how to best handle the query and then how to use that information to enable changes in the process, builds a truly customer-centric company. Often companies miss that last step or are not able to research the customer's call and resolution, forgetting that the outcome of one customer service experience can leave a lasting imprint – negative or positive – on the entire customer relationship.

InnoPath Software
(www.innopath.com)

David Ginsburg, Vice President of Marketing and Product Management

- **Make advanced care tools usable for the contact center agents**

By making advanced care tools accessible through a user-friendly interface, you increase the power of the frontline agents. This means that issues can be resolved with faster and earlier, with fewer calls transferred across the center: a huge benefit to the customer.

- **Increase access to real-time information**

The more an agent understands about a mobile device's current settings, the better care the agent can provide. Mobile device management helps connect the care operator with a mobile device over the air,

enabling the agent to confirm firmware updates and configuration settings. A recent study by analyst firm Stratcast shows that the ability to collect this vital device information helps dramatically cut down on call time, meaning that consumers spend less time on the phone to customer care.

- **Make self-care easy**

A November 2008 study by [Pew Research](#) found that 28 percent of cell phone users tried to correct device issues without calling customer care and another 15 percent sought help from friends or relatives. That means that nearly half of all users resolve issues without dialing the contact center! Easy-to-use self-care portals and one-click configuration reset buttons can greatly increase self-care success rates and decrease call center costs. Furthermore, given the desire to troubleshoot a device independently, good self-care tools actually reduce customer frustration and increase satisfaction.

- **Automate updates**

[Apple's](#) struggles in 2008 with iPhone firmware updates were complicated by the necessity of a wired, manual update process. According to [Pew Research](#), half of adults who use cell phones or the Internet need someone to guide them through set up or use; requiring users to fumble through manual firmware updates is problematic for these less-technical users and the call center. One solution is to push firmware updates to device automatically using Firmware Over The Air (FOTA) technology. Implementing this common technology means that upgrades require no end-user action, so the device stays in top condition and the user stays happy.

- **Implement mobile device lock and wipe**

When a user loses a phone, they lose more than just the device itself; smartphones today often hold contact information, e-mail, business data and even credit card numbers. Implementing device lock and wipe functionality lets the user breathe easy in the event of a lost phone, confident that no one can access her personal data. Nothing is better for boosting customer loyalty

than when the operator that can assure the user that private data is secure.

West Interactive
(www.westinteractive.com)

Pam Mortenson, President

- **Listen closely to the 'Voice of the Customer'**

The positive, or often negative, experience at customer touch points determines the willingness of customers to continue doing business with you. One study indicates that over a recent three-year period 46 percent of U.S. credit card customers, 43 percent of banking customers, and 30 percent of telecom customers defected to competitors because of poor customer service. Having true business intelligence about the customer and hearing their voice in their own words is absolutely critical.

- **Connect proactively with your customer**

Automated value messaging can be a competitive differentiator combating commoditization in some of the most competitive industries such as travel, telecom, retail, healthcare, and insurance. Proactive communication can reduce calls to the contact center while building a long-term relationship with the customer.

One of the best ways to differentiate yourself is to focus on the end-user. Customers want to transact with companies more effectively. Make the customer experience seamless by applying ease of use methods that deliver needed information with quality and speed. Delivering information ahead of customer requests will reduce inbound calls and enhance the customer experience.

- **Learn about your customer needs**

Make strategic use of customer service surveys for happier customers, greater revenue, and cost savings. Capturing and applying customer preference data in a real-time environment delivers more efficiency, reduced call time and increased first-call resolution. The customer also feels the information is personalized and you are ready to provide answers to their questions. **CIS**



Introducing the Outbound Call Center Online Community

Five9's solutions deliver the benefits of million-dollar systems, but without their hidden costs. Five9's predictive dialer efficiently and effectively helps manage product campaigns, generate sales leads, process account collections, raise funds, administer research surveys, and conduct political and community initiatives. Outbound Call Center campaigns also help increase agent productivity, improve sales results, lower infrastructure costs and increase business agility.

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- Case studies
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<http://outbound-call-center.tmcnet.com/>



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Migrating To An All-In-One Solution... How Do We Get There?



By Tim Passios,
Director of Product Management,
Interactive Intelligence

Q The all-in-one contact center solution is definitely the way to go for the future of my contact center. But I've got a problem that's stopping me in my tracks. How do we move from a traditional multi-point communications system to an all-in-one solution and still protect our IT investment?

A This question comes courtesy of a CIO who approached me a year ago at the Gartner IT Symposium, and also from a contact center manager I spoke with at TMC's ITEXPO West in Los Angeles this past September.

In the CIO's case, he literally showed me a diagram of his organization's contact center architecture and couldn't stress enough the number of systems it consisted of. IVRs, ACDs, call recorders, a WFM system — you name it, there was a box for it, and the gentleman was more than willing to explain why each system was necessary and what specific business process it supported.

"It looks as if you have everything you need," I told him.

"Yes, we do," he said. "But this system is extremely complex, and the administration and energy costs alone are more prohibitive than I care to admit. In my mind, we need to simplify the whole thing, but I'm honestly not sure what our options are because we're so limited right now by expenses and budgets."

It was the same story from the contact center manager I met, who oversaw 1,500 agents along with tons of legacy equipment. She attended a presentation I gave in which one of the principal points was that all-in-one communications platforms and application suites will replace a majority of multi-point solutions within the next few years.

"I totally applaud the all-in-one movement," she let me know. "The thing is, we have so many systems from different vendors that are so tightly integrated... I can't get approval from upper management to make the move because they think it would be disruptive and too expensive. And even if I did get the OK, I wouldn't know where to start."

Trust me. I've heard from a lot of CIOs and contact center managers who feel trapped by the mixed bag of technology they have to work with — and who are frustrated by it. I also usually hear a common refrain of dichotomy among such decision-makers:

"Ripping and replacing an entire IT infrastructure of multiple systems isn't feasible,

yet the only way to get to an all-in-one solution is a matter of all-or-nothing."

This simply isn't true.

The biggest benefit of things like open software architectures, IP networks and SIP is that they've led to a broader path of integration for business communications. And totally unlike the heydays of legacy systems and vendor lock-ins, an open approach gives organizations more flexibility than they sometimes realize.

Organizations can integrate with more back-end systems and business applications. They can close the gap between a contact center and the rest of their enterprise. They can even migrate an installed multi-point hardware system to an all-in-one all-software platform piece by piece, as needed, to shelter the investment they've made in each system.

(Yes, this is a shameless plug. Our all-in-one Interaction Center Platform technology was developed using an open software approach in 1994 and architected for SIP in 2002. All along, our platform has allowed Interactive Intelligence customers to integrate with existing IT frameworks, email platforms, databases, applications, CRM packages, speech engines, web servers and other business communications systems, most recently Microsoft's Office Communications Server 2007.)

"Okay, show me how to do that without ripping and replacing our current systems." Two keys here:

Planning. Start with a detailed assessment of your existing technology — much like the CIO who approached me with his contact center's architecture diagram. Determine each system's status, the function(s) it serves, and what you wish to accomplish by moving it and other systems to an all-in-one solution. Less equipment and complexity? Lower energy costs? Central administration? Plan-

ning also includes doing your homework to find a solution that will deliver on your overall objectives now and for the future.

Take incremental steps to the total move. Ease migration by replacing only one multi-point component at a time, or perhaps a few at a time. By design, all-in-one application suites allow a contact center to "turn on" only those applications it needs, when needed, such as ACD, IVR, voice mail, etc.

Consider this scenario for planning and making incremental moves:

- Pinpoint an event that triggers the need for a new system, say an IVR reaching end-of-life status.
- Identify an all-in-one platform that allows you to replace your IVR with like or better functionality. Make sure the platform (and vendor) will support subsequent growth with standards-based integration to handle all the applications your contact center requires.
- As other triggers occur — needs for advanced ACD features, outbound dialing, a new voice mail system, etc. — look to the all-in-one platform you invested in for your IVR. As mentioned, a key benefit of software-based all-in-one platforms is that features are available and easily activated via a simple licensing process.
- In time, move the rest of your multi-point system functions and applications to the all-in-one platform in a "natural" progression.

Migration complete, investments protected, less complexity, central admin...and upper management applauds you for the lower costs. **CIS**

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Is Contact Center-Delivered Loyalty Overrated?

Today's hot business catchphrase is customer loyalty. Obtaining and ensuring it sustains sales and revenues, and also generates these from other customers through word-of-mouth and increasingly text-in-online advertising with peer, friends, and family.

The need to have customer loyalty is one key reason why contact centers have not been as closed as quickly and their staff rosters decimated as badly as they might have been in this downturn. Firms are finally believing the advice from industry experts and vendors that delivering poorer service through lengthening queues and shortening calls can drive some customers—and their scarce dollars—away.

The route to customer loyalty, professionals and suppliers, say is through improving first contact resolution (FCR) via investing in agent training, analytics and in CRM, EFM (enterprise feedback management) solutions, performance management tools, and presence/unified communications. The more satisfying the customers' experiences are when they reach out to firms such as via their contact centers the greater their loyalty to them is the operating theory.

Yet is this formula: better customer service = customer loyalty=sales valid? Are contact centers and their parent or client organizations perhaps spending too much time and limited resources in trying to make this solution work?

There is plenty of evidence that questions the relevance of service quality, and loyalty, to revenues. Do we choose an item from a particular seller because they have great contact center-delivered service even if the price is high and the features are not exactly what we want? Or do we choose a comparable good that has a lower price, and has more functionality from a company that makes us endure long hold times or bounces us around from agent to agent?

Also, think of why we pick and stay with those particular vendors? Is it because they are excellent firms or are they the lesser of multiple evils or that changing them would be more hassle than it is worth?

Two cases in point are airlines and banks. What matters most: being on hold for 20 minutes or making your connections and not having your luggage lost? Banks have become customer-service-centric because they have realized that such service is a key market differentiator. Yet when you have complex accounts, like IRAs, loans, and mortgages with them will you change institutions if the service begins to worsen?

Questionably-applied CRM software probably has done more to wreck customer loyalty via contact centers than all

the poorly-trained agents combined. Forcing the 80 percent of the masses to endure IVR menus from Hades followed by eternity queues so that the top 20 percent can get treatment worthy of the gods guarantees resentment and a 'get lost' from the lower ranks.

Moreover, if a product or service is obsolete or, especially in this economy there is no demand or that the customers want the items but cannot afford them then the best contact center service in the world will not keep buyers and sales. For example there are great deals to be had on SUVs, but is the quality service from the automotive financing contact centers making any difference in getting buyers into the showrooms and signing the paperwork?

The only time where contact center-delivered service truly matters is with technical support i.e. the help desk. Being able to get problems fixed right and quickly makes a substantial difference, in general, in the ability to use these products and services. Yet there are cases where service does not matter: i.e. where the prices and profits are so low on items that they do not warrant support, such as for mice, keyboards, landline phones, printers and many packaged consumer software.

Moreover, there is little point focusing on FCR and other such loyalty-aimed metrics when customers are calling in complaining about your products, service, and delivery. Annoyed buyers will not buy again unless they have little choice, in which case spending money on contact centers will not make much difference in obtaining increased revenue from them.

The key to customer loyalty and income is not on having great contact center service but by making the products and services right and pricing them intelligently. A firm is only as good as the last customer's experience with their wares. If they got what they wanted from it and have need of it again they will lay out the resources; if not then you can kiss them goodbye no matter how nice and friendly the contact center agents.

By concentrating on the product design, delivery, and marketing fundamentals up front, loyalty, and contact centers take care of themselves. The fewer the complaints, the more the sales means more time and resources can be devoted to providing great customer service. **CIS**



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