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November 2010 • Vol. 29/No. 6
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InfoCision's Steve Brubaker

on
Business Process
Outsourcing

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Rich Tehrani, CEO, TMC



Anana Enables Social Networking Dial-Tone

It was only a matter of time – after all, it has permeated so many aspects of our lives – until social networking would be integrated with telephone service like never before, enabling carriers to generate revenue by tapping into one of the most popular phenomena on the planet.

I got an email from Dave Tidwell, CEO of [Anana LTD](#), which connects users between 18-30 with next-gen phone service, allowing Twitter messages and Facebook status updates to be integrated into telephone calls. The company has a new service called its4u, allowing users to call a phone and hear the latest social network updates before even leaving a message. Imagine location-enabled tweets that are read to callers via TTS, allowing them to know where users are when they call.

As Tidwell says, it seems like a simple concept, indeed, but requires a very detailed integration to converged messaging, applications brokerage, voice and media platforms and some innovation in the voice user interface to pull it off. This is a mash up of Alcatel-Lucent's Converged Messaging System, Messaging Applications Broker and the Genesys Voice Platform with Anana speech application framework. It's coded in .Net and delivers rich VoiceXML with integrated NuanceSpeech recognition to describe the unique user experience on each call.

At least one of the carriers working with this service is enabling [Facebook](#) wall integration of voicemail messages. If you are under 30, you probably think this is cool; if you are over 30 you are probably horrified. Remember, there really is no privacy anymore, but most users seem to be OK with that.

Tidwell explains this is fun and exciting, and telephony is boring. He is right. Will consumers pay for such a service – maybe – probably – and this concept may become as popular as text messaging over time. What is really interesting is the carrier response according to Tidwell is excitement with uneasiness about what this new innovation could mean for them.

The enterprise market is excited as well. Imagine that when a call center gets a call, a company's Facebook promotions and tweets can be read – thereby promoting these social media channels and increasing social CRM benefits a company receives.

With so many upsides and no downsides I can see, Anana could be leading an entire new category of social networking, telephony integration which could usher in a new era of innovations in communications and potentially revenue for those who embrace the idea.

Is This What Social CRM 2.0 Looks Like?

One recent conversation about social CRM that has stuck in my mind is someone telling me that, once they find their

company mentioned on a social network, they aren't sure if they should answer or partake in the conversation. The concern had to do with not seeming creepy from a user-privacy perspective.

My feeling is companies do need to get involved with their online communities and become part of the conversations to share their points of view. So, the first part of social CRM is listening and the second part is using analytics and responding when needed.

What is interesting to note is how technology may alter the face of social CRM based upon a chatbot developed to negotiate via tweets with global warming skeptics. @AI_AGW is where the bot can be found and it seeks out skeptics and battles them with links to scientific sources.

Every five minutes, the program searches Twitter for a few hundred phrases and, when one turns up, it answers the messages it believes are anti-global warming in nature. The program answers the same or similar repetitive arguments with different canned arguments designed to make others think a real person is behind the tweets.

It is only a matter of time before this sort of technology is adopted for commercial use. For example, if I am at a Starbucks complaining about the length of a line, perhaps a chatbot should apologize on behalf of the company and offer a coupon or a link to an app that would allow me to order a drink while in line and pick it up without waiting to talk to a cashier.

Over time we will start to see more and more companies answering the tweet, so to speak, and coming up with sophisticated products to help companies listen to, analyze and respond to Tweets without the need to deal with staffing and training a team. Of course, as this happens we can also expect a suite of services which allow anyone to program social networking bots to push their point of view. As this happens, we can expect social networking bloat on a scale of the spam many of us receive in our inboxes – in fact, it may become worse.

One prediction I feel confident making? Expect a new wave of spam filters of the future focused on separating the wheat from the social chafe. **CIS**

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CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine (ISSN: 1533-3078) is published monthly by Technology Marketing Corporation, 800 Connecticut Ave, Norwalk, CT 06854-1628. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, Connecticut and additional mailing offices.

— To Subscribe, Call: 203-852-6800 —

Or write to the circulation director at srusso@tmcnet.com. Subscription rates (published monthly): Digital Subscriptions free for qualified U.S., Canadian and Foreign subscribers. Print Subscriptions free for qualified subscribers in the U.S.A. only. For non-qualified U.S.A. subscribers, \$59. All Canadian subscribers, \$89. All Foreign (air mail), \$109. All orders are payable in advance in U.S. dollars drawn against a U.S. bank. Connecticut residents add applicable sales tax.

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Postmaster: Send address changes to CIS magazine, Technology Marketing Corporation, River Park 800 Connecticut Ave. 1st FL., Norwalk, CT 06854-1628 U.S.A. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement #40612608 Canada Returns to be sent to: Pitney Bowes International, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, CANADA

Reader Input: CIS encourages readers to contact us with their questions, comments and suggestions. Send e-mail (addresses above), contact our Web site (www.cismag.com) or send mail.

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Reprints: For authorized reprints of articles appearing in CIS, please contact The YGS Group, 717-505-9701 or 800-501-9571 x105, tmcnet@theYGSgroup.com.

Lists: For list rentals, please contact Glenn Freedman at glennf@i-i-s-t.com or call 914-765-0700 x 104.

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CUSTOMER INTER@CTION Solutions® magazine has been the voice of the industry since 1982. It is written by industry practitioners for industry practitioners and is regarded worldwide as the "Bible" of the industry. An annual Buyer's Guide is provided as a feature of the December issue.

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



Winning Business Means Knowing What Customers Are Saying

The relationship between customer and vendor... it's the key to a successful business. In fact, most successful companies spend significant effort and budget dollars engaging their customers, ensuring their customer relationships are well-managed, and coaching and training staff on best practices for ensuring customer satisfaction.

It's smart business. That is, until other relationships begin to overstep their bounds, like that between vendor and supplier. Then, it becomes a balancing act for the vendor, who has suddenly being pulled in two, typically distinctly opposite directions.

Many of you in the greater New York area know what I'm talking about, since you, too, missed the first two games of the World Series this year, along with a few Giants football games, when Cablevision and News Corp. found themselves at an impasse over retransmission fees for several FOX channels from October 16-30.

Time will tell how this and other retransmission negotiations on the part of Cablevision will play out – remember, it also saw [Disney](#) and Scripps Networks pull their programming for short periods earlier this year. But, while the cable operator has made every effort to convince its subscribers it has sought to act in their best interests, and despite the resounding message that content is king, the monthly bill will certainly play a key role. To that end, Cablevision has already stated its “customers will pay more than they should the Fox programming,” though it also claims the amount will be less than the original News. Corp. demand.

While reports suggest Cablevision may have only lost around 8,000 subscribers due to this latest dispute and blackout, as AT&T and other alternative providers beef up their service offerings, Cablevision may be in for a rough road, especially given the preponderance of tweets, Facebook posts, and other social media updates, making it very easy for consumers to quickly voice both their displeasure and their alternative arrangements. And if one thing has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, humans are pack animals, and are very likely to not only listen to their pack mates, but to follow them.

Case study 1: I have two acquaintances who have recently told me they have or are on the verge of canceling their cable service in favor of a cheaper ISP and [Hulu](#) Plus (which is partially owned by News Corp. subsidiary Fox). These same individuals have long since stopped using a landline phone service, opting for only the cell service, noting not only cost for both changes, but also recommendations from friends.

Case study 2: I surveyed a number of friends and business associates about their video, phone, and Internet service, as read countless conversations about various service offerings. Finally, I concluded that my best course of action would be to switch my phone and cable service to Cablevision, which already

delivers my cable service. But, despite now having my business for its entire triple play offering, Cablevision has a long way to go in earning my loyalty. It may be the best option now, but as we all know, in this competitive market, subscribers are as apt as ever to switch to a new provider with a better offer.

For the time being, AT&T cannot match Cablevision's service, and DIRECTV only offers New York local programming, despite service being delivered to a Connecticut residence. But, as these and perhaps other providers enhance their services, many in Cablevision's service area will be following the social media updates from their friends and followers, looking for that elusive holy grail combining service quality and cost effectiveness.

Rich Tehrani already pointed out one Social CRM 2.0 possibility that Cablevision and every other provider may be very interested in as it evolves (see his *Publisher's Outlook*). Aside from the chatbot idea, however, there are already myriad social media monitoring solutions developed specifically to track and respond to what has quickly become the most prevalent form of disseminating information among friends, family, and colleagues.

You have certainly noticed the preponderance of social media related content in this magazine over the past year – that trend will continue well into 2011, starting with a major feature on handling the social customer in the January issue. In conjunction, we are also preparing for the second Social CRM Expo, which will again be collocated with [ITEXPO](#), taking place in Miami, February 2-4, 2011 (www.scrmexpo.com for more information). The inaugural event, the past October in Los Angeles, was a resounding success with social media experts from both traditional providers like Interactive Intelligence and [SugarCRM](#) as well as entrepreneurial startups like Nimble began a discussion of social media's presence in business that will be continued and extended in Miami.

It's a challenging environment – not only in the service provider space, but in any line of business – and the only way to ensure your business is fully equipped to meet that challenge is to listen to your customers and those of your competitors, which means you have no choice but to engage them where they interact – social media.

See you in Miami! **CIS**



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InfoCision's Steve Brubaker on BPO

Steve Brubaker, who is InfoCision Management Corporation's (www.infocision.com) Chief of Staff, is arguably one of the most knowledgeable, personable and passionate individuals one will ever meet in the contact center/business process outsourcing (BPO) industry. Steve knows contact centers from the call floor up. He started out as a part-time contact center agent at InfoCision in 1985 while studying at the University of Akron, rose through the ranks and now is now responsible for implementing InfoCision's important operational processes throughout the company as well as overseeing the company's public relations and regulatory compliance departments. He is also responsible for staff-related issues, project details and serving as primary corporate negotiator and spokesperson.

Steve has long been active in the BPO industry via the American Teleservices Association (ATA) and the Direct Marketing Association (DMA). He recently retired from the ATA board after serving for the better part of two decades to focus on [InfoCision](http://www.infocision.com), which is on the cusp of major growth as a result of key trends and initiatives.

I sat down with Steve at the ATA annual convention held in Orlando, Florida last September to discuss industry, trends and InfoCision. Here is our interview:

BR: Outline the state of the North American BPO/teleservices industry

SB: This industry is big, dynamic and diverse with a mix of large multinational firms and conglomerates that offer outsourcing as part of their overall business offerings plus smaller niche outfits. The economy has forced a lot of consolidation and it is undergoing a lot of growing pains.

There will be more business for BPO companies driven mainly by the big corporations that will want to move away from their dedicated in-house contact centers and outsource noncore processes such as customer service, fulfillment, sales and the sales process. Businesses are having to do more with less and are finding



it cost effective to partner with others rather than having to carry the cost and process management of a call center operation. Their stakeholders are continuing to demand that the firms concentrate on their core competencies and outsource those that are not. Yet they also want to make sure that the outsourcers selected are high quality and senior management is getting the message. A higher value is being placed on customer retention – this has not always been the case though. They are now saying: “these are my customers: they are valuable, I cannot afford to churn them; I want to have them served by a quality partner.”

BR: There is a viewpoint that believes that the BPO sector could be trouble with the rise of sophisticated of voice and web self-service taking many calls once outsourced. Yet when customers are finished with the self-service and still need to speak to an agent they want someone who is knowledgeable and committed and may get annoyed if they are speaking to a third party. Can BPO firms be as effective as in-house agents when it comes to meeting the needs of customers?

SB: Regarding self-service, too many companies have structured their self-service wrong. They are forcing all customers through self-service first as their only readily available option. If it doesn't work for them and there is no resolution they are mad when they finally get to the contact center. Yet if they could choose their channel from the outset the possibility of first call resolution increases, as do the odds of having a satisfied customer.



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This is where an experienced outsource partner can help. Teleservices is not a one-size-fits-all medium. Right now it's all about maintaining an increased level of communication with customers while controlling costs. To be competitive, companies are focusing their resources on the calls that need more attention, or relationship building, through contact with a live person. However, there is a place for IVR: taking simple orders, gathering information and consumer inquiries.

BR: The BPO industry has had an image problem because of telemarketing complaints and the low-paid transitory nature of the work. Yet InfoCision has long been held as a model company. How can the industry as a whole improve its reputation to be like yours?

SB: The way for the BPO industry to improve its image is by listening to the end-customer and to tailor the marketing message to each individual. Years ago direct marketers were focused on mass marketing: mail everyone and call everyone. That doesn't work anymore. Customers are insisting that they be treated as individuals and will choose their preferred communication channel. Competitive direct marketing partners are increasing their product base to offer their clients multiple channels to connect with their customers – such as by online, mobile, e-mail, mail and phone. This is also where business intelligence comes in. By using contact data and a cross-channel approach we can deliver the ideal customer experience.

We can also fix the image of the teleservices industry through self regulation. We are already taking steps through the ATA-SRO [American Teleservices Association-Self-Regulatory Organization] program in which InfoCision is certified. The ATA-SRO is the first ever comprehensive set of compliance standards for this industry that in meeting them encourages professionalism. There are, as of at the time of the ATA annual conference in September 2010, 35 companies that have expressed interest in ATA-SRO certification. In addition there is also a growing list of Fortune 500 companies now asking in the vendor selection process “Are you an ATA member?” and “Are you an ATA-SRO certified company?” They see the ATA-SRO as an external validation of important best practices. Certification also circumvent the need to spend unnecessary resources evaluating each and every potential partner

When the buyers drive the certification process, then the standard truly becomes established.

The industry has also changed. It is a better place. It has become more professional. A lot of the fly-by-night companies who were giving us all a bad name are out of business. Companies are also recognizing that as customers focus on quality they must attract and keep quality employees.

BR: What is happening with the onshoring versus offshoring in outsourcing?

SB: It is like a pendulum that keeps swinging back and forth. Ten years ago I was being criticized because we chose an exclu-

sively onshore model. I said “every company makes their own decisions based on what their customers want and at this point this is the strategy that works best for us.” Now I see the pendulum swinging back with stories of poor end-customer experiences and bad training offshore. The U.S has a huge unemployment rate that is creating concern and friction in local communities and the way to fix that is by creating jobs here at home.

Now there's nothing wrong going offshore: if it is serving offshore customers. Chinese customers would be served best by Chinese contact center agents who already speak the languages and understand the cultures. The same can be said for customers in India. From what I see and hear, the American consumer is no different.

BR: Where is InfoCision positioned in these trends and where is your firm going?

SB: We are going to continue to be the leader in raising funds for nonprofits, delivering superior return on investment (ROI). We are also continuing to see more business from multinational Fortune 500 companies as they seek quality onshore partners.

Right now we're investing in personalized CRM solutions - business intelligence, PURLs, on demand variable printing, chat, web; all these components can be used as part of a multi-channel effort to meet the diverse needs of customers. We feel that by investing in improving the quality of their experience, customers will form a stronger bond with our clients' organization and, as a result, increase their ROI.

This year we put together an online service called Rapid Response Routing, which is a technical application that queues a call to a consumer within minutes of them downloading product information from a website. According to the InsideSales.com/MIT Lead Response Management Study, a customer was four times more likely to do business with you if you answered their online inquiry within five minutes compared with 10 minutes.

Our focus is on quality and we have the customer testimonials and awards but much more importantly the process, technology and the people to prove it. We have invested in intelligent analytics to bolster the success of our customers' programs, supported by over 150 full-time in-house IT professionals. We bring our customers to see our operations and they are impressed when they meet our people. Unlike your typical contact center whose workforce are in their 20s who take the work until something better comes along and who don't have the life experiences to relate to callers, the average age of our agents, which we call Communicators is 43. Their maturity enables them to effectively interact with our customers' customers and we have one of the lowest staff turnover and absenteeism rates in the industry.

I can assure you that most of our competitors do not have the same quality of agents. That gives us a huge advantage in this space. We're able to communicate very clearly, carefully and have the experience in customer care. **CIS**



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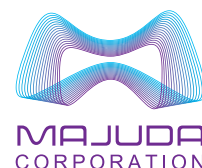
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The Contact Center Evolution

If you had walked into a contact center five years ago, chances are that you would have seen agents sitting at workstations with PCs, phones next to the monitors and wearing corded headsets with supervisors listening in from their posts: perhaps on raised turrets overlooking the call floors.

Today those desktop phones are disappearing, being replaced by applications running on agents' PCs while coaches and managers walk around to their cubes and pods, listening in and interjecting their advice via wireless sets.

Not too far from now, the PCs will be gone too, with the information transmitted to agents on thin-client applications housed on specialized appliances or stripped down computers, fed by virtualized servers situated either per-premise or on corporate one-to-all sites' boxes or by suppliers' or third-party-hosted software.

This is the contact center endpoint evolution, driven by technology advances and productivity needs. And almost every contact center is at some point on it.

Nick Eisner, director, global product management-corded professional products at [Plantronics](#) has seen some of the future at a large financial services corporation's Manila, Philippines contact center on a recent visit. He saw the agents wearing corded headsets plugged into the Ethernet with all of the voice and data processing being done in the cloud.

"[What is driving this evolution] is the happy marriage of customer service with efficient low-cost desktops, enabled by the introduction of VoIP infrastructures," explains Eisner.

Hearing the Evolution

The symbol of contact center endpoints: the headset is changing to reflect the evolution of contact centers from cost to profit centers where excellent service is not just "a nice-to-have" but is central to business strategies as the key tool in retaining invaluable customers. Service that can make the difference between making them fans who praise firms they do business with on Facebook and TripAdvisor, and with this keeping and growing sales: and losing them and others by seeing them write angry posts for their followers and the world to see, and talk about.



The smart firms that get it are spending more to recruit, train and retain the best staff and are equipping them with better quality headsets that minimize painful and attention-requiring neck injuries and reduce harmful acoustic startle and listening fatigue. Continued enhancements in digital signal processing (DSP) algorithms optimize intelligibility of audio stream, relieve strain on agents, boost the effectiveness and accuracy of information exchange, "and improve the experiences for the customers," reports Eisner.

The Plantronics' director also points that Australian and European countries' laws protect employees against high noise volumes based on amount of time while exposed, which have required headset manufacturers like his firm to develop products that step down the volume during the work period. At the same time litigation and fears of the same in the U.S. are prompting employers to look for those sets that can cut down on spinal injuries.

Bottom line: investing in high-quality top-performing headsets that enable agents to carry out their tasks more comfortably and effectively without pain and discomfort pays off in improved productivity, shrunken costly turnover, reduced healthcare outlays and avoided legal expenses.



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"If contact centers have invested in a considerable amount of training in their agents they certainly don't want to face the 50 percent turnover rates that used to be fairly standard in the industry," explains Eisner. "That means contact centers must be more willing to invest in the comfort and efficiency of their agents via the headsets. And with every repetition and every 'I'm sorry' mistake in data entry adding to the costs it is absolutely crucial then that agents be able to hear every single word as clearly as possible."

One of most visual changes with headsets is the advent and spread of wireless models. They look and are cool as well as provide employee workplace mobility. Thanks to [DECT](#) (1.9GHz) technology that have been incorporated into many models, staff now have ranges up to 300 feet from the bases compared with 33 feet for Bluetooth and 100-150 feet provided by older 900 MHz and 2.4GHz -based units. DECT also uses different frequency from wireless data networks, which avoids interference from and with them.

The advent of IP-enabled unified communications (UC) is changing headset functionality. UC via presence permits agents to transfer calls to the right available individuals; it also provides agents and supervisors one-click access to callers and make one-click outbound calls to names in databases and lists. To make this happen more headsets are being optimized via drivers for particular vendors' UC software to tap those functionalities. This avoids obtaining, at added cost, specialized adaptors to connect those designed for one UC solution to be used for another supplier's product.

For example, Plantronics' UC headsets are now integrated with Cisco's UC applications including Cisco Unified Personal Communicator 8.0, Cisco UC Integration for [Microsoft](#) Office Communicator 8.0, Cisco UC Integration for WebEx Connect and Cisco IP Communicator. Cisco customers now have access to features such as remote answer/end, mute and volume control so that users can easily control calls directly from the audio devices supplied by Plantronics.

"If contact centers have invested in a considerable amount of training in their agents they certainly don't want to face the 50 percent turnover rates that used to be fairly standard in the industry. That means contact centers must be more willing to invest in the comfort and efficiency of their agents via the headsets."

– Nick Eisner, Plantronics

Yet should contact centers adopt wireless sets? The general consensus is yes for supervisors who need to move around the call floors to talk with agents, into conference rooms and offices for meetings and training rooms to check on and chat with existing and new staff. Yes also for agents carrying out specialized functions such as in-center and field support or for frequent collaborating with colleagues and customers face-to-face. No though for agents who do not need to leave their workstations. Cool has a price for which for them there is no appreciable ROI; wireless sets cost \$200-\$300 apiece compared with up to \$100 for wired sets.

"You have to buy headsets that make sense with the different roles each staff member is playing," explains Daryle Lamoureux, product marketing manager, VXI.

Yet the UC headsets being worn by non-agents are typically wireless, lightweight and versatile as these workers typically move around the offices. Plantronics' Savi series of wireless 'set products offers multiple simultaneous connectivity with PCs and desk phones and they permit easy adding of supervisors or colleagues to call through simple proximity pairing without need to conference in using telephony interfaces.

Headsets are becoming easier to adjust thanks to more functionality being installed on USB cords, rather via keyboards or appliances. VXI's X100 USB Adapter is an entry-level cord that provides basic plug-and-play capability and includes inline mute and volume; the X200 USB Adapter which offers echo cancellation and DSP to enhance the audio experience.



Jabra's Jabra GN1216 integration cord makes corded headsets that are compatible with Avaya's IP solutions and phones, including the contact center-suitable 1600 series, which provides the business communication systems' customers with a wide selection of microphones, wearing styles and single or dual earpiece options.

The new cord features eight microphone volume settings, ensuring proper audio levels regardless of which Jabra headset is selected. Agents connect the cords to their headsets and adjust their microphones according to headset models and personal preferences.

Coming down the pike for endpoints is HD voice, which promises a higher quality calling experience and satisfaction resulting in shorter calls and fewer repeated ones, thereby leading to greater productivity and lowered costs. HD Voice, delivered via IP extends the bandwidth to 50Hz at the low end to 7 kHz at the high end from the 200Hz -3.2/3.4kHz in PSTN.

Andrew Nicholson who is a product manager at Aculab explained in his TMCnet blog "HD Voice - how much bandwidth do you need?" reports that addition of the higher speech frequencies gives improved ability to discern, for example, between 'p' and 't', 'm' and 'n' and 's' and 'f'. At the same time the extended lower ranges provide increased presence and comfort and a more natural conversation.

Yet HD voice depends on end-to-end IP connections which while possible internally—including to home-based agents over high-QoS residential IP-- is some years off for many customer interactions. There is still a large amount of copper-transporting PSTN while HD is "getting there" in VoIP softphones and desk phones as well as in mobile says Lamoureux.

Headset manufacturers are anticipating need by coming out with HD-enabled units. Yet with the units' life ranging from two to three years in the intensive contact center environments, the question arises when should centers buy them?

"If you have to pay for HD features then a HD-enabled set may not be the right thing for you," says Lamoureux, whose firm is rolling its HD line with that capability as standard in 2011. "Yet if it is rolling in with the same features and quality at the same pricepoints as non-HD sets then having that capability is great to have."

The Softphone Switch

There has also been a gradual switch from desktop phones to softphones. Softphones offer numerous advantages including lower upfront hardware and ongoing support costs, easy integrated on-screen control, less desktop real estate, the ability to be deployed on laptops and remote devices and to integrate easily with other UC functionality such as instant messaging, e-mail and presence.

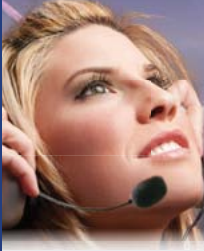
"When softphones first came onto the market, companies were hesitant to use them, as there had been concerns about reliability," explains Lamoureux. "As technology and connectivity have improved, softphones are proving themselves to be a viable option. People don't think twice about using them whether in a dedicated workplace, at home or mobile."

Charles Lee, senior product marketing manager, Genesys, an Alcatel-Lucent company is seeing most of his firm's customers choose soft phones for their contact center agents, citing a sizable 50 percent or more cost advantage plus flexibility for customization not present in hard phones.

Venky Raman, ShoreTel's senior product manager for contact center solutions isn't so sure about soft phones. His firm still sees desktop phones predominantly used in contact centers since they provide the best customer experience.

"Soft phones are good on their own standing; however as soon as you have softphones running in a machine that is sharing resources with other applications that agents use i.e. CRM, ticketing, e-mails, file downloads the experience can really vary and this is something that most call centers want

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to avoid,” explains Raman. “We do have some call centers that are ready for softphone only environments: but they are either very basic call centers or some call centers where the call volume is not too big.”

CosmoCom’s customers use three primary mechanisms for voice delivery: softphone, hard [desk] IP phone, and “any phone”. The any phone option enables a call to be delivered to any phone number, whether it is on the public network or an extension on a private telephone network. All of these delivery mechanisms can be controlled by the CosmoDesk browser-based call control client.

CosmoCom offers the CosmoPhone hard phone; the optional CosmoDesk application is fully synchronized with it, enabling each user to perform complete call control from either the phone or the PC, and to switch seamlessly between them.

“The ‘anyphone’ solution is a popular way to get started because it can be quickly deployed in a virtual or hosted environ-

from shrunken power consumption both directly from the units and indirectly via less demand on ventilation and air conditioning systems; PCs produce a lot of heat.

Ncomputing, which makes thin-client appliances, estimates end-users such as contact center agents typically only utilize five percent of the capacity of typical desktop PCs. Yet contact centers are paying as much as a guesstimated \$600-\$700 per CPU – as opposed to as low as \$70 for its units – and which last only half as long: three years to six years while consuming 90 percent more energy.

Riding on such units are desktop virtualization software that can deliver contact center applications to the agents. The Citrix XenDesktop supports complete Windows desktops and applications for up to 500 users per server. Companies can license Citrix desktop virtualization solutions on a per-user, per-device or concurrent user standpoint. The only software that resides on the workstations or other endpoints is a universal software client called the

“People don’t think twice about using [softphones] whether in a dedicated workplace, at home or mobile.”

– Daryle Lamoureux, VXi

ment without any dependency on the quality of service on the IP network,” explains Steve Kaish, CosmoCom vice president, product management and marketing. “Customers [can] start with an anyphone solution and migrate some or all of their users to IP delivery over time.”

Desktop PCs: Going, and Gone

The agents’ desktop endpoints are evolving from having PCs at each workstation loaded with applications to having this software sitting on on-premises servers (known as desktop virtualization) or on OEM or third-party hosted servers, accessed by “dumb terminals, “dumbed-down” PCs, thin-client appliances or for high-end support staff, laptops.

The gains from this evolution include lower IT costs: hardware, software and support, and as reduced facilities expenses

Citrix Receiver, which gives users access to their desktop and applications. Users can also access their virtual desktop and apps from web-based log-in screens.

Citrix solutions also provide secure access to corporate data and applications using any device, whether desktop PC or laptops, such as by field support reps who are occasionally in the office. Once logged in to their virtual desktop, users cannot copy or download information and software and cannot surf the web depending on the policies set by IT.

Yet one doesn’t necessarily have to recycle PCs to obtain many of the benefits of desktop virtualization; instead these computers can be stripped out and repositioned as appliances. Solutions such as RingCube’s vDesk can run on them, which saves on buying separate hardware while maintaining the familiar boxes. RingCube also helps lower storage costs and deliver a complete desktop



experience for firms who use desktop virtualization software from VMware as well as Citrix two of its larger such partners.

The Home Endpoint

Where the greatest calls are for such secure access is at agents' homes, which is the ultimate contact center endpoint evolution by leaving the formal centers altogether.

Going home can create benefits for organizations: up to \$20,000 per employee/year reports the Telework Coalition in reduced facilities costs and improved productivity. Contact centers that have gone home say they have experienced greater flexibility and have attracted higher quality staff while lowering turnover and at the same time shrinking their environmental footprints by reducing commuting.

The success of work-at-home programs requires though that home agent performance be as equal if not superior to their counterparts in traditional centers. Top of mind is security. Citrix's solution provides locked down desktops on individual employees' home PCs. With more home agents living beyond practical access range of contact centers, the old practice of supplying and supporting them with their own PCs is no longer practical.

With home agents there is arguably a greater need for headsets that reduce echo and which have noise cancellation than for those working in traditional centers. The first feature is often needed because residential VoIP lines, while they may have greatly improved qualitywise over the past few years may still not have the bandwidth as inside typical formal contact centers, resulting in occasional echo and latency on the voice lines.

Noise cancellation is essential for while there may not be the high constant background noise at homes as there is in a formal contact centers there are often sharp sudden sounds that must be filtered out. One such set is Plantronics' SupraPlus Wideband with the M22 audio processor. It uses same approved equipment as inside employer-provided contact centers to assure maximum agent uptime.

"These noises: a car driving past, a dog barking someone at the other end of the line would notice; they can be more distracting than steady background noises like people talking," explains Neil Hooper, senior marketing manager, Plantronics. "You still want to take them out because they affect intelligibility."

With VoIP is the ability to utilize softphones. Yet with many homes still connected only by PSTN/TDM, supporting desk phones is still a necessity. Fitting home agents with the same sets used in the contact centers may not be practical, Genesys's Lee points out as they are behind the PBXes, which means those phones are not compatible with residential PSTN lines. Therefore in most cases, home agent phones are different than those in the contact centers.

To ensure that home agent performance is akin to that of their in-center colleagues he recommends developing a short spec (or vendor/model) list for the home agent phones. Specs may include ports for headset connection, hold and mute buttons and price range.

"In general, home agents do not require high end phone as customer service information is displayed on the agent desktop application on PC and call features (such as conferencing and transfer) are supported by system in the contact centers," says Lee.

And while home-based agents may be tempted to want to have the more costly wireless headsets, manufacturers do not see contact centers permitting them as they fear they will wander away from their desks. And there is a risk of poorer voice quality if agents are being asked to buy their own headsets unless centers specify the features and requirements.

"You need to have standardized headsets for uniform experience regardless of agent location," says Lamoureux. "You want to keep the headsets affordable yet have the agents sound like they are in a professional environment." **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Aculab
www.aculab.com

Citrix
www.citrix.com

CosmoCom
www.cosmocom.com

Genesys (Alcatel-Lucent)
www.genesyslab.com

GN Netcom (Jabra)
www.jabra.com

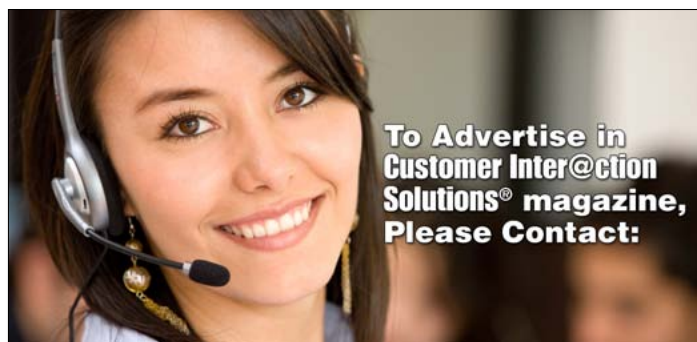
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BPOs: Doing More With Less

The current economic climate has been providing both an opportunity and a challenge for business process outsourcers (BPOs).

To cut costs clients are focusing more than ever on their core competencies, which has led more of them knocking on BPOs' contact centers. At the same time they are seeking more in the way of service and quality from BPOs at competitive pricing so that they can retain and attract more of their clientele and maximize the value from them: with the limited resources available.

To get a handle on how BPOs are responding to this call to do more/for less CIS interviewed several of these leading providers. We posed these questions on:

- The impacts on the BPO industry from economic trends, their projections and how they think BPO firms will be responding
- Changes in the demand of specific types of services
- Pricing and terms trends
- Responses, such as new services, technologies and practices to client demands and trends

Sitel (www.sitel.com)

Bert Quintana, President and Chief Operating Officer
The BPO industry continues to transform in the face of the evolving economic landscape. Consolidation has whittled down the number of significant providers. Customer demand is a lot more sophisticated: and call [contact] centers are pressed to cost-effectively align their resources, agent skill sets, processes and technology with client needs for ongoing improvements. While this introduces challenges never seen before, they also provide a real opportunity for BPO providers to be more innovative, and to truly stand out as a strategic weapon for large businesses leveraging outsourcing.

The dynamic of customer relations is also shifting. Demand is as unpredictable as ever – with customers expecting a lot “more” – even as budgets become “less.” BPO providers are tasked to meet the fine balance in any way possible. This requires BPOs to attract even more skilled employees, who possess the judgment and wherewithal to solve the most complex problems.

We're seeing increased growth in customer engagements – beyond the telephone. Emerging social media channels are



opening new opportunities for call centers to proactively and intelligently engage with customers in more meaningful ways. This includes leveraging a broader set of communication channels – such as e-mail, text messaging, online interactive chats and Twitter – to capture the voice of the customer, and optimize the return on customer investments.

Three trends we are seeing include more customers looking to variabilize their operating expenses, tie expenses to results and considering the total cost of ownership (TCO). All of them share a common theme of better aligning the goals of the outsource provider and the company outsourcing.

Outsourcing has often been labeled as being better, faster and cheaper. Better for its ability to provide solutions that leverage experts focused on their core competency. Faster for its ability to deliver an expedited speed to market and cheaper for its ability to bring efficiency and labor arbitrage. But today many CFOs see it as a way to avoid tying up capital and to turn fixed labor into a variable operating expense.

The second trend, tying fees to results is not new per se, but the applications are redefining in some cases the relationship between the outsourced provider and the companies that use them. By basing fees on results, subscribers, or some other business driver, outsourced providers have realigned a natural imbalance of the outsourcer who wants to make more money and the company outsourcing who wants to cut costs. The new focus is on the result: managing to the output instead of the input.

Lastly, TCO is an evolving discipline that looks beyond rates for services to the actual forecasted business case for making a change or improvement. An effective TCO model will take



into account the tangible costs of change and the forecasted return on the investment. The return is based on specific solution elements such as new technologies, agent skills, management improvements and associated efficiency gains.

To create more value for our customers we have expanded and created new product offers that focus on intelligent engagement. We are working without customers to redefine the rules of customer communications. Using advanced analytics and defined business rules we are determining when to proactively engage customers to sell them new products and services, to notify them of important updates or to offer them service before they even ask for it. We are creating value by increasing revenue, removing unnecessary support cost and improving the customer experience with the brand.

We are also implementing advanced call routing, customer feedback, neural networks and social CRM tools that expend the leverage of our pool of trained customer subject matter experts. Sitel's expanded product suite brings a balance between cost, quality and the revenue increase that comes from having the right agent, talking to the right customer, at the right time.

Teleperformance USA (www.teleperformanceusa.com)
Dominic Dato, Executive Chairman

We, along with most industry analysts see the BPO industry continuing to grow in 2011 at a rate in the low to high single digits. The growth rate will vary based on geographic region and individual provider capabilities as usual. We remain in a counter-cyclical global economy, and the BPO industry traditionally outperforms most industries in this type of climate. Contact volume levels will remain rela-

tively flat, so we expect more industry consolidation and a shakeout of medium to small players.

You can also expect to see continued vendor streamlining efforts by clients. This should result in more volume for the larger players and niche-oriented boutiques assuming they have high performance results and the financial strength to invest in their clients.

Though the recovery is continuing more slowly than we would all like from a macro economic standpoint, [Teleperformance](#) continues to see a bigger growth component each year. If you believe the analysts, fully recovered growth rates can be expected in 2013 for the industry as a whole.

We've noticed that customer self-service inquiries or customer self-help has actually generated, and continues to generate an increased number of trailer calls. The impact of social media is not eroding voice channels; in fact, it appears to be the opposite. The more we do the more interactions we have.

Traditionally, the BPO industry has always experienced pricing pressures and tight margins; that's just the business. But right now the more enlightened customers are looking for long-term customer value rather than shortcuts.

Our chairman, Daniel Julien, is known for the line, "Cheap is actually expensive" and [these words are] more true today than ever before.

Apart from pricing, over the last decade, buyers have become more sophisticated in areas like procurement, contracting and risk management as the industry has evolved. They are weighing criteria such as vendors' financial security and the stability of management teams to using complex and specific KPIs (key performance indicators) in applying risk and reward clauses in contracts.

There was a distinct period of time, especially in the dot-com era, when IT people had procurement control of CRM outsourcing; 10-year contract terms bundled with data outsourcing was not uncommon on the very biggest deals. That approach was often found to be a bad idea and is now pretty much a thing of the past, with most CRM outsourcing contracts now ranging from three to five years. Also the numbers of vendors providing services have been reduced: which is one of the primary reasons why the industry has been consolidating.

Physical and data security have become a significant and critical component within terms and conditions. Because Teleperformance clients are made up of the Global 500 we tend to see security trends first, and we anticipate or identify emerging requirements early. This means we become the first to innovate and adapt to meet new client needs and continually set the pace for the industry.

Here are just a few breakthroughs for services we announced in 2010:

- Raising the bar customer service with our Platinum service, a customer service concept combining state-of-the-art technology and infrastructure with highly trained agents to provide premium service to high-value custom-



ers. Platinum delivers superior results with affordable pricing to attract, retain and grow our client's very top customers and prospects

- An enhanced Fraud Risk Assessment Solution. It's a new service intended to help identify and quantify the business impact of fraud risks within many phases of a call [contact] center agent's work. It reviews processes, applications, daily monitoring and reporting activities to provide comprehensive risk assessments. Its primary goal is to identify detectable vulnerabilities so that they can be removed or to implement early detection indicators for those that cannot.

Teleperformance holds all the key advanced security certifications and we lead the industry with security measures in contact center information defense. The feedback we are receiving from our clients regarding this has been nothing short of sensational. They see it as an exceptional value added service and a real differentiator.

shift their focus to customer loyalty initiatives to retain, capture and grow share. We believe cost optimization will come from outsourcing more front- and back-office processes as well as some technology and cloud-based solutions replacing large highly premise-based implementations. We further believe that late adopters of outsourcing, such as the financial services and health care verticals, along with fast paced new-economy companies will increasingly leverage outsourced providers to achieve their business objectives.

Companies are seeking stable BPO partners to drive improved outcomes e.g. grow revenue, more efficient operations and better customer experience. We are prepared to respond to continued demand for outsourcing and hosted technology with cloud technology solutions that offer a significant opportunity to reduce costs while enhancing capabilities and with innovative and integrated revenue generation solutions.

The top priority we're continuing to hear in current and prospective client meetings is maximizing lifetime customer value.

"Traditionally, the BPO industry has always experienced pricing pressures and tight margins; that's just the business. But right now the more enlightened customers are looking for long-term customer value rather than shortcuts."

– Dominic Dato, Teleperformance USA

TeleTech (www.teletech.com)

Judi Hand, Chief Marketing Officer

The BPO industry business is a real-time indicator of the economy as opposed to a lagging or leading indicator. What ultimately will bring the global economy out of this recession will be an increase in consumer spending; a number of factors including significant global unemployment and a depressed housing market has resulted in lower spending and, therefore, reduced volumes with clients across the industry.

This backdrop exists while at the same time the BPO industry is at an important inflection point. Major shifts are taking place in both the customer channel and technology front.

The last decade was characterized by growth primarily driven from product innovation in the U.S. and Europe. During that time, our greatest market opportunity was tied to outsourced front office solutions, while cost optimization was driven largely by offshoring.

As we look to the next year, and even the next decade, we believe growth will come from the online population and Asian markets as well as maturing U.S. and European markets as they

As a result, clients are increasingly focused on driving revenue by being ranked number one in service and satisfaction. In the eyes of their customers, never before has this been so important given the changing competitive landscape and the transparency created by social media. We are [therefore] at the forefront of a customer revolution.

Communications over the last decade were predominantly a one way channel with companies controlling the message to their customers via mass advertising. That has all changed with the explosion of social media. The digital population has actively embraced the two way channel of global communication. BPOs need to master the integration of traditional and social channels to elevate customer satisfaction and reduce costs.

Nearly every deal we're working on today has a technology component to it, and this continues to differentiate us in the marketplace. We have implemented strategic partnerships to deliver large scale and SMB hosted technology offerings (with [Cisco](#)), and to deliver integrated social monitoring and CRM solutions (with [Lithium Technologies](#)).

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Thomas L. Cardella & Associates
(www.tlcassociates.com)

Thomas L. Cardella, President and CEO

We have not seen a negative impact on our business due to the current economic client. We have actually seen solid business growth which we believe is a derivative of the quality of service and performance we provide our clients. We are also seeing many of our clients moving their off shore business back on shore for a reasons that include quality, brand preservation and a longer term strategy.

We have seen trends which continue to drive technology and operational process to be the trigger of trends in the industry

for privacy and compliance purposes. Because of these drivers, we have invested in becoming PCI- and SAS-70 compliant.

Trends in relationship to pricing continue to become more competitive and we believe the true metric is ROI per client seat. We measure and manage by KPIs that revolve around criteria that have direct impact on our clients' investments or back-end performance results.

We continue to expand our business in a controlled manner and recently were named the Fastest Growing Local Employer by the Corridor Business Journal. Along with this growth we are adding a Hispanic bilingual center in El Paso Texas to complement English-language consumer and business services. **CIS**

Maximizing Conversions With Targeted Routing

Whether one is selling, soliciting donations or seeking support for elected office candidates, there are two lock-step objectives: generating leads and then converting them into bottom-line results.

It is in meeting this last goal that savvy quality-and-results-focused BPO firms can make the difference between expectations satisfied and those surpassed.

InfoCision Management Corporation (www.infocision.com) wanted to test a theory it had for its one of its direct response clients, a DRTV firm specializing in portable heating units. This was whether callers are willing to stay on hold longer to talk with someone because they have a higher level of interest in the product they are calling about. And would these callers, if sent to higher performing agents, convert at higher rates?

Roughly 200,000 inbound calls in total are generated monthly for the client from print advertisements in national publications such as Parade magazine. As one of three contact centers, including one in-house center utilized by the client, InfoCision set a goal to become the leader in conversion rates among the three centers. With conversion rates hovering around 22 percent, the InfoCision client management team began to look at various aspects of the program to see where adjustments could be made.

InfoCision's team began by looking at call arrival patterns. They noticed immediately that the client's audience had higher than average wait times. The account management team theorized that because callers had exhibited a high-interest level in the product, they were willing to wait longer than the average hold time, approximately 45 seconds, before speaking with what InfoCision calls "communicators" i.e. contact center agents.

In late 2008 and early 2009, InfoCision put together the test program, which involved 650 Communicators who then took the calls from January-March 2009. They had been selected

from those tenured staff that had direct response experience and were ranked based on their conversion rate. Communicators also received specialized training by way of product demonstrations, best practices call reviews and intensive role playing.

InfoCision's account management team worked with its Command Center contact center management team to rank the communicators by their conversion rates. The Command Center then set parameters on its dialers that had callers "hold for the best converting communicator," distributing more calls to better performing personnel. The objectives for meeting client's expectations were to increase sales and the client's return on investment without increasing the abandonment rate.

The Command Center monitored arrival patterns and hold times and adjusted wait time thresholds as needed to maintain abandon rates. The center provided real-time and daily reports to the account management team who relayed the tests progress to the client.

The targeted routing program proved its worth. InfoCision improved its conversion rates by 2.17 percent and increase ROI while substantially decreasing the abandon rate: by more than nine percentage points. InfoCision's elite Communicator team also surpassed the client's in-house staff on conversions by nearly three percentage points.

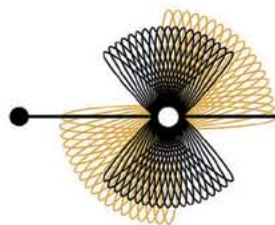
The program paid off in other ways too. InfoCision moved from third place to first place in conversion rates. InfoCision is now the only outsourced contact center supplier used by the client.

"This test was the first time we used the targeted call routing strategy," explains Steve Brubaker, InfoCision's chief of staff. "Because of its success, it has been rolled out successfully to other clients, especially direct response clients." **CIS**

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Success with Remote Agents – Is Not so Remote

Things like smart phones and social media are proving to be good for business, but are also forcing businesses to offer customer service around the clock, around the world, and many are looking for creative ways to do it and still keep costs in check.

Two words and one very viable solution: remote agents. With IP technologies and the new breed of centralized all-in-one IP communications platforms, a company of any size and located anywhere can deploy remote agents with as little as a high-speed Internet connection, a computer, a phone, and a quiet environment in which an agent can work. As importantly, most all-in-one platforms also provide the real-time monitoring and reporting tools supervisors need to view remote agent activity, at all times.

Will using remote agents benefit your business?

As one director of technology advises, “Don’t deploy remote agents for remote’s sake — there has to be a strong business driver.” There are, indeed, a growing number of reasons to employ a remote workforce, and some striking benefits.

- Increased agent talent pool. Take advantage of work-at-home (WAH) parents, students, disabled workers, retirees, persons living in rural areas — workers who might not be able to work full-time in a formal contact center, but who often possess hard-to-find skill sets.
- Reduced churn. Agents who work at home are generally more satisfied with their jobs because they appreciate the flexibility.
- Cost savings. Eliminate the expenditures of contact center facilities, equipment, energy costs, etc. As attrition rates improve with the use of remote agents, costs of training new hires is also reduced.
- Flexibility to meet peaks and ebbs in demand. The ability to bring remote or home-based workers online quickly allows

companies to rapidly respond to daily or seasonal demands, or to emergency situations.

- Business continuity. Stay nimble and responsive in the face of a natural disaster or crisis. When an outage does occur at a contact center site, an IP-based platform can quickly re-route calls to remote agents.
- Follow-the-sun support — think globally, act locally. Remote agents let companies serve customers 24/7 in various parts of the world and in different time zones, minus huge investments on a global basis. Remote agents also provide a “local” voice, and many are willing to work from home at night and on weekends, expanding coverage without leaving the time zone.

Remote agent best practices

When using remote agents, keep the focus on technology, people, and process. Stay flexible, since deploying and managing remote workers isn’t a one-size-fits-all proposition.

Technology

- Leverage a contact center platform that supports remote agents inherently, rather than as an add-on capability. The flexibility to migrate between on-premises and hosted CaaS environments to address changing business conditions is also important. A centralized all-in-one IP communications system can satisfy both needs.
- Workforce optimization software is critical; make sure your platform is equipped to support these capabilities.
- Where appropriate, combine a traditional contact center with WAH agents and automated self-service systems. Agents in the main center can handle interactions during regular business hours, supplemented by self-service IVR and remote workers for nights and weekends.
- Ensure remote access security through a Web client and endpoint of choice, or mirror an office environment through a broadband connection, VPN and SIP endpoint. Terminal server access utilities such as Citrix also provide secure access and simplify deployment for IT.
- Enable remote agents with UC feature sets supported by their organizations in broader UC strategies.
- Determine the ROI of using remote agents by identifying the costs your company will absorb versus what remote agents are responsible for.

Will using remote agents benefit your business? As one director of technology advises, “Don’t deploy remote agents for remote’s sake — there has to be a strong business driver.”

People

- Conduct competency-based staff screening, assessments and extensive background testing for all applicants.
- Establish a probationary trial period for each new hire and determine performance metrics to measure the success of all remote agents. Communicate expectations clearly and make appropriate performance data available to agents so they can self-manage to expectations.
- Allow for a breaking-in period. If working at home doesn’t work out, allow employees to return to the contact center facility without loss of status.
- Have clear guidelines for remote agents as to what is expected of them, including a work area in a quiet environment.
- Consider an initial in-center training program for remote agents, with regular follow-up online training. Allow remote agents to access training sessions at their convenience using e-learning and Web-based training tools.
- Utilize workforce optimization products and services to monitor remote agents’ performance, along with the same recording, reporting and analytics capabilities as in the formal contact center.

Process

- Equip remote agents with the same tools and access to resources as formal contact center agents.
- Give remote agents the appropriate levels of authority to solve customers’ problems.
- Extend reporting, recording, monitoring, staffing, and workforce optimization capabilities to remote agents to give managers and supervisors full visibility.
- Incorporate tools to ensure information security and confidentiality.
- Record 100% of remote agents’ calls, use analytics to identify issues and trends, and offer after-call customer surveys to ensure that quality and performance expectations are being met.
- Ensure communications between remote agents, supervisors, managers and subject matter experts, and establish a formal communication process between agents and supervisors to facilitate ongoing contact.
- Reward at-home and remote agents in the same way with the same visibility as in-house agents. **CIS**



Consona (www.consona.com)'s latest release of its Live Assistance assisted support solution, Version 6.6 (v6.6), has several new features and enhancements. These include a Resolve Window, which enables faster resolution times by producing relevant, contextual knowledge immediately to agents. When they complete a customer interaction, the Resolve Window presents an opportunity to capture, improve, or reuse the knowledge used to resolve the incident. V6.6 also has an improved Analyst Monitor, which expands the ability of supervisors to observe service level agreements (SLAs), as well as additional platform support for 64-bit compatibility (Windows Vista and Windows 7), SQL 2008 and Firefox.

eGain (www.egain.com) has come out with the next generation of its eGain Social Experience Suite. The new version includes a social-blended agent desktop, integration with Facebook to complement already available integrations with Twitter and web search and single-sourced knowledge publishing capability for proactive social engagement. The solution also includes analytics and the ability to move a potentially-explosive social conversation to a more private interaction channel for discreet one-on-one resolution. A community feature enables businesses to include forums as part of their customer interaction hubs. The solution can also monitor social networks through integrations with Facebook, Google, Twitter and Yahoo.

Also, eGain Knowledge 10 solution has achieved SAP (www.sap.com) certification, as powered by the SAP NetWeaver platform. The solution, now integrated with the SAP CRM application 7.0, enables contact center agents to find answers to a broad range of customer queries with the simple click of a button and record the entire interaction in the SAP solution.

IntelePeer (www.intelepeer.com) has made outbound calling easier and more productive via offering to route them over its new SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) trunking service, utilizing the IntelePeer Global Voice Peering Network and the 50-plus global service partner providers in the [IntelePeer SuperRegistry](#). IntelePeer provides direct connections from outbound IVR, notification and telemarketing companies to message recipients and supports volume spikes at high voice quality while reducing communications expenses by up to 30 percent. Calls can be completed to and received from U.S. and international destinations through a suite of termination and origination solutions including toll-free and direct inward dialing.

Interactive Softworks (www.interactivesoftworks.com) has come out with the Metaphor Unified Agent Desktop that consolidates data and functionality from disparate systems and multiple communications channels into a centrally managed and single intuitive user interface. It helps synchronize critical real-time data from backend systems and web services directly onto the agent's desktop. It has easy-to-use business tools to quickly define and reuse critical campaign elements that shortens better time-to-market and slices reliance on IT staff.

Interactive Intelligence (www.interactiveintelligence.com) has acquired Global Software Services, a.k.a. Latitude Software, which provides debt collection software and services for \$14 million. Interactive Intelligence will offer the Latitude Software suite as a standalone solution, which will include integration with its own Interaction Dialer application, as well as with third-party dialer products. The Latitude team will operate as a subsidiary, retaining its current Jacksonville, Fla. headquarters from where it will continue to handle 24/7 customer support and issue product enhancements, both through generally available releases and requested customization.

Nice Systems (www.nice.com) has significantly enhanced the NICE Perform eXpress call recording software that is aimed small to mid-size contact centers and branches with a new quality management solution that is delivered via an intuitive web client. The new version also includes "total recording" to capture all customer interactions, improved call retention and virtualization and expanded support for dozens of additional telephony environments. It also has support for gathering call metadata that is not dependent on a computer telephony integration system. These enhancements says, Nice enables service level improvements to service levels while enhancing regulatory compliance and further reducing total cost of ownership.

SysAid Technologies (www.sysaid.com) has released the newest version of its customer service support software, CSS 2.5. It features a new SLA/SLM module that permits creating and tracking SLAs and easily gauging support quality provided to individual customers; the SLM tool collects various SLAs, measures key performance indicators and analyzes the service delivery, displaying real-time information in a user-friendly dashboard.

CSS 2.5 allows administrators to easily prioritize and manage incoming customer service tickets and automatically sort and route them based on defined preferences. It has advanced live chat capabilities and a customizable FAQ knowledgebase for customers to reference, allowing them to avoid future service calls. There is now an integrated [SysAid Calendar](#) that automatically logs service request due dates and activities, an API functionality which integrates SysAid with other external applications and improved customization options that allow users to quickly add additional fields and validation processes.

Verint (www.verint.com) has released the Impact 360 Text Analytics solution. It mines customer interactions and feedback across multichannel customer communications, including e-mail messages, web chat sessions, blogs, review sites, social media and other text-based channels. It enables firms to extract content using natural language processing. The software also features simplified classification, storage and reporting. It can notify staff about unusual and undesired feedback patterns.

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Outsourcing for Success

Outsourcing contact center tasks to the right partners – BPO (business process outsourcer) firms that excel in people, process and technology – can generate significant bottom-line results. For these outsourcing companies' success depends on how well they can make their clients' programs successful. Yet to make this happen require close coordination between the clients and the BPO providers, as this example illustrates:

Acuity Brands sells commercial lighting products to the new construction and renovations markets. Lighting is considered a “must have” for new construction buyers, explains George Stringer, vice president and general manager, Renovation, Government and National Accounts as it traditionally purchases from a bid schedule. This makes identifying leads relatively easy. Renovation customers, however, may or may not have a lighting purchase planned. Lighting products are typically sold through channel partners.

“Our biggest competitor in the renovation space is a potential customer doing nothing,” explains Stringer. “Therefore, we have to create demand and show value with financial metrics. We do this by showing how a lighting renovation project can reduce a company's energy footprint, often with investment payback in less than two years.”

Yet to generate productive leads requires the bandwidth and personnel. In response Acuity engaged TeleNet Marketing Solution's (www.telenetmarketing.com) outbound telemarketing team to make cold calls on its behalf. It selected the BPO firm after a competitive bid and detailed analysis.

Acuity had considered building an internal team for the cold-calling and lead qualification but had no experience in the contact center business. The firm also saw that a key advantage of using an outsourced model is that the BPO firm has more pressure to perform.

“We may have saved costs by doing the project ourselves,” says Stringer. “However, it would have been at the expense of the program's effectiveness, measurability and reporting.”



Acuity piloted the program with TeleNet in 2009 with two dedicated agents. They were tasked with identifying decision-makers, positioning Acuity's value proposition and uncovering leads for Acuity's internal lead specialists: who then cultivated them further and ultimately provided them to the company's partner network.

The TeleNet agents were selected for having a proven ability to pique called party interest, establish credibility and build rapport and had experience in Acuity's target vertical industries. They also had experience in promoting green business solutions and similar “payback” value propositions.

The pilot program showed immediate signs of success. However, there were challenges with how the leads were being pursued and tracked by Acuity and the two firms agreed to place the effort on hold. Acuity refined its back end lead



engagement structure and tracking mechanisms. It hired and trained an internal lead specialist dedicated to the TeleNet program. It also implemented a new CRM tool that enables automated lead tracking. It then re-engaged TeleNet at the start of 2010.

Acuity and TeleNet are measuring the results of this initiative in three ways:

1. TeleNet set a benchmark that 10 percent of the prospect interviews will result in a lead for Acuity. To date, the program is yielding a 15 percent lead rate, exceeding the benchmark
2. Acuity set an objective for their internal lead specialist to convert one lead to pipeline per day. To date, Acuity has averaged 1.2 leads converted per day, again exceeding their goal
3. Acuity put into place a goal of closing \$8 million in incremental revenue. While Acuity's partners have already won new accounts as a result of this program, their average sales cycle is a lengthy 12 to 18 months

While the final ROI has not yet been determined, key indicators are positive. Ninety percent of the leads provided by TeleNet have been accepted by Acuity's lead specialist; 30 percent of the leads have been converted to pipeline and passed to partners already.

Once the ROI objectives are met, Acuity may expand the initiative with TeleNet to include the government sector as well as other key vertical industries.

"The philosophy of our program and the processes we have in place is to drive for quality, not quantity," states Stringer. **CIS**

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Energizing the Employees

Contact center agents are on the front lines of service, support, sales and collections and as such they make sought-after results such as customer satisfaction and retention and maximum lifetime value and income happen: under the guidance of supervisors who ensure that their performance not only meets but exceeds expectations.

At the same time employees are the most expensive facet of contact centers. Labor costs represent 60 percent to 70 percent of operating expenses and account for nearly all of the technology and infrastructure costs that are spent to support their activities. Contact centers are therefore focused on maximizing agent and supervisor productivity.

A fair portion of those costs is turnover: hiring, training and burning in new staff to replace those who have left. Finding and keeping agents is often difficult even in today's challenging economy because of the nature of the work; it is high-stress, low-paid with few benefits, has minimal status, the hours vary and advancement is limited. As customer contacts become more involved – voice and Web self-service having drawn off the simpler ones – those issues and resulting expenses climb.

The other side of the coin of contact center work is that meeting callers' needs as well as generating revenues is personally satisfying. There is also camaraderie in contact centers even amongst home agents through shared experiences; after all, agents and supervisors by nature enjoy interacting with others.

There are a wide range of methods to boost agent productivity and slice attrition. Articles, editorials and opinion pieces in this magazine have touched on hiring, treating, training and managing right, and have looked at home-based work.

Here are a few technology-aided solutions that can also assist in enabling superior results including higher productivity and reduced attrition by "energizing the employees" i.e. getting the most from them through making it possible for and encouraging them to give their most.

Providing the Right Answers, Online

The easier and faster contact centers make it for agents to assist customers consistently and well the better the service and



the higher the satisfaction on both ends of the lines: hardwired and/or wireless. Providing consistent answers to customers' basic questions consistently and making them available online or to the agents themselves enables just that.

IntelliResponse offers these benefits through its Answer Suite knowledge management solution that enables organizations to quickly deliver the "One Right Answer" to questions posed by customers--and by agents--across a wide array of interaction channels: websites, mobile devices, social media platforms and yes agent desktops.

The technology works by having questions posed on the tool that then queries a knowledge base that will deliver a single, accurate, approved answer. IntelliResponse leverages a patented question-to-answer matching platform that allows them to enter complete questions in plain language – including spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and informal "text speak" – and matches those questions to the One Right Answer.

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The Answer Suite is very accurate: IntelliResponse clients enjoy a 90 percent-plus rating in delivering a single answer to direct questions posed to the system. This benefit increases first contact resolution (FCR) rates, which are tied into customer satisfaction and retention. It also cuts average agent handle and research time by 25 percent to 40 percent, thereby reducing overall costs and increasing customer satisfaction, while allowing agents to handle more calls. And with accessibility by via self-service along with high accuracy, clients report experiencing call volume reduced by 15 percent to 35 percent and e-mail volume by 25 percent to 70 percent.

At the same time the IntelliResponse solution improves agent job satisfaction through enabling FCR that permits them to meet customers' needs while limiting their need to search CMS systems and folders that reduces their stress. And with simpler online inquiries answered with "One Right Answers" they can focus on handling more challenging, interesting and value-added customer interactions.

Metaphor dynamically presents the right information and executes the correct process at the exact time it is needed. It also integrates multiple communication channels – traditional and social – into a seamless dialogue, allowing agents to focus on the customer instead of on the systems, and half-remembered processes.

Agents are assisted with a context-driven workflow; this guides them to the right technical solutions as well as the next, best product offering. They then have a single complete and current point of customer interactions; this minimizes redundancy and hides the typical fragmentation of customer data found on desktops. They are presented with a highly-usable environment, one that is intuitive to use, easy to learn, and "makes sense" when answering questions or requests.

Metaphor also allows firms to immediately re-use content, views, processes and rules across any communication channel desired by the customer, whether social, self- or assisted-serve.

Too often, agents must spend up to 30 percent of their time moving between multiple applications, relying on their own experience to accurately answer questions.

– Steven Herlocher, Interactive Softworks

Unifying the Desktop

Contact center agents are increasingly multitasking, working with a growing range of applications and channels. Yet too often they get jammed through toggling between these solutions and tools, which wastes time and bothers customers, and which adds to their frustration.

Too often, agents must spend up to 30 percent of their time moving between multiple applications, relying on their own experience to accurately answer questions, reports Steven Herlocher, executive vice president, sales and product strategy, Interactive Softworks. Or, they waste valuable time by cutting and pasting information then having to forward that information to customers. These methods are not reliable, consistent or efficient.

Unified agent desktop or customer engagement software provides a solution. Such products, like Interactive Softworks' Metaphor drives significant agent productivity improvements by providing a cohesive, context-aware view into the multiple applications and processes the agent is required to work with for effective customer interactions.

This functionality shortens development cycles, simplifies change and provides better business visibility.

Such software also increases agent job satisfaction, potentially reducing turnover. The lower the obstacles in accomplishing these tasks and going for these objectives the less the frustration and the more likely these top performers will stay.

Selecting the Right People

Boosting productivity both in performance and in lowered costs via reduced attrition in any contact center begins with hiring the right individuals for the positions being offered.

Contact centers have increasingly relied on automated pre-hire screening tools to rapidly and cost-effectively sift through and present the most-likely-to-succeed-and-stay candidates. They assess for skills hard e.g. sales, and soft e.g. empathy; individual attributes, attitudes, interests motivations; and team and organizational compatibility with a combination of questions, tests and simulations.

FurstPerson has recently enhanced its pre-screening solutions with CC Audition Talk & Note and CC Audition Sales, which build on its existing CC Audition interactive simulation product line.

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Talk & Note incorporates pre-recorded speech including customers' calls in customized simulation exercises reinforced by animated representations of contact centers and staff. The speech feature along with advanced call documentation that requires candidates to notate the calls creates an assessment tool that closely resembles actual job requirements. Managers and/or HR staff can then predict key call control and customer satisfaction metrics by applicants, thereby permitting them to select more successful agents.

CC Audition Sales tool granularizes the assessments for inbound sales candidates to help organizations find those agents that can best produce revenue. It requires candidates to demonstrate probing, active listening, overcoming resistance, and assertiveness during realistic inbound sales scenarios.

FurstPerson conducted an analysis that shows that job candidates who score well on Talk & Note perform better on the job – and this higher performance equates to cost savings and revenue enhancement. Those hires that score

well will have shorter average handle time, while also delivering higher call satisfaction.

“CC Audition Talk & Note - helps call center hiring managers identify candidates that can balance customer interaction, resolution and call control,” explains Jeff Furst, president and CEO. “When we have compared on the job performance results with assessment scores on Talk & Note, we find that agents performing well on the job have done well on Talk & Note yet the majority of agents who did not meet performance targets had actually failed Talk & Note. Being able to filter potential poor performers out of the recruiting process objectively enables call centers to hire better performers, which drives significant financial value for the business.”

Agent Motivation and Rewards

While excellent performance is arguably the best reward there is, employees including contact center agents like to be recognized for their achievements. They are motivated to excel further with kind words in-person and

The eLearning Solution

Training is one of the surest methods to raise agent output while building up their loyalty. The more staff knows and can do the greater their productivity; they can perform their tasks more effectively and take on more of them while at the same time the higher their job satisfaction and interest.

Training can also boost agent performance indirectly through training supervisors and managers. They more they know how to get the most of their teams while at the same engendering increased loyalty and decreased churn the stronger the bottom-line results: customer satisfaction, sales, income and lowered costs.

While in-person classroom instruction is arguably the best means of imparting knowledge, it is often not the most practical or cost-effective means for contact centers. Firms must expend scarce resources sending staff to seminars or bringing trainers on-site. Doing so also means pulling agents and supervisors off the call floors, reducing total output and/or requiring added staff. And as more contact centers move to home-based agents, including those living/working some distance away, in-person training becomes no longer feasible.

eLearning a.k.a. technology-based training can deliver lessons including with simulations via web and/or video

to their desktops at their convenience. It works for both agents and supervisors.

For example, Knowlagent's Knowlagent Training eLearning solution optimizes agent idle time by automatically delivering training and updates to agent desktops during unscheduled downtimes. Its patented RightTime engine identifies pockets of forecasted and unforecasted downtimes and uses that downtime to deliver training directly to the agents' desktop without negatively affecting service levels or operational metrics. One of its dividends is that 1 percent -3 percent fewer agents are needed because there is no longer a need to cover for those in training.

The RCCSP Professional Education Alliance provides virtual (web conferenced) training. They cover a wide range of topics among them: building and managing teams, coaching, calculating staffing, workforce management... and motivating employees.

“What's great about the RCCSP virtual training classes, which are instructor-led and interactive, is the ability to broadcast this training to a group of reps [agents], supervisors, quality assurance specialists or workforce managers in one training room at one low price,” explains RCCSP Professional Education Alliance ceo Nina Kawalek. **CIS**



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broadcast to their colleagues, such as on Intranet and social media sites, reinforced by bonuses, accelerated pay rises, choice in hours and parking spots.

Oftentimes offering tangible tokens, such as gifts, can supply that extra incentive. Call them the equivalent of chocolates and flowers.

Yet not everyone wants what they are given to them though they appreciate the sentiment; instead they often want to select what they receive. And there are automated gift-based rewards programs that provide just that with methodologies that link performance with these symbols of appreciation.

Here's how they work: when agents hit certain metrics such as perfect attendance, notable customer service, up-selling customers, retaining one who was thinking of canceling their services they receive recognition from either their managers or peers who are notified through customers or from recorded calls. Once they accumulate their recognition they can redeem for brand-name items and experiences.

I Love Rewards offers and manages a Web-based solution that motivates employees with timely recognition tied to meaningful rewards, with online ordering and fulfillment, which ensures that they receive the rewards they want quickly and which reinforces the

link between positive behaviors and recognition. The firm says providing employees with a broad choice of

rewards items and experiences are key factors to encourage performance and repeated positive behavior.

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I Love Rewards is highly customizable. It offers for example peer-to-peer and bottom-to-top free recognition through its online portal. Recognition is either free or attached to points. These points are accumulated and redeemed for brand-name products, gift cards and life experiences. Employee program members can also post their recognition to any social media outlet including [LinkedIn](#), Twitter and Facebook to share with the personal and professional networks.

I Love Rewards recommends training supervisors and managers on the programs prior to launch so that they know how and when to recognize top-performing employees. It also stresses that online recognition does not replace face-to-face or on-the-spot recognition but instead supplements them.

To get the most benefits from its rewards program especially including employee participation it strongly advises firms to create excitement for the plan with an internal communica-

tions plan that includes teaser e-mails, posters and videos and with links to the programs' websites.

"You may have the best recognition program in the world, but it will fail to deliver results if you don't communicate it properly to your organization," says Razor Suleman, CEO and Founder, I Love Rewards. **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

FurstPerson
www.furstperson.com

I Love Rewards
www.iloverewards.com

IntelliResponse
www.intelliresponse.com

Interactive Softworks

www.interactivesoftworks.com

Knowlagent
www.knowlagent.com

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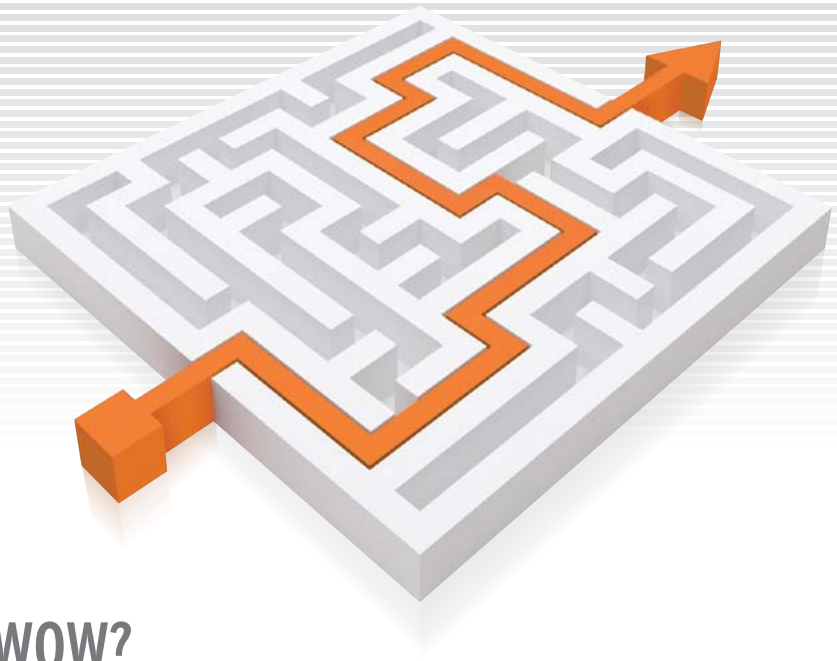
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inContact can help you navigate the way from “good” to “WOW”. Our intelligent contact center solutions enable you to establish a service experience baseline and understand what your customers care about most so you can blaze the trail to an amazing and brand-differentiating experience. Then we help you exceed their expectations by delivering this experience consistently across every touch point in your entire organization. And because it’s all in the cloud, we can do it better and more cost-effectively than anyone else.

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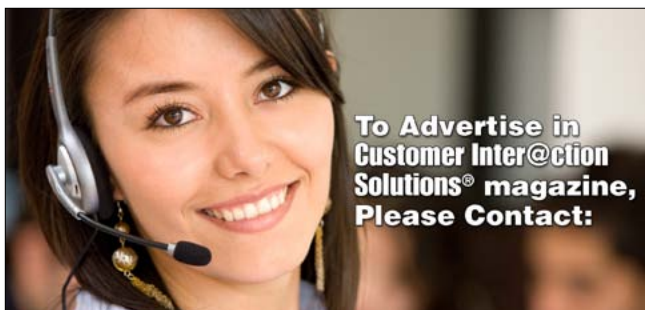
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IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION SOLUTIONS® magazine (ISSN: 1533-3078) is published monthly by Technology Marketing Corporation, River Park, 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl., Norwalk, CT 06854-1628 U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, Connecticut and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to: **CUSTOMER INTER@CTION SOLUTIONS®**, Technology Marketing Corporation, River Park, 800 Connecticut Ave 1st Fl., Norwalk, CT 06854-1628 U.S.A.

To subscribe, call toll-free: 800-243-6002. If busy, call 203-852-6800 or write to the circulation director at srusso@tmcnet.com. Subscription rates (published monthly): Free for qualified subscribers in the U.S.A. only. For non-qualified U.S.A. subscribers, \$59. All Canadian subscribers, \$89. All Foreign (air mail), \$109. All orders are payable in advance in U.S. dollars drawn against a U.S. bank. Connecticut residents add applicable sales tax.



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Curing the Pareto Illness

One of the most serious illnesses to strike organizations is the Pareto Principle: the notion that 20 percent of customers create 80 percent of the value, which is embedded in CRM methodology. To maximize profits the object is to focus resources on retaining and attracting the top 20 while giving minimal least-cost service to the bottom 80.

The Pareto Principle offers firms short-term gains through cost reductions while building greater loyalty and hopefully revenue from elite buyers. Yet it inflicts the medium/long-term pain from rising expenses, shrinking customer bases and individual income and spending declines.

The Pareto Principle's symptoms include poorly-written IVR and web self-service that it forces the lower 80 percent of customers to endure and who then reach live agents only after enduring lengthy queues: only to be pushed through the calls by agents that are being measured to average handle time and cost per call.

Another warning sign is the lesser 80 percent of callers having their contacts handled offshore. Companies have got the message that the top 20 percent will not tolerate agents who cannot understand and help them in a timely manner; they now stay domestic, served by in-house or at high-end boutique outsourced centers: with short or no IVR menus and minimal queues.

The Pareto thinking may now be infecting the social channel by solving customers' problems through solely or principally using onsite communities. The seeming ROIs are lower costs: why pay for support when the "social nation" can provide this assistance for free? Yet social-based support is risky because customers could employ the wrong information that can mess up their products, which will not make them happy.

Don't be surprised if firms begin charging customers for support by professional staff akin to the paid plans for mid-to-high-end business software: free (of course), to elite buyers.

There are only so many of that top 20 percent to go around, and these buyers know it and are demanding firms to woo them with new offerings. Meanwhile the other lower 80 percent of customers represents volume, and infrastructure—hardware, software and services—are volume buys. And the 20 percent in value they bring to the table can make the difference between profit and loss.

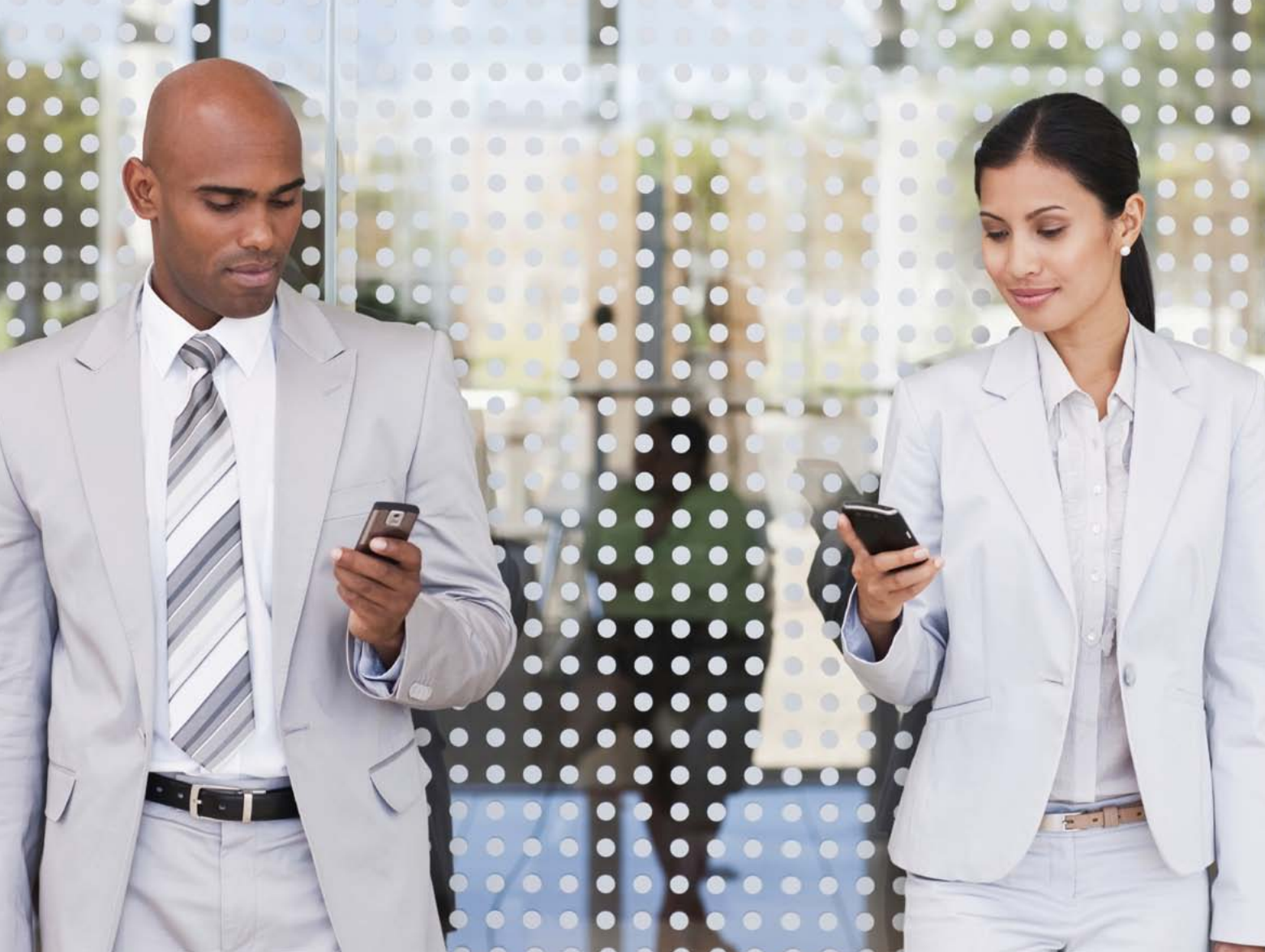
With products and service becoming equal and commoditized, service becomes the only differentiator. But when service quality disappears for the majority of buyers then why they should stay committed to those firms? The net impacts are even less revenue: and higher costs from more marketing to keep them too. Shrink the total demand and the cost per customer for technologies and services skyrockets.

The Pareto Principle has also poisoned the call floors. Agents are at the bottom and are underpaid, with little in the way of benefits, have limited schedule flexibility and must deal with often-incompetent supervisors and managers. There is now a push to turn more agent positions from full-time to part-time mainly to cut benefit expenses. At the same time the top 20 percent want agents which have high-end comprehension, knowledge, empathy, superior speaking, grammar and writing skills to meet their needs. Yet how will contact centers attract and keep high quality employees if they do not treat them well? How can they in turn be customers if they do not have adequate wages?

There is a painful but necessary cure for the Pareto illness. Firms must put their wants on strict diets and instead spend more money to improve service to elite and non-elite customers alike. That means more live agent care and focus on retention metrics such as first contact resolution. They should also boost contact center wages and benefits, avoid part-timing and improve working conditions including bringing aboard quality supervisors.

These investments will encourage all customers to stay loyal and become fans, advising others via their social media posts to become buyers too, which reduces costs and drives up income. They will also make staff more productive, less likely to churn and more willing to recommend employment there to other high quality workers.

Call this approach the capitalistic version of spreading the wealth. And it is the only way which we can cure our economic ailments. **CIS**



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What Is Under Your WFM's Hood?

Forecasting

Other WFM Software

- **Poor forecast accuracy** using Weighted Moving Averages

ac2 Advanced Workforce Optimization Portal

- **Utmost forecast accuracy** using Expert System to fit advanced time series models optimally: Box-Jenkins ARIMA, Exponential Smoothing (Holt-Winters), Forecasting with call drivers
- Special event day forecasting
- Automated IDP, shift bid and budget forecast accuracy tracking

Staffing & Scheduling

- **Poor schedule efficiency** using non-optimal, heuristic scheduling
- Inaccurate Erlang or primitive simulation based staffing and service level predictions for skills-based routing

- **5 – 12+% agent headcount savings over other WFM to meet service level targets**
- Concurrent Optimal Scheduling of all agents' work/off days, daily start and break times together
- Provably optimal schedule efficiency
- Sophisticated Discrete Event simulation for staffing and service level predictions for skills-based routing

Strategic Planning

- **Third-party add-on** using different forecasting, staffing and scheduling models than the WFM software

- **Comprehensive, integrated strategic planning using the same advanced forecasting, staffing and scheduling models**
- Sophisticated What-If analysis capabilities
- Productivity and AHT changes in new agent training/ramping
- Planning all agent and support staff groups
- Vendor SLA and capacity planning

Performance Management

- **Limited to passive reporting** with no decision support
- Real-time Adherence

- **Proactive performance optimization, scorecards and dashboards with advanced decision support tools**
- Real-time Adherence

Agent Workstation

- **Limited or no support** for agents to manage their activities over the internet

- **Easy-to-use web-based workstation**
- Exception entry
- Shift swapping
- Schedule and vacation bidding
- Performance review

Software

- **Outdated client-server architecture**

- **%100 web based architecture**
- Modular licensing