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Going For

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How Avaya Made the 2010 Winter Olympics A Winner

Also In This Issue:

- Building Customer Loyalty
- UC = Customer Communications
- 17th Annual MVP Quality Awards Winners

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Adventures in Social Networking

Last month, I bet the future of the contact center on social networking – well, not really, but I outlined how I think companies need to seriously focus on this space in the future. I have been spending a significant amount of time myself living with social media tools, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, and have slowly begun to really feel the addictive and powerful community-building effects of socializing online 24/7. But, lately I have taken my social interactions to the next level.

The process started quite innocently – as you may know I was invited to go to the Winter Olympics by Nortel/Avaya and, in preparation, my wife and I went shopping for winter clothes. On a totally unrelated note, I believe I own the largest SUV in the world. You see, no matter what department store I go to, my wife is able to produce, on-demand, five bags of returns for that particular store. Interestingly, each bag corresponds to a different department, meaning standing in a different line for each set of returns.

It took me a while to realize it, but I learned that I would have lots of time to kill. That's when I found a comfortable couch and installed the Tweetdeck client on my iPhone and began to join in the conversation taking place among the people I follow on Twitter and Facebook.

Using Tweetdeck or a program like it is the social networking equivalent of discovering the wheel...

Once installed, I was able to rapidly see what my friends were saying, keep track of when I was referenced and, just as importantly, I was able to keep track of references to TMCnet based on hashtags people use in their tweets. For example, to reference IBM, you would use hashtag #IBM and this would make it easier to search and find entries that reference the computing giant.

If you don't use Facebook or Twitter, or especially Tweetdeck, and you are involved in management of a company, you are falling behind. If Richard Branson, Jack Welch, and Bill Gates can use Twitter, so can you – if you think it is beneath you, please drop me a line so I can advise my other readers to sell your stock.

Why is this exercise important? Because every second of every day, there are conversations taking place that are shaping perception about all brands and products. These conversations persist and are forever discoverable via search engines. Moreover, they are often found and used against you by your competitors.

People are complaining and praising you and your competitors all the time. Others are reading this information and forming decisions based on what they see. Journalists are using this content in their stories and other customers are considering this information before purchasing your products. Search engines now integrate social networking results and Twitter feeds at the top of their search results if enough people tweet about the same topic at once.

Let's say you and companies who resell your products occupy the first 10 search results for a search on your company

name and the same goes for all of your products. Imagine that search engines can decide the second search result will comprise all social networking interaction that mentions your company name. A single disgruntled customer who is retweeted (the act of passing along a tweet or micropost to their followers) can disrupt years of SEO strategizing, planning and dollars invested.

Worse, these tweets will likely influence reporters who happen to see these real-time results as they research your company and its products for a story.

Do you see where this is going?

Moreover, what happens when you learn that someone is trashing your products or company online? What is your strategy to engage these customers? Do you know how? Do you have any experience on staff to deal with the problem? Do you utilize your contact center to help you in this regard? Is there even integration between CRM systems and your social networking listening initiatives? Do you even have these initiatives in place today? If not, what could you be waiting for – an emergency?

In the last two years, we have seen massive problems rock GE, Merrill Lynch, Bank of America, GM, Chrysler and Toyota... At this point it seems safe to say that virtually every company will eventually have some sort of crisis to deal with.

Social networking can play a big part in smoothing relations with customers and the media. It can save you millions in brand value and lost sales. Moreover, your customers are getting absorbed by social media – every day they expect you, too, to be more engaged. Disappointing them means less loyal customers and the chance you will lose them to the competition.

I hope this column gets you thinking about using the latest social media tools available and, moreover, making sure you train your workforce on how to utilize these tools to keep your customers happy, your brand strong and your sales robust.

I would love to have you follow me at my blog at Tehrani.com and on Twitter at rtehrani.

PS: As I was proofing this column this alert hit me from Tweetdeck... I rest my case: "#Cigna has horrible customer service! No phone #, no email, no fax on website to discuss a claim. Clearly they're not there to help!" **CIS**

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



Beyond First Call Resolution

As I pored over this year's applications for our MVP Quality Awards – the winners are named in this issue – several common ideals became evident, ideals that are the hallmark of any successful organization and allow businesses to excel even in the most challenging of environments.

“Approach every customer as if they are your only customer.”

“Treat every call like it's the only one you will take today.”

“Never leave a customer stranded.”

“Quality is not just a process, it's a way of life.”

Some may cast these aside as trite clichés – in some respects, they may be – but, though idealistic and almost certainly not original, these values are what distinguish the most successful customer service groups and organizations from the masses.

Of course, the key consideration in most cases is whether you hang up the phone with a favorable resolution – first call resolution remains a key measure of success in most contact centers. The fact is, though, there isn't always a feasible means of resolving every situation immediately. That, however, does not mean the customer has to go away unsatisfied.

Last month, I mentioned Cablevision's mandatory call to customer service to activate a new set-top box – the rationale for which I still fail to understand. So, I made the call, and when the box had been activated, found the DVR capability not functioning properly.

The agent, as he had been instructed, ran through a prescribed set of actions to remedy the situation, to no avail, at which point the agent politely told me there was nothing more he could do and a technician would have to be called out. My frustration grew. However, I also recognized the fact that the first level of CSRs are trained to handle the most common and most easily remedied situations in most cases, and asked to speak to his supervisor.

The supervisor ran through much of the same detail the rep had – and though I had anticipated that, it certainly didn't help my frustration level. He then moved to a new series of tests and operations, which still failed to resolve the issue. At that point, I was told that there were a few other diagnostics that could be run, but they would take some time, and most likely would still result in a technician having to be sent to physically inspect the hardware.

Needless to say, I was less than pleased that the next available appointment was two days later – though from an employee satisfaction standpoint, knowing we were expecting a heavy winter storm within 18 hours, I also recognized that Cablevision had a responsibility to look out for the safety of its workforce. It

also would do little in terms of customer satisfaction to have to cancel a scheduled appointment due to weather conditions.

So, despite understanding the challenges with technology, and with Mother Nature, I was hardly a satisfied customer. But, I did not anticipate what transpired over the next few hours to change my attitude.

The supervisor reiterated there were some additional tests he could run, but rather than keep me on the phone, asked if he could call me back to determine if the service had been repaired. I will admit that I was less than optimistic about getting a call back, let alone the problem being resolved, but had little choice but to accept the offer (I suspected the issue was with the hardware, which would need to be replaced).

To my surprise, a little more than an hour later, the phone rang, and the supervisor asked me to turn on the box to test the DVR functionality, though to no avail. He said he would run one final set of test that was available to him and would call back again, which he did, though the DVR still was not functioning, and we scheduled a technician to come out two evenings later to replace the unit.

Ultimately, the scenario played out just as the original agent has indicated. But, because his supervisor had taken the time to go into greater detail about the problem, explained the scheduling constraints and, most importantly, because he had followed through on his promise to call me back – not once, but twice – I hung up the phone much less likely to cancel my service the next day.

Admittedly, I have no way of knowing how many tests were actually conducted, if any, but customer service is largely a matter of perception. I am not Cablevision's only customer (if I were, I would be paying much more than my already exorbitant rates), and mine was certainly not the only call the agent or supervisor had taken that day. But, the attentiveness and personalized level of service that I experienced almost made it seem so.

So, while the trite clichés that were abundant in this year's applications may cause you to roll your eyes, they, nevertheless, offer a valuable lesson in quality customer service. You know you won't be able to solve every issue immediately, but you can ensure you have a strategy for leaving your customers satisfied with what you are able to offer until a resolution can be found. That's the difference between customer service MVPs and the rest of the field. **CIS**



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UC = Customer Communications

Unified communications is enabling enterprises to improve customer service by permitting their clientele to be connected regardless of channel to the best available people who can meet their needs. UC then becomes customer communications (CC).

With quality customer service becoming even more vital to organizations' bottom lines we reached out to leading firms to provide their insights on UC. We asked them questions on the rationales for UC, on deployment challenges including acceptance of presence outside of contact centers and on the impacts of mobility and social media. We also asked which steps firms can take to have UC projects green lighted.

Avaya (www.avaya.com)

Chris McGugan, Vice President of Products and Marketing, Contact Centers

With UC the entire enterprise can become a customer service center making anyone in the enterprise available to serve customers on a real time basis based on availability. This is critical in these economic times of doing more with less.

We expect that businesses will have to accommodate the younger customers' choices of communicating: SMS, instant messaging, online blogging and social networks. Does that mean that voice is dead? No, but the expectation of instant access is forcing us to do business differently. Few are willing to wait in queue to talk to a live agent: people expect immediate satisfaction with expert service.

This means that we must evolve the architecture of the classic contact center, as customers are expecting more and more and are driving alternate vehicles for interacting with these contact centers: instant messaging, voice, the Web and

even video. Each of these can be seen as merely an application supporting the interaction type required; however, the various jigsaw pieces that are deployed in many contact centers today may not scale to support them.

The notion of establishing "experts" within the organization is the easy part; managing their time, availability and presence is the tougher issue, and we're finding our customers are moving in this direction. An active reporting system is essential to making this leap. Managing real time customer feedback, active agent coaching, and in some cases, voice analytics, are just some of the solutions we have deployed utilizing Avaya and our partner community.

We are hearing more and more about mobility from our customers. Not must mobility of making their own sales forces and employees mobile but how to meet the needs of their customers who are always connected to their mobile device. Using SMS with UC in the contact center is a win-win for the end user customer who prefers texting and it has a rapid ROI for our customers because it is completely automated. It becomes a customer satisfaction enabler proactively alerting customers of notifications that would be of interest to them.

We see people willing to spend money on technology if it will improve customer satisfaction and help them cut costs. We estimate customers will be investing in more technology and auto-



mation like video, SMS, presence and social networking rather than adding call center agents, we see this area as a strong growth area post-downturn.

Multimedia and UC solutions are key as long as they deliver a personal, intuitive experience. The ROI is based on the ability to automate many of the standard business processes and customer service interactions that the majority of customers need to interact with a traditional agent for.

Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories (www.genesyslab.com)

Jim Krauetler, Solution Owner, Unified Communications

UC is playing a significant role in enabling contact centers to extend beyond their traditional walls and include back office and branch workers. The poor economy has played an important role as it has spurred enterprises to look for better ways to use the people they have.

Many companies are looking for ways to better serve the customers they already have – to keep their customers from moving to a competitor. With some UC technologies, companies can make sure their high-value customers speak to the right person, such as to their unique health care provider, their personal banker, broker, account executive and claims adjuster. In this way, UC has helped some forward-looking enterprise protect vital, existing revenue streams needed to sustain profitability during the recent economic downturn.



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Knowledge workers are expensive. UC must have ways to selectively use back office personnel before it will become a widely accepted technology.

Security and regulatory compliance also are huge barriers to adoption of current UC systems into contact center operations. For example, if an agent in financial services has a customer on the line, conferences in an expert, and that expert is allowed to add someone to that call, transfer it to another party, or even IM vital personal data to another party, that customer security is gravely compromised. In this case, the enterprise's regulatory compliance has failed. Only integrated solutions that preserve existing reporting, routing, and security best practices can deliver the collaboration and productivity benefits of UC without becoming a liability in the process.

For UC to be successful in customer service, employees will require the capability to choose how to set rules on how many calls or inquiries they take, under which circumstances, and what types of customers. Employees will accept the technology if it is easy to incorporate into their regular work lives, but not if it is overly disruptive. In many cases, this will mean that employees outside the contact center must be able to choose whether to accept an interaction. Yet, this also poses a challenge to efficiency. How can you ensure that a customer is not left on hold too long while the correct, available and willing back office worker is identified?

All new investments are undergoing great scrutiny and must show a clear business case to move forward in today's environment. UC is no different. For UC to show an ROI in customer service, it must be tightly integrated to existing contact center applications, databases, infrastructure and processes. This is necessary to preserve the best practices each enterprise has developed over time to most effectively and efficiently handle each interaction, to protect customer's personal information and data, and to measure employee productivity through reporting.

Simply deploying UC systems in both the contact center and enterprise for the purpose of say for increased collaboration does not amount to an integration that accomplishes these customer service must-haves. As UC becomes more ubiquitous in the enterprise, contact center technology vendors will increasingly see the opportunity to develop integrated solutions, causing sustainable and applicable contact center focused UC solutions to proliferate.

“We must evolve the architecture of the classic contact center, as customers are expecting more and more and are driving alternate vehicles for interacting with these contact centers: instant messaging, voice, the Web and even video. Each of these can be seen as merely an application supporting the interaction type required; however, the various jigsaw pieces that are deployed in many contact centers today may not scale to support them.”

– Chris McGugan, Vice President of Products and Marketing, Contact Centers, Avaya

Verizon (www.verizon.com)

Alla Reznik, Director, Product Management for Global Contact Center Solutions and E-911

The first key rationale is customer satisfaction. UC improves it via presence by increasing first contact resolution and reducing escalations, which enables customers' matters to be resolved quicker. The second is the economy. There is a pull pressure to deploy UC to enhance and uphold the level of customer service that our clients' customers have come to expect, with retaining customers having become extremely important. The third factor is environmental, with our clients wanting to

Ensuring Call Quality

Unified communications, and with it customer satisfaction and loyalty and program effectiveness is only as good as quality of the calls. Few facets bother customers more distortion, echo and noise while connected to agents.

While there are quality of service-based (QoS) management and monitoring tools, [Psytechnics](http://www.psytechnics.com) (www.psytechnics.com) officials say they do not provide real time visibility and operations to manage and diagnose

end users' call experiences. Instead firms, suppliers and providers should also deploy solutions that measure quality of experience (QoE).

“The ability to measure actual user experience (i.e. QoE) as well as network-related QoS is fundamental to a consistent and acceptable UC user experience, as well as delivering efficient operations and support,” says Joe Frost, vice president of marketing, **Psytechnics**. **CIS**



reduce their carbon footprint by utilizing the ability of UC to enable remote agents, which cuts down on commuting trips.

The economic conditions in the past couple of years have certainly impacted the rationale for deploying UC tools. Before the downturn, UC was being sought after as a nice capability to have. Now enterprises are adopting UC to address mission-critical tasks, such as providing enhanced customer service aimed at customer retention and acquisition at lower costs. UC-based presence permits this because you don't have to deploy as many agents and because you are avoiding longer and repeat calls by directing callers to expert employees or idle staff who can help them immediately and with greater rate of success.

Another reason for the growth, even in an economic downturn, is that enterprises that have aggressively migrated to IP-based solutions in the past 18 to 24 months have realized strong savings. We've seen customers achieving savings averaging between 10 percent and 40 percent from pure migration from TDM to IP platforms. These realized savings, in many cases, are immediately put to work to deploy UC tools.

It will take some skillful contact center managers and some cultural shifts to get to that point where department and their staff outside of the contact centers are comfortable with being connected to contact centers that UC via presence permits. This will happen first in smaller companies where everyone is naturally oriented that way: being jacks of all trades where someone in accounting may have to answer the calls. It will also happen in new companies where they can set expectations for their staff from the beginning, and in firms with a younger, more multi-task-oriented workforce.

Yet larger companies can have an easier time employing UC company-wide but from a different angle. They can set work processes that have to be followed with standardized approach, which is what they are good at. If you have a smart manager who is forward-looking then he or she can come up with a way to integrate specialists into the workflow. They can write employment contracts with the job expectations that employees will spend X number of hours supporting their contact center agents. Systematic training should also play a key role in pushing the cultural shift forward.

The maturity of UC will drive acceptance. If you have easy to use presence tools, such say with a push of button to let the system know someone is available, then employees will be more willing to be connected.

The workforce management tools to make this happen across departments efficiently are getting there. There is more work to be done though in that regard.

Regarding social media there is a certain amount of unease with it. Companies have still not figured out how to use it for

Managing Non-Contact Center Workers

A key benefit of unified communications is the ability via presence to directly connect enterprise employees outside of the contact centers to customers whether to handle specific inquiries or to take overflow calls.

The recording and quality monitoring tools are there that can capture and analyze interactions regardless of who handles the call. The question is how to schedule these "informal agents" to ensure service levels?

Verint (www.verint.com) sees a shift-bidding type environment develop where employees will provide support for limited durations. Calls that require knowledge workers from other areas of the business may only consume 15 minutes of their day.

"It is more likely that the workforce management system will identify call center support requirements and generate notices to eligible non-contact center workers who voluntarily sign up for pieces consistent with their other professional duties," explains Bill Durr, principal, global solutions consultant, Verint Witness Actionable Solution.

normal interactions let alone for customer service via contact centers. There is plenty of growth potential here. For example, you can use it to pose difficult questions from customers to the broad community via Twitter or to a defined user group such as those that exist on eBay and PayPal. This method solves problems quickly without having to pay anyone for it. But we are at the beginning of the process.

There are several strong arguments for UC that must be put forward for these projects to get green lighted. One of them is the ability to cost-effectively deploy chat, which enables agents to serve several customers at once. Others are shorter duration of calls and avoiding repeat calls. With UC you can route the calls faster and get to the right person specializing in specific services or have particular expertise available sooner. All of these benefits come from reducing the number of contact center agents. Fewer agents translate into lower labor, equipment and real estate costs.

One of important steps for green lighting is to look at the ROI based on your particular enterprise's operations and give the CFOs hard numbers. It is easy to do with VoIP solutions because ROI is proven and very easy to demonstrate. You can utilize the savings to invest in UC. The ROI with UC is there but not so clearly defined as it varies from enterprise to enterprise as each of them has their own unique work environments. **CIS**



- **ADTRAN** (www.adtran.com) has entered the UC market with the NetVanta Unified Communications Solution Suite (UC Suite). It provides UC functionality such as voicemail, unified messaging, fax server and an auto attendant that can be personalized for each individual user and each unique business practice or process. NetVanta UC solutions are designed to accommodate from five to over 2,000 users per server.

Other facets of the NetVanta UC Suite include the NetVanta UC Server that is designed for businesses and enterprises with an existing PBX. The UC suite also provides the NetVanta Business Communications System which combines ADTRAN's NetVanta 7000 Series IP-PBXs with the NetVanta UC Server enhanced with additional features such as click-to-dial capabilities and an integrated conference server. It also includes NetVanta UC Servers database connectivity option. In the UC Suite as well is the NetVanta Enterprise Communications Server that is aimed at larger enterprises. Designed for use with Microsoft Windows and Active Directory, it offers a full soft IP-PBX that is complemented with the NetVanta UC Server, plus click-to-dial, an integrated conference server and a paging server.

- **Chrysalis Software** (www.chrysalis.net) has come out with the first in a series of packaged IVR applications, this one aimed at the utility industry. It automates high-volume common tasks such as common requests for information, inbound outage reporting and outbound restoration notification.

- **CSC** (www.csc.com) has launched its new Unified Communications Services Portfolio. CSC will design, build, integrate and manage this suite of services for enterprise-scaled firms. Key components of this platform are technologies that connect remote and mobile workers and which deliver messaging and presence integration, fixed and mobile integration, IPT services, desktop video and collaboration and communications-enabled applications.

- **ManageEngine** (www.manageengine.com) has come out with new version of ManageEngine SupportCenter Plus, the company's Web-based customer help desk suite. It targets and integrates relevant conversation taking place on Twitter, allowing support reps to identify instances of customers tweeting about a company or its products. It also features a new Intelligent Response System, a self-service capability that responds to customers as they begin typing their questions or requests, automatically suggesting helpful materials from the application's knowledge base. It allows reps help customers by looking up a previously catalogued answer or piece of information residing in the application knowledge base without ever leaving their primary consoles.

ManageEngine has also rolled out ManageEngine ServiceDesk Plus, MSP Edition. The new solution helps managed providers to deliver that specialized service to a range of customers using just a single installation of the software. It also provides separate dashboards and reports. Service providers can perform all help desk and IT asset management functions from a single console.

- **Nexidia** (www.nexidia.com) has introduced Nexidia ESI-Quality, part of the firm's Enterprise Speech Intelligence (ESI) software suite. With ESI-Quality, contact centers can tap into 100 percent of recorded customer interactions and apply speech analytics to help measure and improve quality and agent performance. ESI-Quality leverages Nexidia's patented phonetic indexing and search technology to provide quantitative analysis of large, complete data sets and coaching and performance management at all levels within a contact center organization. ESI-Quality can analyze agent activity as it relates directly to these same strategic initiatives to ensure that team and agent performance is measured on those activities that are most important to the overall bottom line.

- **SoundBite Communications** (www.soundbite.com) has come out with a new release of SoundBite Engage. New features include the SoundBite Dialog Engine. It uses enhanced keyword search functionality to support fully-automated, interactive text messaging conversations that implement custom business logic. Messages are relevant and personalized to the mobile recipients. The Dialog Engine enables opt-in programs, alerts, self-service and automated issue resolution.

Also included in SoundBite Engage is the SoundBite Agent Text Portal. It allows contact center agents to log in and view message history and interact with customers in real-time via a Web user interface. Agents can engage in multiple text conversations simultaneously using predefined or free-form messages. SoundBite Engage can seamlessly transition between a fully-automated and agent-assisted text messaging dialog. Supervisors can monitor agent activity as well as the overall campaign status.

- **Subex** (www.subexworld.com) has rolled out Vector, a service fulfillment solution that combines order management and service provisioning processes aimed at enabling communication service providers to shorten the time-to-market for new services through rapid deployment. It has automated order management and service provisioning processes and a service creation environment that enables rapid service development and adapter creation. It also offers predefined "Service Accelerators" that capture fulfillment best practices and service definitions out-of-the-box, fixed interface for CRM tools and end-to-end service views.



• **TantaComm** (www.tantacomm.com) has come out with Dart 3.0, the latest offering of its suite of contact center quality management and recording solutions. Dart 3.0 provides users with increased functionality including a Web-based user interface, which allows convenient and streamlined access to the suite's scheduling, reviewing, evaluating and reporting capabilities. Enhanced data-driven reporting facilitates improved interaction with firms' internal and external partners. It allows users to create schedules by employee, product, client, agency or vendor.

• **BPO firm Teleperformance** (www.teleperformance.com) has launched Teleperformance Platinum, a new program that builds on clients' in-house contact centers by combining leading-edge technology with agents who are immersed in the culture of the companies they represent. With Teleperformance Platinum, the clients' environment is reproduced at agents' workstations to accommodate a broad range of complex customer demands, such as a sophisticated tech support issue. According to company officials, the agents leverage a unique set of tools to drive first call resolution and, therefore, higher customer satisfaction, all at fees that are favorable when compared to similar in-house provided services.

• **TelStrat** (www.telstrat.com) is shipping Engage 3.2, its contact center solution suite. Incorporating the previously announced phonetic-technology-based speech analytics product Engage Analyze, this release also brings new capabilities in other key areas. It extends soft key-based, on-demand call recording to Avaya and Cisco VoIP phones. It has new low-cost option for Avaya VoIP recording, the T-SPAN configuration which does not rely on service observing or single-step-conference. Engage 3.2 now supports virtual server implementations in VM Ware, Microsoft Hyper-V and Citrix environments. It also rolls in TelStrat's newly available support for SIP.

This capability allows Engage Record to provide full-featured recording functionality to SIP-based phones on a wide variety of PBX platforms. **CIS**

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Building Customer Loyalty

There has rarely been a greater focus by companies on retaining customers' loyalty to maximize their lifetime value than now. Enterprises of all sizes are finally "getting it" that it costs them five times more to obtain new buyers than to serve existing ones, that there is ROI in this strategy if customers stay loyal: who if very satisfied also drive in new ones with no added marketing costs.

"In any customer lifecycle, the cost of obtaining and servicing new customers comes in the early days of the relationship with them," explains Tony Compton, director of CRM product marketing, Infor. "As their loyalty grows, companies begin to minimize servicing costs. In the end, it will cost less to service happy, loyal customers and much of the value of their future transactions can go to increasing margins."

Yet there has rarely been a time when customers are more fickle and more quick and able to spread the word globally at the speed of light. The Internet and social media especially have empowered customers, placing them in charge. The slogan "you're only as good as your last performance" is becoming the buying motto.

Ryan Pellet is [Convergys](#)' vice president, global business units. He points to recent Convergys and market research that found that firms which are successful at retaining more of their customers (i.e. achieving greater loyalty) drive a three percent market capitalization increase for their companies over those who are not as effective. At the same time the data also showed that while over 85 percent of customers say they are generally satisfied with overall service, only one-third would remain loyal after a single bad experience.

"The recession has made customers more determined to protect their 'rights'; they are not willing to settle for less than the best experience... every time," Pellet points out.

The downturn has exacerbated two apparently income-driven splits between preferences based on price and on service. Steven Jeffes and Kirk Olsson, Cognizant Business Consulting, Customer Service Practice, has seen an increase and a decrease in loyalty at the same time for different segments of customers. They report that traditionally price-sensitive customers have become even more so, making these customers less likely to be loyal and churning more frequently among product and service providers to find the best deal, regardless of loyalty incentives. Yet another group of customers has responded well to enhanced loyalty programs, more flexible and attractive incentives, and better customer service.

If one factor outweighs the other then it would be service over price, within reason. Buyers also tend to stick with the products and services they know and are reasonably satisfied with.

"Many people will go elsewhere if the prices are lower, yet overall customers will stay loyal if you give them great service," says Dianne Durkin, president and founder of The Loyalty Factor.

"And they're willing to pay extra money for high quality products and service. They will give up spending someplace else to get it."

Developing a Loyalty Strategy

A customer loyalty strategy must be built on attractive products/services and pricing. To retain and gain market edge firms need to look at ways to lower



production or service delivery expenses while maintaining high quality. This approach also cuts leads to fewer cancellations, returns and service calls or e-mails – happy customers don't tend to contact companies – resulting in lower costs.

Durkin cites IKEA International, which offers quality products at fair prices as an example. They have not cut corners whereas other manufacturers have got prices and margins and cannot keep up with quality.

"High quality at reasonable prices, more than anything else, is the key to loyalty," says Durkin.

Borge Hald CEO Medallia points out that this "do it right" strategy is becoming very important to retain younger customers (Gens X and Y), which data collected by his firm and that of his clients reveal are less forgiving than the previous population cohorts.

"As the younger generations become a larger part of the customer base, they raise the bar for companies," says Hald.

Ideally products, services and companies should have a buzz about them. That attracts committed loyal 'fans' that are happy to buy more, willing to participate in product trials, and who eagerly recommend the firms' offerings to others.

"As companies increase their share of customer 'fans' and reduce their share of customer detractors, the business results can be dramatic," reports Hald. "In a



typical case 'fans' of one specialty retailer purchased two times more than 'neutral' customers and drove the same amounts of additional sales through word of mouth recommendations."

With the fundamentals in play companies need to learn all they can about their customers: attributes, demographics, geographies, and their buying behaviors not just of that firm's products and services but of others so that they can see spending patterns. Enterprises must also find out and understand customers' perceptions about their companies and offerings.

"In a down economy, one's company has to be a marketing machine," says Durkin. "That means pulling together customer data, all touchpoints and channels to make sure one knows who is buying and who isn't buying and how that has changed and why. Companies must ask customers 'how can we help you, how are we doing, what are we not doing, what things are we doing that we should stop doing?'"

Infor's Compton says firms must make analysis-based decisions on what is known about customers, their propensity models, channels of preference and influencer communities. Gone are the days, he says, of making customer relationship management decisions based on gut feelings or emotional reactions to trends in the market.

"Those companies which strive to understand their customers through the analysis and utilization of data can employ an intelligent customer interaction strategy across multiple channels and engender long-term customer loyalty," says Compton. "Many companies and senior marketers don't effectively use the data they already have within their four walls – those that intelligently use customer data can lead, compete and win, right away."

Customers are also motivated differently even when it comes what makes and keeps them loyal. Firms must then take steps to find out this for each segment.

"All customers are not created equal in terms of loyalty needs," Jeffes and Olsson points out. "So customer service might be the most important to some premium customer segments, while others are much more concerned with how well the company communicates and interacts, e.g., social media interaction, while yet others are predominantly fixed on price or incentives."

They recommend that firms develop a deep understanding of the specific needs of the customer base and sub-segments. From there they can create a very specific and tailored programs based on these identified needs (such as price saver and award plus segment/program), and seek to meet or exceed the expectations of each segment group.

"The bottom line is that people care about people and companies who care about, listen to, and respond effectively to

them," report Jeffes and Olsson. "If companies offer a unique product with pleasant customer service at a fair price, with the proper loyalty reward/incentives, then people will want to return and refer the product or service to others."

Making Loyalty Happen

Whatever loyalty strategy is developed steps must be put in place to execute it successfully. Durkin recommends having a customer retention strategy focus, approved and championed at the top, backed up by policies and procedures, including metrics and training, to carry this out. The strategy must also be communicated repeatedly to ensure that it is understood by employees so they can carry out these policies effectively.

"The CEO needs to clearly articulate this vision of loyalty, and its importance to the company," says Durkin. "Each department manager then needs to carry this forward and be very explicit with each and every employee on how they will contribute to the customer service vision and strategy."

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In developing plans to execute a loyalty strategy firms need to take a hard look at offshoring and self-service, especially IVR for their contact centers. Offshoring affords otherwise unaffordable live agent contacts but at the price and risk of increased escalations and repeat calls and customer dissatisfaction. Self-service provides lower-cost quick responses to inquiries but customers prefer not to talk to machines; deploying it also loses opportunities to build customer relations and added revenues via cross-selling and upselling.

“Hiring and keeping quality people in domestic contact centers is the most cost-effective and productive investment that companies can make,” says Durkin. “They can purchase expensive self-service tools and often times their costs are much more than the cost of investing in their people who come into direct contact with their customers.”

The Cognizant team points out that companies also need to keep their costs manageable. One of the best means of doing that is by matching the channel (and location) to the value of specific customers.

“Companies would want to determine the optimal mix of the customer preferred communication channel with the most cost-effective channel against the backdrop of the customer value,” says Jeffes and Olsson. “So while it might be cost-prohibitive to communicate with lower value customers via phone 100 percent of the time it might make sense for premium customers if this is their preferred communication channel. In keeping the commu-

nications matrix optimally balanced the needs of companies and customers are likewise kept in balance.”

A master key to enabling loyalty is hiring and training the right agents: those who can ask the right questions, can understand and get to the problems quickly, demonstrate empathy to the most difficult customers, and who can resolve customers’ issues and build relationships with them. To make that happen, firms also need to use retention/loyalty-focused metrics, such as first contact resolution (FCR).

“Often times, contact agents have been trained to fix customers’ problems as opposed to building customer relationships,” explains Durkin. “You can ‘fix them’ while at the same time building a relationship. This means learning specific relationship-building techniques that allow customers to express their needs and feel valued. One good way of doing this is by encouraging them to thank customers even if this adds a little time to each call. It shows customers they are appreciated and their problems are also being resolved.”

Jeffes and Olsson recommend that firms use more customer-oriented metrics such as customers’ qualitative rating of the handling of customer issues and concerns in feedback to ensure loyalty rather than traditional and tactically-focused metrics such as FCR and calls per hours. For example, while a customer call might meet a time per call metric and their issue might have been resolved in the first call per that agent, the customer might have had other feedback that they wanted to share, but felt as though they were rushed or cut off from the call.

“Then the corresponding customer satisfaction score for that call might be much lower than anticipated if it were measured,” says Jeffes and Olsson.

A successful loyalty program is one where the firms listens to customers and follows up on what they are saying to improve products or service and correct issues. Convergys’ Pellet recommends that companies collect the customer experience as from call recordings, screen interactions and surveys, and social media and examine them with analytics tools to understand what customers are saying. These methods close the loop with feedback to customers. Doing so he says will correct the current perception that over one-third of customers say companies do not listen to or act on their feedback.

“Companies who will prevail in this economy will tie the ability to identify feedback and quickly incorporate and react to the feedback via refined customer experience processes,” Pellet points out. **CIS**

Different Customer Types, Different Loyalty Strategies

All customers aren’t cut from the same cloth, especially when it comes to loyalty. Dianne Durkin, president and founder of The Loyalty Factor, points out that there are three different types: (1) those who buy a lot and don’t talk about the company; (2) those who love the firm and they’re buying a lot; and (3) those who don’t buy much and they really, really love the company and are good advocates.

For category (1) companies need to put some branding and referral incentives in place so that they will talk about them. For category (2) firms must ensure that no issues develop, customers are looked after, and steps are taken to build on this relationship, including thanking them frequently for their commitment.

For category (3) the challenge is how to get them to buy more because right now they’re not but they love the company. This can be achieved by providing various purchase incentives.

“Even though the customers in the third group are not big purchasers today, you have to treat them well, especially in this economy, because when things improve, they will remember the companies that helped them out,” says Durkin.

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Cognizant
www.cognizant.com

Convergys
www.convergys.com

Infor
www.infor.com

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Ignify, Parature

In his "First Coffee" blog, TMCnet's David Sims writes:

Ignify, a CRM and ERP consulting firm and Microsoft Dynamics Inner Circle Partner, has announced an enhanced contact center platform for Microsoft's CRM Call Center Agent Desktop.

The new platform allows "customer service agents using Microsoft CRM to prioritize incidents and escalate those incidents for resolution with just one mouse click," company officials said, adding that "this capability greatly enhances first contact resolution while reducing cost per incident and most importantly improving overall customer satisfaction.

The contact center extension offers an approach to increase sales and handle greater client workloads without the need for additional personnel, company officials contend, by providing customer self-service capabilities and

"an integrated agent desktop that ties together different applications and voice, chat and CRM information."

The extension integrates into existing Microsoft CRM deployments including "automatic classification of accounts to multiple tiers based on past sales volume, visualizing a sales funnel through probability and accurately forecasting future sales and assigning contacts and customers to various marketing lists among many others," according to Ignify officials.

Parature, a vendor of on-demand customer service software, has announced integration between its customer service software suite and Microsoft Dynamics CRM.

Parature's integration, with the catchy name of ParaConnect for Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online, offers what

Parature officials describe as "a customer service suite for Microsoft customers... a one-stop shop for all service and support needs."

Parature's products let companies support customers through its Software-as-a-Service delivery and design: "The integrated suite of Parature Customer Service software modules allows organizations to effectively manage all of their support needs without additional hardware, software and IT expenses," company officials contend, since "Parature integrates everything in one system: Customer support, operations, development and sales."

Parature Founder and Chief Strategy Officer Duke Chung said ParaConnect for Microsoft Dynamics CRM Online "opens a new world of visibility and intelligence for organizations."

Visit David's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/telecom-crm>

The User Experience

In his On Rad's Radar, Peter Radizeski of RAD-INFO, Inc writes:

At Broadsoft Connections Michael Tessler spoke about it being all about apps and the Customer Experience. (Has he been reading my slides?)

One reason IP Telephony grew (according to Dell'Oro) 7 percent to \$737 million in Q209 is because IPT lowers the cost of the capital expenditure (CAPEX) and it also lowers the cost of maintenance and support.

As an industry, we have to move away from talking cost savings to a discussion about value to the customer experience. Efficiency, productivity, privacy and security will be key topics coupled with TCO and ROI studies.

The user experience must be about usefulness, ease of use, reliable and enjoyable. (Something that most folks would not associate with telcos.)

You need to take the technology out of the way of the user. If you can do that, you win.

Visit Peter's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/on-rads-radar>



WHERE IS MY MOBILE DATA?

In his Communications and Technology Blog, Rich Tehrani writes:

Perhaps one of the most important nuggets of recent news is a catastrophic loss of T-Mobile USA Sidekick customer data, and if you have one of these nifty little gadgets, be aware the wireless carrier asks that you not reset it.

This issue highlights the problems with SaaS and cloud-based services. Google, thought to be the gold standard of hosted-data companies, has suffered outages and so have Amazon and Salesforce.com. The one constant here is cloud-based services seem to be as error-prone as CPE equipment, which makes sense. If it can better, it will gain a larger share of the data center pie.

Visit Rich's blog at <http://blog.tmcnet.com/blog/rich-tehrani>

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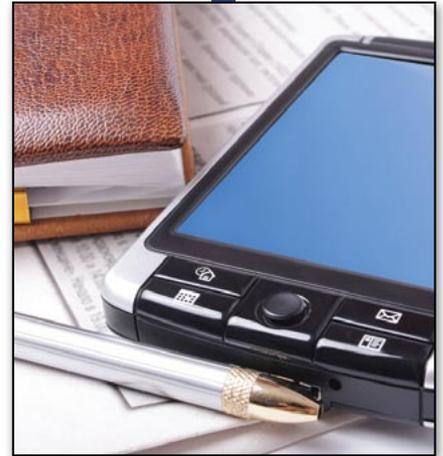
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Remaking Business Intelligence

For contact center agents, retaining customers and improving sales starts with data-gathering. And business intelligence – or “BI” – is one technology that helps turn data about customers into improved retention rates as well as profits.



Having solid BI methods and tools in place is becoming critical for firms what with forecasts showing a slow recovery, including with it marginal but growing increases in spending. Companies need to extract every last ounce of value from the data, obtaining from it a most accurate picture of what is happening with customers. This way they can fine-tune with customer relationship strategies to obtain maximum revenue at minimal costs.

At the same time firms need to look at refining their BI in view of changes in how customers interact

and transact with organizations. They are using growing array of channels both traditional live-person (agent via voice, e-mail and chat, and retail/counter), newer automated (Web, kiosk, and IVR self-service) and the latest: social media. That means firms have to look at hard at the types of data that can be collected from these interactions, which could force them to change how they aggregate, analyze and process them.

The payoff in having the right BI methods in place is enabling com-

panies to stay competitive or better yet, best their competition in today’s environment where there has been a commoditization of many products, pricing and even service.

“You can relatively easily gather for example that some of your customers are satisfied dissatisfied from surveys,” says Boris Evelson, principal analyst, Forrester. “But to automatically and proactively infer the reasons for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction from their activity in their account, e.g. all of a sudden they start withdrawing

BI Best Practices

Boris Evelson, principal analyst, Forrester, offers these best practices when considering and deploying BI:

1. Place a broadly defined BI process, one that goes beyond dashboards to include analytics front and center of all CRM activities
2. Insist that businesses, in partnership with IT own CRM data and metrics
3. Practice top-down CRM performance management (define strategy; define supporting goals and objectives, and identify metrics needed to monitor goals and objectives

“If firms look at BI as just another technology and tool and relegate management of BI activities to IT department that is a sure recipe for disaster,” he points out.

“Say a customer satisfaction goal is a churn rate that is no more than X percent per customers per month,” explains Evelson. “When you agreed on those metrics and how

those metrics support those goals and objectives then you can analyze the data sources to understand why that churn is occurring and amongst which customer segments.”

4. Create BI applications and processes that support all types of CRM decision makers: strategic, tactical and operational

“In CRM there is an interplay between strategic decision makers versus operations decision makers, i.e. ‘I’m on the phone with customers, I need to make decisions right there on the spot’ versus ‘I need to analyze customers’ buying patterns to optimize service to them,” says Evelson. “Yet the architecture and tools needed to support these strategic versus operational decisions are very different.”

5. Use BI not just to monitor and analyze customer behavior but for internal CRM processes, success or failure. Use BI to adjust CRM strategy and tactics as necessary.



money, or when they complain on Facebook, require a comprehensive BI application. Having that capability is what differentiates companies from each other.

“If you can make a better, faster decision on information with it [BI] from your customers than your competitors guess which one is going to respond with the most success? And when your analytics does cover social media as an extra dimension and are more insightful then obviously you will make better decisions and that will be your competitive edge.”

Freeing the CRM Data

The biggest need and driver for BI is to unlock the power of the data aggregated in CRM systems, just as basic oxygen furnaces tap the strength of steel hidden unprocessed inside iron by applying the right elements and processes.

Brad Peters, CEO of Birst, is seeing huge demand for analysis of CRM data. Companies have made tremendous investments in their CRM systems over the past decade, and now want to see how they can make the most of that information. The reporting available within the CRM solutions is often rudimentary and can hamper the CRM solution itself, though, so companies are turning to BI for better, faster, and more effective analysis.

“At its core, BI allows customer-facing organizations to treat their customers strategically,” says Peters. “This means arming customer-facing employees with the power to make better decisions at the time of customer interaction. By driving better customer interactions (as opposed to just more efficient ones which is really the goal of CRM), customer experience and customer value can be dramatically impacted.”

Mark Flaherty, vice president, marketing, InetSoft, says there is a huge amount of insight about customer behavior and potential churn or customer loss to be derived from all the data stored in a CRM system that goes otherwise untapped without decent BI tools. Businesses know this; in the past, they’ve looked to copy the data into data warehouses and use heavy duty statistical analysis software to develop retention and scoring models. But now, while that is still important, businesses are looking to make the operational data in CRM systems more accessible and to link those retention scores back to the customer accounts.

“The biggest problem with retention management is that by the time an at-risk customer is recognized using traditional methods, the customer has already left, and getting him or her back is either impossible or exorbitantly expensive,” explains Flaherty. “With a BI tool that offer good visualization capabilities, now macro retention trends can be spotted more easily and quickly and even at-risk customers can pop out at a glance. Front-line business managers are able to react sooner instead of waiting for statistical analysts to spit out reports for them.”

There is still a challenge in using BI tools with CRM systems that are closed, storing the data in proprietary databases. This makes accessing the information difficult.

“I think CRM users are getting fed up with that, and [as a result] more vendors are opening access to the data,” says Flaherty.

Forrester’s Evelson thinks the BI scope should be broadened to include data gathering and management including data cleansing, integration, aggregation and warehousing to enable the information to become meaningful actionable and integrated. BI has too long been defined, he says, to only encompass analytics, dashboards and reporting. Some 80

Business Intelligence and Predictive Analytics

When looking at employing or refining BI take a close look at coupling predictive analytics solutions to it. By applying predictive analytics software to the data already harnessed through BI technology, organizations can uncover unexpected patterns and associations and develop models to guide front-line interactions with their most valued assets: customers, constituents or employees.

BI and performance management focus on what’s happening now or happened in the past, explains Erick Brethenoux, vice president of corporate development at IBM SPSS.

Why these occurred, what is likely to happen next, and forecasting future trends is what predictive analytics delivers. It does so by analyzing, modeling and scoring demographic data (attributes) and transactional data (actions) from operational systems, as well as attitudinal data gathered through customer feedback and surveys. Predictive analytics provides specific, real-time recommendations on the most appropriate decision to make and/or action to take at that precise point in time.

IBM is coupling BI and predictive analytics into upcoming offerings through its acquisition last year of SPSS. While IBM’s BI solutions enable organizations to understand performance and make better decisions, IBM SPSS predictive analytics software capitalizes on that insight, allowing organizations to anticipate change so that they can acquire, grow and retain customers, while mitigating fraud and reducing risk.

“The combination results in a distinct competitive advantage, allowing organizations to optimize all parts of their business,” says Brethenoux.



percent of the effort in building CRM is data organizing, reconciling from different sources, and sorted in different formats, addresses, and identifiers.

“If I am a business, I need to know if I am selling into the right or wrong customer segment, how customers are responding, and customer satisfaction,” says Evelson. “Unless there is a very strong analytics program on back end with sufficient and clean data in BI, I cannot see what’s effective, and what’s not effective.”

Crossing the Channels

The growth in Web and IVR/speech recognition and ATM/kiosk self-service, mostly at the expense of live-agent and retail interactions has created a need for companies to also deploy analytics across these channels to understand customers’ behavior. The information obtained is being integrated with that pulled from contact centers and retail via BI to see and predict customers’ actions.

Crossing those channels can be challenging though. By definition self-service does not capture the customers’ tone, which imparts invaluable information as effectively as speech analytics on live agent calls. Also, the information often rests in different silos. That runs the risk of inaccuracy: multiple entries and storage increase the odds of data errors such as misspellings and incorrect addresses that annoy customers.

“So how can firms optimize the use of BI tools and minimize data quality issues given the multichannel environment and limited direct exposure to customers?” asked Vuk Trifkovic, senior analyst, **Ovum**. “I’d recommend: a) data quality initiatives; b) master-data management (MDM) initiative; c) a knowledge-management layer; and d) unified approach to customer intelligence.”

BI and Social Media

If employing BI to process information and gain insights from customer interactions in existing channels: contact centers, IVR and Web self-service and retail was challenging enough, then social media threatens to knock managers for a loop. Social media is unlike any other channel in that it is not one-on-one but a community, one where customers not the companies control the messaging. Customers can therefore make or break a product or offering at the speed of light by their comments.

Tapping into and managing information from social media is also different from other channels. These rely on and BI apps pull from structured data whereas social media data is unstructured and flowing between multiple parties. Firms cannot just use standard text-parsing tools because the terminology is different for different industries and verticals and regions, and social communities. They must create custom applications to understand the meaning of extracted keywords that they can then integrate them into the BI applications.

“Anyone can write a program that would take an e-mail or IM and chop it up for keywords,” explains Evelson. “That is not enough in social channels. It requires a much more sophisticated semantic entity fraction; to understand which keywords are the subjects, objects and actions. You have to ‘train’ these applications to understand the taxonomies that could be unique to each industry or business domain.”

To tap into social media, Evelson recommends that firms tighten down their existing BI processes i.e. walk before you can run. They then need to understand what their problems are in the social channel, and set up goals and objectives and metrics in response.

While firms, chiefly their marketing departments are beginning to listen to the social channel and in some cases use it for brand awareness and respond to comments and issues. Yet a much more difficult task is to actually adjust strategy, tactics, campaigns and product offerings based on insights derived from social media.

“Even if I glean some interesting insights from social interactions how do I tie that to back to the cross-sell/upsell ratio and customer satisfaction; it is not a one-to-one relationship,” says Evelson.

Ovum’s Trifkovic says that BI tools per se can readily manage social channels through natural language processing built-in, taking advantage of the text-based nature of interactions. Also, social networking can be graphed to understand who is saying what and who are the leaders and follower on social channels via the relatively well understood concept of network analysis.

The challenges lie in normalizing data across channels, establishing social media participants’ identities – which are often nicknames – and how best to monitor these interactions track what is being said about companies. These also include how to effectively flow through and incorporate loose unstructured data from that channel. Also, the volume of data pulled in from social media consumes is large; it may require firms to bolster their processing capacity.

“The BI framework is there but the analytics are not quite there yet,” explains Trifkovic. “There needs to be more network and semantic analysis, and perhaps more parallel processing to handle the information. While enabling BI for the social channel will require frankly a little bit of vision, case study but in general I don’t think it is going to be an insurmountable problem.” **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Birst
www.birst.com

IBM
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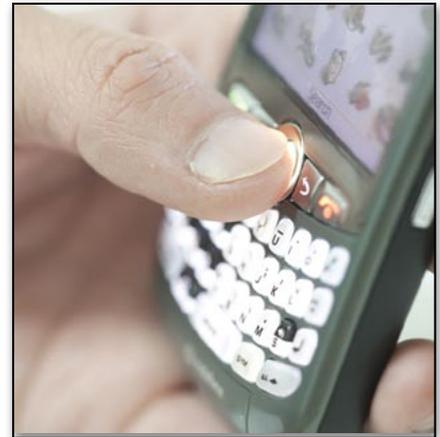
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by Brendan Read

RTR Goes to the 'Max'



Business is about change. When businesses change, their systems and technologies – such as CRM software – often need to change with them to meet new circumstances and take advantage of fresh opportunities.

RTR Advisory Group designs, implements and manages financial plans for high-net worth incorporated professionals, small business owners and retirees. The company, based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, has a team of seven mobile sales people plus administrative staff who support more than 3,000 clients.

RTR was formed in 2005 by four individual London Life advisors to establish its own identity with its clients and to expand its product and service offerings. Going on its own though meant that it needed a new CRM application tailored to its needs, plus an IT system for the new solution to sit on.

The advisors were using a London Life proprietary system, which is still available to their company as London Life licensees. However, the system cannot integrate different products or allow RTR to work with the clients as a team. While RTR still carries London Life products and funds through Quadrus Investment Services, it also offers a wide variety of products and services from over 15 other suppliers.

“We needed a new, team-oriented client management system that would enable us to collaboratively provide accurate and timely service to our clients,” explains Doug Roche, managing partner of RTR. “Additionally, because we are a service-oriented firm, we visit our clients at their locations rather than having them come to us.”

After evaluations with three CRM solutions including Maximizer Software (www.maximizer.com), RTR felt Maximizer was the best fit.

“Maximizer Software was designed specifically with businesses like ours – SMBs – in mind, so the product’s features align with our key priorities and bring immediate value to our business,” says Roche. “It offers a one-stop client relationship and information filing system for all transactional instructions, enabling us to stay on track with compliance and auditing – a major issue in the financial services industry. It gives the entire staff the ability to deepen client relationships by going beyond the business conversation and allowing us to track personal details like a favorite restaurant or kids’ names for reference in future conversations.”

RTR contracted with Cencomp Systems Solutions in January 2006 to install Maximizer CRM, Version 8, integrated with a new IT system; both went live by Feb. 15. Cencomp also trained RTR’s staff over six months beginning in late January with the first month being a boot camp with intensive sessions to get everyone up and running at a basic level to use the system when cutover was complete. Staff then received monthly training to enhance individual competencies with the new system.

“The results obtained since then more than met our goals,” says Roche, “with a

comprehensive CRM system that gives us a competitive advantage in staying connected with and updating our client information regardless of our location during any given day.”

In 2009, RTR implemented Maximizer Mobile CRM for **BlackBerry**; at the same time it also upgraded to the latest version of Maximizer CRM, Version 10.5. The firm realized that once it had Maximizer CRM running on its desktops that it needed to take the CRM system to the mobile level to access the latest client information and log relevant notes, while engaged in, or right after, on-site client meetings.

“Prior to implementing Maximizer Mobile CRM, our staff had to wait until they returned to the office to synchronize their BlackBerry data with Maximizer CRM,” says Roche. “The seamless integration we now have from the mobile experience to the desktop makes teamwork possible no matter where we are.”

Further enhancements are in the works. For instance, RTR plans to use the marketing and customer service modules built into Maximizer CRM.

“For example, using the customer service module, we can see all open requests and be assured when they are closed that nothing has slipped through the cracks,” explains Roche. “It’s just another level of insurance and confidence we can offer our clients in utilizing our services.” **CIS**



Medal-Winning Interactions

When the cauldron was lit at BC Place in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, on Feb. 12, 2010, heralding the opening of the 2010 Winter Olympics, some of the best medal-winning performances took place.



This is the state-of-the-art communications and customer service deployed and serving the Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games, enabling countless interactions among paid and volunteer staff, the athletes and trainers, spectators, suppliers, sponsors, the public and the media. These systems have been rolling out over the past couple of years, handling calls, e-mails and video and Web traffic.

The Winter Olympics runs through Feb. 28 followed by the Paralympic Games from March 12 to March 21. They have been set up and are managed by the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games (VANOC).

Stepping up to the podium are Bell Canada and Avaya, formerly Nortel; Avaya became part of the Games when it acquired Nortel's enterprise division in 2009. Both firms are official suppliers.

Bell Canada put together the first all-IP converged network serving an Olympics, connecting Vancouver Olympics headquarters, venues, athletes' villages and media centers. It also created and hosts the Vancouver 2010.com Web portal. It put in a fiber-optic network linking Vancouver with Whistler, some 80 miles north where many of the events are taking place.

Nortel supplied the hardware and the software. That includes Ethernet routing and switching, switched firewalls, VoIP phones, wireless access points and interconnects to the various sites. Bell's data and IP telephony operations are running on Nortel platforms.

The scale of communications needs is of Olympic proportions. Avaya reports that Vancouver has become the tem-

porary home for 5,500 Olympic athletes and officials from 80 countries, plus 25,000 volunteers and 10,000 media representatives. Some three billion television viewers from 160 countries will be watching. To enable the interactions there are 15,000 VoIP phone and fax lines, 7,000 mobile phones and 2,000 push-to-talk plus 5,000 radios, 4,000 TV drops and 500 wireless access points.

It was predicted there would be 1.8 million spectators at Olympics and Paralympics events. Those living in Canada will have purchased venue attendance and bus tickets and obtained customer service via the Vancouver 2010 Web site directly and/or by calling or e-mailing customer service through the numbers and addresses listed on the pages. Spectators going to the Cypress Mountain and Whistler venues have to book tickets on special buses; Vancouver sites are accessible on mass transit; there is no parking at any Olympic venue.

Tickets were sold in other countries via other sponsors' sites. For example CoSport, the official hospitality services provider, handled sales for Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Sweden and the U.S. via its site.

I can attest to the excellent functionality of the Vancouver 2010 site and to the quality customer care; my wife and I were at the Whistler watching the women's luge finals. The site is remarkably easy to navigate. The call queues and e-mail response times were some of the shortest I've experienced; the agents have all been helpful with smiles to their voices.

Contact center customer service plus support for the games community takes place at VANOC's headquarters, with a



number of agents working remotely. To minimize traffic congestion and emissions the Olympics transportation plan stresses using public transit and telework.

The networks are built to and have handled sharp peaks in Internet traffic such as when the tickets went on sale. Avaya/Nortel tested them extensively and made configuration changes based on results to ensure quality.

“The nature of the Olympics in general is such that they have spiky traffic patterns from start to finish,” explains Dave Johnson, general manager, Olympics program, Avaya. “We have designed the network to be as scalable as we can to accommodate that traffic.”

Bell and Avaya have won “Sustainability Stars” from VANOC for the IP and wireless networks. It cited economic benefits and low energy use from the technology, plus plans for its re-use following the events with less than 2 percent entering conventional waste disposal streams.

The Sustainability Stars program, says VANOC, “recognizes initiatives by Games partners, sponsors and VANOC that demonstrate positive and measurable social, economic and environmental impacts.” **CIS**

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By Tim Searcy, CEO, American Teleservices Association



Worldwide Regulatory Challenges

Oftentimes in this column, I reference domestic regulatory issues. However, as the world becomes smaller and we see repatriation of contact centers and even foreign companies bringing offshore work to the U.S. for labor, it makes sense to look at a bigger picture. Like the U.S., worldwide regulation continues to be very active, particularly in the outbound marketing arena. When I am concerned about international trends in regulatory activity, I often turn to my friend, Ken Sponsler at CompliancePoint. As usual, Ken gave me the best perspective on what is happening, and much of this column should be attributed to him.

U.S.-based companies that are telemarketing to consumers outside the U.S. face a myriad of compliance challenges that could ground marketing campaigns before they get started. Not only do corporations conducting global marketing face language barriers, but also a maze of regulations and very different personal data privacy regimes in each region of the world.

Non-compliance can mean heavy fines, negative publicity, and the possibility of criminal sanctions. It is critical that direct marketers remain pro-consumer and vigilant in the laws of each country where they are conducting marketing campaigns, both for the sake of the consumer and for the integrity of the direct marketing industry. In countries with more developed laws, it is easier to plan good compliant marketing campaigns. But in countries that lack distinct data protection laws, one inappropriate piece of direct marketing can lead to significant penalties.

Non-compliance with EU countries' legislation could entail administrative fines up to €750 (\$1,075.28) for each unsolicited commercial call or e-mail. In France, criminal sanctions can be imposed up to a maximum of five years imprisonment and fines there can range from €15,000 (\$21,505) to €300,000 (\$430,110) and up to €75,000 (\$107,527) to €1,500,000 (\$2,150,550) for legal corporate entities.

There are dramatically higher fines for non-compliance with German laws as well, where companies calling private homes without consent could be fined up to €50,000 (\$71,685) per violation, and telemarketers who do not display their phone numbers on consumer

caller ID systems could be fined up to €10,000 (\$14,337) per violation.

Tough legislation is also present in Australia, (where the Australian Communications and Media Authority recently issued two infringement notices in the value of \$110,000 to Optus Networks Pty Limited for allegedly sending commercial electronic messages without accurate sender identification) and in New Zealand, where companies can face fines for violations of the Electronic Communications Act, sanctions can be up to 500,000 AUD (\$443,867).

In countries where no specific law on direct marketing exists, companies must be even more cautious because penalties may be inflicted on the basis of the civil or penal codes of the country where the marketing campaign is being conducted. This means that companies will confront a myriad of rules, spread out in all different kinds of laws, often not strictly related with direct marketing activities. This is specifically the case in Malaysia, (where Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act of 1998 states that a "person who initiates a communication using any application service, whether continuously, repeatedly or otherwise, during which communication may or may not ensue, with or without disclosing his identity and with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass any person at any number or electronic address commits an offense"). This can also be the case in a number of Latin American countries and almost all Caribbean countries where there are no laws to guide direct marketing practices.

Companies need to know the law in each relevant jurisdiction as well as enforcers' views on the application of the law to specific marketing programs. They also have an obligation to keep track of the consents received on a per-consumer, per-country basis.

Recently, countries have been trending toward the expansion of preference lists (do not contact lists or "DNC" or Robinson lists), which offer protection to consumers who do not wish to be contacted by companies for direct marketing purposes with respect to mail, telephone, fax, e-mail and mobile mediums of communication. A company's requirement for accessing this data is different in every country and in many instances companies have to register as marketers to have access. Being a member of the Department of Commerce's Safe Harbor program can expedite data access in some instances. Also, some countries, such as India and Australia, require companies to submit their calling list to the government-run DNC list to be scrubbed. The scrubbed list is then transferred back to the direct marketer.

Although this is very detailed information, I think it is clear that the real issue is that each market has its own approach, and regardless of similarity, companies need to pay attention. There are additional trends on the international front, so in next month's column, I will attack where we go from here. In the meantime, I am on the line. **CIS**

If you would like to reach me, please contact me at tim@ataconnect.org. Ken Sponsler can be reached at ksponsler@compliancepoint.com.



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For the 17th year, *Customer Interaction Solutions* is proud to present the winners of its prestigious MVP (Marketing via Phone) Quality Awards.



Following the lead of their predecessors, this year's winners have set a new standard for demonstrating their commitment to providing quality contact center services through the use of not only the latest technology, but consistent, proven business processes and training programs.

Each of these companies has exhibited a commitment to driving success of their client programs through exemplary hiring, training, monitoring, and coaching of their agents, and through close, constant collaboration with their clients to ensure quality standards are not only understood, but also met.

Through an exhaustive 16-point essay and supporting documentation, each of the applicants described the quality standards, agent monitoring and coaching practices, workplace enhancements, and organizational messaging – along with the technology in place to support these initiatives – that have helped them develop sustainable quality within their operations.

We congratulate this year's winners, and have shared some of the unique and compelling comments from their essays.



Cross Country Automotive Services

Medford, Mass.
B-to-B and B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound
www.crosscountry-auto.com

How do you measure customer satisfaction?

We have deployed a “bottom two box” initiative, where we report on and track daily all customers that have rated our contact center service as being fair or poor. We attempt to contact each and every one of those customers, with the intent to, first, apologize for not achieving our high standards, and then understand the drivers that cause poor service, perform root cause analysis, and implement solutions to influence a paradigm

shift to “top two box” CSI. We have seen our bottom two box results shrink from 3.5 percent to 2.5 percent in past year.

InfoCision Management Corporation

Akron, Ohio
B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound
www.infocision.com

Explain how quality has evolved in your contact center and how it is sustained.

Despite the offshore trend, all of our centers are and always will be located in the United States. This enables us to establish strong customer relationships that aren't hindered by cultural differences or language barriers. We believe it is imperative to grow our business the old-fashioned way – by offering a service that is unrivaled in the marketplace and earning new clients. We have never acquired or merged with another company.



Hamilton Contact Center Services

Aurora, Neb.
B-to-C Inbound
www.hamiltontm.com

How has quality evolved in you call center, how is it sustained, how is it measured?

By placing the emphasis on processes, human error is minimized and continuity is maximized – ultimately resulting in greater quality of production by each department within the company. Of further benefit is the ease with which problems can be identified by strict process adherence.

Intelenet Global Services

Mumbai, India
B-to-C Inbound/Outbound
www.intelenetglobal.com



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

Intelenet follows the “principle of partnership” and treats clients’ businesses as its own. This consultative approach to client management enables us to become an integral part of our clients’ organizations, rather than a supplier or vendor. Constructive resolution of issues reflects concern and commercial interests of both parties in a spirit of partnership.

Protocall Communications (formerly Novo 1)

Laurel, Md.
B-to-B Outbound
www.novo1.com

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

Every day, Protocall shuts down the entire call center for 30 minutes to review the previous day or shift and discuss strategy and issues for the upcoming ones. Conducted by team supervisors for every project, these sessions involve role-playing, motivation, and teaching through example.

Stream Global Services (formerly eTelecare Global Solutions)

Wellesley, Mass.
B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound
www.stream.com

How do you measure customer satisfaction?

Competitor contact centers utilize predictive churn models to market retention campaigns to customers with a high propensity to cancel. Stream takes that one step further through predictive dissatisfaction modeling. By ranking dissatisfaction drivers, we are able to predict which customers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their overall service.

Synergy Solutions

Scottsdale, Ariz.
B-to-C Inbound
www.synergysolutionsinc.com

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

All of our technology is enterprise-wide, so there is no confusion with disparate

systems. Our switching platforms are centralized and all data at the contact center level is collected in real-time to provide redundancy and the ability to report across all channels in an integrated Web platform. Our open systems are configured to easily communicate with our clients’ systems and our seasoned team of IT professionals is committed to client service and maximum flexibility.

Thomas L. Cardella & Associates

Cedar Rapids, Iowa
B-to-C Inbound
www.tlcassociates.com

What are your policies and philosophy on quality?

Our belief company-wide is that we have an obligation to our clients, their customers, and our employees to ensure that quality is our main priority. We will never compromise quality in order to inflate program statistics. We realize that each call we make has an impact on the people we contact. The impression we leave with each individual call, whether positive or negative, passes on to many others in their circle of friends and associates.



Ansafone Contact Centers

Santa Ana, Calif.
B-to-C Inbound
www.ansafone.com

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

A consistent message of quality must start with a clear company vision of with the quality standard must be. Quality starts at the top and supports everything that follows. A clear and consistent quality process must include: a solid foundation and clear direction, proven training programs, motivation and inspiration, and demonstrating by example.

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ACCENT Marketing Services

Jeffersonville, Ind.
B-to-C Inbound
www.accentonline.com

What are your policies and philosophy on quality?

ACCENT is so committed to providing quality customer experiences that we have adopted a zero-tolerance policy regarding first call resolution. If our CSR does not assist a customer to the fullest extent of their capabilities, including escalating to the highest level necessary, it leads to disciplinary action up to and including termination. By adhering to such strict standards, we have fostered a corporate culture that values a high quality customer experience.

Aegis Limited

Irving, TX/Mumbai, India
B-to-C Inbound
www.aegiscomgroup.com

Explain how your quality has evolved in your contact center.

Quality at Aegis can be depicted by the alignment of services to customer experience paradigm, where BPO services manages business experience, technology services enables business experience, and shared services extends business experience. We understand that measuring satisfaction relates to as assessment of factors contributing to both satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

The Connection

Burnsville, Minn.
B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound
www.the-connection.com

Describe your efforts to make your work environment stress-free and ergonomically correct.

Every call center of The Connection has a budget for employees to design and personalize their break rooms through art, new colors, and vending preferences. This unique benefit gives our employees ownership in their work environment and a place to relax that is designed specifically to their preferences. Our break room design policy is such a success that it has actually been adopted by several of our clients after touring the facilities.

PRC LLC

Plantation, Fla.
B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound
www.prcnet.com

How do you handle complaints from your clients' customers?

PRC handles customer complaints through a systematic approach, which helps identify marketplace trends. The goal of handling customer complaints is to ensure FCR. By empower-

ing employees to resolve customer complaints during the first point of contact, we are able to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

TELUS International

Singapore/Pasig City, Philippines
B-to-C Inbound
www.telusinternational.com

What are your monitoring practices?

Regular quality calibration sessions are held weekly with the client to ensure consensus in the definition of quality, using either recorded or live calls. Both the client and the account's QA team listen to a call and perform the audit simultaneously. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the audit, an ongoing activity that provides a forum to continuously maintain the integrity of the quality evaluation process. **CIS**

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Brendan B. Read, *Senior Contributing Editor*

Is Social Media Powerful? Just Ask Simon Cowell

Facebook recently flexed its muscle by denying the top U.K. Christmas song title to the winner of Simon Cowell's "X-Factor" reality TV show. Instead, a campaign conducted through the social media giant to thwart that effort led, eventually, to a 17-year-old neo-punk political hit taking the crown.

Lyndsey Parker's "Reality Rocks" blog, carried on Yahoo, reported that the song, a cover of Miley Cyrus's "The Climb," which was sung by "X Factor" champion Joe McElderry had been beaten out by a 1992 Rage Against the Machine track, "Killing In The Name": 450,000 as compared to 500,000 copies. RATM fan Jon Morter had instigated the drive in what the blog reported was "a protest effort to stop Simon Cowell's empire from dominating the music industry – since Simon is the main X Factor judge, and "X Factor" winner McElderry just signed to Simon's SyCo record label.

"Eventually some big-name rockers – including the Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl, Sir Paul McCartney, and Rage's own Tom Morello – pledged their support to the campaign, the goal of which was to make "Killing In The Name" Britain's Christmas number one, instead of the expected 'X Factor' single," says the blog. "[And] for the first time in five years, an 'X Factor' champion has not snagged Britain's coveted Christmas number one spot, thanks to Morter's Facebook campaign."

What makes the Facebook-driven move all the more interesting, and fun, is that the RATM's song's bent and language does not exactly offer the warm and cuddly singalong ambiance that one expects for Christmas, or from Simon Cowell's pop music machine. That is unless one wants a tune to recite while connecting the wires in an attempt to become a more successful heir to the famed English icon, Guy Fawkes with the warmth coming from the ensuing firestorm.

McElderry could not have said the first part of the preceding paragraph better. Reports the blog: "Joe recently told British newspaper 'The Sun' that he hated the RATM song, saying: 'They can't be serious! I had no idea what it sounded like. It's dreadful and I hate it. How could anyone enjoy this? Can you imagine the grandmas hearing this over Christmas lunch?'"

Not that there has been any hard feelings from Cowell. Says the blog: "As for Simon Cowell's reaction, he is probably taking the news in stride, judging by a recent conversation he had with campaigner Morter. Morter told the British music paper NME that Simon personally phoned him the night before the

chart numbers were released, to wish him well in this bizarre sales battle. "Simon was very sweet and it was lovely to talk to him," said Morter. "We had a good chat about music in general and just wished each other good luck. I've got total respect for him. That was a really nice thing to do."

Cowell, as an extremely savvy businessperson, was more likely tipping the hat to the new order. Intentional or not, Joe Morter had won a signature battle against traditional brand-driven top-down consumers-are-to-be-manipulated-like-lab-rats marketing, with social media. The social channel enabled the "rats": consumers like him who had decided to act and found enough likeminded people. Yet what happened with "X Factor" is occurring at a smaller but much more widespread scale though. Witness the reviews on TripAdvisor, which helps consumers make travel-buying decisions such as one hotel over another based on comments and rankings.

Cowell, as an extremely savvy businessperson, was more likely tipping the hat to the new order. Intentional or not, Joe Morter had won a signature battle against traditional brand driven top-down consumers-are-to-be-manipulated-like-lab rats marketing with social media.

Social media puts enterprises on notice that this is an interactive marketplace, one where paying attention to and following up on what the buyers are saying is no longer an option. That means ensuring they have high-quality products and services at the right price. Only when these conditions are satisfied should they look at and invest in a growing array of tools that enable firms to listen, assess and respond to the markets.

Cowell's firm will live to fight another day. By paying attention to customers via social media, so may others. **CIS**

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