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September 2010 • Vol. 29/No. 4
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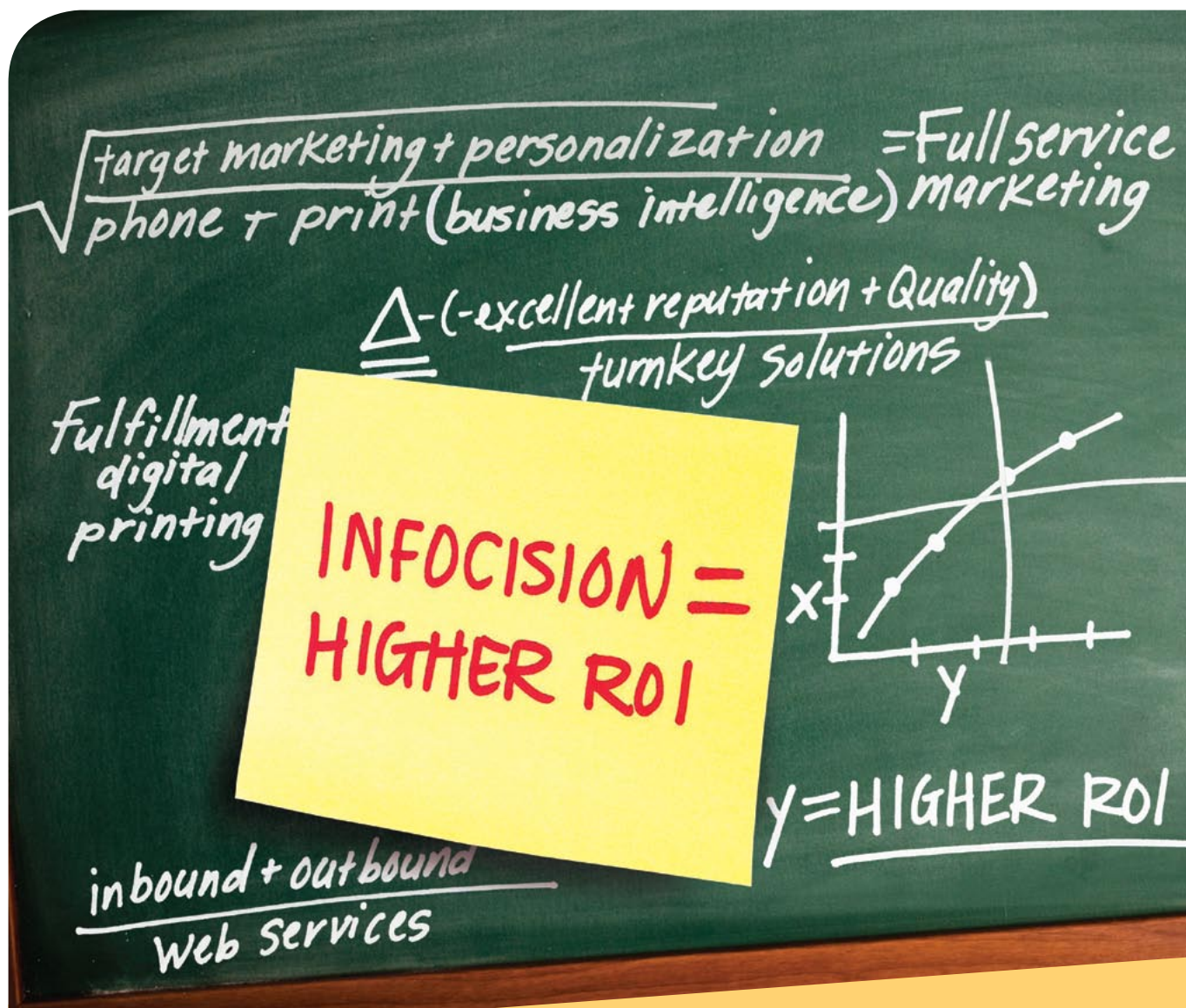
Interactive Intelligence's



Social Channel “Buzz”

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The Real Time of Social CRM

As I sat to write this month's column, I came across interesting news from Google that the company has decided to launch a new service called Google Realtime, which was a feature of Google's search prior to this move. By launching a separate site, the company has taken on the search features of companies like Twitter but, more importantly, this new page could eventually become the official Google results.

There is another possibility. By unveiling this new search page, increased attention will be focused on the capability to use Google in a new way and, as a result, more people will use this page instead of the standard Google home page. If enough people do, Google is in a position to better determine which results are pertinent, meaning these results will likely receive far greater attention in traditional Google search results.

Once again, I remind my readers that if a single customer has a bad experience with your brand and they tweet about the experience and it subsequently gets retweeted, the potential exists for this result to be shown to your potential new customers as they search for your brand.

The threat of having search engine results pertaining to your company or products filled with results you don't control is more real than ever and, sadly, customers tend to be less tweet-happy when they are satisfied with a purchase.

has a recall, I can be immediately kept in the loop. Obviously, this can kill a deal even when I am at the dealership if I receive an alert on my phone.

From a social CRM perspective, companies that have put in place a solid strategy to deal with customer complaints and questions via social networks are at a huge advantage. McDonalds is an example of a company who has done a good job in this regards; I recently tweeted them about Happy Meal gifts they plan on giving in the future and they rapidly answered. By the way, the Happy Meal wasn't for me - it was for a friend.

Seriously, though, the trend is very clear: social networking and Twitter, in particular, are allowing real-time conversations to take place and persist about your products and brand. They can break your company if you do not engage customers who are unhappy and get involved in the conversation.

The trend is very clear: social networking and Twitter, in particular, are allowing real-time conversations to take place and persist about your products and brand. They can break your company if you do not engage customers who are unhappy and get involved in the conversation.

As part of this new search service, users can refine a search based on town, state and country and they can further see a timeline of what people have said about a company or anything else. Moreover, Google has now put together conversations so a searcher can see a customer complaint as well as responses from others who chimed in on the matter.

If this wasn't enough, you can set up real-time alerts on any topic, so, if I am about to buy a Toyota and I set this feature up on the keywords "Camry" and "Toyota" and the company

I have spoken with company leaders who tell me they don't want to appear creepy and, subsequently, don't think engaging customers on Twitter is a smart move. I vehemently disagree. Twitter is a public forum and a basic tenet of providing proper service levels is to solve all customer problems you become aware of. Moreover, if you are CEO of a company that is in charge during a time when hundreds or thousands of negative comments are being made about you online and you do nothing about it, you will likely be considered incompetent in the future. That assumes, of course, your company has something useful to add to the discussion. **CIS**

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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

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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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A Technology Marketing Publication

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



Turning Social Media into Revenue

With ITEXPO West 2010 approaching, I can't help but get increasingly more excited about Social CRM Expo (www.scrmexpo.com), one of a dozen collocated events at this year's ITEXPO West (www.itexpo.com). The reasons are many, but mainly it's about the almost ridiculous growth of social media, certainly driven by 500 million Facebook users. But, there's also its impact on business and, though there is ongoing debate over the legitimacy of Social CRM, the fact is that the majority of CRM and contact center vendors are weighing their options, and many start-ups have sprouted to leverage the social media phenomenon.

Social media sites and platforms are in their infancy, so it remains to be seen how it all plays out. We do know that business success ultimately rests with customer satisfaction, and social media presents businesses with a new and highly available resource for reaching their customers. Of course, it also gives customers a bigger audience than ever to whom they can voice both complaints and praise.

I've had a chance recently to talk to a number of vendors in the contact center and CRM space, and the one thing they all agree on is social media is coming. Where they disagree is how quickly it will rise to prominence as a CRM tool and how it should be integrated into existing technologies.

Some, like VoltDelta, see it as an opportunity for entrepreneurial companies to launch a new breed of add-ons to core contact center technologies.

"We see ourselves as being the solid plumbing, the core technology that enables call centers to operate," explains Terry Saeger, executive vice president and general manager, VoltDelta. "We will look to elegantly integrate social media and other ancillary features into our core platform."

It seems a rational approach, given that, traditionally, contact centers have been among the slowest to adopt new technology, drawing on the fundamental – though grammatically contemptible – theory that, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

The same holds for social media integration, according to USAN's Senior Vice President of Business Development and Marketing Harry Miller, who notes that, "People are recognizing it, but I haven't

seen a dramatic shift in taking advantage of SMS or social media channels."

He does, however, agree that there is a fundamental demographic shift taking place, with the younger, more mobile and much more tech-savvy generation leveraging social media and text messaging, and quickly becoming a very vocal constituency to every business with which they interact.

What it means is a new model for customer contact that will rely on connecting with customers through the best available channel, which could be live, IVR-based, SMS, social media, or others. The key is understanding that "the best channel" is simply defined as that through which each customer chooses to engage.

The result has been a frenzy of activity, as business explore ways to invest in social media – simply because they are beginning to understand that ignoring social media can easily undermine previous efforts to strengthen already fragile vendor loyalties.

"There is a great chance that, if I do a search for a product, I am not going to find the vendor site first," suggests Michael Perry, head of speech self service at Avaya. "So, vendors have to be able to inject themselves into the conversation wherever it happens."

Perhaps even more important, though, is the reality that the growing use of the social channel means customers no longer have to wait to give feedback – nor do they have to seek out ways to provide it. They simply use the same social media applications they use on a daily basis to share other thoughts and content with friends and colleagues.

This real-time nature of social media means that businesses must be prepared

to react to customer feedback just as quickly as they receive it. Quite simply, because they are able to provide instant feedback, customers are quickly developing an expectation of instant response.

"Social media has helped people understand that it's about real time, and that the little things make all the difference in terms of operations and efficiency and feedback," says Jon Sanderson, vice president of marketing at Mindshare Technologies. "The longer you wait to respond to a customer, the worse it is going to be. If you resolve the conflict immediately, the customer is actually likely to become more satisfied."

It seems easy, and it can be – as long as businesses understand where their customers are providing feedback, are able to track it, and can turn feedback into actionable interactions. But, it all rests on effectively integrating social media with existing customer care tools and getting the feedback to the right people – those who are best equipped to react to it.

Then, and only then, can companies that have invested the time and effort into developing effective social media strategies tie social media into their revenue streams. This means not only monitoring, tracking, and reacting to feedback, but also building a customer information database and incorporating that into outbound campaigns.

"The key is being able to take social media interactions and tying them back to something meaningful," says Perry. "It's about getting to increased customer satisfaction, but when you take it to the next step, the more information you have the better you can deliver valuable information to your customers." **CIS**



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Interactive Intelligence's Social Channel "Buzz"



There is always a buzz around Interactive Intelligence: Since day one, the firm has and continues to come out with (and its customers have successfully deployed) imaginative, feature-rich, easily-enabled-and-supported needs-anticipating-and-meeting communications solutions used in or via the contact centers. Perhaps not surprisingly, Frost and Sullivan recently bestowed Interactive Intelligence with its 2010 North American Technology Company of the Year, Contact Centers award. The analyst firm reports that more and larger companies are discovering the value proposition Interactive Intelligence's products provide and are employing more of them.

This year the buzz is literally just that. Interactive Intelligence is enabling firms via their contact centers to extract the rich customer service and sales value from social media a.k.a. the social channel without getting stung through a partnership with Buzzient announced in July that it provides an integrated social media monitoring, routing and reporting solution.

The agreement combines Buzzient's social media analysis and integration capabilities with the Interactive Intelligence multi-channel queuing, routing and reporting applications for more effective and efficient handling of online social media content. The combined offering enables enterprises and contact centers to monitor social media "chatter" on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other sites for customer-defined keywords. It then routes the content as e-mail messages to the most appropriate individual or department based on business rules and agent skill.

To get the buzz on Interactive Intelligence's entry into social media/social channel, Customer Interaction Solutions recently interviewed Denise Meyer, product solutions manager, and Jennifer Wilson, product manager:

CIS: What are the key differences between the social channel and other interaction channels i.e. voice, chat, e-mail and IM?

DM, JW: The social channel allows for a great deal of visibility and transparency to messages (public posts, directed public posts, and private directed posts). This is different from IM, SMS, e-mail and voice, which are not publicly available and thus considered a point-to-point communication between individuals. Conversations held on these channels are not visible unless the person has been added

to the address information (e-mail), text forwarded, conferenced in, or invited to a collaborative workspace in IM. The social channel is considered open communication and is monitored to the extent where one actually detects that a posting has been created, which may or may not be possible. Social channels are conversations held in near real-time and are generally unfiltered. Consider it "participatory surveillance" and "situational awareness." By allowing greater visibility and transparency surrounding ones' activities, people can be more aware of information and interactions happening in an ambient manner. The social channel also lacks presence awareness, whereas with IM, SMS, e-mail and voice one can typically detect the availability of someone from their status change.

CIS: Why should organizations pay attention to and tap the social channel?

DM, JW: Organizations must recognize that their customers have a variety of preferences related to how they interact and get information. It is the responsibility of the organization to provide customer service and opportunities that fit the needs of its constituents. Older generations tend to prefer face-to-face contact and phone conversations, while younger generations typically lean towards instant messaging, SMS, e-mail and now social media. Organizations should realize that people could be talking about their brand, services and products on social channels, whether they are present and listening or not. They need to be listening to what is being said about their organization via these channels and respond accordingly, whether the conversations are negative or positive. In addition, by regularly listening, other benefits may be realized such as opportunities for cross-selling and up-selling.

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CIS: Are companies' customers providing information or opportunities to engage with over the social channel that is not possible or less convenient via other channels? If so, what types?

DM, JW: Customers are providing open access to their opinions and thoughts about their occupation, brands, the industry, and buying habits via social channels. Sites like Twitter and Facebook give them the ability to develop a personal relationship with the companies they do business with by "following" or "liking" the organization. By doing this they expect to receive perks, which typically deepen the relationship with the company. Examples of perks include "fan only" coupons, advance notice of a deal, and opportunities to participate in surveys that help shape a product or service. By engaging socially, there is a chance for the customer's voice to be heard and to be shared with others (e.g. word-of-mouth marketing). Customers can be brand advocates on their terms – but they can also revoke it just as fast. They become participants in a type of self-service channel where they can voice complaints freely and publicly in the hopes of expediting a service request. In today's environment of time-poor and Internet-savvy customers, it's important to be actively listening to and participating in the social channel.

CIS: What are the benefits of integrating the social channel with the other channels via the contact center?

DM, JW: The same benefits apply to integrating social media as those that apply to integrating other forms of multichannel interactions: simplified system management; a single point for monitoring and reporting resulting in improved quality assurance; more flexible queuing options; and generally more efficient and effective service by eliminating the "silo" effect of separate routing systems for separate channels. Because our customers are accustomed to having a truly unified platform to manage multichannel interactions, they now expect the same ability for routing, assigning and reporting on social interactions. To give them this functionality we've combined our multichannel queuing, routing and reporting applications with Buzzient's social media monitoring and analysis capabilities. While many organizations today understand the benefits of social media – from improved customer service and retention, to better products and services – they fail to recognize the risk of engaging in social media without integration to existing communications routing and reporting systems. Without this integration, organizations are far more likely to respond to social media with wrong, inappropriate, or inefficient responses, which can turn minor customer annoyances into major public crises.


CIS: What challenges are there in such integration, how can they be overcome and what are the best practices?

DM, JW: It's important that customers have a plan in place for how interactions will be handled before they attempt integration. This should include a documented methodology for interaction-processing, setting specific goals for the integration project, and projecting a return on investment. Because social media integration projects are still an emerging trend, best practices are not yet well-formed. In addition, desired goals for these projects can

vary quite a bit – from improving customer loyalty and increasing brand recognition, to decreasing business costs and improving collaboration. For these reasons, it's critical that organizations look for vendors that can provide services to help them identify their unique social media objectives, put the appropriate measurements in place and then track performance against goals to determine the success of the project and make modifications where necessary.

CIS: What is happening with incorporating and tighter meshing of other channels with contact centers? What opportunities and issues do you see there and how have you been responding?

DM, JW: Although many organizations are recognizing social media as an additional communications channel, most have not formally incorporated it into the contact center. Many are hesitant to do so because of the additional expense associated with dedicated resources to keep up with social media monitoring and interaction. An integrated solution, however, enables organizations to use the same skills-based and availability-based applications to route and queue interactions from social media platforms, as they use to route and queue calls, faxes and e-mail. In addition, this enables organizations to report holistically on all of these interactions so they can better determine ROI, thus further justify investment in social media technologies.



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CIS: Discuss your partnership with Buzzient. What led you to selecting that firm and what unique capabilities does it bring?

DM, JW: We researched extensively to find a social media monitoring solution that met our customers' needs. We wanted a partnership that reflected our customer base; a company that "got" customer service – a topic relevant to both the contact center and the enterprise. Buzzient had this experience and focus, along with extensive data warehousing capabilities; proven application programming interfaces for integrations to Oracle CRM On Demand, Salesforce.com, and Sugar-CRM; support of mobile devices; and much more.

CIS: How do incorporation of social channel tools via Buzzient, and other channel integration improvements help Interactive Intelligence position itself in the marketplace?

DM, JW: Our partnership with Buzzient adds the increasingly important social media component to our current solutions for contact center automation, enterprise IP telephony, business process automation and content management. It also further reinforces our "all-in-one" approach. In 1999 we became the first vendor to offer a standards-based "all-in-one" communications platform for skills-based routing of multichannel interactions. We remain committed to this heritage of helping customers most cost-effectively and simply manage all types of interactions and our Buzzient partnership is a perfect example of this. We look forward to learning

from our joint customers about how they are deploying this integrated solution and how we can make improvements to further add value to the contact center and beyond. **CIS**

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Meshing the Media, and Channels

The customer-contact center interaction dialogue is about to become more complex as it expands from supporting multiple channels – voice, e-mail, and chat – to enabling and engaging customers through multiple media: social and a little further down the road, video.

Yet many contact centers are still struggling to make live agent programs and mobile interactions via SMS and the web work function seamlessly with “traditional” channels. Now they must face putting together inputs from and outputs to social and video.

Contact centers will clearly have to find ways to mesh in these channels and media because customers will insist on it: or else they will go to competitors that offer comparable right-priced goods and services, but who also engage in them via their choice of interaction methods.

“The question is not about the rise of social in the contact center, the question is about the customer communicating with the company and/or the brand,” says Jacob Morgan, principal, Chess Media Group (www.chessmediagroup.com) a social business consultancy. “The role of the contact center is to make sure they are aware of how many different channels an individual customer is using. They need to be prepared to interact with the customer where they are, when they are ready and on their terms.”

Multichannel, Media Integration Begins at the Top

Before contact centers can think of effectively handling these channels (including in-person retail) and media, and investing in the enabling tools their top management must have strategies in place to use them productively.

This is not happening though in many outfits, reports Eric Tamblyn, vice president, Genesys Product Marketing at Alcatel-Lucent. Too many companies have not yet coordinated their contact center teams, and their mobile customer service programs and other channels, including social media.

For example, he reports that sometimes frequent flier-program-enrolled airline customers who need to change their flights would receive outbound alerts that seats were available and they would say yes or no. Yet, when they show up at the check-in desks, they would be told their carriers had no seats.



Also in mobile banking, customers check their account balances or shift money over on their smartphones. However, even if they call from the very same devices, all too frequently the conversations start up all over again i.e. they have to repeat the information previously provided.

Yet at the same time most organizations do not permit their contact center staff to be proactive, the Genesys executive points out, unlike say sales reps. Agents are not empowered to reach out to customers by phone or e-mail to see how they are doing, or review and reply to their comments on social media sites. Instead they are diagrammed to be cause-and-effect: making outbound calls or contacts only if prompted by events such as a credit card limit was exceeded or if marketing overhears a complaint on a social site the agents must address.

The root cause of this issue is twofold: First, Tamblyn sees how contact centers are measured and that in turn is embedded in corporate culture. Contact centers are generally cost centers under IT or operations and are budgeted as a cost of doing business. In contrast the other media are getting built and supported by the idea that they can drive business and help promote the brands. Second, many of the technologies that provide some degree of channel integration either do not scale to the needs of large companies or require that existing IT investments be replaced.

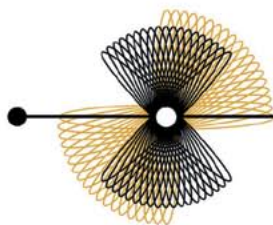
“Until we see contact centers needing to have some degree of monetary business impact and customer engagement, until we have measurements of a true multichannel contact center including social media, it will not happen,” says Tamblyn.

The consequences for companies not having the strategy right will be felt in their bottom lines: greatly accentuated by word

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of mouth or more accurately word of text via social media. The lack of integration at the top, reflected at the bottom with poor or disconnected service delivery will hurt their branding, warns Tamblyn, and with this their reputation, customer loyalty and ability to attract or retain business.

“Until businesses realize that their growth strategy has to be complemented with an integrated service strategy and until they get the message that they could lose out to their competitors—that there is a cause and effect in buyer behavior and customer behavior—they are not going to solve this problem,” Tamblyn points out. “For by the time some companies realize where their brand is really at it may be way too late.”

them into conversation by dragging the contact name into the chat. The ZCC also has e-mail queuing that supports social media by enabling RSS feed configuration to deliver all social channel activity mentioning firms via e-mails to agents through skills-based routing.

Enabling Social Interactions

Staring at contact centers is how to mesh in social media through its various forms: blogs, corporate-sponsored communities and third-party sites. The need for having solutions that integrate social media with the other channels are increasing but fortunately so are the solutions both methods and technologies.

“Until we see contact centers needing to have some degree of monetary business impact and customer engagement, until we have measurements of a true multichannel contact center including social media, it will not happen.”

– Eric Tamblyn, vice president,
Genesys Product Marketing at Alcatel-Lucent.

Integrating the Conversations

Contact center suppliers are helping firms make headway in integrating the conversations between customers and enterprises in voice and text but also with outside experts via unified communications (UC) solutions.

For too long text-based communications such as chat and e-mail have been treated like second class citizens compared to voice, which discourages their use by lengthening reply times. Agents would have had to take separate steps such as opening windows to see who is contacting them over these “alternate” channels.

ShoreTel’s Contact Center 6 solution eliminates the pushing aside by permitting contact center agents to see the names of those wanting to communicate through those channels directly on their desktops when they come in; just as they do with calls. This improvement shortens chat and e-mail interactions, lowers costs and improves customer satisfaction, reports Venky Raman, ShoreTel’s senior product manager for Contact Center Solutions. It also cleans up the agents’ desktops, which can become cluttered, confusing and ultimately lead to lowered productivity.

Chat is being integrated with UC, enabling this method to become an even more an even more useful interaction tool. Zeacom’s Communications Center (ZCC) UC solution has web chat queuing that permits agents to contact subject matter experts and see their availability via the UC presence functionality and if they can be engaged bring

Fergus Griffin, vice president of product marketing, Service Cloud, Salesforce.com sees some companies who embark on a social media strategy for customer service by opening a Twitter account and responding to any tweet related to their company or products. The problem with that approach is that it is totally disconnected from their core customer service processes, he points out. A customer issue that starts out as a question on Twitter may well be best handled by transitioning to a private e-mail exchange with an agent who resolves it by sending a knowledge article from the multi-channel knowledge base.

The urgency for doing just that is there. Consumers appear to be ahead of the businesses they do business with on social media. A recent Yankee Group study commissioned by Siemens Enterprise Communications, found that 70 percent of consumers and employees would prefer to use the social channel for business communications. Most customers feel that companies should be monitoring social media for customer feedback; nearly 60 percent of customers feel company outreach via it would improve their loyalty to that company. Yet only 30 percent of firms are equipped for social media.

Why the disconnect between consumers and businesses? Ross Sedgewick, Siemens’ senior director of large enterprise solutions marketing explains that most social media is a largely consumer-driven phenomenon that has grown quite rapidly and as with any technology, there is an adoption curve which businesses are just at the early stages of. Also, some companies are skeptical or resistant to using social media while others may not have access



to the tools they need to leverage social media or aren't sure how best to use it. Last, many companies lack awareness and understanding of how social media can benefit them.

In response, Siemens Enterprise Communications has put together the OpenScape Fusion Social Media Integrations solutions. The tools can automate and aggregate social media applications and inbound and outbound social contacts with existing desktop communications, making it simpler for employees to collaborate and monitor customer or partner activities. OpenScape Fusion enables one-click escalation of social media dialogue to richer media such as multi-party audio or video conferencing and to bring in subject matter experts or customer assistance personnel via social networking sites, simplifying and speeding customer response. The new product sets provides streamlined information sharing via blogs, corporate wikis and chat groups to improve team collaboration.

John Kembel, vice president of social solutions at RightNow Technologies reports that companies are looking to handle social interactions in the same stride as the rest of their customer interactions.

Firms are integrating formal knowledge answers via web self-service with social answers and conversations such as through search, widgeting/syndication, with comments on knowledge bases. They are meshing social community profiles (e.g. Facebook-ed.) with formal contact records so that contact center agents have a full view of consumers when they engage with them. They are infus-

ing social media into the processes and workflows they currently run, such as escalating unanswered community posts as incidents for agents and are also building robust linkages between social with the web and contact center experiences.

"Social consumers channel hop during conversations, and companies need to be able to efficiently and effectively follow their conversation and pick up where they left off," says Kembel.

Remarks made about one's firm can make or break them in social media. The sooner these are uncovered the quicker they can be acted on, whether ramping up supply of a hot new items or responding to, resolving and performing damage control on complaints.

Yet determining which of the vast universe of comments and conversations are worth listening to, notating and acting on is the challenge. nGenera's nGen Social Media, which is part of nGen CIM 9 suite can meet it. The software scans multiple social networking outlets using its Listening and Sentiment Analysis Platform. It identifies customer chatter, prioritizes the incidents using sentiment-assessing technology, and routes them to the appropriate agent just like a traditional customer-initiated inquiry. How they are handled can be controlled based on business rules so that the most pressing issues are addressed first, ensuring high-value customers are taken care of and cutting off the broadcast of an issue to a larger audience, ultimately protecting the integrity of one's brand.

Cutting The Calls

Self-service solutions are becoming more even more effective at diverting and shortening calls to live agents in more ways and channels than one:

- Genesys and Voxify have partnered in making speech-based IVR systems more effective and have solidified the links with live agents through personalization via identifying callers, checking their preferences, e.g., for language, examining their last interactions and basing prompts on that, and analyzing their intent through instant speech analysis. Voxify's Intelligent Enterprise Services uses Genesys' Intelligent Customer Front Door (iCFD) self-service along with its customer interaction management tools. If callers need to reach live agents the information captured is then relayed at the same time. The payoffs are greater automated call completion and shorter, but richer, agent interactions and higher customer satisfaction. The personalized IVR can also be used for outbound automated calls, achieving the same results
- SpeechCycle has come out with RPA Express, a new platform for creating and powering what it calls Rich Phone Applications (RPAs). RPAs are high performance, multi-channel applications that it says enables fast, intuitive and personalized self-service and orchestrate voice

and visual interactions with enterprise systems. RPA Express includes a set of pre-tested, customizable dialog components to automate common business functions with built-in best practices for voice interaction design.

The RPA Express-powered RPAs are equipped with high definition natural language understanding to pinpoint customer intent that SpeechCycle says significantly reduces misroutes and decreases customer frustration reinforcing an optimized customer experience. With a SpeechCycle RPA if a customer starts in self-service, but a live agent is needed to complete the transaction, they can continue where self-service left off

- Customers using social channels will also have less need to reach out to live agents. Lithium Technologies has incorporated IntelliResponse's AnswerSuite automated answer tool in its social community products. With this solution, consumers in search of knowledge from customer communities can acquire community-driven results powered by Lithium, as well as the official "One Right Answer," delivered by the IntelliResponse Answer Suite. Popular content promoted by the communities can be promoted into the IntelliResponse answer base and made available to all customer channels and contact center agents



There are tools to route analyzed social media interactions into contact centers. For example, Interactive Intelligence has partnered with Buzzient that combines multichannel queuing, routing and reporting with social media analysis and integration capabilities (see cover story). The offering enables social media “chatter” monitoring on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other sites for customer-defined keywords. It then routes the content as e-mail messages to the most appropriate individual or department based on business rules and agent skill.

Aspect will in 2011 incorporate social media directly into the agents’ desktop, allowing agents to respond in real time as comments and posts come through, reports Michael Kropidlowksi, senior product marketing manager. Aspect Unified IP 6.6 can integrate other channels with voice. The solution includes instant message (IM) routing, e-mail, chat, web push and collaboration functionality; it can escalate any IM or chat to a voice conversation.

“Our customers are currently monitoring social media with third-party applications, but through integration we can transpose those messages to agents,” says Kropidlowksi.

Avaya is taking a different approach. Rather than building in tools to take feeds from social sites directly into the contact centers the firm recommends having this information routed and filtered through Avaya’s Social Media Gateway. This tool, customized by Avaya’s professional services organization based on companies’ offerings and markets looks at the content from all social media channels and parses through them for relevancy.

“While you can feed in this information directly there is so much of it that it can swamp contact centers,” explains Anthony Bartolo, general manager, contact center solutions. “The Social Media Gateway makes this content contact-center ready, and we plan to evolve it further.”

Video Interactions?

Slowly growing as a media in contact centers is video. One such application is as a support tool via increasingly popular broadband (3G/4G) smartphones. Customers can show the problems they are trying to fix, say on the back of their HDTVs to agents who can then talk them over, queue in subject matter experts or zap over videos.

Steve Kaish, CosmoCom vice president, product management and marketing sees video adding value in healthcare, where expert providers interact with patients at their homes, thereby enabling more frequent care and attention given to them, which then improves the overall quality of care and patient satisfaction. Another area where interactive video can help is enabling the hearing-impaired callers to communicate via sign language.

Similar expertise can be delivered to retail and banking customers via video kiosks that are placed at distributed locations (e.g. branches, retail stores) where customers can engage with remotely located subject matter experts via video links.

Avaya has developed and delivered a video kiosk solution that enables two-way and/or one-way video collaboration relying solely on a web interface, eliminating the complexity of managing a standalone video client at each end. The Avaya Aura

Contact Center, launched this year is also capable of handling video along with voice, e-mail, IM, and web services.

“The demographic and interaction preferences that we are observing across the globe are making video much more acceptable, and in some cases, required,” explains Jorge Blanco, Avaya vice president, product and solutions management for unified communications.

CTI Evolution

To enable a seamless multichannel, multimedia experience with customers Genesys’ Tamblyn sees CTI systems having to change from interaction views i.e., from calls to the entire conversation views including IVR and the web, where conversations increasingly start that if unresolved end up at the live agents’ terminals. The problem he sees with many CTI deployments is that most are not leveraging multimedia. He explains that only with extensive customization can customers’ records with web self-service brought onto agents’ desktops. Instead, many CTI solutions are based on the notion that the calls are the first points of contacts by customers with enterprises.

Yet CTI unlocks the intelligence contained in calls very well. And Tamblyn says Genesys is one of the few businesses that have allowed CTI to be applied in other channels such as: chat, e-mails, SMS, IVR, Web self-service, mobile and social media. There is vital customer service, support, leads, sales opportunities and other insights locked in them that need to be opened looked at and responded to.

To make that happen, Genesys has pushed CTI farther up the evolutionary tree with Genesys Conversation Manager, which sits on top of CTI routing and tracks and pulls in conversations with customers across these channels, and is integrated with Genesys’ iCFD automated voice solution. Companies can track customers from the point where they entered the brands and start a conversation with them, through to when the conversations are completed.

“Organizations need to capture everything that is going on with its customers; no longer do customers pick up the phone for help as a first step,” says Tamblyn. “What you really need is a step above CTI that tracks all interactions customers are having with the brand.” **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Aspect
www.aspect.com

Avaya
www.avaya.com

CosmoCom
www.cosmocom.com

Genesys
(an Alcatel-Lucent company)
www.genesyslabs.com

IntelliResponse
www.intelliresponse.com

Interactive Intelligence
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nGenera
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Streaming the Data

Contact centers act as bidirectional gates on the vast streams of data between customers and enterprises. Handling and managing the flow is becoming more challenging as the volume is increasing while the contents that must be sifted and analyzed become more complex.

Customers and organizations are now reaching out to each other across many different channels that must be carefully managed to provide a consistent and seamless experience. The data contained in these interactions provide invaluable service, problems, performance and product knowledge and insights.

There are also new and richer data sources to enable effective marketing campaigns via contact centers both inbound and outbound. For example Harte-Hanks's Ci Technology Database (CiTDB) has been expanded to provides insight into technology installations, buying potential, and business demographics for more than four million locations (up from 500,000) and identifies over five million (up from 1.2 million) U.S. and Canadian IT decisionmakers. Harte-Hanks plans to further expand the CiTDB to include cloud computing, mobility and green IT in the near future and to include more businesses in Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific in 2011.

"Contact centers are being asked to drive more revenue for the business," says Jay Bourland, group technology officer of Pitney Bowes Business Insight (PBBI). "Instead of simply working from 'one-size-fits-all' scripts, they are being asked to execute 'best next action' steps. These enhanced interactions require a deeper knowledge of the customer in order to provide a personalized experience tailored to that individual."

Analytics are Key

Suppliers are successfully meeting increasing, and increasingly sophisticated data processing needs with faster generations of hardware and software.

For example, [Teradata](#) has boosted data warehousing performance by 65 percent in its Teradata 13 database on an Active Enterprise Data Warehouse 5600 series over the previous hardware generation shipping a year earlier. Data throughput has improved by 30 percent. Backup, archive and recovery are four times faster. Teradata has also come out with the Data Warehouse Appliance 2580, which delivers up to two times the performance of the previous version, the 2555.



Instead the core matter is determining what does this information mean and that requires analytics tools.

"So you collect all the bits, so what?" Dave Schrader, director of strategy and marketing, Active Enterprise Intelligence, Teradata points out. "You need to know what it means so you know what you need to do, including nothing."

Schrader says analytics is used to better predict why customers are calling and what information is needed to service their requests. If companies looked at their data, they would find that 85 percent of the time, companies can predict why a customer is calling. And with 95 percent accuracy they can guess the top three reasons.

Analytics is also being deployed to effectively handle customer complaints by applying complete context information across all channels on the screen, says Schrader. For example if a high-value on time-paying customer bought a product that was damaged upon inspection and that person is calling because the credit did not make it on this month's bill, that customer would be given a discount on the next purchase of 35 percent. All of this needs to be on one screen so it's "one and done."

One critical data issue is pulling together and analyzing information from across channels to deliver this single customer view in a usable and efficient manner to the contact center agent. This is a significant hurdle to many organizations, reports Tim Shaw, chief technology officer, Portrait Software (now owned by PBBI parent Pitney Bowes). He says this matter is a top 5 challenge for 60 percent facing B2C according to a [Forrester](#) report, "Craft Your CRM Investment Plans In Light Of Technology Adoption Patterns".



The solution is applying cross-channel analytics that Shaw says “allows an organization to understand the full customer journey, behavior predictors, improve its segmentation and targeting, and identify process bottlenecks and customer drop-out points.”

Social Channel Data

The third and newest use of analytics is on data representing social media interactions. In this case, companies need to learn to “listen” proactively. Says Teradata’s Schrader: “this is often done by marketing department. New analytics can help measure sentiment by analyzing texts like Tweets or mentions of the company – good or bad – on blog sites.”

There are a lot of comments to analyze, the Teradata official points out. Twenty percent of Tweets are about brands or products, 34 percent of bloggers post opinions about products on the 200 million blog sites out there. Nor should they be ignored; according to a Forrester report, “Tapping the Entire Online Peer Influence Pyramid” 50 percent of people trust consumer reviews, 42 percent trust blog writeups on products from people, they know, and 39 percent get their recommendations from social media sites. In contrast, 32 percent that believe TV ads and only 11 percent believe information in a blog written by a company.

One challenge is how to extract intelligence out of this information because social media data is unstructured. Emerging in response says Schrader are tools including buzz analytics, emotion detection and sentiment analysis tools enable organizations to determine the significance and priority of social media comments. For example CrimsonHexagon monitors buzz and Attensity and SAS that perform tasks like natural language processing to extract keywords and tone, resulting in sentiment analytics.

Meanwhile there are companies like Touchgraph provide solutions to visually see the connectivity graphs of who is interacting with whom, leading to who is influencing who.

With these solutions, as well as access to data providers like BlueKai, Exelate, or TARGUSinfo who aggregate information from websites, “companies can build databases to monitor customer behavior in the aggregate, or where identification information is available, down to individual customers,” says Schrader.

With social media some activities are noteworthy while others are not. For those that are database triggers can be used to alert either the contact centers or the marketing departments, depending where the feeds are landing.

“Social media data is on a par with web clicks because there is a steady stream of data coming from multiple servers that must be integrated so that contact centers and other users can see and understand what is being said and what is happening, so they can formulate the right company reactions,” explains Schrader.

Taking Data to the Cloud?

Cloud/hosting is becoming a popular option to premises-based servers for applications. Is it practical though for handling, storing and warehousing data used by them?

“The cloud was engineered for highly concurrent, simultaneous transactions of the form that are typical in a contact center,” says Bourland. “The cloud may be an issue for large batch processes that occur in the back office because the cost of moving large volumes of data is high.”

Clouds are ideal, reports Schrader for low-volume experimental applications such as social media market research and offer testing. Teradata recently partnered with Amazon.com to launch Teradata Express, which provides for free a 1 terabyte system via the public cloud.

“When you have low latency and bandwidth requirements i.e. you are not pushing a lot of data and you do not require it in real time – such as social media analytics – the public cloud is good for that purpose as it saves money and is highly scalable,” says Schrader.

Cleaning, Enriching the Data

For data to be of value it must be accurate: Up-to-date names, phone numbers, e-mail and other contact information. This can be very challenging as customers use an increasingly widening array of channels.

One of the big hurdles is the shift by consumers and even some businesses from landlines to wireless devices, whose numbers are not publicly available. That can make verifying mobile number accuracy from Web forms, agent record entries, lists and in databases difficult.

In response TARGUSinfo has significantly improved its On-Demand Lead Verification and On-Demand Lead Scoring solutions by increasing the authoritative linkage to “right party” contactable leads by 30 percent. It has re-architected and improved linkages at the identity layer (i.e., name, address, and phone) combined with the addition of mobile phone coverage that permits firms to check against TARGUSinfo’s data repository of more than 219 million mobile numbers. The information housed is extremely current; it is refreshed ten times a day.

“These enhanced interactions require a deeper knowledge of the customer in order to provide a personalized experienced tailored to the individual,” says PBBI’s Bourland. “This uses sophisticated analytics based on a rich supply of data. The data must be clean – the old adage of “Garbage In, Garbage Out” is really multiplied in these settings. So users are responding to larger quantities of data with higher requirements on the fitness for purpose.” **CIS**

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Harte Hanks
www.harte-hanks.com

**Pitney Bowes
Business Insight**
www.pbbi.com

TARGUSinfo
www.targusinfo.com

Teradata
www.teradata.com

The Exceptional Customer Experience:

Customers of any business say good service often comes down to a courteous and attentive voice at the other end of an issue. And in most cases that's true. But just as critical to a positive customer experience are the processes that drive service in the first place — and if such processes aren't effective, you can bet service won't be either.

Here's the perfect example of a service process breakdown. It's also the true story of an experience I had with a fairly respected retailer, in which their service could only be described as abysmal. Because as I discovered from one point of futility to the next, the company's service processes were basically abysmal.

Start with a new BluRay player purchased from "XYZ Company" and a satisfied customer (me, along with my husband). Unfortunately that positive opinion changed over the next two months when 1) things went wrong with the player, and 2) things got worse as we tried to get the problem fixed.

the instructions to a tea. Yet the download process failed, so I called customer service again.

Hurdle #2: According to another customer service agent at XYZ Company, I had done "everything right" to download and upgrade the BluRay firmware. But since the online download didn't work, the agent this time decided to send me a disk in the mail. Not overnight. Not priority mail. No urgency whatsoever. Two weeks later the disk finally showed up, and the download still didn't work. Third call to customer service, and I was completely calm about it — which, as a consumer, is the surest way to set a positive tone with an agent and get them to help you.

Hurdle #3: "It might well have been a bad disk," the agent told me. OK, I'm still calm, and I ask quite innocently if XYZ Company ever quality assures such a disk before sending it out to a customer. "Um, no, that isn't part of our process." Now my annoyance meter is on, although I kept my interaction with the agent calm and friendly. After all, she was only the messenger, and yelling at her would never have accomplished anything. And that, as a consumer, is another sure way to get an agent to help you.

"The cost was steep. As in, a lost customer, no repeat business, and no spreading a good word to other potential new customers. As in, I will never buy another product from XYZ Company, because I would never want to experience this scenario again."

Hurdle #1: Little did we know that if the BluRay firmware isn't upgraded periodically, some of the newer discs won't play. It's a glitch we learned about when I bought my husband a new disc for Christmas and, you guessed it, the disc wouldn't play. So in March of 2009 I placed my first call to the XYZ Company to resolve the problem. Easy enough. According to the customer service agent I spoke with, the firmware upgrade was an easy download via the web. The agent explained every step, as XYZ Company's service process dictated, and I followed

In this case, after I politely insisted, the customer service agent told me they would indeed check the next firmware disk before sending it, but that it would be another two weeks before I received the new disc in the mail. My husband and I waited two more weeks, the new disk finally arrived, and just like a bad dream the download failed again. My annoyance meter? On the happy camper scale, I was definitely not a happy camper, so I called XYZ Company for the fourth time.

Hurdle #4: Different agent than the first three times I called, and no record of my previous issues with the BluRay firm-

How Not to Provide Service

ware download and the defective discs. Bad, bad process on XYZ Company's part. Or actually, a broken process. When the agent offered to send another disk, I promptly requested a supervisor — who in turn promptly informed me that the previous disks had a known software bug! Accckkkk!! "However, that bug has now been fixed, and we'll make sure you receive a corrected disc as soon as possible."

ASAP, huh? My calmness was about to fly out the window, and I told the supervisor her company should seriously consider shipping the disk overnight this time, especially given the unacceptable timeframes from the previous two mailings. I also explained that I was extremely disappointed in the XYZ Company, that I would never do business with them again, and that if they didn't want a bad reputation to get worse, it would behoove her on behalf of XYZ Company to forego the normal two-week delivery procedure and keep her promise of ASAP.

"I'm really sorry, but even as a supervisor I don't have the authority to overnight any item, especially if it's only a service issue." Only a service issue?! This was closing in on a two-month lesson in how not to provide service. The best the supervisor could do would be to ship the disk via the normal snail mail channels, which she did. On the good side, I did finally get the disk, two weeks later, and it did work.

What was the cost to the XYZ Company?

The cost was steep. As in, a lost customer, no repeat business, and no spreading a good word to other potential new customers. As in, I will never buy another product from XYZ Company, because I would never want to experience this scenario again.

Does process matter? You bet it does. I've since told my story to many of my friends, and they've sworn off the XYZ Company based solely on my testimony against their unacceptable service. In fact, my story clearly demonstrates that the company took a hit on two levels: reputation, and bottom line revenues.

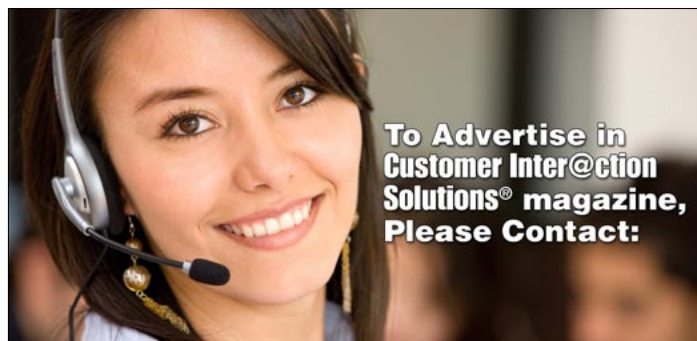
Getting service "right"

Could XYZ Company have turned my perception around? In a heartbeat. All they needed to do, even after I learned they were knowingly shipping defective disks for our BluRay firmware download, was to tell me they were sorry for the problem, and for the inconvenience it caused. Seven simple words. "We apologize for the inconvenience we've caused." Even better would have been authorizing a supervisor to bypass a normal procedure, and ship me a disk overnight so my husband and I wouldn't have to wait any longer than we already had to enjoy our new BluRay. That's it. A sincere apology and the cost of an overnight envelope is all I needed to forgive the XYZ Company and reconsider being a return customer at some point in the future.

Unfortunately, their existing service process didn't allow them to do that. It didn't even allow their service agents and supervisors to budge. Worse, there didn't appear to be any means, or interest, to identify the root cause of a problem like mine, and to attempt to fix it to prevent the same thing from recurring. In the name of service, how many other customers had a similar negative experience? And how many customers ultimately severed their customer ties?

One more question. Exactly how did the XYZ Company get into this service process mess? I don't know specifically why their process failed, but I do know there's more than one avenue leading to dysfunctional processes. Mergers and acquisitions, ineffective technologies, departmental divides, any number of things. Still, customers don't really care how a company's processes go wrong. All they know is, their own issues aren't being sufficiently addressed and they're unhappy.

To improve service, businesses must first identify and fix dysfunctional processes that cause service breakdowns. And the best place to start is to listen to customers, so you don't repeat mistakes of the past.



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Altitude Software (www.altitudesoftware.com) has released the Altitude vBox 4.0, a new version of Altitude's SIP Server. It adds high end scalability including support up to 2,000 agents, proven fault tolerance with very fast recovery times and achieving increased availability, advanced management features including easy-to-install processes and administration tools and a revamped GUI with centralized configuration and management.

Avaya (www.avaya.com) has introduced the Avaya Aura Contact Center, a multimedia work assignment application for midsized contact centers. It uses Avaya Aura's SIP-based collaborative session model to enhance the efficiency and quality of customer service. It also lets businesses deliver advanced work items, such as online applications or claims, to agent desktops via an open universal queue. With the solution, a single desktop agent application can be used to track and manage up to six types of transactions simultaneously – one voice and five non-voice (e.g. e-mail, web chat).

Other new solutions unveiled with the Avaya Aura Contact Center include the Avaya Aura Workforce Optimization, which offers recording and quality monitoring to capture and synchronize an agent's audio and screen activity and workforce management. They also include Avaya Proactive Outreach Manager that permits firms to reach out to customers automatically over multiple channels and Avaya Aura Call Center Elite 6.0, the new version of Avaya's routing software for large enterprises. This product now offers greater capacity and includes the adaptive, predictive routing capabilities of Avaya Business Advocate. The company also delivers Avaya IQ 5.1, its reporting and analytics solution, which gains improved capacity (900 simultaneous users), availability and graphical views.

dvsAnalytics (www.dvsanalytics.com) has released Encore Version 2.2.8 of its Encore Technology Suite, incorporating voice and screen recording, quality management, and performance management. It includes best practices evaluations that feature sales and customer service templates via which evaluators and/or managers can use to score agent performance and gather business intelligence. It has an enhanced version of Encore's Notifier that now includes the ability to send SNMP traps to network management systems, supplementing alarms that can page, e-mail and sound alerts to notify appropriate personnel immediately. Global search capabilities have been expanded to include easier retrieval of recordings regardless of the location. Encore's integration enhancements include for Tadiran Coral MAP and expanded Mitel 3300 ICP using SRC integration.

InContact (www.incontact.com) has partnered with **Verint** Witness Actionable Solutions (www.verint.com) to convert its workforce management (WFM) solution to the inContact platform and deliver it via the cloud to contact centers of all sizes. Powered by Verint, the new inContact WFM helps optimize agent-handled contacts, reduce the risk of missed service level goals, minimize costs through the efficient use of overtime and by reducing overstaffing, manage schedule adherence, and help ensure the best possible use of agent resources. The solution also provides employees with scheduling preferences and automated time-off management, shift swapping and shift bidding capabilities.

Inova Solutions (www.inovasolutions.com)' client-side contact center products are now compatible with **Microsoft** Windows 7. This allows Inova customers the option to upgrade computers throughout their centers while utilizing the contact center programs they depend on. Market exploration conducted by **Inova** shows that many contact centers are beginning to migrate from Windows XP to Windows 7 because the new system is more secure, manageable and responsive.

OAISYS (www.oaisys.com) has early-released 6.2 versions of its Talkument and Tracer software solutions. New features, functionality and options include incident reconstruction via multi-channel playback, portable incident replay and SMDR matching logic with SIP trunk integration that permits associate extension information and account codes to calls once they are completed. The solutions are also now integrated with the **ShoreTel** Enterprise Contact Center.

ShoreTel (www.shoretel.com) has come out with ShoreTel Contact Center 6 that is loaded with several new features. It includes a new real-time event feed that generates group, queue and agent information through an open application programming interface (API). It introduces the ShoreTel Contact Center Agent Dashboard, a Web-based application which enables supervisors to publish customized dashboards for agents, including from iPads and mobile devices. It also offers a fast and efficient ShoreTel Contact Center Interaction Viewer that allows supervisors to get an end-to-end view of all interactions, including multimedia interactions.

ShoreTel Contact Center 6 increases support for up to 1,000 concurrent agents and 2,000 total agents, making it perfect for enterprises and midsized organizations with large contact centers. Advanced redundancy features allow them to effectively deploy their agents in multiple sites while increasing the reliability and uptime of their centers.

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Recording the Experiences

Today's call recordings solutions can make a difference in contact centers, whether the rationales for choosing them are to replace outmoded tools and to accommodate expansion and/or boost customer satisfaction and bolster quality assurance. The following examples (also online, www.tmcnet.com/38390.1) illustrate just that.

Old School, New Recording Technologies

Call recording is a vital tool for healthcare providers, enabling them to provide and ensure quality service and resolve disputes; they must comply with stringent regulations such as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), which means they must be kept up to date along with the other technologies used in these facilities.

The University of Pennsylvania Health System (UPHS), whose heritage includes becoming the nation's first school of medicine, in 1765 and the first teaching hospital, in 1874, has a network of hospitals, university school of medicine, medical centers, outpatient facilities, clinical practices, primary care physicians and specialists.

In 2007 UPHS examined its network of six existing and planned contact centers, each with its own needs, and realized that it needed new call monitoring and recording solutions for them:

- A 220 seat center, handling over six million calls annually for appointments, completion of intake questionnaires, or transfers, was moving to a new location and needed new equipment and technology.
- A 100 seat center, which fields calls for specific hospitals, needed an emergency replacement as its technology was becoming unreliable.
- A 125 seat center, which serves clinical offices of approximately 20 different practices, needed to replace its PBX that did not have quality monitoring or recording capabilities.
- One 50 seat center, whose agents scheduled patients, needed emergency replacement. Its recording platform was at end of life and needed a reliable platform for HIPAA compliance.
- Another 50 seat center at one of the hospitals required a technology platform upgrade to include quality monitoring and reporting.



- A 50 seat center that is new construction, with planned expansion to 125 seats, for expanding clinical practice specialties required quality monitoring and reporting.

In early 2008, UPHS issued an RFP for a new set of recording solutions for deployment during fiscal 2009-2011. It turned to dvsAnalytics (www.dvsanalytics.com) and its Encore call recording and quality management product. The healthcare organization found the solution to be the most user-friendly overall as it easily ran scheduled and custom reports, and was simple to locate stored records on for quick playback.

"As our research continued, we realized how the Encore reporting and quality management capabilities could leverage the overall effectiveness of operator and patient scheduling operations," recounts Dominick DiPietro, UPHS corporate director, telecommunications.

With disparate types of technology across multiple sites, typically there would be integration challenges. Fortunately, Encore's built in CTI links for both VoIP and TDM allowed for challenge free implementations in all but one site. The site that posed the challenge had an aged switch, not supported by standard CTI integrations.

"However, dvsAnalytics responded with a solution, modified its standard integration to work in our environment and successfully completed the project within 30 days," says DiPietro.

The dvsAnalytics solution, in its staged deployment is proving successful. UPHS, like other dvsAnalytics customers, receives regular software upgrades and plans to use these added capabilities such as encryption enhancements for HIPAA compliance, expanded agent and team performance reporting, SNMP alerts and additions to the Avaya integration interface to increase standardization across the various business units.

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“Due to dvsAnalytics’ ability to meet our requirements and time frames, our plans have remained on schedule with no changes,” reports DiPietro. “We are looking forward to their new releases of best practice evaluation templates, expanded global search capabilities, enhanced reporting and speech and desktop analytics.”

Giving an Edge in Improving Customer Experience

Few markets are as competitive as wireless communications. There call recordings and quality monitoring can give savvy operators an edge by closely listening and responding to customers, thereby successfully retaining, cross-selling and upselling to them and equally as importantly, inciting them to become raving fans via social media. Recording solutions can also permit performance tweaking that shaves costs and keeps prices competitive and profits compelling.

O2 Ireland is that country’s leading wireless provider mobile communications provider. A wholly owned subsidiary of O2 plc, it has a 400-seat contact center handling three million inbound and outbound calls per year from and to its approximately 1.57 million Irish customers. O2 Ireland wanted to improve and excel its overall customer experience, allowing team leaders to evaluate, score and learn from each customer call quickly and with detailed intelligence. The firm needed a solution that would support a customer segmentation process by providing accurate customer intelligence to its managers, team leaders and agents based on calls received.

In 2008, the company researched and then selected Verint (www.verint.com) Impact 360. It says the solution would enable it to better understand and respond to customer requirements quickly and efficiently through the use of detailed voice and data capture. The wireless provider could also boost first call resolution that would reduce costs and heighten customer satisfaction. Impact 360 was also picked to support the introduction of a more calibrated and efficient staffing coaching and training.

To successfully implement the solution O2 Ireland worked in partnership with Verint Consulting by participating in a “Performance Optimization Workshop,” which links corporate, contact centers, agents and strategic objectives to a comprehensive evaluation form. This helped the firm decide on which areas to concentrate so it can deliver high quality customer experience. The output was a detailed evaluation form for the business, plus a definitions document, which clearly defined measurable skills and behaviors, as well as a blueprint for building the processes required to support its quality initiatives. The definitions document provided specific examples for agents and team leaders to refer to during the coaching process.

With implementing Impact 360, O2 Ireland refined the agent coaching process, and increased training focus and effectiveness through calibrated call evaluations for agents. Additionally, it aligned corporate, contact center, agent and customer objectives in a comprehensive evaluation form and detailed definitions document.

The investment was such a success that in six months, O2 Ireland launched a “Call of the Month” program. The company now evaluates calls as part of the normal review process. Exemplary, or “best practice,” calls are submitted monthly to a team comprised of agents, team leaders and HR. Awards are then presented to three or four agents for outstanding performance. With Impact 360 both the agents and team leaders can easily select calls to replay and evaluate, and consistently coach other staff on how to deliver the “wow” factor to customers.

Enabling Quality Service in Tough Times

The economic downturn has hurt both consumers and firms providing financial services alike. By hearing out their clients and responding to their needs via cost-effective recording solutions, savvy companies generate both loyalty and profits that can only grow when times get better.

Benefit Consultants Group (BCG), located in Delran, N.J., is a third-party administrator serving the financial services industry for 50 years. BCG has over 125 employees with seven to 12 contact center agents, depending on volume.

In 2008 BCG was looking to deliver to their customers a superior level of customer service and make these traumatic times a little easier for their clients to handle, reports BCG CEO Bob Paglione. At the time, the firm did not have a solution for recording calls and costs were a big concern of implementing such a system. They were looking for one that could record calls but also have the flexibility to move the call recording option to various phones throughout their business; cost was an issue as was also recording ease of use and retrieval.

BCG looked at several outside call recording products, but found they were very expensive. Seeing that it already had an Alteva (www.altevatel.com) hosted VoIP phone system all what BCG had to do was enter a ticket to have the recording platform added and provide Alteva with the phone numbers that BCG wanted on the platform. Alteva also integrated with Salesforce.com, its CRM application.

The Alteva solution offers easy-to-use Web interfaces, filters, descriptions and comment annotation that provides users with tools to quickly find recorded calls says BCG. Recordings are easily accessible; they are transcoded into the MP3 format, and are viewed and accessed via standard Web browsers and media players. Recorded calls required for legal, regulatory or compliance purposes can be easily transferred from the SmartRecord IP system to the user’s system individually or in batches. No hardware and software were required.

“Alteva’s solution allowed us to monitor calls that led to a better and improved quality of our service to our clients,” says Paglione. “Alteva Archive uses a toll free number to enable users of any phone to record their calls anytime, from any location. Call recording is a reliable service that comes with limitless, secure storage of user recordings and easy-to-use tools to manage the recorded files that can be accessed any time.” **CIS**



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Staffing for the Next-Gen Contact Center

As the economy slowly climbs out of the downturn there is a next-generation contact center that is emerging. One whose agents must communicate intelligently, demonstrating skills both soft: i.e. empathy and hard: sales as well as service, with ever-more demanding customers via multiple channels: voice, chat, e-mail, fax, SMS and now social media. One where the environment is anywhere: inside traditional employer-provided facilities, in agents' homes and on the road.



Customer Interaction Solutions interviewed two hiring and assessment solutions firms: FurstPerson and Knowlagent, and a well-known contact center expert, Kathryn Jackson of ResponseLearning Corporation, to get their take on hiring and skills needs for the "next gen" contact center. The questions posed concerned:

- Impact on skills needed as a result of ever more complex calls being handled by self-service, leaving the more challenging interactions to contact center personnel;
- Skills and qualifications that contact center agents must have to interact with via next-based including social new channels;
- Screening and assessments methods are now coming into play including using social media sites such as Facebook; and
- Best practices in home agent recruiting, screening and assessment.

And here are their answers:

FurstPerson (www.furstperson.com)

Brent Holland, vice president, research and consulting; Dawn Lambert, director, selection and assessment

Brent Holland: Call [contact] centers often expect a representative [agent] to perform equally well across a variety of call types: services, sales, collections, technical support. The reality, however, is that most people are not equipped to perform at a high level in each of these call types. Therefore, call centers often make mistakes when deciding which call type is best aligned with an individual's skills and abilities. As call centers move toward more challenging live interactions, one important issue that will come

to the forefront is the ability of representative to manage more complex information quickly. The implication is that call centers that continue to screen on traditional skills will likely miss this ability, which will create downstream challenges.

BH: Writing skills are becoming increasingly important in the contact center industry. Historically, customer service involved meant being able to create a connection with a customer via a live interaction where emotions can be understood through tone and inflexion in a person's voice. As social media and alternate service channels gain popularity, the representative's ability to comprehend written information and express oneself clearly takes on a more predominant role. A pre-hire process that assesses the candidate's written skills complements the other components in the hiring process and allows the organization to place the individual into the role (e.g., voice, chat, or email) that is best suited to his/her capabilities.

BH: First, the use of realistic job simulations is becoming more popular. These simulations offer businesses the ability to screen candidates effectively while giving them a flavor of what life will be like once they are hired. Second, as the number of businesses that are screening their applicants from at-home settings becomes more popular, the need to protect assessment content from theft and cheating is becoming a critical issue. Testing companies can minimize these factors through using adaptive assessments (i.e. test content changes based on how the candidate responds to questions), confirmation testing (i.e. delivering a mini test once the candidates



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comes onsite to confirm that they are the person who completed the test at home) and data analytics to monitor cheating-related behavior.

DL: Based on what I've seen, I believe that, yes, social media sites will be used more and more as a screening tool, along with basic Internet searches (e.g., "Googling" the candidate). As far as future trends in assessment, job simulations (such as our CC Audition tool) and other on-line simulations that measure computer competency/skills, are becoming, and will continue to become, more widely used. Such "work sample" types of simulations used to be very difficult to create, but with advances in technology, it's actually become fairly simple. In addition, advanced statistical techniques and advanced technological capabilities are making "adaptive" assessments (for example, 1stSolve) more common. Adaptive assessments are those designed to hone in on a candidate's skill level in a quick and efficient manner by "tailoring" the difficulty level of the questions based on their responses to previous questions, which continues until you have enough information to zero in on the candidate's skill level.

DL: In general, any type of recruiting, screening, or assessment process that gets at those "at-home-specific" competencies, as well as other core agent skills and competencies, would be appropriate. From an assessment perspective, these characteristics would typically be measured via work sample/job simulation tools that require the candidate to demonstrate these behaviors, and/or via more "personality" oriented of assessments. These are typically self-report questionnaires asking the candidate to characterize him/herself on these and other work related dimensions of behavior.

Knowlagent (www.knowlagent.com)

Lee Anne Wimberly, director, marketing

There is a definite impact on the skills required for these more complex interactions, problem-solving being foremost. You may also see a different dynamic around empathy and call control, given that a caller has probably navigated an IVR and maybe even attempted other channels to resolve a problem without success before reaching the agent. [Contact] centers can hire for these things by testing a specific quality in candidates. They can

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train and coach existing and new agents to be better at them. They can also enable these success factors by giving the agent the power to do what's right for the customer.

The average age of a call center agent is 23. These "new" channels are already second nature to this demographic, but they may lack the maturity and experience to use them for business. That's when proper training and coaching against clear guidelines are critical. We have also worked with companies who separate agents by channel and screen against the critical success factors for the job – maybe they are spelling and grammar for chat, for example.

More information than ever is available about a person today, but companies can be overwhelmed by the volume of that information, and apply it pretty subjectively, frankly. What really matters about performing the job is a pretty short list,

typically. And the good news is that it can be assessed objectively. Methods that allow for objective assessment of a candidate's skills and abilities and that allow for the candidate to get a good view into the job will continue to be best practice and yield the best results for performance and retention.

From the research we've done, centers tell us that the at-home agent requires a slightly different profile than the in-house agent to be successful, particularly with regards to qualities such as working independently, problem-solving and technical aptitude. So recruiters should have an objective screening method that assesses those attributes.

Centers also need to adapt their processes to account for a virtual screening and hiring process. They need to ability to assess candidates online for the skills and attributes required. They should provide candidates with a realistic preview of the job, without requiring

Selecting and Training Social Agents

The fast rise and exploding popularity of social media as a customer interaction channel has prompted contact centers to look at the skills needed by agents to communicate with customers through it. They have to become not just contact center agents, adept at handling and making calls and responding and composing one-one-one e-mails but they also have to be "social agents" or "social associates."

BPO firm TeleTech recently entered the social channel interactions field through its partnership with Lithium. Lithium makes software that supports online social communities.

TeleTech is recruiting and assessing its contact center agents, known as "associates" or "social associates" both from inside the company and new hires and place them in clients' social community programs. These agents/associates are able to work both in TeleTech centers and remotely at their homes through TeleTech@Home. TeleTech defined four key social channel-specific roles that it selects and screens the social associates to; these employees will be assigned to them based on clients' needs. These roles are:

- Customer support and product knowledge social associates
- Community moderation social associates
- Content moderation social associates
- Community managers

These associates are, depending on the roles they are assigned to, responsible for community program management, providing customer support, monitoring community metrics, interpreting community policies and social content rules, communication with clients and reporting community trends and success.

TeleTech screens its social associates for fluency in social networks, knowledge of social media culture and etiquette, strong written communications skills and ability to moderate conversations. They must also have experience managing conflict. The firm uses its proprietary recruiting and selection tools to create the appropriate profile for an associate to guarantee a proper fit for the job and to meet specific clients' requirements which vary depending on the specific social associate role and the client's objectives with social media.

Candidates are then further evaluated during the interview process by past performance reviews and skills testing including predictive aptitude testing.

Once approved, social associates will be given training on using social channel tools, primarily the Lithium application and other proprietary desktop tools used in monitoring. They will also be trained on the four roles described above. Those that are selected have their performance monitored and assessed through TeleTech's quality assurance process which includes both real-time and periodic evaluations.

TeleTech says its social channel hiring and assessment methodology has already proven itself. It began performing content and community forum moderation for a leading unnamed telecommunications manufacturer. Moderators are instructed to monitor and take action on user-generated content or UGC as well as links being posted by forum members that violate the forums' rules. The social associates have reported violations, issued warnings to users, deleted posts and had successful resolution discussions with users while banning others who refused to cooperate.



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a visit to the centers. Targeted interviewing is even more important, since you may never meet the person you hire face to face.

ResponseLearning Corporation
(www.contactcenter.ning.com)
Kathryn Jackson

Companies have to be careful when considering how to address the social channel. This communication channel has a wide audience and, unlike other communication channels, is not a “one-to-one” interaction. Anyone tapped into the channel can listen to the

conversation. And, it is a conversation that stays public for as long as people are interested in viewing it.

For this reason companies define strict communication protocol and assign a highly trained workforce to monitor and

Continued on p.34

Enabling Disabled Agents

Individuals with disabilities make for great contact center agents for several reasons. They are highly motivated and know how to overcome obstacles for that is what they must do every waking day. They also know all too well what it is like, like the customers who call, to be reluctant to seek help. And because one of the handicaps they face is obtaining employment, they will perform well for and stay with employers longer than many of those who are “less exceptionally-abled.”

AbilityOne (www.abilityone.org) is a federal initiative to help people who are blind or have other severe disabilities find employment by working for nonprofit agencies (NPAs) that sell products and/or services to the U.S. government. With a national network of 600 NPAs, AbilityOne is the largest source of employment for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities in the U.S. That also includes with contact center positions. AbilityOne manage 29 contact center and 33 switchboard operation contracts, employing approximately 1,000 people. The program handles volumes exceeding 17 million contacts per year, 24/7, 365 days per year.

The National Statler Center for Careers in Hospitality Service, a program of the Olmsted Center for Sight (www.olmsted-center.org/StatlerCenter) provides job training programs for individuals with visual impairments or physical disabilities in the hospitality industry, customer service and contact centers. It has trained over 360 graduates in these fields. Contact center trainees learn their skills on a 20-seat contact center where they take calls for the Olmsted Center, which is located in Buffalo, N.Y. and other companies who have contracted their services.

Mary Ellen Mest is project manager for New Initiatives at the Statler Center. She points out that thanks to what is collectively known as assistive technology, or AT, there are no real technical barriers anymore to effectively accommodate either the visually or the hearing impaired or those with limited motor skills. Price is often not a barrier as AT is often freely available to employees via state programs and nonprofit organizations.

AT examples include screen-reading software, which transmits words to Braille displays, and text-to-speech tools have compensated for the shift from mostly phone-only to phone-and-computer environments while speech-to-text are enabling those who cannot hear to communicate with those who can. Also, text-to-speech/speech to text solutions permits those who cannot type or write to interact with customers and use via their PCs.

Just as AT users have to sometimes overcome obstacles the same goes for the technology. For example not all core applications can be read by screen-reading software as most of these applications are company-specific and/or proprietary and confidential, Mest points out. They can be programmed to read it but that takes another level of expertise and by a third party expert to provide that. Statler offers this service. It can select the right AT applications to facilitate a smooth transition into the workforce for both Statler graduates and the companies that hire them.

Instead the highest barrier to hiring and retaining the disabled are often the people: HR staff, managers, supervisors and would-be colleagues, Mest points out. Sometimes employers feel that by hiring someone with a disability that along with it could be medical issues and absenteeism but that is not true for research indicates their absenteeism and tardiness is lower than that of the able-bodied. Oftentimes her program's graduates would have great interviews only to detect by tones of voice the interviewers' discomfort – and would call them out on it by mentioning they are disabled for by law firms cannot ask them – and they can perform well at the jobs they are seeking.

Then there is the matter of co-workers making minor adjustments to accommodate the new member of their team, such as sharing a hallway with someone with a cane or behavior around guide dogs. Mest admitted that when she started working at the Statler Center she said to the students “did you see that last night on...” then clapped her hand over her mouth, afraid to offend someone. “Use the same words, phrases, and analogies as you would with any other person,” she points out.

To overcome these barriers, Mest recommends educating employees about the disabled firsthand by reaching out to local support organizations, visiting rehab and training centers and having their representatives visit contact centers. Contact center and HR staff can then ask what may be embarrassing questions but in comfortable, supportive and understanding environments.

“You can put all the laws out there you want but if someone is not comfortable in a room with someone with a disability then it will be hard for them to have an open mind when they are interviewing them and objectively decide whether these individuals will work for their company or not,” says Mest. “Getting them to know the disabled overcomes this barrier. Once done the experiences for employees and for the customers who call the contact center will be mutually positive.”

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Better Agent Hiring, Retention Through Feedback

Just as obtaining feedback customers is essential for companies to deliver the products and services buyers want at the right price so too is gathering likewise from the employees to enable contact centers to hire, screen, and train, manage and retain the best customer-serving/supporting and sales staff. And with agent turnover high even in today's challenging economy it pays to listen to those on the front lines so you know what to look for when seeking and sorting the replacements for those who have left.

The typical employee feedback method has been exit interviews. While they can be a rich source of insight, Justin Schuster, vice president of enterprise products for MarketTools (www.markettools.com) points out they are inherently a lagging indicator of issues that need attention. Also the

volume of feedback that can be captured from them is relatively low and unpredictable. Moreover many individuals may withhold information in an exit interview because they want to move on and no longer have a stake in seeing something come from their feedback. He says a best practice is to complement exit interviews with employee relationship studies, anonymous feedback forms and transactional surveys that target other moments in the employee experience.

There is also the issue of anonymity with feedback regardless of type. If employees don't feel safe sharing their inputs openly, there might be high participation rates, but the quality of the data – and therefore the insights – will be poor, warns Schuster. One way to address this is by working with a reputable third party for feedback collection.

MarketTools' CustomerSat feedback solution enables businesses to listen, analyze, and act on feedback from customers and from employees alike. It can capture data through any contact center survey channel (e-mail, phone, inbound/outbound IVR, SMS) as well as through other data collection approaches such as social media, websites, and online communities. MarketTools can marry survey data with data from other systems such as a CRM, HR or workforce management platform, allowing survey response data to be sliced and diced in infinite ways. It uses role-based security to hide personally identifiable information from business analysts who generate reports, and from managers who view survey results.

"For some customers, we even delete this data entirely as an added measure to ensure confidentiality," says Schuster.

Continued from p.32

respond to these interactions. This workforce must be skilled in communicating diplomatically through writing. Unlike phone or e-mail, the agent responding to SMS must be able to communicate intent in short bursts. This "short burst" intent needs to convey understanding, willingness to help and empathy all at the same time.

While some customers will use this channel to applaud a company's efforts, many times customers use this channel to vent their frustration. The agents assigned to care for customers using this channel must clearly understand their empowerment level and be able to discern if moving the conversation to a different channel would produce a better result.

Due to a strategy of cost containment and an expectation of high agent turnover, many contact centers are still in the minimalist mode. They develop a job description that contains basic competencies and they provide nominal training. These organizations rely on on-the-job experience and supervisory monitoring to catch performance gaps after the fact.

However, companies that see their call [contact] center agents as vital contributors to customer retention invest in a different set of hiring methodology. These companies do not wait for someone to fail on the job before they intervene. The

proficiency of the new hire is assured prior to taking customer calls and ongoing training is implemented to make a good agent, great. These leaders document detailed job requirements, define thorough competencies and implement tiered assessments for each job description.

The most exciting new-hire assessment tool is the job simulation. The applicant sits at a computer with a headset on. They are presented a simulated call during which they are expected to handle a customer interaction. The simulation may not be an exact replication of the call center environment yet often contains scenarios and tasks similar to the one they might be handling in the center. The customers' voices are simulated and the simulated computer desktop ensures the agent has all the required tools to meet the customers' requests. The entire simulation (voice and data) is recorded so that the hiring committee can assess the prospective employee's competency.

Companies utilizing the work-from-home model benefit from a simulation screening, assessment, and training tool. A prospective employee can take the simulation from any remote workstation and the results can be reviewed by a team of evaluators located at multiple locations. The simulations are built for each job description and job grade and easily implemented to assess a new hire or veteran employee. **CIS**



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2010 TMC Labs Innovation Award Winners – Part I

Two-thousand and ten marks the 11th anniversary for the prestigious TMC Labs Innovation Awards, where TMC Labs reviews dozens of applicants and chooses the most unique and innovative products and services. The contact center industry is often the early pioneer in creating innovative products since contact centers are always looking to increase agent productivity, reduce costs and improve customer satisfaction.



Reflecting the high level of innovation we are seeing, we have nearly doubled the number of winners to a total of 19 in 2010 from 10 in 2009. They cover hot areas including business intelligence, hosted contact centers, desktop virtualization, social media, smart design and workforce optimization. The awards are broken into two parts to fit the write-ups. The first part (this issue) starts with [Amdocs](#) and ends with Interior Concepts. The second half (October issue) will start with Knoa and end with VanillaSoft.

Here are the highlights of our winners:

Amdocs

www.amdocs.com

Amdocs Smart Agent Desktop provides a task-based, unified agent desktop across all lines of businesses, interaction channels and customer-facing processes. Smart Agent Desktop reduces the number of screens/clicks required during the course of an interaction with a customer. This enables agents to focus on the customer, which can lead to higher job satisfaction and lower agent churn rates for the contact center. One of the distinctive features of Amdocs Smart Agent Desktop is the ability to integrate multiple back end applications through a single unified desktop allowing access to these applications within the context of the agent desktop directly or as an integrated application that can mask the complexity of these back end systems. Smart Agent Desktop incorporates over 100 service-provider-specific best practice business processes out of the box.

Cicero

Cicero XM Suite

www.ciceroinc.com

Cicero XM is a customer experience management (CEM) and business intelligence (BI) solution for contact centers and the enterprise. Cicero XM simplifies workflow, automates tasks, and automatically shares data between any applications from back office to desktop servicing solutions. It differs from competitors' various unified desktop concepts in that Cicero XM does not require taking away or hiding users' access to existing applications but rather simplifies, extends, and automates processes using those applications while allowing new applications to be simply and rapidly integrated. Cicero XM enables creating a modular,

customizable interface, scripting or user guidance, screen pops, new composite applications and features a powerful toolbar.

Cincom Systems

Cincom Synchrony

www.cincom.com

Cincom Synchrony provides a single location for managing the incoming flow of various customer interactions, and intelligent routing that connects customers to the most appropriate available agent. It also includes an integrated document automation component. At the end of a customer interaction, Cincom Synchrony automatically generates a follow-up correspondence (to be delivered by e-mail, fax, chat or even postal mail) that documents the discussion details and provides additional relevant resources based on the context of the interaction. Cincom supports fully hosted as well as a hybrid model where it does the application hosting only, but the customers' database and/or PBX/ACD environment runs locally. This can be a traditional PBX or a VoIP-based solution. When Cincom is hosting the telephony services it can support both environments.

Coveo

Coveo Customer Information Access Solutions (CIAS) 2.0

www.coveo.com

Coveo Customer Information Access Solutions (CIAS) retrieves and indexes information from the entire knowledge ecosystem (an unlimited number of systems which may include CRM, knowledge bases, e-mail, desktop content, archives, file shares, intranet, ERP systems and social networks). It then presents the information in role-specific dashboards for agents, managers, executives and customers alike – without requiring moving any data to a central knowledge base. This eliminates the need for support agents to switch between multiple systems/screens to efficiently resolve customer issues and presents a holistic view of a customer account. Coveo also enables customer self-service information access via a Web portal.

Eagle Conferencing

Eagle Conferencing

www.eagleconferencing.com

With Eagle Conferencing's new offering, users can log into their conference call account directly from their Outlook or Web browser toolbar and manage their conferences in real



Vendor	Website	Product
Amdocs	www.amdocs.com	Amdocs Smart Agent Desktop
Cicero Inc.	www.ciceroinc.com	Cicero XM Suite
Cincom	www.cincom.com	Cincom Synchrony
Coveo	www.coveo.com	Coveo Customer Information Access Solutions (CIAS) v2.0
Eagle Conferencing	www.eagleconferencing.com	Eagle Conferencing
Epicor Software Corporation	www.epicor.com	Epicor Manufacturing Express Edition (Epicor Express)
Five9	www.five9.com	Five9 Cloud Computing Platform for Call Centers
inContact	www.incontact.com	inContact
Interior Concepts	www.interiorconcepts.com	Call Center Furniture

time. All dial-in numbers and pass codes are stored in each individual's Outlook toolbar and calendar; a toolbar is available for Internet Explorer and Firefox. During the conference call, the toolbar will give live conference control and management capabilities to the moderator by providing a dashboard view showing the number of callers on line. In addition to an Outlook toolbar, Call management software is over the Web, call control, hang up, add, and delete functions can be easily managed from any Web browser. Host/moderator has complete visibility in the call so they see the caller ID of each participant, build a database for all callers for future marketing campaigns, drop annoying callers from the bridge, and more. Other useful features include presence and call recording.

Epicor Software Corporation

Epicor Manufacturing Express Edition (Epicor Express)
www.epicor.com

When Epicor Express was created Epicor looked at the whole Epicor 9 product suite and simplified the solution by pulling 20-plus modules and hiding functionality that was overly complex for small manufacturers.

They explained: "Epicor Express includes customer relationship management, financial management, production, product and material management functionality, as well as business intelligence, business process management, and the Epicor ICE business architecture featuring Epicor True SOA to drive internal process efficiencies, user productivity, and ultimately enhance bottom line profitability." Epicor Express is accessed through a Web browser or Smart Client interface, which is downloaded onto a user's workstation.

Five9

Five9 Cloud Computing Platform for Call Centers
www.five9.com

The **Five9** Cloud Computing Platform enables advanced integrations with their call center applications. The Five9 Cloud APIs consist of a CTI Web Services API that is designed for computer-telephony-integration (CTI) on the desktop and a Configuration Web Services API that is designed to integrate common administration functions. The CTI Web Services API can be used to connect the Five9 Web-based softphone to

other business applications used by call center agents, such as home-grown CRM solutions, billing or order entry systems, and agent scripting applications. The Configuration Web Services API provides developers with access to Five9 User, Calling List, Contact, and Campaign Management.

inContact

inContact

www.incontact.com

inContact sells all-in-one cloud-based solutions including ACD/CTI, eLearning, IVR/speech recognition and workforce management/scheduling to contact centers in companies of all sizes, from mid-market to the enterprise. It also has built-in feedback/survey to gather customer opinions immediately following a call and use this feedback to directly measure customer satisfaction levels and drive business improvement. Agents and managers have Web-based applications to handle contacts and to manage contact center settings. All calls in progress as well as those in queue will failover to another server if there is a failure on the system.

Interior Concepts

Call Center Furniture

www.interiorconcepts.com/call-center-furniture/

Interior Concepts designs and manufactures call center furniture, and recently adopted ICE solutions to create an interactive quoting and design program capable of presenting custom furniture products in an understandable way to clients. Interior Concepts' system automatically engineers the product, determines material needs, and generates paperwork and computer code to facilitate the manufacturing process. These factors improve quoting and presentation of projects, and reduce engineering time resulting in quotation revisions 75 percent faster, improvements to engineering time by more than 500 percent and reductions in machine programming time for manufacturing by 200 percent. The software is also a great marketing tool because with it Interior Concepts can show clients what the furniture will look in a facility before it is manufactured. In addition it allows the company to post animated virtual tours of designs which they have placed on their website. **CIS**

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The California Earthquake Authority (CEA) is seeking to work with an organization with substantial insurance-related experience that is qualified to provide call center services on an as-needed basis to handle post-earthquake telephone call volume. See the Request for Proposal (RFP) posted at www.earthquakeauthority.com or e-mail to rpf01-10@calquake.com. Responses to the RFP are due by 4:00 pm Pacific Time October 15, 2010.

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.



Call Center Software Online Community

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

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Today's Social Customers: Do Not Bother?

This is the age of the social customer: Where buyers and prospects decide what they want rather than what Madison Avenue thinks they should have; who dictate their interactions with companies; and who will both rave and rant about the firms they do business with to the world. For that last reason they have value that far exceeds what is marked in their bank accounts.

So how come, once again, instead of getting with the social customer program, are too many outfits insisting they have the “right” to bother the very customers they depend on?

The issue here is privacy: tracking individuals’ Internet activities and using their data without their consent. Too many firms are annoying consumers with these practices just as they did with telemarketing and e-mail.

And, not surprisingly, there are threats of legislation and regulations.

- The Hill reported that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is looking at making “do not track” lists for online advertising. This is similar to the FTC’s do not call list, according to the agency’s chair, Jon Leibowitz.
- Rep. Bobby L. Rush (D-Ill.), chair of the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, has introduced The Best Practices Act of 2010 (H.R.5777) aimed at improving consumer protection online and offline. The bill contains provisions such as requiring companies to obtain opt-in consent before disclosing information to third parties and enabling consumers to correct or amend certain information firms hold on them
- Reps. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), chair of the House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet, and Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.), ranking subcommittee member, released a discussion draft of privacy legislation. If these became law, firms would have to for example offer opt-out of information collected on consumers. Moreover consumers would have the right to opt-in on sensitive information collected about them. Opt-in would also be demanded of firms seeking to share individuals’ personally-identifiable information with unaffiliated third parties.

Predictably the direct marketing industry has denounced such proposed rules and legislation. Direct Marketing Association (DMA) senior vice president-government affairs Jerry Cerasale told DM News: “Any ‘do not; national list doesn’t work and undermines the basis of the Internet as we know it now, in terms of free content and companies being able to monetize the Internet.”

DM News also reported that the industry is planning to fight the Boucher-Stearns draft. DMA Executive Vice President of Government Affairs Linda Woolley said it would “pretty much kill direct marketing as we know it.”

Here’s the rub from the consumers’ perspectives: “And the problem is...?”

As demonstrated by the deafness to the pleas of job loss risks from do not call legislation, voters do not care what happens to direct marketers. Theirs is a business that they see that annoys them, such as junk mail, telemarketing and now Web tracking and using their personal information rather than delivering tangible benefits they see to their everyday lives.

The industry also appears to forget or ignore that such laws and regulations come about – not because lawmakers and bureaucrats are out to get them – but because their own ranks have ticked off sufficient numbers of people for them in turn to annoy their representatives and agencies enough to take action. As one who has long been involved in community advocacy and politics, I can attest that to get on politicians’ and officials’ radar screens requires a huge and vocal amount of mass energy and importance for them to notice.

In fairness, all of this legislation – from do not call to do not track and opt-in – costs money for corporations and taxpayer to manage and comply with. So with these laws having the same impetus and roots, why not simplify matters by creating an all-in-one set of them that could be called “do not bother.” In short, “don’t contact us, track our activities or sell our data with no exemptions unless we give you our permission.”

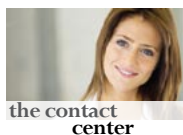
A “Do Not Bother” law would cut costs for firms and governments alike. The bigger payoff, for enterprises, is obtaining greater customer loyalty and ultimately more revenue both directly and indirectly via referrals, by respecting rather than harassing them. For there are no direct marketing budgets big enough to equal the kind of penetration and response rates and ultimately total lifetime value from today’s social customers. **CIS**

REMOTE agents or Remote Headaches

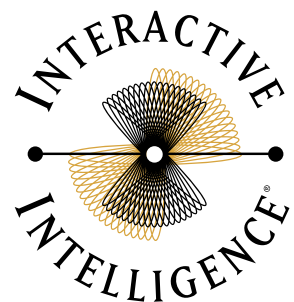
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