TMC

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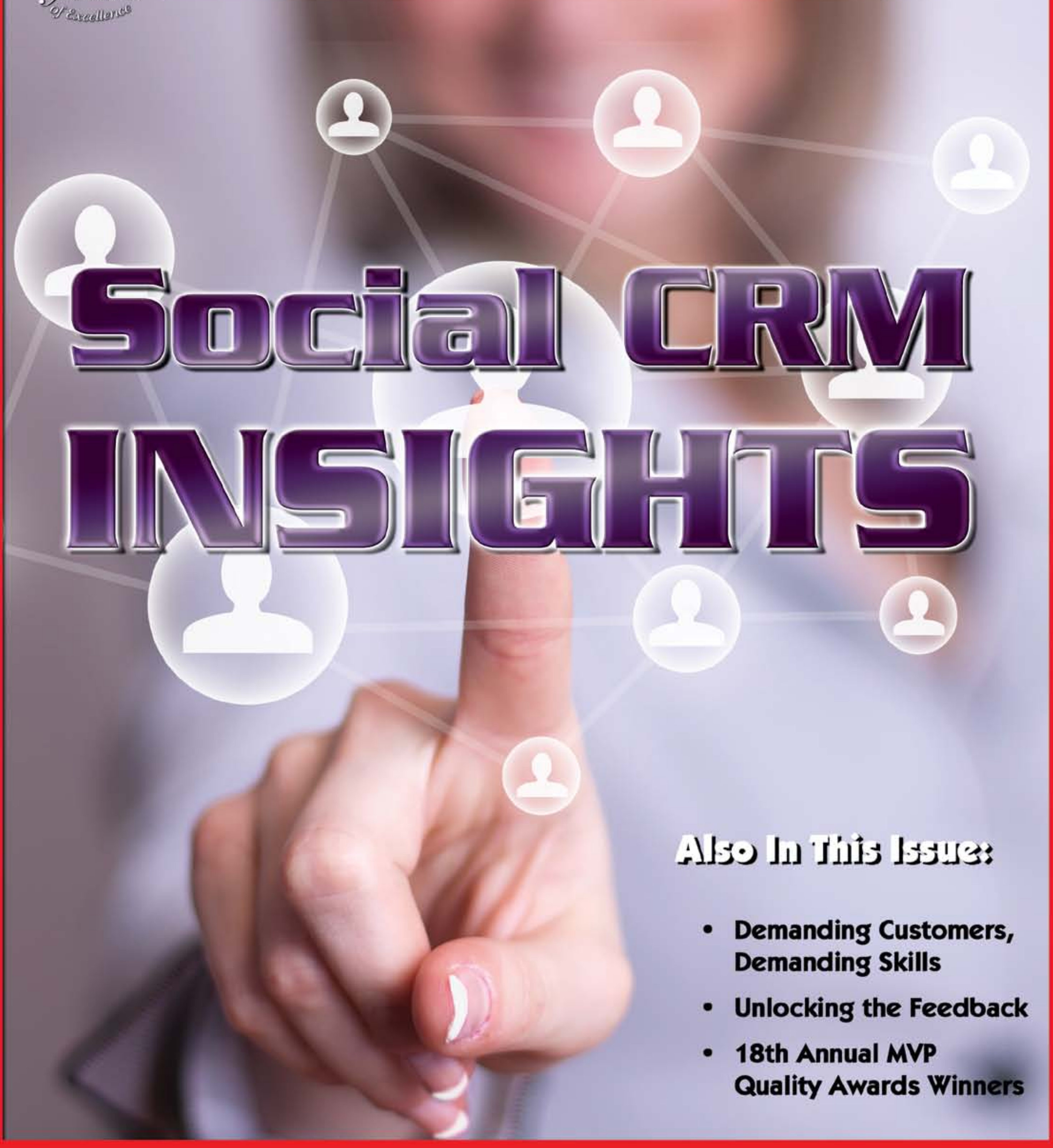

Rich Tehrani, *CEO, TMC*

Making Social Media Your Business

Paul Dunay is one of the foremost experts in social media marketing. He has been a keynote speaker on Facebook Marketing at a past ITEXPO and, until recently, he expertly handled social media at Avaya. Since I heard him speak, I realized he was someone worth watching in the social space. When I learned he recently changed jobs, I immediately posed a series of questions about why he changed careers and where social media marketing is headed. I hope you find his responses as useful as I have.

You've been on the forefront of social media in a B2B environment for years, what have you learned?

PD: There are some great places to build a business case for Social Media in B2B – and some not so good places. The first place is obviously Social Customer Support, where there is a huge advantage for B2B product and services brands which requires monitoring and listening for brand mentions and reacting to them accordingly. Once we got this process down in my organization, I began to look for ways to use social data to make better business decisions, which is how I got to my new company.

With about 7k tweets and about as many followers, what advice can you give companies looking to build their social following?

PD: Be interesting and be passionate about what you do. If you are a telecom outsourcing firm, talk about the interesting things happening in your space. Be the thought leader. Everyone loves to follow the leaders in life and on Twitter. That's why are called followers!

I am beginning to hear complaints about social networking ROI in the B2B space. Do people expect too much from it?

PD: It's time for social to grow up. We are past the honeymoon phase with social now, and many firms are searching for an ROI. I used to hear this question constantly from marketers: "How do I calculate ROI on Twitter?" The answer I gave them was, "If you are posting press releases on Twitter, the ROI is zero!" Marketers were looking for a tool with which to measure ROI, but it's really the "approach" that was the difference for me at Avaya. We used Twitter to service unhappy customers and make them happy customers. How can that be a bad strategy and how can that not have an ROI?

How should businesses measure their results effectively?

PD: Measuring ROI of Social Customer support is easy – so easy even a caveman can do it. If you take customers who are unhappy and potentially ready to leave the company, and you delight them with your customer service via social media, that creates one less customer you have to touch with your marketing. So, 50 such instances, times your cost of sale, less any social media costs, and you are pretty much guaranteed an ROI.

Having written four books on Facebook and social media, what can you tell us about the intersection of it with advertising and marketing?

PD: That is where things get really interesting. I realized, after providing support via social media for two years, just how much data there is out there about brands. We have two solid years of data in social media, and it's like the world's largest focus group. There are ways of using that data (all publicly available) to make smarter decisions in marketing and advertising. For example, take the National Foolball League lockout situation we are facing this week. Beer and car makers can use this data to find that same NFL audience in other places online, at a fraction of the cost. It's a very exciting time to be in marketing!

You just became the CMO of Networked Insights – what can you tell me about the company?

PD: The company does exactly what I was just saying above. I looked at the whole landscape of firms, from monitoring to analytics, and Networked Insights has some outstanding technology and is applying it for their customers in ways I never expected. What convinced me was hearing about how customers were making proactive decisions because of the social insights we provided, which was refreshing to me, since I spent two years reacting to social data. As I've always said, there is a big difference between data and insights.

What steps should every company be taking to get ready for the future online marketing and social (r)evolution?

PD: You have to listen to your customers and react to them at a base minimum. Customer service is the new PR, so you need to have that down. In the mean time, start finding new ways to get social media into your new product designs, your R&D, your online media buying, your advertising. John Wanamaker was famous for a saying that 50% of his marketing was wasted, but he didn't know which half. I think we just went through an explosion that makes it even harder to figure out what was effective, so targeting using social media is going to be a critical piece of the puzzle going forward to make marketing as effective as it can be. Right now, you are shooting in the dark, comparatively. CIS

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*

Two Sides of Social Media

There has been an incredible volume of discussion about the role of social media in the business world, it's hardly surprising one can't find a common answer to the question. The one consistent response, though, is that social media should have a role.

And indeed, in many organizations, it already does.

If you follow Twitter feeds of any of the businesses with which you are associated or in which you have some level of interest, you know many of them tweet on a regular basis, pushing out valuable information on a regular basis – some weekly, some daily, and many several times each day. For them, social media is an easy, yet effective way to disseminate information on products and activities.

Indeed, as a member of the media, I've found social media a great way to keep up with many of the vendors in the communications space. In fact, we, at TMC, found social media a highly effective tool for communicating with our various constituencies, notably throughout ITEXPO East, giant Twitter boards displayed live feeds of all Twitter activity related to the event.

But, as effective a tool as it is, such outbound uses of social media are only part of the picture – the marketing piece.

The other element, and the one which most businesses have yet to fully grasp, is the inbound side.

As much as marketing departments are leveraging social media to deliver information to client and prospects, the larger social media user group is that which provides feedback and commentary on products and services, particularly those that comprise an existing customer base.

In speaking with a number of contact center technology vendors recently, they all agree the challenge is not deciding IF social media has a role in the contact center environment, but WHAT that role should be and HOW it should be integrated into the environment.

Much of the difficulty lies in understanding sentiment and, more specifically, the depth and the potential impact of that sentiment.

First, it's important to understand that, while many social media users do post positive feedback, human nature is such that customers are much more likely to post to social media sites when they are dissatisfied with a product or service. In that group, there are at least two distinct segments: those who are genuinely unhappy and are determined to proliferate negative (though often constructive) commentary, and those who post in a fit of anger that quickly subsides and is forgotten.

Which group is a more credible source of feedback? Ideally, both.

But, for better or worse, there is another significant factor in play when determining which interactions should require more immediate response – or any response at all – and it requires some understanding of the structure of social media. Two users can post similar comments on social media sites. Using Twitter as an example, one might have 63 followers, and the other 1,812. On the surface, it might seem intuitive that the user with 1,812 followers will likely have the greater potential impact, that may or may not be true.

Indeed, the user with more followers has a wider immediate reach, what complicates the matter significantly is who those followers are, and what their respective social media communities consist of. All it takes is one connection to a Lady Gaga or Justin Beiber (currently the highest ranking Twitter users in terms of followers), and a tweet can instantly end up in front of millions.

To complicate matters further, in addition to followers, the profile of the individual user can also play a role. For instance, it stands to reason the social media user from Microsoft is likely to be picked up by any number of additional feeds or sources, increasing the reach of a single update, not because of who he or she is, but because of a relationship with a known power in the tech world.

These examples merely scratch the surface of the complexity of social media and its role as an inbound medium. It is easy to quickly suggest that the user with a larger group of friends or followers should be addressed first. But the inherent complexity of social networks makes that determination a very shallow and highly naïve one.

Certainly, it is critical to understand who the influencers are within a customer base, and to focus on them – particularly with outbound campaigns. But, understanding the potential impact of individual social media interactions and how to effectively address them is what has, thus far, stood in the way widespread inbound social media strategies.

What is certain is that social media is a force to be reckoned with. What is uncertain is what the best strategies are. Should it entail one-to-one interaction? Or is the best strategy to simply follow general trends, giving less weight to individual interactions? After all, no business wants to become known for openly ranking its customers based on the number of Facebook friends they have.

Of course, responding to social media also requires a level of capital investment, in both technology and staffing, adding yet another wrinkle. So, what's the answer? That is yet to be determined. But, what is certain, as sure as social media as an outbound marketing tool is reasonably easy to leverage, harnessing its power as an inbound medium is no less complex than understanding the human thought process, which is why there is such a preponderance of discussion about it with little real progress. CIS

by Brendan Read

Social CRM Insights

The social channel via social media such as Facebook posts, Tweets or social collaboration sites are changing customer relationships–in other words social CRM. The customers are in charge, and are influencing each other in their buying decisions in a way that has not existed on a large scale since the early 20th century when word of mouth served as the primary product and service information channel.

To help contact centers understand what social channel/social media and social CRM is about and what is happening with them, Customer Interaction Solutions magazine reached out to a range of thought leaders to get their insights. Here are the highlights:

IBM Collaboration Solutions (www.ibm.com)
Doug Heintzman,
Director of Strategy,
IBM Collaboration Solutions

Social media captures the energies and opinions of customers. It captures content and packages it as a value for others. That content may be a review, information about how to configure or fix something, about related goods or services or an innovative way to use or optimize products. This content also represents an invaluable data source against which a company can perform analytics and derive insight about trends, customer buying patterns, customer satisfaction, and an early warning of safety or satisfaction problems. This insight and advanced warning can shape go-to-market and support strategy, lead to proactive early recalls and contribute to continuous product design and quality improvement.

There are issues with social media such as unauthorized data leakage, copyright infringement, or inappropriate or offensive content that need to be dealt with. Tools with comprehensive content management capabilities are a must and systems that can readily connect to sophisticated enterprise content management systems that have regulatory compliance and data leak discipline. They can work with analytic engines to discover dangerous patterns that should be considered in some industries in some situations. But our experience so far is that, for the most part, communities are very good at self regulating and tend towards focusing on quality.

Social media as a customer engagement strategy also requires focus and timeliness on the part of the companies and vendors. If they are giving customers the ability to ask questions and have the opportunity to delight them with timely and accurate answers, then they had better take it. Companies also need to track customer issues and social dialogue not only to ensure customer satisfaction but also to gain insight into trends, make adjustments to marketing and sales tactics and get advance warning of potential problems.

There are many benefits of social CRM. Companies are much more in tune with and connected to their customers, thus improving customer satisfaction, improving customer retention and increasing the likelihood of repeat, adjacent and referral sales. Support costs can go down due to the peer support phenomenon. And firms can garner timely and high quality input about product design improvements, market trends and competitiveness. With the addition of analytics, you can specifically tailor sales and marketing initiatives to a specific group or even individual.

> **"There are many benefits of social CRM. Companies are much more in tune with and connected to their customers, thus improving customer satisfaction, improving customer retention and increasing the likelihood of repeat, adjacent and referral sales."**
>
> – Doug Heintzman, IBM Collaboration Solutions

The issues and challenges of social CRM include privacy, security and intellectual property concerns. Analytics can be an important means of addressing these issues by better understanding the context and relevance of any particular piece of information or the role or threat of any given individual. Analytics can be applied as a means of efficiently educating a community about issues, acceptable behavior in a community and policy compliance.

It is important that companies are up front about how they use personal information. For the most part, customers are comfortable with companies using rich customer profiles to deliver value to them to improve the quality of the sales and support experience. Having policies about how information is used and when information becomes separated for an individual identity and harvested for analytic derived patterns is important. Companies should be upfront with customers about policies and practices and perhaps even solicit their input.

Loyalty Factor (www.loyaltyfactor.com)
Dianne Durkin, President and Founder

With today's social media, organizations should be aware that while engaging in social media may leverage their customer service, it can also destroy it. A poor customer experience can now be more harmful than ever. With the click of a mouse, customers can take their grievance global and change public perception of a brand.

Customer care via social media is a viral movement, both positive and negative. Organizations should think carefully about how to use social media as an additional tool to engage their customer. At the same time, they need to utilize the basics of respect and satisfying customer needs when building customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Today's businesses need to take a step back from social media tools and web traffic analysis for establishing employee, customer and brand loyalty. To sustain loyalty, I would recommend organizations take a "back to basics" strategy – and have face-to-face conversations with customers to sustain loyalty. Rather than automatically defaulting to technical measurements gathered from Facebook, website analytics and Twitter-injected metrics, businesses must redefine corporate culture, image, brand and consumer behavior by building a loyalty advantage from within.

A good brand can increase consumer interaction and result in increased productivity, higher profitability and lower customer turnover if they energize the workforce to promote excellent customer satisfaction and loyalty from within the organization. It can stimulate a positive outward bound chain reaction and create a favorable brand perception among consumers and stakeholders.

MacMurray, Petersen and Shuster (www.mpslawyers.com)
Michele Shuster, Attorney

Here are four such areas where social media meets the law:

1. Copyright

Copyright is copyright on blogs and on social media. If someone makes a comment using copyright-protected material it is their responsibility, not that of the firm hosting the item, whether Facebook, TripAdvisor or a company site, if the author and the hosting firm are different. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act section 512 (c) limits liability to hosting companies for copyright infringement.

2. Libel and slander

The same protection exists for social media sites as for newspapers. If you don't know that the information you are putting out there is false then there will not be liability; it is difficult to prove intentional tort. But let's just say the social media site has been put on notice that the information they published is inaccurate and that if the publisher doesn't take steps to retract it, then the publisher could have exposure to libel.

3. Liability

For example, on a vendor-hosted IT support site say a customer has a problem with the vendor's product and seeks help. Then other customers come up with solutions, and the customer having the issue tries them out but these do not work or causes more damage. There is a potential negligence action and individuals are tempted to go after the host because they have the deeper pockets.

Because it is on a computer it doesn't change the basic elements of the tort. Did the firm hosting this forum take steps that a reasonable person would have taken to prevent this unfortunate act from happening?

If a firm does not have control over the environment that is putting out general information, what it should do is to put up some form of liability disclaimer. This puts consumers on notice that not all of these solutions have been tested and will not guarantee that they are going to work, causing potentially more harm. However, these disclaimers are not always as completely effective as legal defenses. There are hundreds of years of tort law that outlines what's reasonable.

4. Deceptive acts and practices

If a contact center agent says something that is unfair and deceptive such as lowballing prices, that's going to be an unfair or deceptive practice whether they are saying it to one person or an entire community. It is no different than someone putting that claim in the newspaper, or on a radio or TV ad.

What is different in social media and the social channel compared to one-on-one conversations between contact center agents or retail staff or salespeople and customers is that there are many more people exposed to the same harm. Every person you transmit that message to increases the liability. With social media comments out in the open, and with their ability to be spread rapidly and worldwide, the exposure, and the damages, rapidly escalates.

Social Channel/Social CRM Best Practices

Sid Suri, senior director, marketing for Inquira (www.inquira.com) recommends these best practices in incorporating the social channel into CRM:

1. Understand what your goals are – Is it a marketing check mark, is it to scale your support organization, is it to promote new products and services, or is it to build loyalty? While there will be tangible benefits encompassing all of these, having a clear understanding of what the primary goal is will help make decisions such as to invest in internal or external communities easier.

2. Quantify ROI – Similar to point 1, companies should have a clear understanding of the ROI they are expecting and where it will come from. Is it deflections by pushing answers into the social channel? Is it x-selling products into a community of loyal shoppers? Is it shortening product development cycles through greater feedback capture? A clear vision and plan to measure the impact is essential to realizing that success.

3. Invest in social beyond just the software platform – "If you build it, they will come" rarely works. Social channels, be it a moderated corporate forum or a Facebook page, need an investment in content, oversight, and processes to capture and respond to customers just like the contact center or website.

4. Plan for scale – Peer to peer interactions are going to generate more information to mine and understand. This requires a greater investment in "findability" of information and managing unstructured information than what companies are used to today.

5. Don't let social become a silo – The social channel is just one channel, including the website, contact center, retail and other customer touchpoints. Customers want and demand experience consistency. Building "cool" social outlets for the sake of it might be visually compelling. Yet if the information platform powering the social channel does not integrate with the retail stores and the contact centers, customers will get conflicting information leading to frustration and a drop in customer satisfaction and loyalty.

"Like many strategies, social CRM represents an upfront investment that will yield results down the road," says Suri.

Companies should place closer attention to these laws for those reasons. They should apply compliance layers with policies and procedures set up for social media that makes sense from customer satisfaction, legal and messaging perspectives and train their staff on these rules and methods. For example firms should look at filtering messages which may slow response times but would limit the odds and risks of incorrect and damaging comments reaching the public.

A firm may be able to settle an issue with a consumer in a one-on-one engagement, but it is much harder to resolve when this matter occurs and gets out on social media, with the speed that the information travels and with the sizes of the audiences.

Parature (www.parature.com)

Duke Chung, Founder and Chief Strategy Officer

Social channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Forums and blogs) are simply another channel for customers to provide their feedback and engage with a company. A well managed social community system can be a way to offer support deflection by enabling other customers to help answer customer questions. In some cases, this could reduce inbound support load by 30 percent to 40 percent.

However, in social media you need to be where your customers are. You can set up a social community site for your website to engage in, but you can't control what the next Facebook or Twitter will be and where your customers will go to get support help.

You are more likely to be successful with customers when you adapt to them instead of forcing them to adapt to you. There are many successful corporate-hosted communities but these are less organic than external sites. The external sites create natural communities and many become a central part of the customers' online or connected experiences. Corporate hosted sites remain useful but are a secondary community identity and presence for customers.

With a multichannel customer service strategy, you will be able to actively manage monitor, engage and respond to questions from all of these social channels and stay on top of new social channels. The more answers you provide back online the better your SEO will be for your marketing efforts.

Social CRM is changing the game and now enables customers to take more control of the customer service process. This is happening because everything is public and everyone can see what your customers and prospects are saying.

While the strategies remain similar, to get to that 360 degree view the tactics multiply and become more difficult to execute. With customers currently tracked in your CRM, the question becomes how are they interacting with you on Facebook and Twitter, etc.?

Much effort has gone into unifying traditional channels and social CRM introduces more complexity. Direct integration from your support system into these channels is absolutely imperative so you can track, manage and analyze what is being said and what is being resolved. You also need to provide timely and quality answers back into the social channel just like you would with e-mail, phone and online case management. The way your company handles responses back to your customers showcases the personality of your firm and customer service culture.

Your staff also needs to be trained and prepared for the social channel. The brand needs to be well-represented with a consistent and accurate voice. It's becoming more important that your customer service/marketing team actively responds to each post. Negative sentiments or posts can get viral quickly so it's imperative that all customer questions are answered honestly and in a timely manner.

Pegasystems (www.pega.com)

Steve Kraus, Senior Director of Product Marketing

The social channel puts more pressure than ever before to provide great products and services. Most importantly, it allows a flaw in a product or service to be quickly identified and rapidly corrected so before more relationships are impacted.

It is critical that social channels are monitored, analyzed and responded to like any other channel. If an individual chooses to communicate socially about an organization, the company should capture, track and associate that communication with a customer (or prospect) profile to ensure consistent responses, regardless of channel, and a full understanding of each customer's interaction history. This is very important, not only in responding to that single customer's communication, but also when analyzing and executing that best communication strategy across marketing, sales and service.

The key issue in today's deployments is that since social media is still relatively new and unknown, companies deploy social solutions that are not integrated with their overall CRM systems and other communication channels. This leads to siloed communications, lack of overall customer insight, and the potential to damage, as opposed to enhance, customer relationships.

Social media is certainly creating a lot of "noise" for companies to sort through and decide when and how to engage customers. The challenge for organizations is to filter out the noise and find opportunities to sell more or deliver better service.

There is a divergence in social media strategies between responding to posts on external sites and hosting social communities, the result of organizations not yet ready to concede complete control of the social conversations happening on external sites. Having active communities on corporate hosted sites is a way for more traditional companies to open up their social media gates, but still have the control to monitor and facilitate discussions. By drawing people to internal community sites, organizations have a much better ability to recommend additional information and products, complimentary services and track and record that interaction on their sites. With external sites, it becomes much more difficult.

Ultimately, the customers/participants will decide which model is better, and companies will need to adapt to the customer's preference. The balance between communities and external sites will exist, but they will continually move closer together and share more and more content.

The social channel does not change CRM strategies, for at the core of CRM strategies is ensuring that you are able to create, maintain and expand relationships with customers. Social channels provide alternative ways and additional tools to do that.

To defray the short term cost in setting up social channel strategies while companies find the right balance, there are some powerful technology solutions that can continuously adapt to customer behavior and automate responses and customer treatments. One example that can be leveraged in the short term is social listening capabilities. They enable companies to monitor social media conversations and automatically create and respond directly through the same CRM systems that are processing other channels. By taking advantage of this, not only are companies able to capture and respond, but they are gaining insight to customer communication habits across all channels. CIS

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NEWS

Avaya (www.avaya.com) has come out with its Agile Communication Environment (ACE) Release 2.3. It offers richer integration with Avaya Aura through a broad set of packaged applications and Web services available on the Avaya Aura platform. Also, a new client-side add-in for Microsoft Communicator allows employees to click-to-call from online or premises-based Microsoft Communicator clients and converse using their Avaya desktop phones.

Empathica (www.empathica.com) has come out with Analyst Suite, which enables business analysts perform complex queries on their customer experience data through selecting criteria to extract data for custom reports, explore hypotheses and discover strategic insights beyond operational trends. Offered as a SaaS (software-as-a-service) solution that leverages QlikView's (www.qlikview.com) in-memory, associative search technology, data sets are no longer pre-calculated, but instead are processed in realtime as requests are entered into Analyst Suite. Added criteria can be automatically aggregated into an existing search without IT department assistance.

Interactive Intelligence (www.interactive-intelligence.com) has made its Softphone Connector available on Salesforce.com (www.salesforce.com)'s AppExchange 2. The Softphone Connector integrates the Interactive Intelligence multichannel contact center software with the Salesforce CRM desktop user interface. It includes embedded call controls within the Salesforce CRM interface, and integrated presence management and screen pop.

Radish Systems (www.radishsystems.com) has debuted its ChoiceView software that permits businesses to communicate more effectively with smartphone users for customer service, support and sales. ChoiceView allows callers to talk with a ChoiceView-enabled business while seeing visual information delivered to their smartphones by that firm, either from a contact center or an IVR system. ChoiceView increases comprehension, problem solving, and recall by as much as 50 percent over just hearing the information, and improves the way businesses interact with its customers, field force, and other mobile stakeholders says Radish Systems.

Sipera (www.sipera.com) unified communications (UC) security systems solution has been integrated with the Zoom (www.zoomint.com) Quality Management (QM) Suite. Sipera's UC-Sec solution features, for example, "Borderless UC" architecture enables all communications to be encrypted and compliant on any UC device, at any internal and external location. The Zoom QM Suite is equipped with extensive features that enable compliance with PCI-DSS and other security standards. Among them is privilege-based user access including optional call encryption with full audit log of every user action taken to ensure a high level of security.

Zoho (www.zohocorp.com) has added two new integrations to its ZohoCRM solution:

- Zoho PhoneBridge, which permits storing all customer communications in Zoho CRM, gives ready access to a complete history of customers' interactions with organizations. It automatically display key contact details as screen pop-ups during calls. It instantly captures and logs all call details, including notes added during them. It also permits easy one-click outbound dialing. The solution supports Asterisk, Avaya, Elastix and Trixbox PBX systems.

- Zoho CRM for QuickBooks, which gives users a convenient, automated way to synchronize customer data between the two applications. It lets users import, export, or synchronize data either manually or automatically, resolve conflicts while synchronizing data, sets up field mapping for standard and custom fields and view history of data transfers.

by Brendan Read

Staying on the UC Wave

If the most recent wave to wash over enterprises and contact centers is and has been IP telephony, taking PSTN/TDM-connected PBXs away in the undertow, the next one that is starting to make landfall and in doing so impacting service quality and costs, is unified communications (UC), gradually washing away IP-PBXs.

UC draws its momentum and force from several key sources. It enables improved customer service and retention via presence: the ability to determine availability of and to connect subject matter experts who can readily and directly solve customers' problems. It makes external and internal collaboration such as via conferencing and IM easier and less expensive by having everyone on a single platform as opposed to installing and supporting multiple applications.

"Yes there has always been 'unified communications' in contact centers via multimedia routing and agent state a.k.a. presence via the ACDs that permit agents and supervisors see who is available," explains Ernie Wallerstein Jr., president, Americas, Zeacom. "What UC does is enable contact centers to easily leverage the rest of the organization for customer service, sales and support."

The UC wave in contact centers could not land at a better time. Agents are handling increasingly complex calls and contacts from demanding customers; the simpler ones have been managed by IVR and web self-service. Yet it is not viable or cost-effective to train every agent to expertly respond to each issue, even with the help of sophisticated knowledgebases.

"For the most part, contact centers have had the technology to confer with other resources within the contact center using IM:like applications as well as putting callers on hold and conferencing supervisors," explains George Despinic, global contact center marketing manager of Siemens Enterprise Networks. "UC allows agents to expand their support network into the rest of the organization."

The Hosted UC Option

Unified communications (UC) solutions are also available hosted as well as via premises licenses. It offer similar lower-capital-outlay and shorter-lead-time benefits and greater affordability and increased business continuity as other hosted products. The UC functionality is tightly integrated with routing, messaging and other features.

BroadSoft is one such hosted supplier. Its hosted UC solutions blends its BroadWorks business telephony and trunking, ACD/contact center, conferencing and messaging features and functionality with integration with Microsoft, IBM and Google applications with CRM and ERP tools and with mobile devices. There is also built-in video telephony.

"What has in some cases been lacking within the call/contact center is a fuller and more seamless integration of voice with UC services such as unified messaging, conferencing, CRM and other business applications, ACD and video," says Leslie Ferry, vice president of marketing at BroadSoft. "Through this integration–as well as the mobility enabled by a hosted solution–users can easily transition between different environments (home, office, remote), while organizations can ensure a more consistent customer experience and more effectively management of customer-agent interactions."

The UC ROI

These attributes can generate strong potential ROI. Aspect sliced its costs by nearly $2 million annually by going from the PBX to UC for its 1,900 employees that are located worldwide at 20 sites including in its contact centers. The totaled gains have come, it says, from conference calling and PBX support savings alone; without even considering productivity benefits such as avoiding call transfers and achieving higher first contact resolution (FCR) rates.

UC-enabled presence saves money by shaving total interaction time, resulting in lower labor costs. That attribute gives UC a unique and powerful business case in contact centers.

"In a contact center every second counts," points out Eric LeBow, Spanlink vice president of professional services. "Even if presence saves five seconds per call, you are talking about massive savings."

Venky Raman, senior product manager at ShoreTel sees another UC benefit: the ability to integrate a mobile workforce into the contact centers that avoids having them being tethered to their desks and enables them to respond quicker to issues. ShoreTel recently acquired Agito Networks, which permits users to communicate on any device–desk, mobile phone or computer, at offices, homes or temporary sites, on cellular and/or Wi-Fi networks. The Agito solution is integrated with ShoreTel's UC products. It also offers support for other UC and for IP and TDM PBXs.

"The first individuals in the contact centers to really use mobility are the call center supervisors/customer service managers, who are on the move with their smart phones,"

The "M" Wave

Acting like gale force winds on the UC wave is Microsoft's introduction and rollout of its Lync 2010 UC server in November 2010. It combines telephony with the presence and collaboration functionality present in the earlier Office Communications Server R2 (OCS) solution. It enables firms to replace their IP-PBXs while permitting by definition out of the box integration with other Microsoft tools firms may have, such as Outlook and Access, and Sharepoint.

Microsoft Lync appears, however, as a complement to contact center-specific routing solutions. Suppliers are following suit by integrating their switches with Lync.

In Aspect's Unified IP 7 with Lync one of the new features is "Ask an Expert" functionality that leverages knowledge workers to increase first call resolution for customers. There will also be increased opportunities for multichannel collaboration between agents.

The Interactive Intelligence Customer Interaction Center (CIC) and Lync integration will enable both solutions' users to communicate by phone, or by Lync IM or video call from within a single interface. They will also receive synchronized presence, along with a common company-wide directory that can be viewed from within the CIC desktop client. Zeacom's Zeacom Communications Center (ZCC) will interoperate with Lync, starting June 1, 2011.

"Many voice decisions for corporate America are made via their IT departments and as such Microsoft is immediately a player in the UC marketplace," says Ernie Wallerstein Jr., president of Americas, Zeacom. Today, Lync will very much be part of almost all RFPs and UC conversations. Either the ability to work with Lync today–or insuring that an investment today will allow for a compatible solution with Lync in the future–is going to be imperative to the current market players."

Raman points out. "Giving them the ability to easily use their wireless phones for escalations while providing critical call center statistics on the move are extremely important for them in carrying out their tasks."

The UC ROI and payback will depend on contact centers' current FCR rates and the percentage of calls where agents require a real-time resources via presence to resolve the contacts, explains Siemens' Despinic. The requirement to tie in subject matter experts and other informal agents to contact centers varies wildly from company to company, contact center to contact center.

While presence takeup has been slow— Despinic estimates that less than 20 percent of their customers presently use the feature that has been part of the OpenScape Contact Center solution for years—he expects this figure will increase."I project that more and more of our customers will start using the built-in UC features as contacts coming into the contact center become more complex," he predicts.

center employees such as accountants, engineers and product specialists who have not been hired, trained or had their performance evaluated on customer service skills. They often see taking on such calls and contacts as "not my job".

To manage that issue, Zeacom's Wallerstein recommends having contact centers agents as customer interfaces. They can transcribe voice or cut-and-paste text questions to available experts via e-mail or IM in language these individuals understand, get answers and then translate them back if need be to customers. UC tools allow the agents to prioritize calls to these expert workers by sending over only those screens that they need, instead of what the agents see, which simplifies their tasks.

"The average chemist will be happy to talk to you about molecular chemistry but may not be great in customer service," Wallerstein points out.

"The cost of not integrating UC throughout the enterprise and not allowing contact centers to leverage and extend UC for customer service can be measured in brand dilution, customer experience and service interaction costs."

– Eric Tamblyn, Alcatel-Lucent Genesys Solutions

UC issues

There are issues with UC deployments. TMC blogger Peter Radizeski of RAD-INFO pointed in his Nov.24, 2010 entry, "UC Won't Last", that UC is not a one size fits all package. Instead it is a forklift upgrade with many moving parts and scale will be difficult."UC [is] a concept that you can't clearly define for the prospect," says Radizeski. "And in some cases, the vendor cannot deliver on the promise due to business process hurdles that handcuff the solution. Those hurdles can include security measures, regulations, policies, interdepartmental politics, and software integration."

Employing UC in the contact center poses a major people challenge: obtaining and keeping buy-in by non-contact

Silo mentality is another issue amongst too many managers that is holding them back from adopting UC and benefitting from core features such as presence. Firms must tear them down ASAP if they hope to make productivity and profitability gains. They need to engage their resources all throughout their organizations, argues Eric Tamblyn, product marketing vice president for Alcatel-Lucent Genesys solutions. While contact centers will still operate as primary customer relationship hubs, customers will expect the agents to be enabled to solve any level of customer service issue.

"The cost of not integrating UC throughout the enterprise and not allowing contact centers to leverage and extend UC for customer service can be measured in brand dilu-

Going to VoIP for UC

To optimize unified communications (UC) investments whether for contact centers and/or enterprisewide, the voice communications that hit the application should be VoIP rather than TDM, carried by SIP trunking. The sooner that TDM circuit-switched calls get converted to voice packets at gateways closest to where inbound calls originate and outbound calls terminate the lower the total communications costs due to unlimited local calls with most carriers' rate centers.

And while PSTN has long been lauded for impeccable reliability when compared to VoIP, Ben Navon, ceo of Optimized Business, which supplies T1 and VoIP including SIP trunking services, reports that his customers have instead found that VoIP-transporting SIP trunking is more stable as well as less expensive, if structured configured correctly. He says IP bandwidth is increasing and quality of service improving with greater redundancy while the prices are dropping.

Be careful though when selecting SIP offerings, warns Navon. Traditional TDM/PSTN-based carriers, i.e. the phone companies, are moving into SIP markets but are charging for it at close to the same prices with the same high setup rates and long-term commitment requirements as they do for TDM.

"On SIP trunking, there is no difference between InterLATA and IntraLATA costs," says Navon. "Therefore, the rate per minute should be the same."

In contrast, many independent SIP carriers such as Optimized Business charge much less on a pay-as-you-go basis with no setup costs while providing excellent built-from-the-ground reliability and quality, with no legacy TDM technology to work around. There are often also no lengthy commitments such as through Optimized Business. Some SIP providers are charging various fees and asking for commitments, Navon points out because their offerings are still better and more competitive than standard T1 voice circuit providers.

"The traditional carriers are getting away with this because right now there is not much awareness of VoIP services," explains Navon. "Contact centers want to go VoIP but they are unsure of its reliability and whether it is for them, so they go to the ones that have been supplying them with the TDM for VoIP. As soon as they become knowledgeable about the benefits of independent SIP services they will switch over to them."

tion, customer experience and service interaction costs," warns Tamblyn. "Service interaction costs can be measured based on call lengths, first call resolution, revenue per call and customer loyalty. Brand dilution and customer experience costs are difficult to measure but are at the top of most CEOs' agendas."

SpanLink's LeBow thinks that corporate misperception around security and the ability to manage and monitor how agents are using presence applications are restraining firms from adopting UC. Not every department is used to making everyone in an organization into a contact center agent. Getting people used to keeping their presence engine up-to-date so that when an agent connects with them they respond quickly is a challenge.

"The benefits are that once you do overcome those challenges you speed up decision making and solve customer problems more quickly—with a better chance of solving it on the first call," says LeBow. "As more companies are able to demonstrate the value-add, more will adopt the technology."

ShoreTel's Raman recommends building a strong ROI tool to prove to customer service managers and CFOs the cost savings and customer experience from UC. The UC solution should be integrated into the contact center applications to show supervisors an integrated view of the agents and experts, thereby showing FCR status: and improvement.

"We have always seen UC as a great application for call/contact centers," says Raman. "We have a few customers who use the UC feature of presence effectively. We see that this resistance will gradually fade within call centers but it has been challenging thus far." CIS

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

Aspect
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www.genesyslabs.com

Interactive Intelligence
www.interactive-intelligence.com

Optimized Business
www.OptimizedBusiness.com

ShoreTel
www.shoretel.com

Siemens Enterprise Networks
www.siemens-enterprise.com

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www.spanlink.com

Zeacom
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by Brendan Read

Unlocking the Feedback

The key to meeting customers' needs and obtaining their loyalty and business both directly via sales from them and indirectly through referrals to others such as social media/social channel, is by listening to them and analyzing their comments, i.e. obtaining the voice of the customer, or VOC. The notches on the door that enable it to be opened on the insights within are carefully-crafted questions cut by enterprise feedback management (EFM) software, delivered by voice, e-mail or web and increasingly by text-based surveys to customers and employees.

EFM tools capture customer-and employee-generated information, enable response and reporting analysis both speech and text (including unstructured responses such as those obtained from social media) and permit these insights to be blended and shared across the organizations. Automated alerting and case opening tools based on survey results launch immediate calls to action, such as agent coaching. Native case management environments rescue at-risk customers, optimize employee performance and identify new sales opportunities from a single, integrated solution.

EFM can deliver then a vital edge to those who ask the right questions at the best times and act immediately on the responses gathered. These tools therefore permit firms to "see customers through a common experience," says Justin Schuster, vice president, enterprise products at MarketTools.

Listening to the respondents

EFM relies on by definition customer (and employee) response. The higher the response volumes and the more complete the answers, the more valid and valuable the results.

MarketTools' Schuster is seeing more end-customers than ever before respond to surveys' questions. And as the numbers of channels proliferate, the surveys follow–via e-mail, to mobile devices, callbacks to cell numbers, pop-up surveys on web sites and survey links on Tweets.

"There is a greater expected cultural norm to be asked and to give responses, which sets up a virtuous circle in that more firms are embracing the practice of surveying their customers through their channels of preference," says Schuster.

Yet in the rush to gather customers' insights and in deploying EFM solutions to obtain them, too many firms are inadvertently let accuracy go by the wayside, which risks leading to poor decisions and survey fatigue. Pawan Singh, ceo and chief science officer of PeriscopeIQ reports that companies are paying less attention to proper question design, data validity and minimizing errors. With the proliferation of inexpensive online survey tools, overall attention to survey quality has severely declined, he points out. Potential audiences are eschewing surveys or abandoning poor quality surveys very quickly.

"The survey process involves more than survey design itself; it also includes communications with respondents prior to


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and following completion of the surveys and giving confidence to the respondents that their feedback is valuable and will be acted upon," explains Singh. "Our recommendation to clients to help increase response rates is to pay unyielding focus on the quality of the complete survey process, and to respect respondents' time and opinions."

Erick Brethenoux, Executive Program Director IBM SPSS, points that out customers today, and especially going forward, appear to have less patience than in the past. They are also savvier as to inducements: the $1 or $2 in envelopes sent to households no longer impress them when they know their information is much more valuable than that.

To manage these issues requires obtaining insights into the customers themselves–what they care about as well as how and how best to reach them and when, along with what will get them to respond. He recommends applying predictive analytics tools to analyze customer data such as transactional (who purchased what and when), demographic (location and age) and attitudinal (likes and dislikes), obtained within an organizations' database, or gathered from surveys and/or social media sources.

For example the analytics tools could reveal to an airline that a particular customer cares about their comfort, relies on text communications and that they fly fairly often but not enough for them to justify joining a rewards program. This knowledge could lead to a survey delivered by text with a free upgrade to business class if they fill it in.

"To have the right conversation you need to have the right context of the customer," says Brethenoux. "What you are asking has to be relevant to the listener and offered at the time that is convenient for them, to get them to spare that time with you to provide you with the information you are seeking, on their terms."

Schuster says firms should be mindful on survey length–they tend to be eight to 20 minutes in length for voice and text–and when to survey customers. "A well-designed survey will think a lot about the minimum number of questions that are absolutely necessary," he points out.

Tapping the Agents

Contact center agents' actions help determine customers' satisfaction and retention as well as generate sales and revenues. To capture and enable action on that, MarketTools has developed Adaptive Role-Based Reporting, which supplies each employee with personalized metrics that show how they impact the overall customer experience. It also provides managers with objective data for coaching and rewarding employees.

More firms are also realizing that direct employee feedback, such as surveying agents on a periodic basis, can deliver unique and invaluable insights in a triangulated view of what customers are telling them are the most important issues. Contact center agents have a "catbird seat" to gain visibility into customers' experiences.

"Just as your customers can tell you directly what some of the issues are that they encounter when facing your employees, em-

Surveying by Text

With SMS/texting becoming the channel norm for the next generation of customers, it follows that EFM surveys utilize it too. Carolyn Hall, product marketing manager of Confirmit, is seeing increased use of SMS surveys especially in the leisure and retail industries to gather feedback from customers for whom they otherwise might not be able to easily reach in a timely manner. They can be invited to fill out the surveys by text by advertising the URLs on receipts and posters. Confirmit recently added SMS capabilities to its EFM solution.

"If customers are on the move they probably would not be inclined to log onto their computers until several hours later when their experiences are no longer fresh," Hall points out. "When a feedback request is clearly related to a recent purchase or experience, then it's likely that the request will be much better received."

There are challenges with SMS. They include the need for brevity; because each text message can incur service costs, survey question types are very limited, and there is a delay associated with each text transmission, reports Justin Schuster, vice president of enterprise product marketing at MarketTools.

To make SMS surveys work it is crucial that such programs are implemented specifically for the medium rather than being a "tweaked" version of an e-mail survey, Hall points out. Two or three short questions are a maximum, the response mechanism (rating scores for example) must work effectively across the media, regardless of the handset used.

"Contacting consumers by text for what are perceived to be marketing purposes is still relatively new and can be badly received by them, much more so than sales messages received by e-mail," explains Hall. "While this is beginning to change, it's something that businesses must implement carefully if they're not to alienate their target. This is particularly true given that younger people, who are likely to be the target of text-based feedback, are one of the hardest demographics to access for surveys already."

Going mobile

As consumers go mobile for voice and web as well as text—including cutting the cables and wires in their homes—EFM solutions are following suit. For example Medallia created an Apple iPhone app that allows its clients to access the Medallia system in the field so that they could monitor customer feedback in real time as surveys were filled out and submitted by their customers. It also created a survey for a client that was designed specifically for the iPhone.

One of the key mobile EFM benefits is immediate response to feedback. For example, if a hotel guest ranked their experience as poor, the hotel manager can be alerted and the manager can contact the customer immediately and offer any assistance, explains Dan Lee, senior director of product solutions at Medallia

Surveying customers through these devices is creating challenges though. There is more pressure on making questions and forms shorter and tighter because the on-the-go users have limited time and patience to fill out surveys.

"With the popularity of mobile devices, we're seeing a decrease in participant attention spans," reports Lee Orr, director of web survey sales at Cvent. "Respondents want well crafted, short surveys and participants want shorter studies."

And given the platform and soft (on-screen) keyboards on many smartphones, any open ended replies will also be succinct.

These issues can be managed by asking just a few numeric score-based and open-ended questions by voice, text or web forms and then applying text analytics–Medallia has recently released such a tool that is mobile-optimized–to the responses. Cvent recommends making EFM surveys shorter but survey more frequently, and regularly.

"For example, rather than throwing all of the questions into one long survey, divide the feedback collection into several surveys, each with a specific goal," advises Orr.

Medallia also ensures that its users see the exact same data regardless of whether they use the iPhone app or the regular Medallia system. The data is the same–it is the presentation of the data that is different and tailored to the platform.

There are also design issues. Lee reports from his firm's experience with the iPhone app that the user interface, survey and feedback design requirements are very different from traditional landline-assuming applications. The user interface elements must be big enough to touch, as opposed to clicking with a mouse. Links tend to be more challenging to touch, but reasonably sized buttons work wonderfully he points out.

Scrolling can create problems. Lee recommends avoid horizontal scrolling "try doing that for a while when reading on a smartphone and it will drive you crazy!" An example of this is in tackling numeric rating questions. For VOC applications, there is usually a 0-10 or 1-10 horizontal scale on a typical survey. For the mobile version, his firm rotates that scale 90 degrees so the scale runs vertically instead of horizontally.

Vertical scrolling must be minimized. For example, in some cases, a survey designed for a "regular" computer may have two or three questions on one page to fill the page. Medallia would probably limit that to one question per page on the mobile version, trading off less scrolling for a few more clicks or screen touches.

"These design elements are not hard to implement, but you have to take time to consider the user experience in order to create the optimal design," says Lee. "The bottom line is to make it easy for the user and to increase the likelihood that they will provide you the feedback in a timely manner."

ployees also have insights into those issues, as well as some of the obstacles in serving the customers that exist in your organization that prevent them from doing a better job," says Schuster.

There is another dividend–higher agent retention and lower churn, resulting in reduced costs while enabling higher performance through having more experienced staff interacting with customers. He points to a July 2008 Harvard Business Review article, "Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work", that points to a strong relationship between satisfied employees and satisfied customers. "The more engaged employees are, the better equipped they are to deliver stronger customer service," says Schuster.

EFM and Social Media/Social Channel

The rapid rise of social media/social channel as a means by which customers freely express themselves has given rise to the question–if they do so, and free of charge to the enterprises, then is there a need to pay for EFM solutions? There is already a growing array of comment capturing, filtering and analysis tools for enterprises that many are already deploying.

Yet social media has key weaknesses as a feedback collecting means, among them widely varying volumes and topics that can fluctuate month to month, which have little relevance to corporate needs, MarketTools' Schuster points out. Often individual posters' identities are unknown, making it difficult to identify trends across segments. The data is often very "dirty" with irrelevant content. And since posts primarily take the form of unstructured text, analysis can be difficult and time consuming to perform.

In contrast, EFM-delivered surveys provide a structured, predictable, projectable approach to soliciting feedback data that drives a consistent set of operational metrics, Schuster explains. Firms know exactly who they are surveying and can control what questions to ask. A well-constructed survey can yield statistically significant data for driving process and policy improvements.

"We see social media as a qualitative feedback source that can instead complement surveys in a variety of ways, like reaching broader audiences, expanding the ability to spot emerging issues and providing insight that should be further explored and quantified in surveys," says Schuster.

IBM's Brethenoux recommends that firms analyze social media comments to obtain insights that can go in the drafting of EFM-delivered questions to customers directly when they contact outfits or in outbound surveys.

"And a one-size-fits-all reporting method won't work when, for example, you've got your CEO looking for immediate, global insight and a team of regional operations people who need to focus on ways to improve delivery lead times in Colorado."

To fully hear the voice of the customer, VOC data captured via EFM-enabled surveys should be integrated with data from other sources, including customer interactions, CRM, enterprise resource planning and finances, and turned into automated actionable insights by business intelligence digging, spotting and analysis processes. Chris Cottle, executive vice president of marketing and products at Allegiance calls this approach voice of the customer intelligence, or VOCi. The Allegiance Engage platform combines any VOC and operational data to create VOCi.

> **Yet social media has key weaknesses as a feedback collecting means, among them widely varying volumes and topics that can fluctuate month to month, which have little relevance to corporate needs.**
>
> – Justin Schuster, MarketTools

"The beauty of social media for corporations is that it is a context-free/pressure-free environment where individuals can really express themselves without being prodded on what to say and where to go," says Brethenoux. "At the same time there needs to be a systematic way to obtain and gather the feedback from surveys and social media which becomes the time to ask the questions that corporations care about the most."

Making the data actionable

The question then becomes how best to utilize the information captured from customers via all channels to reach the underlying corporate goals of increasing customer loyalty, raising profits and cutting costs.

Too often, businesses start gathering data but have a limited idea of what to do with it, or if they do, they don't have the systems in place to take appropriate action in a reasonable period of time, reports Carolyn Hall, product marketing manager at Confirmit. This has led to a demand for effective ways of disseminating the feedback data through the business, reporting on it and assigning actions to the appropriate people.

The process is more complex than it seems on first glance. Issues raised in feedback may span multiple departments such as legal and shipping and it may require escalation to the C-Suite. Hall recommends create an alerting system that will send e-mails to the right person to follow up. Also consider which departments will benefit from insight into customer experiences—chances are, all of them. Then work with the representatives to understand what data needs to look like for them to be able to make decisions.

"The contact center is not always the appropriate medium for follow-up, particularly in non-standard situations," explains Hall.

VOC programs that rely solely on EFM risk failing because they provide just scores, basic survey date, or raw customer feedback data, Cottle points out. That is because they do not effectively deliver the 'why' behind customer reactions and views that managers need in their decision making.

In contrast, the VOCi approach boasts many benefits, including greater awareness into issues and opportunities from all data sources, not just survey data. This includes the combination of EFM data with operational and other data sources, which leads to better decision making, more effective use of feedback, and better unity with key staff around the company. VOCi can lower survey fatigue, as more surveys and feedback data are not the answers for most businesses, stresses Cottle, but more insights and decisions are.

"If you present your VOC results as a broader business story via VOCi, rather than just a VOC or customer satisfaction score, success will skyrocket," says Cottle. "It is hard to do, and requires thinking big, being ready to tackle processes beyond your job scope, and thinking like an executive but it certainly is possible." CIS

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Confirmit
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Cloud-Based Communications: Trends, Benefits and Drivers

If functionality, flexibility and innovation are important keys to your business needs, then Communications as a Service (CaaS) is right for you. Learn about trends, benefits and drivers for cloud-based communications from Richard Snow, vice president and research director for Ventana Research and Joe Staples, CMO for Interactive Intelligence.

Where should an interested company start their investigation into Communications as a Service?

JS: It really comes down to looking at taking their communications, the applications they're looking for and having those served to them by a third party provider and changing the way they pay for that, moving from a capital expenditure to a monthly service charge.

Why so much success, when past hosted models didn't get very much traction?

JS: The reason we're seeing such an increase in traction or acceleration in cloud-based communications has to do with the trends. There are a number of companies that started the trend by experimenting with moving different computing or software to the cloud and having found that the cloud was a good way of doing business. They discovered there was a lot of benefit to it.

How much momentum are you seeing in the area of cloud-based communications?

RS: I'm seeing quite a shift toward cloud-based communications, and people tend to forget that communications has been in the cloud forever. What we're seeing is that companies are moving the way they manage their communications into the cloud.

Including how they "manage" communications, then, what are the overall drivers for customer adoption of cloud-based communications?

RS: The drivers for people adopting cloud-based communications come down to three categories: cost, resources and risk. However, when I asked people during my research, the drivers tend to be around flexibility in the way cloud-based applications and services can be managed; you can be flexible in terms of the volumes you use, can scale up or down to meet your business needs, but you can also use the functionality that you want. The bigger thing I find with people adopting cloud-based communications is innovation. With these kinds of solutions you can actually innovate the way your company runs, and how it communicates with the outside world and your customers.

What are some of the things customers should look for in a mature, solid cloud-based communications offering?

RS: The three things that people told me you should look for are summed up easily. It's functionality, functionality, functionality. You should be looking for a system that's got the functionality that delivers your business needs. People should look for a supplier that's got a track record of providing solutions that are going to meet your business needs.

JS: Customers still have a little bit of trepidation around security. That's the thing customers brought up the most as a concern to migrating communications to the cloud. But there are some distinct ways of mitigating any kind of security risks. For example, at Interactive Intelligence we make sure everything is housed in a SAS 70 24x7 monitor data center. We provide an option to allow all of the voice recordings and the actual voice traffic to remain inside the customer's network, inside that customer's firewall. We also provide every customer an isolated environment where their software is running on a virtual machine.

What percentage of the overall contact center market do you think will make the shift to the cloud in the next five years?

RS: I think over the next five years we're going to see an increasing adoption of cloud-based solutions for the contact center, including communications. The adoption of Voice over IP (VoIP) was down in the single figures, but over the last seven years, I've seen that figure go to the 60s and 70s. It's almost becoming the de facto choice and was largely driven by the same three things: cost, fewer resources and it enabled people to innovate. I anticipate a similar trend in this market place. Today people still prefer on-premise solutions, but over the next several years we are going to see this go from single figure adoption to 50%-60% adoption rates.

For more information on cloud-based communications, please visit www.CaaS.com. CIS

by Brendan Read

Demanding Customers, Demanding Skills

Staffing and training contact center agents have arguably never been more demanding. Customers are now charge of the relationships with the companies they do business with. They are dictating what they want, when they want it and how much they are willing to pay, and recommending to others, especially via social media/social channel, which outfits they should or should not spend their money on, based on their experiences.

Contact centers must then make the time and money available to seek out and train those agents, located in employers' premises but increasingly at their homes, with the necessary talents to meet the needs of today's rightfully demanding customers. And while staffing and training properly is expensive, it is a bargain compared with the lost revenues when customers spend less or go to competitors.

"Even though the economy appears to be stalled, having an excellent customer experience is a high priority for consumers, so much so that many often will pay more for a better one," observes Rosanne D'Ausilio, president of Human Technologies Global. "Contact centers therefore need to have more consistent training on products and services to meet these greater expectations."

Enough Time for Training?

As contact center agents take on more challenging contacts, with self-service and social collaboration via customers' peers stripping away the simpler ones, they may not have enough non-call time for the added needed training. The consequences may well be firm-hurting performance gaps.

Lee Anne Wimberly, director of marketing at Knowlagent says her company is seeing more contact centers look to e-learning because it is more efficient for agent training. Yet they are running into adoption problems because contact center service level rules limit the allotted time for these sessions, which either means that training comes in at a distant second or management has to double-staff for it.

To solve this problem savvy contact centers are altering these rules and taking advantage of small pockets of downtime for activities such as e-learning. These centers, she says, will have the highest e-learning adoption as well as more training actually delivered, and better results.

Knowlagent has created active wait time in its e-learning solution. In a specialized queue, activities–including training–are delivered to agents during their idle time.

"There are a lot of opportunities as well as risk on each call now," says Wimberly. "All of these things conspire to require enhanced skills and more performance improvement."

Hiring and Training Wounded Veterans

There are few individuals who are arguably more deserving of being offered excellent employment opportunities such as in contact centers than those who were wounded while honorably serving their country. The rewards for employers are having employees who are skilled, disciplined and who are determined to succeed.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) contracts with Project HIRED through the Ability One program to hire individuals with severe disabilities—including wounded veterans—to work at five contact centers co-located at its hospitals in Fresno, Livermore, Palo Alto, Sacramento and San Francisco, Calif. Disabled vets comprise 40 percent of the approximately 55 agents working there, handling a wide range of calls from missed doctors' appointments to suicide and code blues.

Gwen Ford is executive director of Project HIRED, which trains and transitions disabled individuals into the workforce. In January 2010, with a generous grant from Google, it started the Wounded Warrior Workforce Program that provides veteran-specific training and placement. The VA is not surprisingly one of its largest clients.

The Wounded Warrior Workforce Program offers general customer service and computer skills, literacy education and job training such as writing resumes and cover letters in civilian language and placement through career fairs. It also trains managers how to hire and retain those with disabilities.

This last one is a critical issue as there is an unfortunate perception that all wounded vets suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome and other ailments when only few of them do, and no more than the civilian disabled workforce, Ford points out.

The VA is not alone in partnering with Project HIRED to recruiting and assist wounded vets. Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, NASA Ames and the Department of Rehabilitation and private firms such as Cisco, Google, Hitachi, LiveOps, Lockheed and Yahoo! have successfully hired and supported those who have gone through the Wounded Warrior Workforce Program.

Project HIRED will be opening more opportunities in 2011 by starting up its own outsourced contact center with equipment donated by LiveOps. Ford points out that with the Iraq and Afghanistan wars winding down, there are more candidate veterans than there are positions. Her program requires that before being accepted for it, veterans must have their treating physicians and therapists approvals. Very few have "washed out" and they can return when they need additional help or are ready to be retrained.

Ford has found that on the contact center side alone there is not a task that wounded veterans cannot take on successfully. She has disabled vets working in every area from switchboards to medical support.

"It is very hard to rattle the veterans, which isn't surprising considering what they have been through," says Ford. "They are very professional and focused, which is why the VA hires them away from us once they are rehabilitated and retrained."

Communications/Relationship Skills Focus

To answer customers' expectations contact centers must focus on hiring and training agents with the abilities to build relationships via excellent communications skills, not just understanding what customers are saying. Emotion accounts for over 50 percent of customers' experiences with firms, reports D'Ausilio, which means it is vital for agents to have personal connectivity with customers.

> **"People assume that if you can speak or write that's communication, when that's only talk...Communication really is about creating and building relationships."**
> – Rosanne D'Ausilio, Human Technologies Global

"People assume that if you can speak or write that's communication, when that's only talk," says D'Ausilio. "Communication means a message was sent, was received and was understood. Communication really is about creating and building relationships."

Customers, especially the next generation, are increasingly using text-based means–chat, e-mail, SMS/text and now social media, principally social collaboration sites–as well as voice, to communicate with organizations. This milieu requires having agents screened for oral and writing skills and to be thoroughly trained on how to speak and write in a businesslike fashion, with no slang or emoticons. Agents must also be exceptionally accurate in their language use; one slip of the tongue–or a finger–could end up harming their employers' brands and reputations if their comments end up on social media.

The RCCSP Professional Education Alliance offers the Contact Center Professionals Training and Certification course that teaches a wide range of agent skills. These include building customer relationships, creating a positive business image, recognizing customers' needs and problem resolution techniques. It also includes training on writing effective e-mails.

"There is more emphasis by employers that is being placed on finding the right personality fit for the position, and on identifying candidates that possess strong written communication skills in addition to verbal skills," reports Nina Kawalek, ceo of the RCCSP Professional Education Alliance. "However, the significant changes we see relate to what contact centers do with their workforce after the recruitment process. They are realizing the value of having a comprehensive training strategy that prepares recruits for the specific types of customer contacts they will be handling."

Contact centers also need to empower agents so that they can identify, handle and resolve issues. Requiring them to tell

Recruiting Via The Social Channel/Media

Today's workers, especially the next generation, meet not so much over coffee as over the social channel/media to chit-chat. Yet just as savvy recruiters seek out where people gather to introduce themselves, or listen in and the follow up with individuals one-on-one, is undertaking those practices via social media an effective contact center hiring method?

The answer is yes, but only in conjunction with other tools such as employee referral programs and IVR/speech recognition-delivered evaluations. Social media could invite prospective employees to call specific numbers or provide links to recruitment pages but it cannot seek out and assess for defined attributes such as personality fits and voice skills. Nor is it always effective timewise in tapping a wide enough applicant pool in a short period of time.

"Social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, if used properly, can be part of an effective recruitment strategy, as they allow contact centers to reach a wider audience at minimum cost and can increase the productivity of recruiters," says RCCSP Professional Education Alliance's Nina Kawalek. "To use them though requires properly defined guidelines and screening procedures that ensure quality."

FurstPerson's research found that it takes four to five times as much recruiting time to source applicants via social media compared with traditional employee referral campaigns.

"While a well-run referral campaign will generate 20 to 30 referrals per hiring class, the effort to generate 20 to 30 social media hires is probably 10 times the effort of running a solid social referral program," reports Jeff Furst, president and ceo FurstPerson.

customers "please call this other number" no longer cuts it in today's marketplace. The benefits of such empowerment are two sides of the same valuable coin–greater customer and employee satisfaction and retention.

There is an extensive array of e-screening tools that can assess applicants based on their issue handling skills. FurstPerson's new CC Audition Talk & Note is a web-based contact center simulation that allows job candidates to "play the part" as if they worked in a center. By leveraging a speech application, Talk & Note is even more like the jobs that contact center are recruiting for.

"Our job analysis research is showing an increasing importance of agents' problem-solving abilities, especially understanding a situation and generating possible solutions and the willingness to resolve these problems," reports Jeff Furst, president and ceo of FurstPerson.

Training the Informal Agents

Providing an exceptional customer experience often requires connecting customers directly with "informal agents". They are subject matter experts, linked from contact centers by presence; they are also counter, office, reception or sales staff via contacts routed to their phones or inboxes when they are idle.

Human Technologies Global's D'Ausilio strongly believes that anyone who touches the customers, whether they work in the front or back offices, must be trained on customer service skills to provide consistent, seamless high quality service. With this, everyone would be speaking the same service language to avoid pitting one department against the other or creating silos.

She once provided contact center training to a large food company client that had found that messages from contact center agents to other departments to call customers were being "circular-filed"; agents were not allowed to transfer calls. The firm discovered this because the customers would call back. The client then prodded those departments' employees to attend the training.

"These employees were kicking and screaming, saying they didn't belong there but I told them that if they were going to be taking calls to support the front lines that they need to speak the same language," says D'Ausilio.

Yet many of these informal agents were and are in most cases not recruited, let alone trained for their customer service skills. They may speak in the jargon of their professions, which customers may not understand and they could be abrupt and lack empathy.

RCCSP's Kawalek points out that most IT jobs require technical expertise, logic, and attention to detail; empathy is not a critical requirement of that work, she points out.

Bilingual English/Spanish Recruiting

With the rapid rise and spread and affluence of the Hispanic population across the U.S. there is a growing need for bilingual English/Spanish-speaking contact center agents. The practice of connecting interpreters onto the calls is arguably no longer viable in this instance as it does not provide Spanish-speaking customers with an equivalent experience as those enjoyed by English-speakers.

FurstPerson recommends evaluating these language skills while the applicants are performing simulated calls to see if the added complexity of handling them impacts their language capabilities, especially for bilingual positions, in addition to measuring oral communication clarity and overall comprehension.

"Leading call center firms are either building the Spanish language capability internally or outsourcing these calls to firms that can manage the Spanish component successfully," says Jeff Furst, president and ceo of FurstPerson.

Engineers have high math and problem-solving skills, with virtually no communications requirements. Accounting is all about communicating, but not of an oral or interpersonal nature; clarity, brevity and accuracy are key. She recommends that informal agents be screened for customer service skills and have only those that possess such skills be contacted by agents or have customers' contacts escalated to their desks.

"Anyone who interacts with customers should receive the same training that 'traditional agents' receive, on how to assess a caller's service expectations, how to properly handle the call, and other tools, techniques and soft skills," says Kawalek. "At the same time, companies need to be realistic about 'assigning' call center duties to analytically-minded professionals whose fortes may not be those shared by contact center agents, such as dealing with difficult personalities or handling complaints." CIS

The following companies participated in the preparation of this article:

FurstPerson
www.furstperson.com

Human Technologies Global
www.human-technologies.com

Knowlagent
www.knowlagent.com

ProjectHIRED
www.projecthired.org

RCCSP Professional Education Alliance
www.the-resource-center.com

CASE Study

by Brendan Read

Cleaning Up Issues With Mobile CRM

Mobile CRM applications are not just for sales reps that are on the go. They are becoming vital tools to identify and resolve issues anytime, anywhere that results in increased customer satisfaction and business. Here is one such example:

Founded in 1991, Corporate Cleaning Services Ltd (CCS) provides high quality janitorial and related services to commercial and industrial clients across the fast-growing Metro Vancouver, B.C. Canada region. It has a team of seven supervisors and 80 work crews who clean over 2.5 million square feet of space every night.

The firm prides themselves on their customer service and the rigor with which they inspect and stand behind their work. The supervisors regularly visit each site to perform quality control audits.

Founder and owner Mark Sippola's vision for CCS was to use information to effectively manage his business and distinguish it from competitors by offering that higher-quality level of service. He sought to speed up responses to service issues, and to ensure that they were being addressed in concert with each other with an effective mechanism where day supervisors would enter these problems on records that the night supervisors could easily access and resolve. He was seeking complete records to show to his clients the tangible actions that he and his team conducted to fix issues.

In 1995 CCS installed CRM software, from Maximizer CRM. With it, supervisors would work with cleaning crews and make notes of any client issues and then go to the office and enter their findings into the database. Yet while this was a great improvement over the old process, which was to write the inspection results onto a photocopied inspection sheet and file this sheet into the client's physical folder at its office, this duplication of effort required more labor. There were time lags between issue identification and database entry, which sacrificed immediacy and sometimes led to errors. There was also no means to accurately track issue status in realtime.

In early 2010 Sippola decided to deploy a mobile CRM application. He set several key goals including improving customer satisfaction, issue response and resolution speeds, customer information accuracy and timeliness. He also wanted to raise accountability for solving customer issues and problems with staff and crews. He turned to Maximizer and in May 2010 went live with Maximizer All Access version 11 Group Edition.

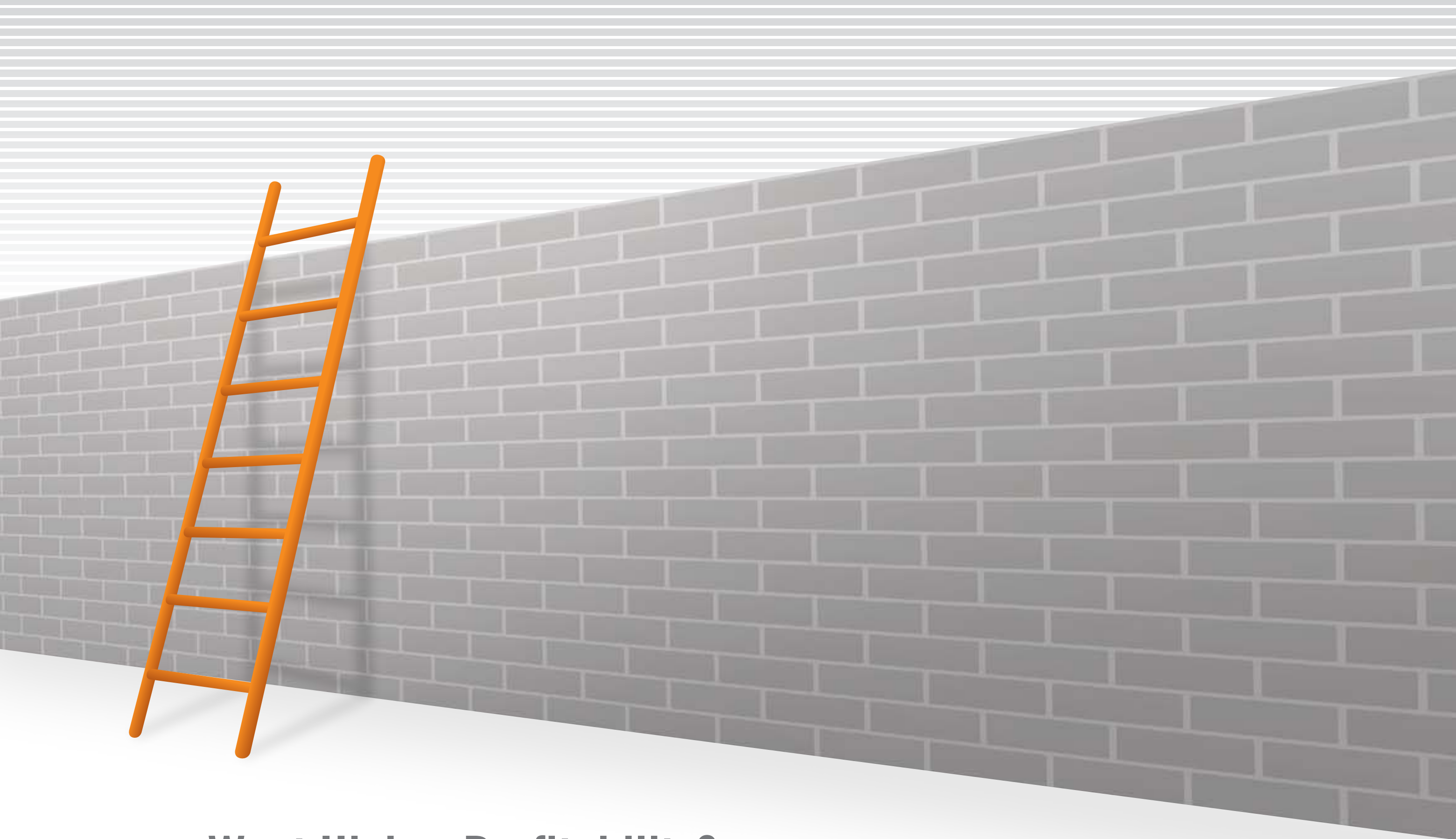
Maximizer Mobile CRM began filling in Sippola's vision by permitting CCS supervisors to create customer service cases and enter notes from inspections in realtime on their BlackBerries while at clients' sites, which sped up issue resolution and boosted customer information accuracy and timeliness. CCS uses the Maximizer CRM Customer Service module to identify customer problems immediately; it begins tracking and following up on outstanding incidents and their resolution. Applying these features has created, says Sippola "a culture of accountability both for the customer service supervisors and for the individual cleaning crews."

CCS has been evolving its Maximizer Mobile CRM application. The onsite crews now take pictures of the flooring or carpeting material to be cleaned so that they can use the appropriate products. They attach the images to the customers/facilities records, send them and CCS supervisors immediately help them find the right approaches to use. The sales staff now uses the Maximizer solution to identify potential opportunities with new customers.

The results paint a pretty picture for CCS. Maximizer Mobile CRM has increased client satisfaction by allowing supervisors to address issues quicker, improving reporting and updates. Performance and efficiency has improved; supervisors now manage more cleaning crews and facilities, and by avoiding duplicating data entries and by obtaining realtime accurate information, so have employee satisfaction. There is increased accountability and incentive for staff to 'take action' and address customer issues quicker. These achievements, and business growth has prompted CCS to add another supervisor.

The results paint a pretty picture for CCS. Maximizer Mobile CRM has increased client satisfaction by allowing supervisors to address issues quicker, improving reporting and updates

"For at least a decade I have been waiting for the day when the technology caught up with my vision of providing my staff with real time reporting and monitoring of customer relationships," says Sippola. "This latest version of Maximizer has hit the nail on the head as far as my vision is concerned." CIS



Customer Interaction Solutions' 2010 MVP Quality Awards

For the 18th year, Customer Interaction Solutions is proud to present the winners of its prestigious MVP (Marketing via Phone) Quality Awards.

Each year, award nominees represent the best of the outsourcing community, setting new standards for service quality and customer care by integrating the latest technology trends with time-tested practices for exceeding customer expectations.

Each candidate provides detailed information on its call center volumes, staffing, and technology, and completes an exhaustive 16-point essay detailing their policies and practices supporting their exemplary commitment to delivering sustainable quality across each of their programs. The essay includes company values as well as standards for quality measurement, agent monitoring and coaching, employee care, and industry development, along with a case study detailing one program, including success metrics.

We congratulate this year's winners, and are pleased to share some of the compelling comments from their essays that exemplify their continued drive for excellence and commitment to the outsourcing community.

GOLD

Cross Country Automotive Services
Medford, Mass.
www.crosscountry-auto.com

B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound

How do you measure customer satisfaction?

We have improved our monitoring process to directly reflect the Voice of the Customer. We have redesigned our monitoring form to closely mirror the responses of our customers in the monitoring survey. The monitoring form was designed to measure the associate's impact on the call. Supervisors score calls based on three mission critical questions:

1. Should the customer leave the call with a positive impression based on Cross Country Automotive Services' standards?

2. Did the associate do everything to ensure first call resolution?

3. Were critical internal processes/procedure s followed correctly?

We have moved away from point scoring to binary scoring. It is an all or nothing scoring method and, although more critical, it provides a more realistic look at success. Supervisors are able to coach to trends, rather than exceptions. This allows us to react to actual common themes versus one-off, one-time occurrences.

InfoCision Management Corporation
Akron, Ohio
www.infocision.com

B-to-C Integrated Telephony/ Web-enabled

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

Our Communicators act as brand ambassadors for our clients. InfoCision Communicators are skilled in every detail of their client s' background, ope rations and all aspects of the specific program they are working on. We are extremely selective in hiring only the very best Communicators. We have multiple team-oriented call centers at each of our facilities, and each center handles calls for a different division of the company. This allows us to match Communicators with the type of work they have the greatest interest in, and ensure they demonstrate the skills necessary to be successful.

Thomas L. Cardella & Associates
Cedar Rapids, Iowa
www.tlcassociates.com

B-to-C Outbound

How do you measure customer satisfaction?

A core mission at Thomas L. Cardella & Associates is to focus on executing the basics of contact center services correctly the first time-rework translates into lost opportunity for our clients and reduces their ROI as well as produces higher costs for us. One of the basics is client relationship management and serving as a guideline for all employees on how to best serve our clients is Tom Cardella' s pivotal list of "Twelve Steps to Effective Client Relationship Management."

These Twelve Steps are more than a list. They are key elements in Tom's vision for the company, shared by the management and passed on to call center personnel. Implicit in this list is a desire for long-term relationships because we have learned that keeping our focus on the long-term ultimately reduces costs. Long-term client relationships are critical to success but equally important in this industry, known for its turnover, are long-term employee relationships. The company places an equal focus on employee satisfaction, which results in a stable workforce that is more productive. A workforce that is more productive requires less re-training and, therefore, results in a cost savings not only to the company but also to the client.

SILVER

Protocall Communications
Laurel, Md.
www.protocall.net

B-to-B Outbound

Specifically state your policies on quality and your company's philosophy/motto on

Quality.

Our philosophy is simple: selling is customer service and the only good sale is a quality sale.

Outsourced clients are offered the best opportunity to exceed sales projections and achieve the highest quality sales possible, while they solidify relationships with the customers through Protocall. The pursuit of quality – more than any other factor – drives Protocall's inventiveness.

Stream Global Services
Wellesley, Mass.
www.stream.com

B-to-B and B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound

What Do You Do For Customers That Give Them The Impression Of Quality And High Ethical

Standards?

Stream takes predictive churn models one step further through predictive dissatisfaction modeling. For a consumer electronics technical support program, Stream analyzed the correlation between call disposition and customer dissatisfaction. We identified the key dissatisfaction drivers to be length of call, number of calls for resolution, and complex order-taking/up-sell (hard-drive reformats or system replacements). Ranking these elements against each other, we were able to predict which customers were most likely to be dissatisfied with their overall service.

We trained our service professionals to review former contacts within the case management system to quickly assess a customer's likelihood of frustration and created an outbound queue to contact those who are likely to be dissatisfied. This program has cut dissatisfaction by approximately 88%, and was adopted by the client for its internal centers and shared with competing third-party centers.

Synergy Solutions, Inc.
Scottsdale, Ariz.
www.synergysolutionsinc.com

B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound

How do you measure customer satisfaction?

We have found that the best way to measure customer satisfaction is through customer retention. Synergy Solutions is proud to have significant tenure with many of our clients and continues to work with several of our original clients. Client referrals also serve as a testimony to customer satisfaction. Whether it is a client giving us a referral upon request when a prospective customer asks for one or even more importantly, when clients move to areas of new employment and proactively recommend that their new company partner with Synergy Solutions based on our history of quality.

The Connection
Burnsville, Minn.
www.the-connection.com

B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound

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

In order to demonstrate our commitment to staff quality, we provide extensive training. Prior to answering a single telephone call, every newly-hired agent completes a New Hire training course that includes the following: History and philosophy of The Connection; Responsibilities to our Clients (i.e., customer service skills, sales skills, accuracy, confidentiality, boundaries of the call and standards of excellence); Client history and background; Call goals and objectives; Product/service overview; Q&A requirements; Online system script training; Up-selling; Assessing callers needs; Cross-selling ; Call control; Developing courtesy and listening skills; Internet and PC skills; and How to handle irate callers.

Aegis Limited
Irving, Texas/Mumbai, India
www.aegiscomgroup.com

B-to-C Inbound

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

Aegis' expertise in various verticals – including Financial Services, Banking, Telecom, Healthcare, Insurance, Energy and Utilities, Retail, Entertainment, and IT – facilitates the ease of doing business. Aegis provides quality voice-based support across many languages, such as Spanish, English, Hindi, French, Tagalog, Bisaya, Kapampangan, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Telugu, Filipino, Arabic, Afrikaans, Tamil, Marathi, Punjabi, Oriya, Gujarati, Singhalese, German, Scandic, Mandarin/Fookien, and Italian.

Alorica Inc.
Chino, Calif.
www.alorica.com

B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound

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

Alorica's standard project implementation methodology incorporates all activities necessary to implement a successful program. Activities include site preparation, system development, telecommunications and connectivity, hiring, training, testing and quality assurance. The detailed implementation plan includes tasks, responsibility ownership and target dates. The listing includes action items for both the Client and all departments within Alorica that will "touch" the program. The document serves to provide direction throughout the entire implementation and system development life cycle. Weekly status conferences are held to review the plan and the status of the pending items. Any additional issues that are best addressed as a team can be done through this forum.

NCO Financial Systems, Inc.
Horsham, Pa.
www.ncogroup.com

B-to-C Integrated Inbound/Outbound

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

IT investments are central to our long term strategy. Each of our objectives for growth and supporting seamless customer service requires different levels of spending. NCO has focused on achieving flexibility to meet the need of its various customer segments. The higher costs of this approach to IT management are offset by the benefits of innovation and our ability to respond to customers' needs. NCO uses its investments in technology to provide consistent service across all customer segments. NCO's continued success is matched to our spending levels related to improvements in IT strategy, not industry benchmarks. CIS

AD INDEX

MARKETPLACE

IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

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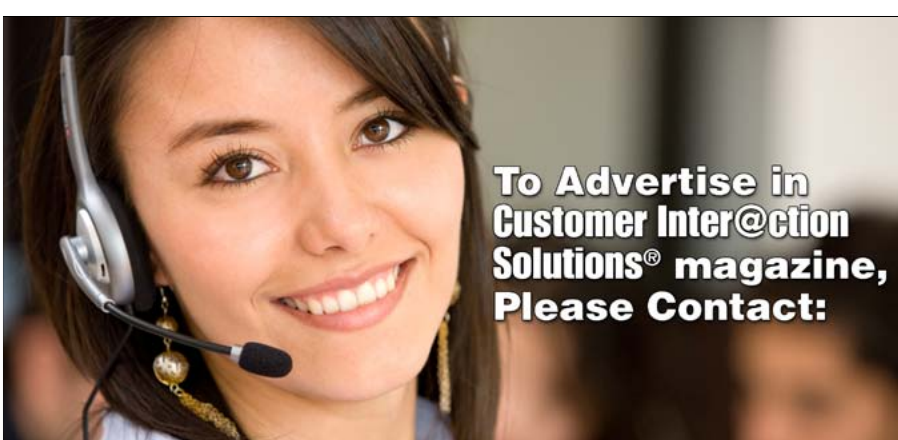

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Mining The Social Channel for Customer Gold

The social channel a.k.a. social media appears on first glance to provide a readily-extractable motherlode of information and insights that can help firms retain and build relations with customers and attract new ones. For in the huge volume of conversations: blogs, comments on sites e.g. TripAdvisor et al, Facebook postings and Tweets are concerns, complaints, experiences and ideas about companies' products and services, and the companies themselves that are waiting to be mined, assayed, refined and used.

Yet as one spends any time on the social channel knows all too well, going through it is akin to mining in another way; there are an awful lot of tailings to be removed so one can yield a few nuggets of value.

Blogs are often more hype than substance, blog and site responses too frequently border on the unintelligible and the insulting. Facebook conversations and Tweets are typically weighed down with minute details on individuals' lives.

When there is commercially worth while information it may not be what firms need to know and can use at that time. With the social channel, like any resource, what is there is all that there is: take it, work with it or leave it. There is nothing companies can do to change the composition or the location.

Then there is the issue of whether what is said on the social channel fully and accurately reflects marketplace sentiment. Who actually listens and heeds commenters' messages? Are the people who use these tools: leaders and followers alike, also sought-after customers, possessing the right income, interests and demographics? Or are the comments and posts instead examples of "empty cans rattle the most?"

The majority of the working population rarely has time during business hours--which are becoming longer as are commute times—to spend much time on the social channel. Stringent corporate Internet access policies and tougher laws that rightly restrict communicating in motion are in or going in place to limit such activities, though their success in doing so is debatable.

The social channel's anonymity creates challenges for firms to readily find out commenters' identities and from there to determine their value to their enterprises without arousing their suspicions. The only option is approaching them head-on, invite them to chat, which works only if they agree to reveal who they are.

More ominously, too often the remarks made about firms are unhelpful and worse yet inaccurate, which could harm brand reputation and sales. The anonymity opens the door to concerted guerrilla marketing warfare where commenters would be paid to build up their clients and tear down competitors, with language specially shaped and sharpened to get through the host sites' screens.

Spam has already infested social channel sites, requiring accurate and continually updating filtering. Suspicious-sounding responses have been sent to blog entries; it takes a careful eye and ear for language to detect them.

The social channel, for all its ability to give consumers a global voice, has limits on influencing buying behavior; which makes it no different than any of the other channels. Customers will, for all their squawking, tolerate mediocre products and services if these marginally perform better for the money compared with the competition (certain airlines, carriers and software firms come to mind…)

Companies that want to tap the social channel should prepare for the hard work ahead. That means investing in top-grade harvesting and analysis software and in social collaboration solutions that draw and engage customers and prospects into mutually productive conversations. That also means setting up channel management processes with which to proactively put out and reactively respond to comments, the key for which is hiring and training media—and it is social media--savvy-staff.

At the same time firms must retain and expand their use of traditional voice of customer means and tools. These include managed customer feedback surveys and interaction speech and screen analytics on calls, e-mails, chats and texts.

Even more important than that though outfits must design, engineer, deliver, price and support their products and services right. For there is no surer means to wealth than that to attract and retain profitable customers: who will then encourage others via the social channel to join them. CIS


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Forecasting	- **Poor forecast accuracy** using Weighted Moving Averages	- **Utmost forecast accuracy** using Expert System to fit advanced time series models optimally: Box-Jenkins ARIMA, Exponential Smoothing (Holt-Winters), Forecasting with call drivers - Special event day forecasting - Automated IDP, shift bid and budget forecast accuracy tracking
Staffing & Scheduling	- **Poor schedule efficiency using** non-optimal heuristic scheduling - Inaccurate Erlang C or primitive simulation based staffing and service level predictions for skills–based routing	- **5 – 12+% agent headcount savings over other WFM to meet the service level targets** - Concurrent Optimal Scheduling of all agents' work/off days, daily start and break times together - Provably optimal schedule efficiency - Sophisticated Discrete Event simulation for staffing and service level predictions for skills-based routing
Strategic Planning	- **Third-party add-on using different forecasting, staffing and scheduling models than the WFM software**	- **Comprehensive, integrated strategic planning using advanced forecasting, staffing and scheduling models** - Sophisticated What-If analysis capabilities - Productivity and AHT changes in new agent training/ramping - Planning all agent and support staff groups - Vendor SLA and capacity planning
Performance Management	- **Limited to passive reporting with no decision support** - Real-time Adherence	- **Proactive performance optimization, scorecards and dashboards with advanced decision support tools** - Real-time Adherence
Agent Workstation	- **Limited or no support for agents to manage their activities over the internet**	- **Easy-to-use web-based workstation** - Exception entry - Shift swapping - Schedule and vacation bidding - Performance review
Software Architecture	- **Outdated client-server architecture**	- **%100 web based**

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