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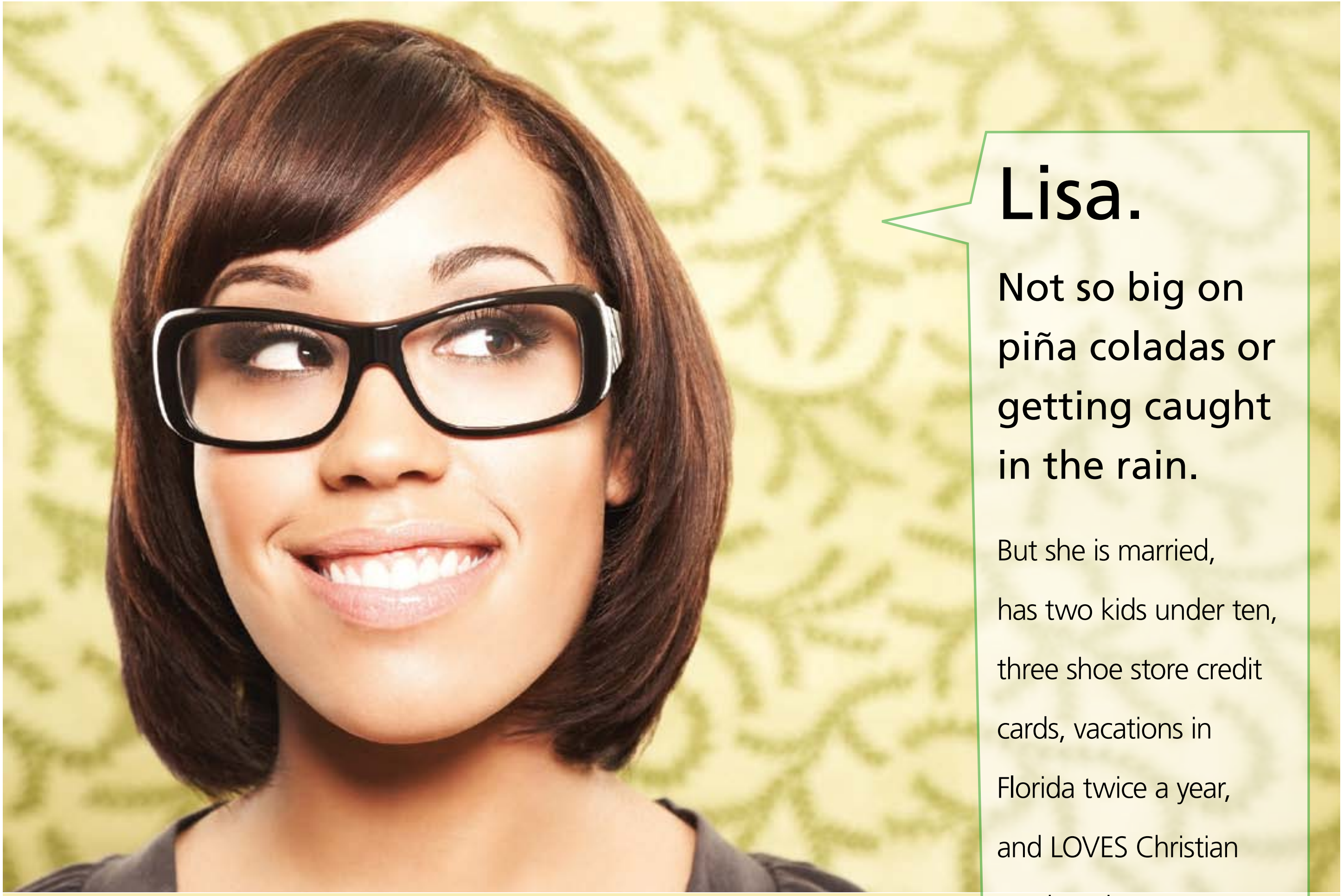
- Kunnect FREE Delivers Gratis Call Center Functionality
- Servion Gives the Age of Social Networking a Voice
- Self-Realization is a Key Ingredient to Effective Call Center Management



Lisa.

Not so big on piña coladas or getting caught in the rain.

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Rich Tehrani, *CEO, TMC*

Will Nimble 2.0 Take Social CRM Mainstream?

Recently consumer products manufacturer P&G – one of the largest advertising spenders at over $9 billion – announced it will cut its marketing headcount in part because advertising on Facebook and Google is more efficient. The maker of Gillette and Pantene products is not alone; in fact, the business world is focusing heavily on social media including Google+ and Twitter. But while it is understood by many web-savvy companies that social is important – how many of them are embracing social CRM? My informal analysis shows the numbers are very low, meaning there could be huge room for growth.

That is, of course, if you don't ascribe to the idea that it is important for companies to help shape the dialogue about themselves online, and more importantly, you don't believe that tying social media into CRM systems can boost sales and service levels and perhaps even increase productivity.

One person who believes in the power of social CRM is Nimble founder and CEO Jon Ferrara. Around 1991 or so he told me at a dinner that his new contact management/CRM company Goldmine has lots of potential because, "There is no Lotus in the market." Ironically, Goldmine did in fact become a major player in the space while Lotus faded from the scene.

Last year Nimble rolled out its initial cloud-based social CRM solution, and there are now 30,000 users and 3,000 of them spend almost half their day on the platform. The newly released Nimble 2.0 aims to increase the first, if not both, of these numbers. In Ferrara's own words, "Nimble is an integration of social listening and engagement platforms, internal collaboration with sales and marketing capabilities of traditional CRM, and elegance and simplicity of contact manager rolled into one easy-to-use system."

He contrasts the look of Nimble – which is similar to a Facebook page to Salesforce which he says looks like a mainframe screen. Additionally, he believes that while Hootsuite is useful, it's limited because it doesn't allow you to drill down on specific contacts.

Successful salespeople have always known that information related to a certain prospect could help increase the chance of a sale. In other words, if you know where a potential customer went to college, that information could be helpful in relationship-building, which in turn could give you the edge in a competitive sales situation. Although people like to believe they purchase based on objective facts, likeability and/or trust of a salesperson is a major factor in pulling the purchasing trigger.

And one of Nimble's objectives is to boost relationships by enabling companies to get a better overall picture of their prospective customers.

Ferrara likens Nimble 2.0 to fishing in the social river where salespeople can find a needle in a haystack. By tying in traditional CRM data, a company can ascertain which people on social networks have also downloaded documents from the corporate website. Moreover, companies can also determine who in the social stream is interested in which products.

For a few years now I have swept all my Twitter follow e-mails into a special folder, and I'm frankly amazed at the quality of the follows on this network. Not only do I find numerous related companies I never heard of and are worthy of coverage, often these follows turn into prospects and sometimes become new customers of TMC.

Tying these follows into a CRM system makes infinite sense if for no other reason than to justify the spend companies are making on social media. In other words, if you are to put aside the passion that Jon and I share for the future of commerce being closely aligned with social CRM, then at least you should be onboard with using an integrated social CRM tool to evaluate the ROI of the effort your company is putting into social networks.

In using the platform I am happy to report it has proper hooks into a number of social networks including Google+. A number of other social aggregation platforms don't yet connect to Google+ for some reason. Moreover, although I am a Nimble dabbler, not a frequent user, I find its daily e-mail digest of job changes from my social networks very useful.

Jon also feels his company's integrated solution is better suited to the world of social CRM than a CRM system with social bolted on. While this is a logical statement, I wouldn't count out Oracle, Salesforce or any other CRM vendors as social integration should be straightforward. Sure, some will always do it better, and Nimble is a pioneer, but that doesn't mean the CRM world won't be watching like a hawk and emulating like a cheetah.

Nimble is free for standalone personal users and business and multi-users can sign up for $15 per user per month. At that price it is certainly worth trying. **CIS**

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*

CRM: Putting the RM Before the C

Verizon and AT&T both began using terms like 4G and LTE in their advertising well in advance of network and device rollouts, preparing customers for the next great thing in communications. Remember the HTC Thunderbolt ad that was initially launched without the "coming soon" moniker at the end? (http://tmcnet.com/59102.1)

Every time I saw it, I confirmed my decision to wait for the thunder to come in order to trade in my BlackBerry, rather than escaping early on the ferry to Steve Jobs' iLand. It's a decision I would take again.

But, what I also wondered as I watched the two top American wireless carriers boast about their new networks was, are they neglecting what may well turn into a key customer segment for them – the Baby Boomers?

We dedicate a tremendous amount of editorial real estate to interactions with customers once they have purchased products and how to retain them. Yet, we sometimes neglect the fact that, in order to offer quality customer service and care, we must first acquire customers. There is customer relationship development to be done before any CRM can happen.

> *How do you build a relationship and turn a prospect into a buyer when he doesn't know what you are selling or how it will help him?*

Which brings me back to the Baby Boomers. Those of us in the tech world know LTE, 4G, Wi-Fi, Droid, App, and all the other terms and acronyms that go along with today's mobile services. But unless you follow the space to some degree, you're not going to know what they are.

So, when I saw this Saturday Night Live skit poking fun at Verizon, I thought back to the first 4G commercials. How can you sell a product when your buyer doesn't know what it is? How do you build a relationship and turn a prospect into a buyer when he doesn't know what you are selling or how it will help him? Here's the SNL skit: http://tmcnet.com/59101.1.

Yes, more smartphones and tablets are being purchased by younger generations, and to a large degree, they are much more in tune with the latest tech trends and language than their parents. Which is precisely why mobile operators must focus on those parents, making sure they understand what the latest technologies mean to them. They already see what their kids are doing with their Motorola RAZRs, the younger, more exciting siblings to the originals many parents are still using. But they don't have use cases to which they can relate.

So, operators have to find those use cases and approach this market segment with them. It might be about keeping in touch; or it might be about playing a role in their kids' education; or it might be about following local sports organizations; or it might be about avoiding long lines and creating the best possible amusement park experience.

It could be just about anything – but they have to be depicted as simple, personal, logical use cases, not as chilling acronyms and eye-glazing tech lingo.

The fact is, at some point – the sooner the better, so operators can reduce spending – operators will seek to shut down legacy networks completely. But not until the strong majority of legacy subscribers have voluntarily migrated to newer technologies. Anything else would be damaging. In order for that to happen – before operators can shut down their legacy networks – they will have to convince Baby Boomers they want to be on LTE networks.

But, they can't do it by creating an "old person's nightmare," as SNL referred to the scenario. Rather, they need to understand that in a BYOD world, where devices, services, and applications are all very personal, so, too, must be customer relationship building, retention, and acquisition efforts.

The theory extends to all businesses. By building the right pre-sale scenarios, providing the appropriate education, and setting the appropriate expectations, customer relationships begin at a much higher level and, even when challenges arise, they are more likely to be as tolerant as they are overcome. Furthermore, beginning the relationship building process in advance of the actual sale is likely to have a positive impact on overall revenue. **CIS**

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AVAYA DEVCONNECT GOLD

by Paula Bernier

Making Workforce Optimization Easy and Affordable

Monet Brings Cloud-Based Call Recording, Quality Management into the Picture

Workforce management has always been considered a bit of an art, says Chuck Ciarlo. That's why the CEO named his company Monet Software and trademarked the phrase "The Art of Workforce Management".

Monet Software has been a pioneering force in the area of workforce management for about a decade, providing call center customers with software that is at once sophisticated, uncomplicated and affordable. And, like the French impressionist painter after which the company is named, Monet Software continues to evolve and expand its portfolio, having recently introduced call recording, and quality management and metrics solutions.

"Over the years we have continued to get requests from our customers for a cloud-based call recording solution that is easy to use and affordable," Ciarlo tells CIS magazine. "Monet has spent nearly 9 years perfecting a best-of-breed WFM solution, and call recording has been in our sights for a while. Now we are able to offer it, along with a robust quality management module. Both are fully integrated into a unified cloud-based workforce optimization solution. We are very excited about this offering, and we think our customers and the market will be as well."

The solution suite is called Monet WFO Live. As Ciarlo notes, it enables call centers to automate workforce management, call recording, quality assurance and agent analytics.

"Call centers can now quickly and easily optimize all aspects of their workforce with one affordable solution, resulting in better utilization of resources, better cost management and improved service levels," Ciarlo explains. "Monet WFO Live unifies workforce optimization across multiple processes to better meet customer needs and deliver more effective customer service. Customers can create accurate forecasts, efficient schedules for work volumes, track key metrics in accordance to their business goals, record and monitor calls for quality, training and compliance purpose, all in one integrated cloud-based platform."

Ciarlo added that "Monet is leading the call center workforce technology cloud by addressing some major industry trends":

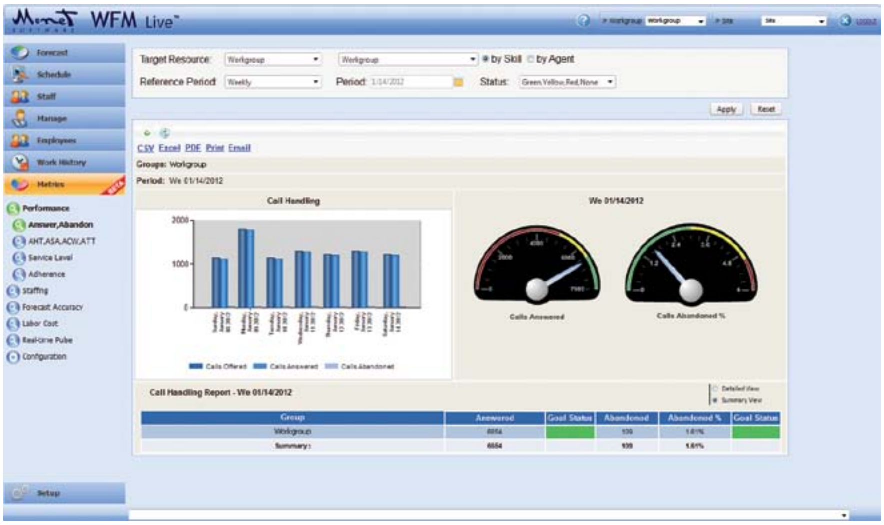
- "Customers are looking for one stop shopping and for a fully integrated WFO solution to take advantage of synergies across multiple functions.
- The adoption of cloud-based software is further accelerating due to proven value: scalable, security, low cost, ease of use, and fast implementation.
- Call centers want to move from a reactive to proactive mode of operation with goal settings, dashboards, triggers, and alerts to further optimize resources."

Monet WFO Live consists of a handful of software modules, including Monet WFM, Monet Record, Monet Quality, and Monet Metrics.

Monet WFM

Monet WFM is a call center workforce management solution that enables organizations to create more accurate forecasts, develop more effective call center schedules, and increase agent adherence.

According to Ciarlo, Monet WFM sets a new standard for ease of use and affordability of workforce management software.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Detailed View
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Reference Period: Weekly · Period: 1/14/2012 · Status: Green,Yellow,Red,None

Groups: Workgroup
Period: We 01/14/2012

Call Handling Report - We 01/14/2012

Group	Answered	Goal Status	Abandoned	Abandoned %	Goal Status
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Summary:	6654		109	1.61%	

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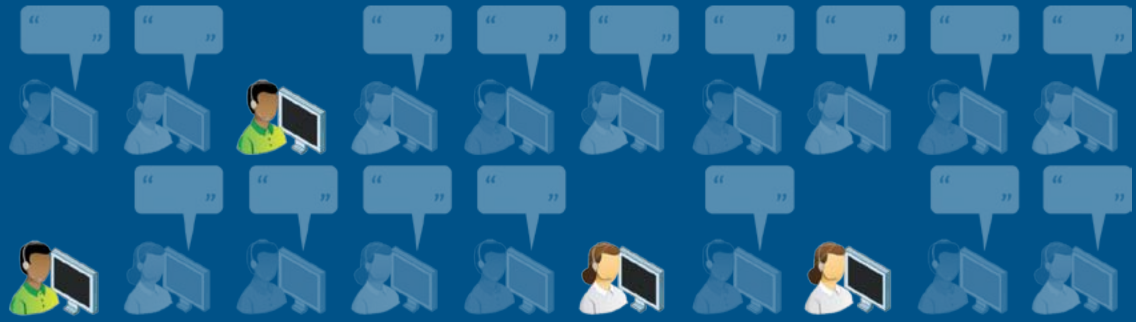

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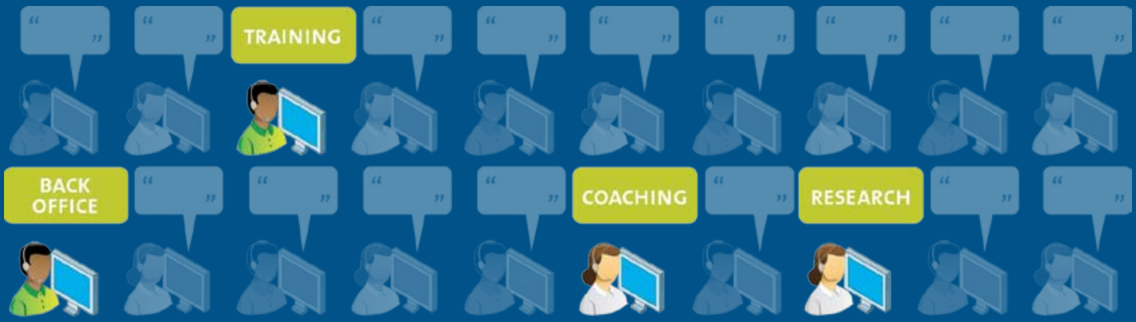
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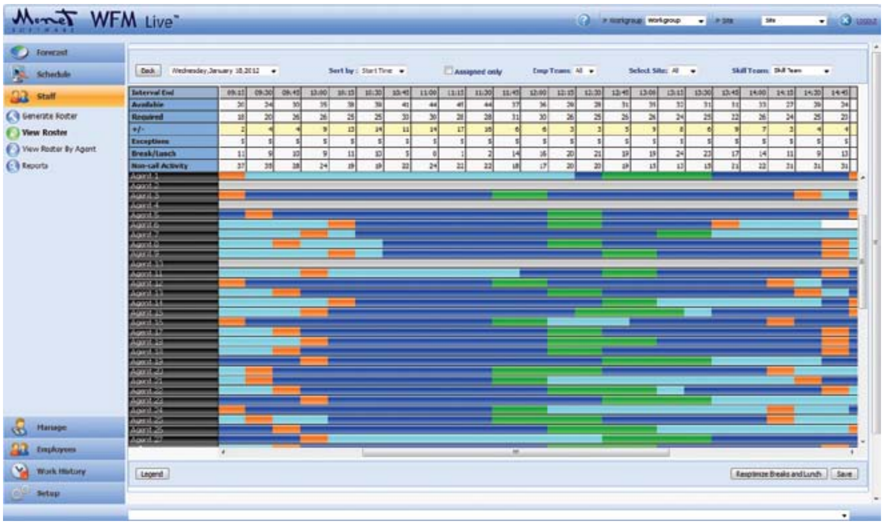


"Monet's solution delivers value to the entire call center business and operation, helping to improve service levels and reduce costs while improving employee morale through more predictable, flexible and efficient scheduling and staffing," Ciarlo says.

Monet WFM also features Monet Anywhere, a supervisor collaboration solution, and Monet Integrations Service, a solution that enables customers to integrate their ACD systems more easily with all of the above.

Monet Record

Monet Record, meanwhile, is a call recording solution the company unveiled this year. It records, archives and retrieves customer interactions.

Call recording is, of course, seeing growing demand as organizations continue and expand their efforts to increase productivity, provide better customer service, and address transaction disputes and other service-related issues. The Monet Record solution is also noteworthy in its ability to enable organizations to comply with legal requirements such as HIPPA, PCI and Sarbanes-Oxley.

Monet Quality

The above is complemented by Monet Quality, a quality management solution that monitors customer interactions. It enables organizations to deliver a consistently high level of service and improve customer satisfaction.

"Monet Quality provides a flexible platform to evaluate the performance of contact center agents," Ciarlo says. "It gives managers and supervisors more time and resources to strategically focus on improving call quality, customer interaction and productivity."

Monet Metrics

Monet Metrics, a call center and agent performance management solution, was designed to allow organizations to manage key performance indicators, set up real-time alerts, access dashboards and reports for agent analytics, and generally look at agent performance at a more granular level.

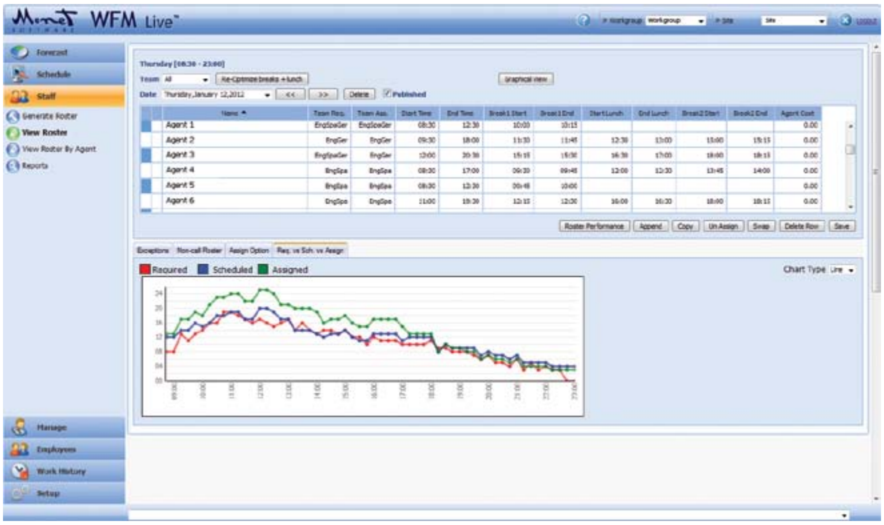
"Monet Metrics sets a new standard in actionable intelligence by transforming call center performance management from a reactive to a proactive approach," explains Ciarlo. "Call centers get easy access to a unified view of key performance metrics and can quickly adjust center operations resulting in better decision making, better utilization of resources, better cost management, and improved service levels."

All modules of the Monet WFO Live suite are affordable, subscription-based services. That, Ciarlo notes, makes it easy, fast and affordable for call centers to get started without the usual risk of software investments and implementations.

"What our customer tell us is that they like us because our solution is very easy to learn; quick to deploy – usually in less than 30 days; and, more importantly, they typically realize cost savings and improved productivity within 60 days," says Ciarlo. "That is almost unheard of in the software industry.

"Customers are extremely excited about that, as you can imagine," he adds. "They also appreciate the simplified integrations with their existing premises-based or hosted call center technologies and the fact they get it all with a low monthly subscription fee with no hidden costs."

That's especially important for small to mid-sized organizations, a traditional customer target for Monet Software. However, over the last few years Monet Software has seen tremendous interest and traction



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MONET SOFTWARE

from larger contact centers with as many as 5,000 agents. These larger centers are looking for the same ease of use and flexibility and are interested in getting it all delivered from the cloud.

Given the majority of Monet Software's employees have past work experience in the call center industry, and Ciarlo has owned and operated call centers himself over the years, the company has a unique perspective on the requirements and challenges of its call center customers.

"Having spent many years owning and operating call centers, some of the biggest challenges we faced were the inability to accurately forecast call volumes and properly schedule agents to meet the various service levels and other business demands," he says. "Call center software was too expensive, difficult to implement and very complex to use. Only the largest call centers could afford it, most often they spent years implementing it, and never realized the full potential. I thought there had to be a better way. So I started Monet Software."

A few years later, with the rise of web-based technologies, Monet Software moved its solution to the cloud. Of course, there are a lot of vendors that are introducing hosted solutions these days, Ciarlo says, but often this is just web-hosting of old legacy client-server systems. However, this approach doesn't deliver the benefits of true cloud solutions to customers: Low infrastructure costs, ease of use, simple upgrades, and scalability. By comparison, Monet Software's solution is based on a single set of code and a single back end – all on the cloud.

"We actually took the time to rewrite our entire solution to be used and delivered from the cloud," he says. "This was a huge undertaking. But now, looking back, it was the right move."

That move has enabled Monet Software – which has grown its business 100 percent in the last two years – to provide customers with quick service turn up, significant savings, and gains in productivity and customer service. **CIS**

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Call Center Gurus Weigh in on Industry Topics in New Forum: Productivity Plus Blog

Knowlagent recently launched a new Productivity Plus blog where experts within the call center industry can collaborate and opine upon the customer experience, agent productivity and the call center culture…things that are top of mind for most customer service leaders.

Productivity Plus is a type of short-hand that epitomizes the balancing act leaders have to do on a regular basis. Call center people tend to spend a lot of time optimizing productivity and efficiency, but it's the "plus" that gets them excited.

Maybe you're trying to figure out:

- What you can do to focus more on the customer experience, including first call resolution and quality monitoring?
- How you can create a positive work environment that can improve customer retention and increase revenues.
- How you can better communicate with agents, deliver one-on-one coaching and recognize achievements.
- What tactics have successful companies implemented to improve customer satisfaction?
- How your company can better measure return on investments.

We've asked industry experts Jeanne Bliss, David Butler, and Greg Levin to join us in helping answer these and a host of other questions that will help you create a great customer experience and great agents.

We will focus on five topics that matter most to you: corporate culture, customer centricity, technology, agent success factors and best practices. We'll provide you with case studies and real-world tips from companies that have mastered these areas so you can too.

Below are a few excerpts from recent posts:

"Can Everyone Jump a Fence to Serve a Customer" by Jeanne Bliss

The silos often get in the way when we are serving customers. Customers are triaged, put on hold or passed from one person or department to another. And we also deliver a broken up experience when the data does not connect – so your frontline is compromised with lackluster information they need to serve and support their customer. This leaves customers thinking, "Do they know me at all?", "Do they even talk to each other?" and "Why can't someone just own my call?"

How good is your "fence jumping" ability to connect the silos and the data today?

San Antonio-based Rackspace grows by imagining the life of their IT manager clients. And that means making it easy to get help, support and service without the customer "hot potato." Rackspace is organized by teams assigned by customer account, in order to create customer peace of mind.…

"Learning to Focus on Employees – A Call Center's Best Asset" by David Butler

Let me tell you a story of two call centers. Both have similar operations, similar employees and both serve the same basic customer operation.

Call center A manager was a traditionalist. He focused on the basic metrics, average handle time, time in queue, customer satisfaction and the rest. He was never satisfied with the performance of the agents in his center. Each time he tried to improve one of the metrics in his call center the other seemed to change in the wrong direction. Frustrated, he did not know what to do. Every attempt to increase the metric based performance created shifts in the wrong direction.…

Call center B manager had the same problems as call center A manager. She was always looking for improvements in metrics only to have other metrics move in the opposite direction. One day call center B manager decided to sit down and shadow her best agents for two days.…

"Is Yours An IVR… or an IVRn't?" by Greg Levin

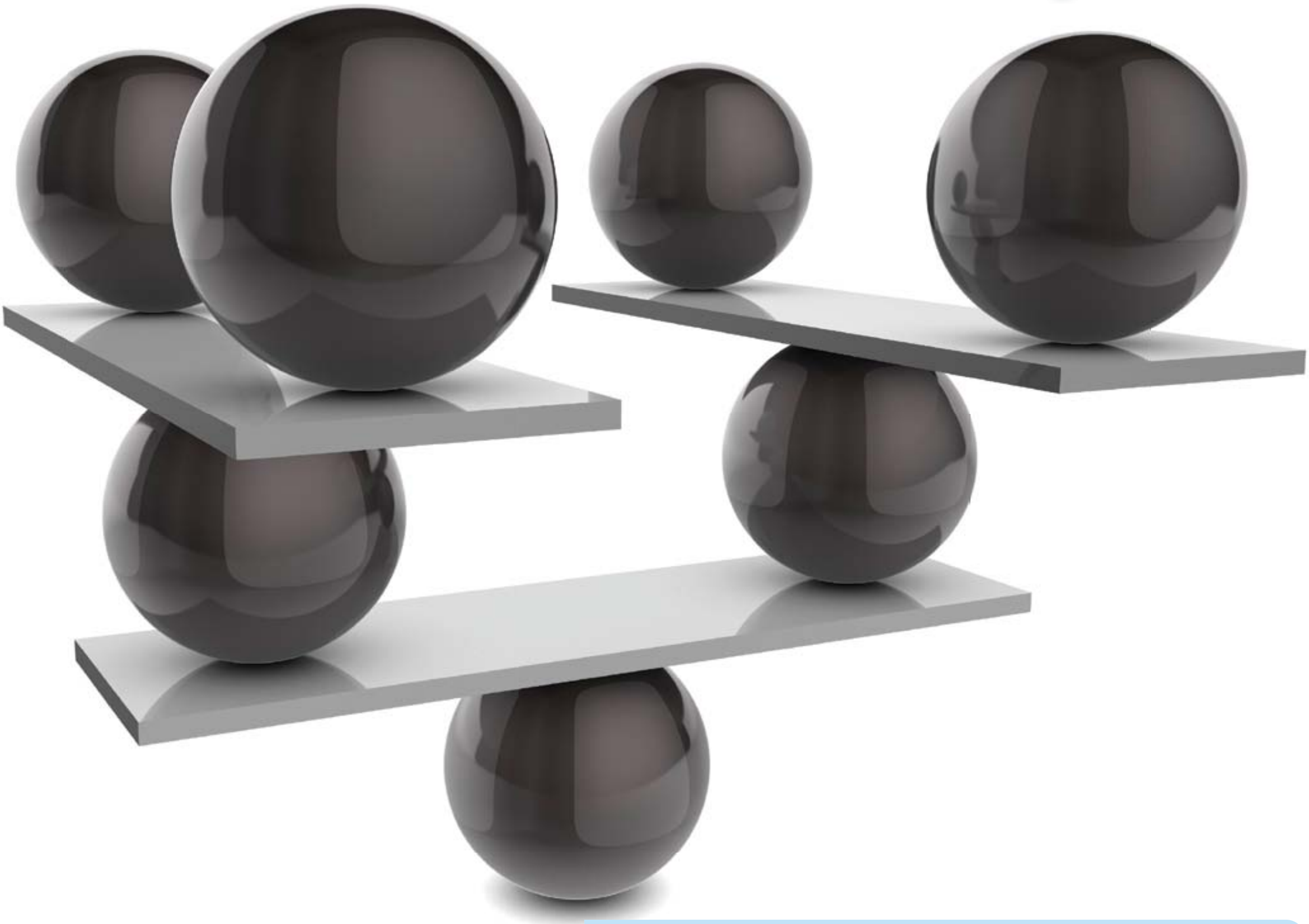
No contact center technology is more notorious than interactive voice response, or IVR. This three-letter acronym more often than not is viewed by customers and the media as a four-letter word.

But the truth is, the universal hatred for this instrument of automation isn't really justified. Granted, some – okay, many – IVR systems are certainly deserving of customer wrath; however, there is nothing inherently wrong or evil about IVR technology itself. The problem lies in the common programming and design mistakes that are made – by humans.

We hope the information presented in each post gets you energized about ways to improve your call center operations. Please contribute your ideas as well through the comments section on each post. We'd love to hear your thoughts, stories and successes. If you find it useful, spread the word and share this information with other executives and managers in your company.

We'll be posting a few blogs a week on these varying topics, so please visit the blog often! And, enjoy. **CIS**

Need to Improve Your Multichannel Ability?



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by Paula Bernier

Servion Gives the Age of Social Networking a Voice

There is a lot of talk right now that online chat, social media, e-mail, and other new technologies will replace voice communications when it comes to customer contact and service. David Baker, vice president of Servion, does not agree. In fact, he believes that voice will become increasingly critical for large and small companies around the globe. And his company is currently working in 20 of those countries. Baker recently shared the thinking behind his views in a Q&A with Customer Interaction Solutions magazine.

David Baker

Why is voice important in the age of social?

Baker: The phone is a ubiquitous device and will probably not be going away anytime soon. We are an on-the-go nation and, as such, we need to have every option available to us to interact with one another – be it voice, video, text, or e-mail. In the world of social media, the cell phone still plays a key role in being the main device used to interact with one another. The interaction may not always be through voice, but voice is still important. As long as companies still depend on IVRs and agents in the call center to handle incoming calls, then voice will still play an important role in the social media evolution.

The millennial generation is famous for not using phones, but texting instead. How does this play into your thesis?

Baker: Interacting with one another in the social world via text is common place, but once you get into the business world the phone (voice) still plays a major role in how you communicate to your bank, insurance company, favorite retail company, etc. Companies are still spending significant amounts of money on their call center technology through upgrades, enhancements and replacements in order to give their customers options when communicating with them. Voice is still one of those options that call centers rely heavily on.

How will customer service evolve in a world of clouds and mobile devices?

Baker: The world has become an anytime, anywhere, anyway place. Gone are the days of brick and mortar and 9-5 business. In order for companies today to stay one step ahead of their competition, they need to make sure that they have all angles covered when it comes to customer service. The days of all agents handling only voice calls has passed us by. Now agents need to be separated into certain skill sets where they can handle multiple requests from multiple modes of communication. Those companies that do this the best will have the greatest chance of success in the age of social media.

What is the biggest CRM challenge of the decade?

Baker: Being able to give the customer access to your business anytime, anywhere through any media. Also, you will need to make sure that you have the right people in place in order to keep up with what people are saying about your company through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. Companies need to make sure that they have the capabilities to read and respond to any questions or comments about their products or any negative messages being said about their companies on these media and have the skilled people in place to respond to these messages. The last thing you want to have happen is what happened to United Airlines when they broke a guy's guitar and didn't take the right steps to make him happy. The customer wrote a song about it on YouTube that went viral and caused a huge customer service problem for United Airlines.

How should companies prepare to provide exceptional service in the future?

Baker: Companies need to stay current with what is happening with social media. They can't just rely on the fact that angry customers will just write a letter or call them up to complain. Companies need to make sure that while they are giving their customers anytime, anywhere, anyway access to their business, they also need to make sure that they are properly staffed and trained on the customer service end in order to be able to handle all the requests that are coming in from different modes of communication. If companies can be successful at that, then they will spend less time monitoring Twitter or YouTube for negative publicity and more time hearing and reading the great things that their clients are saying about them. As the old saying goes 'Diversify or Die'. **CIS**

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Today's competitive landscape necessitates that businesses do whatever is within their power to improve performance, while complying with state and federal mandates and regulations. That's why many businesses have already deployed company-wide call recording technology. Call recording helps ensure regulatory compliance, enhance training and development capabilities, increase customer satisfaction, limit legal liability, and provides a record of audio transactions for clarity and continuity of operations.

The Call Recording Community is your resource for call recording solutions for businesses of all sizes, including SIP Print's SIP-based call recording appliance, a system-level call recording solution for today's VoIP phone systems.

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by Pamela Hamor

How Brand Ambassadors Can Strengthen Your Message and Build Customer Loyalty

In this day and age, every company should recognize that having a strong brand is essential to success. But recognition alone doesn't necessarily translate into effective practice. Brand isn't just a logo or a letterhead or your corporate identity. It's not even the product you make. Your brand is how an individual feels about your company – not the way you want them to feel, but how they actually feel.

While you can't completely control individual feelings, you can certainly influence them by properly communicating the qualities that make your brand unique. Consumers need to know who you are, what you do, and why they want your service. They need to have a clear sense of your identity and what makes you stand out. This knowledge gives customers confidence, motivates buying and helps cement loyalty.

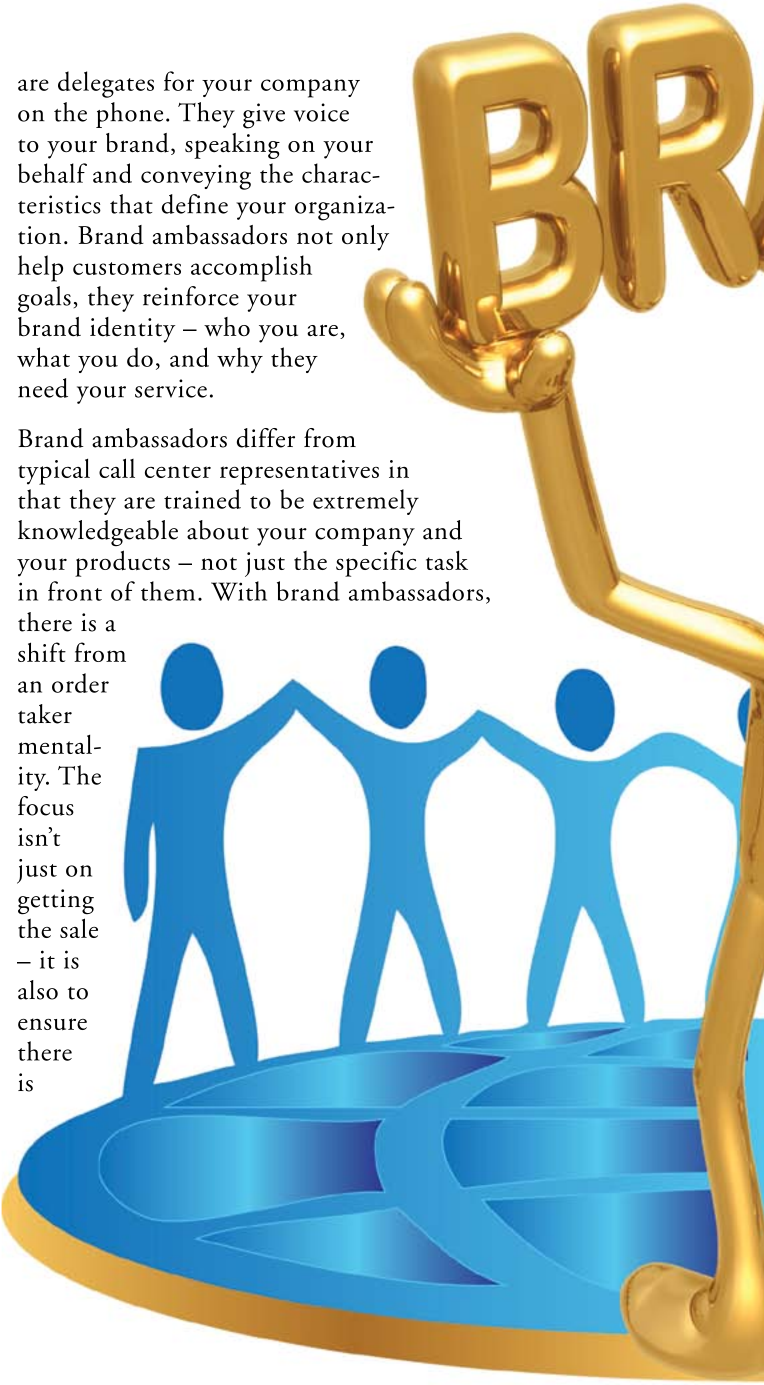
Unfortunately, often times, branding – the cornerstone of all marketing efforts – can get lost in call centers (both in-house and outsourced). The reason is simple: Call centers are primarily task-oriented. Representatives concentrate on completing specific tasks – taking orders, providing customer service – rather than fortifying your brand. As a result, you miss out on a golden opportunity (one-to-one contact!) to bolster brand perception.

But a new approach to taking calls – one that concentrates as much on brand reinforcement as it does on task resolution – has been gaining steam. By employing brand ambassadors on the phones rather than traditional agents, companies can enhance their brand value with each and every call. The end results not only improve your bottom line in the here and now but also benefit your organization as you move into the future.

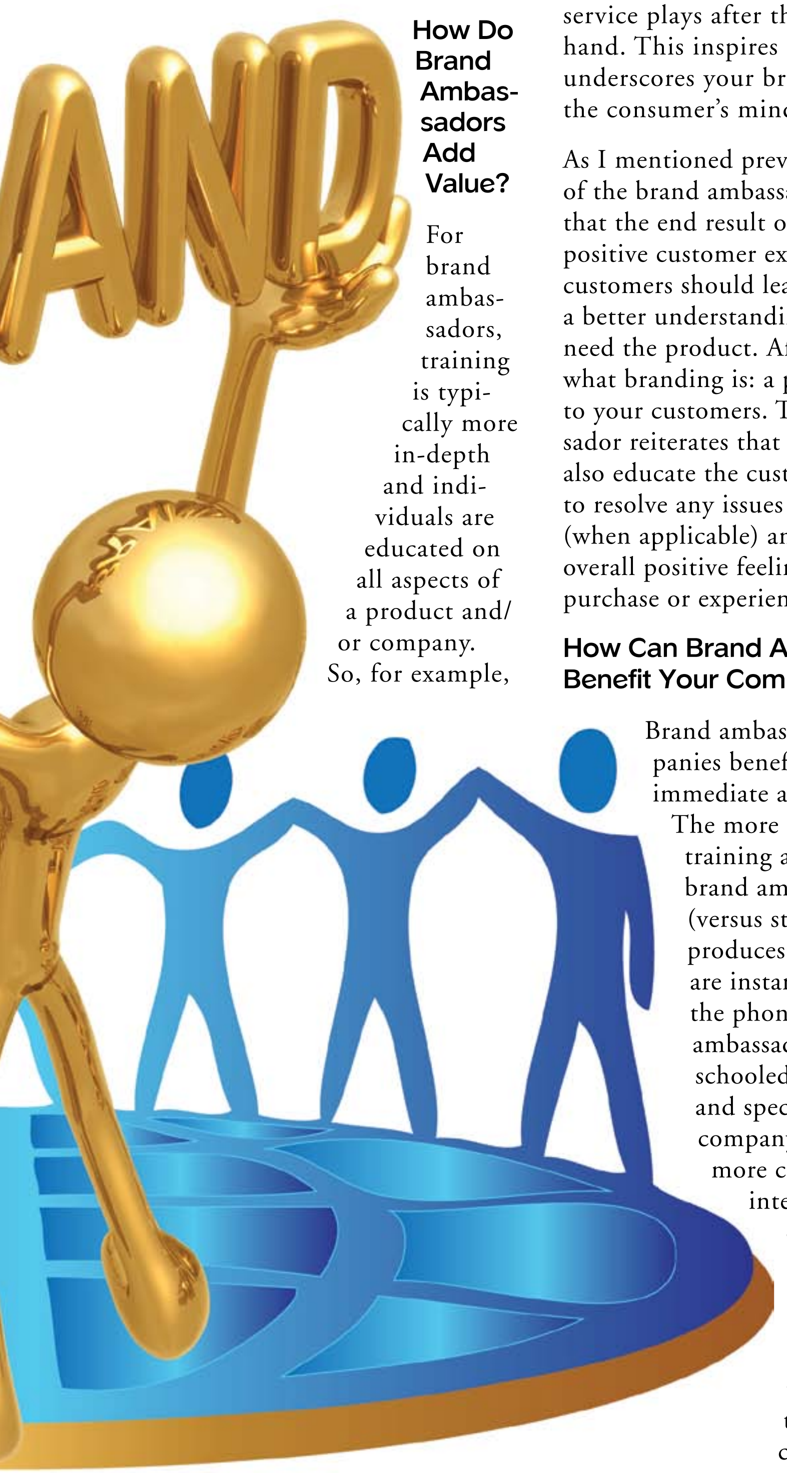
What are Brand Ambassadors?

Much like diplomatic ambassadors act as spokespeople for their nations in foreign lands, brand ambassadors are delegates for your company on the phone. They give voice to your brand, speaking on your behalf and conveying the characteristics that define your organization. Brand ambassadors not only help customers accomplish goals, they reinforce your brand identity – who you are, what you do, and why they need your service.

Brand ambassadors differ from typical call center representatives in that they are trained to be extremely knowledgeable about your company and your products – not just the specific task in front of them. With brand ambassadors, there is a shift from an order taker mentality. The focus isn't just on getting the sale – it is also to ensure there is



a positive customer experience and the customers leave the call with a product that meets their needs. They become an integral part of your overall sales and customer lifecycle.



How Do Brand Ambassadors Add Value?

For brand ambassadors, training is typically more in-depth and individuals are educated on all aspects of a product and/or company. So, for example, even if the individuals on the phones are only taking calls for one specific product, they still need to be knowledgeable about complimentary products and the role customer service plays after the product is in hand. This inspires confidence and underscores your brand message in the consumer's mind.

As I mentioned previously, the focus of the brand ambassador is to ensure that the end result of every call is a positive customer experience. The customers should leave the call with a better understanding of why they need the product. After all, that's what branding is: a promise of value to your customers. The brand ambassador reiterates that promise. They also educate the customers on how to resolve any issues in the future (when applicable) and give them an overall positive feeling regarding their purchase or experience.

How Can Brand Ambassadors Benefit Your Company?

Brand ambassadors offer companies benefits that are both immediate and enduring. The more comprehensive training and education brand ambassadors receive (versus standard agents) produces benefits that are instantly evident on the phones. Since brand ambassadors are truly schooled in the tenets and specifics of your company, they are much more confident in their interactions with customers. And the confidence of the brand ambassador is directly transferred to the customer through the call – producing a positive and rewarding experience that enhances brand value.

Pamela Hamor

While brand ambassadors require more training time up front, they generate results that ultimately give you a higher return on investment. Their expansive knowledge base enables them to answer questions more quickly and satisfactorily, streamlining calls; and, because they work to make sure customers are fully educated on the product or service of interest, they also cut down on returns and cancellations. Perhaps most importantly, by providing positive experiences and inspiring confidence, brand ambassadors build customer loyalty, cultivate repeat business and lay the foundation for future success. **CIS**

Pamela Hamor is director of client services at InfoCision Management Corp. Reach her at pamela.hamor@infocision.com. In business since 1982, InfoCision is the second-largest privately held teleservices company and a leading provider of customer care services, commercial sales and marketing for a variety of Fortune 100 companies and small businesses. Along with call center solutions, InfoCision offers business intelligence, digital printing, direct mail solutions and fulfillment services. For more information, visit www.infocision.com.

CUSTOMER INTER@CTION NEWS

TeleTech Holdings Inc. (www.teletech.com) recently revealed plans to expand its capacity in the U.S. by opening a new customer experience delivery center in Greeley, Colo., which is expected to bring more than 500 new jobs to the area. The 50,000 square foot facility will be home to a TeleTech customer experience center of excellence for a financial services client. It will feature state of the art technology and business process management capabilities to deliver a superior multi-channel customer experience. The site began training classes in January and will be fully operational starting this month.

Interactive Intelligence Group Inc. (www.inin.com) has signed an agreement to purchase select Interactive Intelligence-related contact center assets of its South African-based reseller, ATIO Corp. Pty Ltd. Under the terms of the agreement, effective Jan. 1, 2012, these assets are now owned by Interactive Intelligence Group Inc. The new company will operate as Interactive Intelligence South Africa Pty Ltd. As part of the all-cash transaction, Interactive Intelligence South Africa Pty Ltd. will employ approximately 40 ATIO team members, and will begin direct support of nearly 40 joint ATIO and Interactive Intelligence customers located throughout South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. ATIO was founded in 1986 and is a privately held provider of information and communications technology services. It had been an Interactive Intelligence reseller since 2002.

Voice Print International (www.2vpi-corp.com) has been tapped by Interstate Batteries to provide the VPI EMPOWER performance optimization suite. This solution will be used to maximize the quality and performance of the customer service center at Interstate Batteries, a billion dollar-plus, privately-held corporation that is the No. 1 replacement brand battery in North America. "Interstate Batteries chose to implement VPI's call recording, quality evaluation, E-learning and analytics to ensure our PCI DSS compliance and to enable in-depth tracking and improvement of our sales and ordering processes and outcomes," says Patsy Reid, Interstate Batteries' project manager. "Our partnership with VPI opens the doors to new levels of customer care and competitive differentiation for Interstate Batteries." VPI EMPOWER will automate the classification of all calls handled by the company's contact center according to type and outcome, mute and mask out sensitive portions of customer interactions according to PCI DSS standards, and will then prioritize high-value interactions related to sales for quality evaluation and targeted, personalized E-learning to rapidly close skill and knowledge gaps where needed.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution recently reported that **AT&T (www.att.com)** has said it needs to trim about 250 jobs from its wireline call center operations. Reportedly the company is taking a voluntary departure tactic first. The layoffs are likely to be nationwide, although they may impact Georgia most heavily, as AT&T had 21,700 employees in that state as of the third quarter last year. Company spokeswoman Emily Edmonds attributed AT&T's need to trim personnel to "changes in customer behavior, including increasing use of technology to choose convenient self-service options rather than calling our centers, and by the continued decline in our wireline business." As a side note, AT&T was one of the company's named in the FCC's jobs4america initiative announced last year.

Computer Generated Solutions (www.cgsinc.com) has acquired acquired Prego S.A., a specialized value add contact center headquartered in Santiago, Chile, from Sigma S.A., a subsidiary of Inversiones Siemel S.A. According to the officials from CGS, the acquisition will help the company to add existing business in Latin America and Europe. The company will now be able to provide tailored solutions and highly personalized services to growing Spanish-speaking markets in the United States. "Today, there are over 400 million Spanish speakers globally; 29 million U.S. residents speak Spanish at home. This represents an enormous market that our customers have asked us to serve," says Philip Friedman, president and CEO of CGS. "Our investment in Chile will allow our clients to gain a competitive edge in these markets and receive consistent high quality support around the globe."

RMI Corp. (www.rmiusa.com) has launched Contact Relationship Management (CRM), allowing ADVANTAGE Mobile users to avail various features such as rental or sales quotes, customer and prospect information including history, e-mail current and historical customer documents (including invoices and receipts), and much more. With the introduction of CRM, RMI expects to build on its strong growth in the mobile user market. Contact Relationship Management for ADVANTAGE Mobile is immediately available to ADVANTAGE customers. "Since September 2011 we have seen mobile users more than double, leading to the development of CRM functionality for mobile users. The ability to add and modify contact information for the people you interact with, when you are interacting with them, is paramount. The time, effort, and paper wasted to collect contact information received in the field, and then input after you return to your desk is unnecessary," says David G. Richards, vice president of client services.

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by Paula Bernier

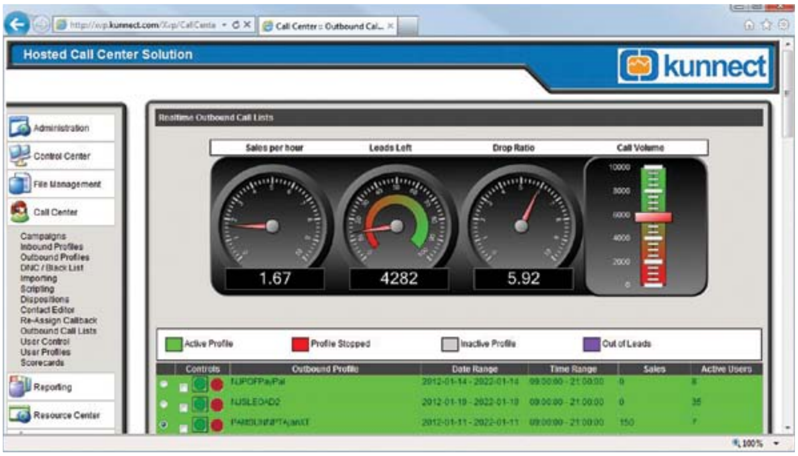
Kunnect FREE Delivers Gratis Call Center Functionality

Google and Skype have found great success based on business models involving providing free tools to the populace. Now Kunnect is following those examples by introducing a free call center solution.

Fred Côté, president of Kunnect, says Kunnect FREE will change the landscape for hosted call center solutions. “It’s time for a game changer, and Kunnect wants to be a game changer,” he tells *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine.

Although Kunnect FREE, which launched commercially in February, will satiate 80 percent of call centers in the marketplace, it is positioned as a stepping stone and promotional tool for those customers that want to move up to Kunnect’s for-pay hosted call center solution, says Côté.

The company also hopes Kunnect FREE will act as a hook for Kunnect’s VoIP services. (Six-year-old Kunnect started life as a carrier offering tier-2 VoIP carrier solutions.) **CIS**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Call Volume
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🟥 Profile Stopped
☐ Inactive Profile
🟪 Out of Leads
100%

Controls	Outbound Profile	Date Range	Time Range	Sales	Active Users
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	NJSLEOAD2	2012-01-19 - 2022-01-19	09:00:00 - 21:00:00	0	35
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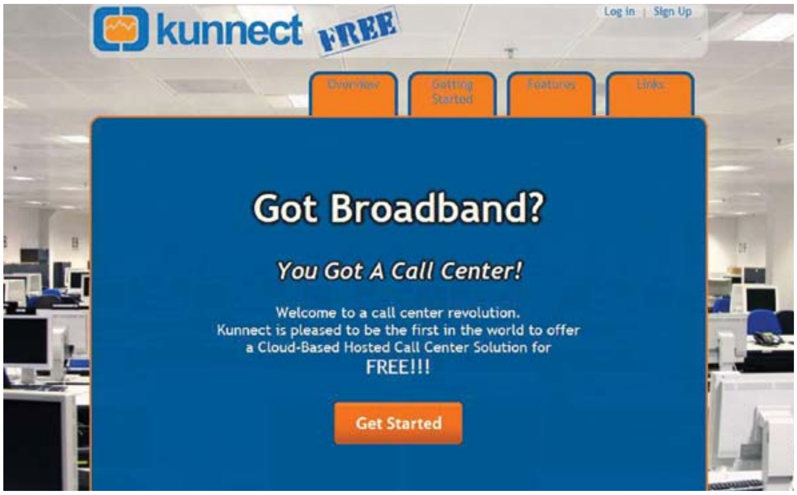
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by Scott Ray

Self-Realization: A Key Ingredient to Effective Call Center Management

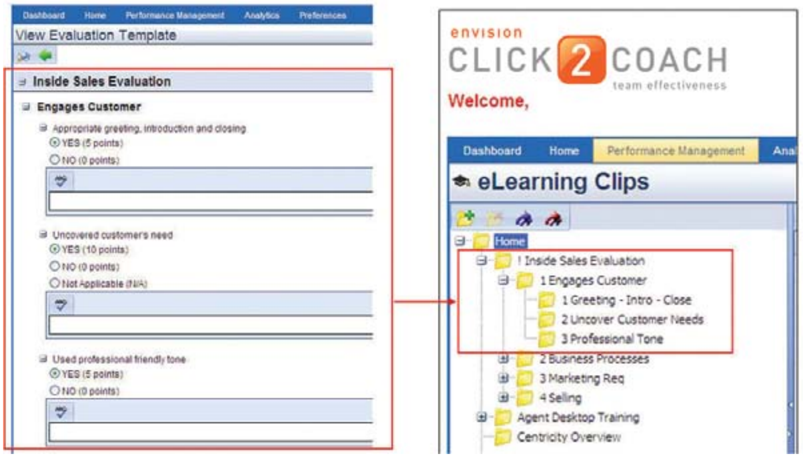
> "We wait all these years to find someone who understands us, I thought, someone who accepts us as we are, someone with a wizard's power to melt stone to sunlight, who can bring us happiness in spite of trials, who can face our dragons in the night, who can transform us into the soul we choose to be. Just yesterday I found that magical someone is the face we see in the mirror: It's us and our homemade masks."
>
> **– Richard Bach, American novelist**

In my 15 years in the call center industry I have encountered many agents who have expressed similar feelings to those expressed above by Mr. Bach. Perhaps not as broadly or intellectually stated of course, but they do look to their supervisory and training staff for help, guidance and assurance as they seek to improve their individual job performance. When dealing with those tangible issues related to a given process or product, they need help from those possessing the knowledge and know-how to meet the requirements of the tasks assigned. Process improvement and product awareness are usually easy to identify and correct when things go wrong, but how do you manage behavioral issues? Interestingly, the answer often lies with the agents themselves and can be realized and addressed easier than we might think.

For standard information-based development we create training curriculum, analyze results, evaluate accuracy and performance and, occasionally, we may even coach. When dealing with behavioral issues, however, we often miss the one area that makes affecting change more easily attainable. Helping agents become self aware is often the key. Creating tools and infrastructure that help agents gain self realization skills should be incorporated not only into your daily quality management routine but should be interwoven with your company's messaging and values as well.

What exactly is self realization? As defined by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it refers to the desire for self-fulfillment and the tendency for a person to become aware of their potential. Self realization is the manifestation of the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything one is capable of becoming. Yet, I have found that it is rarely used consistently in today's call center workplace. We tend to lump behavioral patterns into our standard training practices instead of recognizing the value of addressing these issues individually with tools that do the work for us.

Let me explain. A few years ago, I was participating in a workgroup where we routinely recorded and evaluated our own call performance. Using Envision's Agent Pro I was able to experience my voice as my customer



View Evaluation Template

Inside Sales Evaluation

Engages Customer

Appropriate greeting, introduction and closing
● YES (5 points)
○ NO (0 points)

Uncovered customer's need
● YES (10 points)
○ NO (0 points)
○ Not Applicable (N/A)

Used professional friendly tone
● YES (5 points)
○ NO (0 points)

Welcome,

eLearning Clips

- Home
  - ! Inside Sales Evaluation
    - 1 Engages Customer
      - 1 Greeting - Intro - Close
      - 2 Uncover Customer Needs
      - 3 Professional Tone
    - 2 Business Processes
    - 3 Marketing Req
    - 4 Selling
  - Agent Desktop Training
  - Centricity Overview

did, and it was an eye-opening experience. I couldn't believe some of the bad communication habits I had formed over the years but if I hadn't experienced it privately, with time for reflection, it's likely I would have resisted another person's negative critique. I mean, I have always had a wonderful "radio voice" and how could anyone accuse me of having poor communication skills? My "homemade mask" was what I believed myself to be, not what I actually acted out. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't terrible, but it wasn't nearly as good as I had led myself to believe, and there was definitely room for improvement. The key to my motivation was that these improvements were important to me personally, and I made it my business to ensure I worked out a plan to address the negative nuances and behaviors that detracted from my message. No one had to coax or convince me because the evidence was indisputable, and I expected better from myself.

I don't think my personal experience was unique because most of the people I've come to know in this business have reasonably high expectations of themselves and expect to perform at a high level. If we find that we are not meeting our own expectations, we will quickly address the problem, no one needs to do that for us.

Do you allow your agents to experience themselves and then come to your evaluation team with an improvement plan? If not, you are missing a golden opportunity to form a unique bond between management and the folks taking care of your customers. You may already have the tools to put a self-awareness program in place but the greater question is: Will you make it a priority?

Here are some actionable tips to make self-realization a routine part of your agent coaching practices:

Step 1: Evaluate Your Current Culture

On the road to helping your agents achieve self-realization, it is important to evaluate your current culture. Are you in an environment that is willing to accept change, do you have to force change, or are your agents actively seeking change?

Every environment is different, but in most instances this self-realization coaching format can be applied to your management and supervisory team. Take the time to do an internal evaluation of your call center and discover your environment.

Step 2: Give Your Agents a Chance

Self-realization is achieved by your agents when they are given the opportunity to hold themselves accountable in a non-hostile environment. Provide an environment where agents have the opportunity to self-assess and ask for open feedback. In the self-realization process, it is important for the agent to have the opportunity to self assess.

Step 3: Define and Develop a Plan for Success

First, you need to determine you and your agent's ultimate goal. My biggest piece of advice during this step is to let your agent be a part of the process. Take his or her feedback and suggestions and incorporate them in to the plan. Remember to keep your agents goals aligned with the overall company objectives.

Step 4: Recognize Your Agents for Positive Growth

Positive energy feeds off a positive working environment. Publicize your agent's achievements on a regular basis and celebrate the individual, team and corporate success.

Make self-realization and self-evaluation part of your contact agents' New Year's resolutions. I promise you, it will pay off. After all, it is not for nothing that we call ourselves our own toughest critics. **CIS**

Scott Ray is customer advocate manager at Envision (www.envisioninc.com).

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by Phil Gray

Just Getting the Job Done is Not Enough

Delivering exceptional customer service requires more than just getting the job done. You must also make the service experience itself easy and effective for the customer. Recent research suggests that minimizing a customer's effort during the service experience has the greatest impact on customer loyalty. A 2010 Harvard Business Journal report entitled "Stop Trying to Delight Your Customers" outlines the Customer Contact Council's use of a customer effort score as a means to gauge how easy it is for customers to complete their desired request. Their research suggests that CES has the highest correlation to customer loyalty.

In the world of customer care we often focus on the outcome itself without much regard for the customer's effort to achieve this outcome. For example, containment is a metric that is commonly used in voice self-service systems. Containment measures the percentage of customers who hang up on an interactive voice response without transferring to an agent. Another outcome-based metric is first call resolution, which has become popular over the last decade. However, just because you helped a customer in one contact does not mean that the experience was easy and effective for them. Consider the experience described on page 26. As you can see, the customer does complete the desired goal in one contact, but

**CUSTOMERS WHO EXERT
HIGH EFFORT ARE**

61%

***LESS LIKELY
TO REPURCHASE***

&

96%

MORE LIKELY TO BE DISLOYAL

&

ANY
1-POINT **INCREASE**

IN CES CAN RESULT IN A

14% **DECREASE**

IN INTENT TO REPURCHASE

- CUSTOMER CONTACT COUNCIL

From this...
While you were out!
Time: 9:45 am
Message: Customer needs product assistance ASAP
Caller: Customer #3128
Can be reached at: 654-555-3295
Receieved by: Steven
While you were out!
Time: 3:30 p.m.
Message: Client re-scheduled lunch meeting to next Tuesday the 7th.
Caller: Client # 553
Can be reached at: 433-555-9934
Receieved by: Angela
While you were out!
Time: 10:15 am
Message: No MSG
Caller: Client 762
Can be reached at: 655-555-1236
Receieved by: John
While you were out!
Time: 1:30 pm
Message: Client to close account.
Caller: Client 845
Can be reached at: 265-555-5478
Receieved by: Tom
While you were out!
Time: 12:15 pm
Message: Product exchange details from Sales needed.
Caller: Customer #437
Can be reached at: 966-555-7762
Receieved by: Christine
A
Need approval from Cust
B
Explain process
Experience Evaluation.
How Can we SIMPLIFY?
...to this.
inContact

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WE GET THE CLOUD

spends 20 difficult minutes accomplishing what should be a simple task.

Most contact centers would consider this resolved on the first contact, but was it really a quality service experience? As consumers, this type of example may be all too familiar. As customer care professionals, you know that these types of service issues happen every day, but fixing them is a significant challenge.

Comprehensive, end-to-end analytics are crucial in measuring the customer's level of effort, but these metrics are difficult to implement. Surveys such as CES can also provide insight into your customer's perceived effort. However, beyond analytics and surveys, there are steps you can take today to make things easier and more effective for your customers. A good place to start is within the IVR. The IVR is the front door to most voice contacts and can set the tone for the rest of the experience. Sometimes the IVR can even be the fastest, easiest way for customers to accomplish their goal. However, most IVR systems today significantly add to the customer burden. A recent study by NYU Associate Professor Liel Leibovitz indicates that IVR systems score lowest on an ease-of-use scale when compared to other service options and score considerably lower than an agent. The reason for this is that most IVR systems just don't work that well.

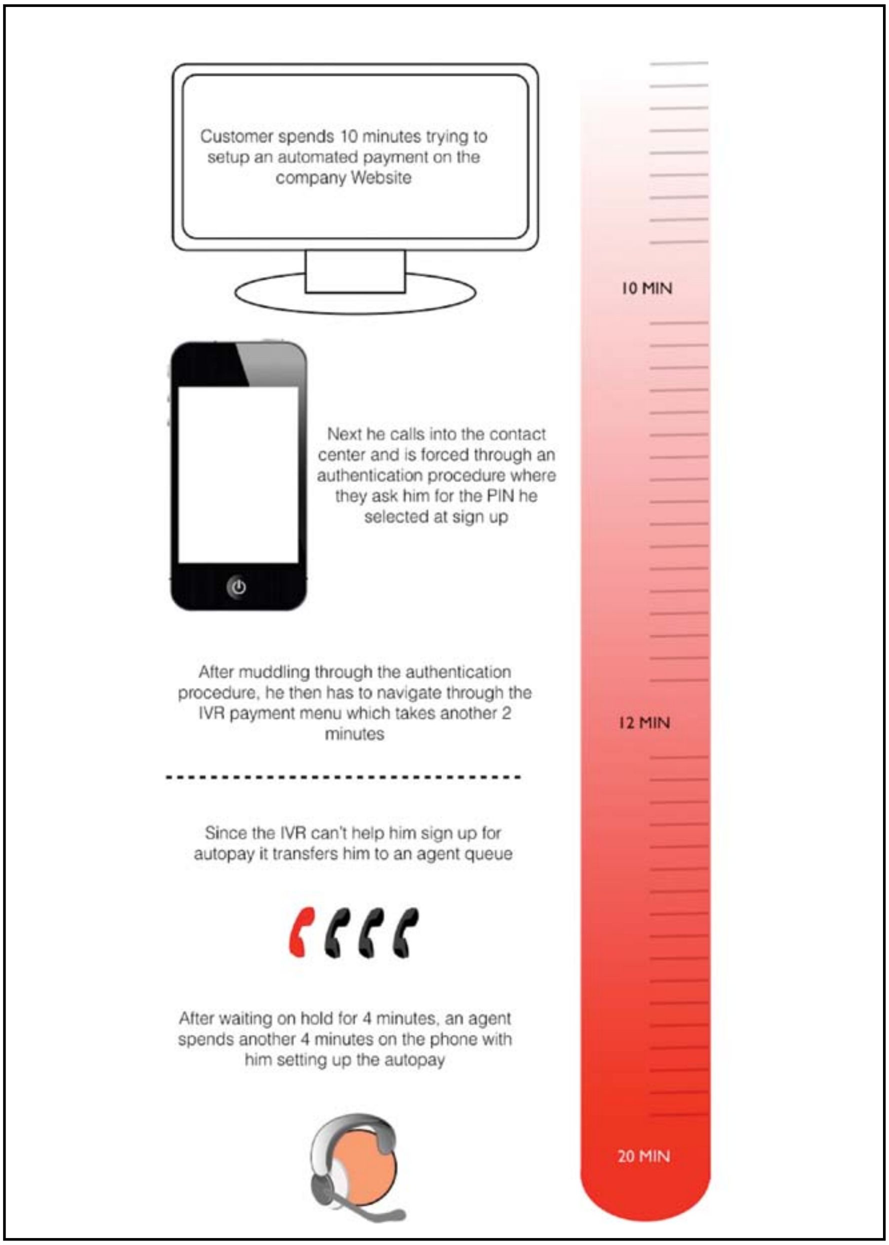
IVR usability problems primarily stem from technology limitations and design issues. Although it continues to improve, speech recognition is still a major limiting factor for IVR systems. As much as the technology has advanced in recent years, speech recognition still cannot understand anywhere near as well as your average call center agent. Therefore, systems that utilize speech recognition just can't measure up to talking directly with an agent. However, there are some encouraging things happening in the industry that may change this. Advancements in natural language understanding technology as well as agent-assisted technology can improve the customer experience today – in some cases in dramatic fashion.

Natural language understanding has been around for years, but it finally is starting to work well enough to provide real commercial value. Just like the name implies, NLU enables customers to speak more naturally as opposed to forcing them to speak single words or short phrases. However NLU systems have an inherent challenge. Recognizing wider open-ended responses presents both an accuracy and development problem. That's where agent-assisted technologies can help. These systems selectively use live agents to boost and supplement speech recognition performance. With the added accuracy and understanding capabilities, these systems have superior performance compared to traditional speech recognition systems.

The net effect for customers is that agent-assisted systems can be as easy to use as talking directly with a customer service representative. The benefit for businesses is that they can automate more interactions while minimizing the customer effort – driving both cost savings and increased loyalty.

In summary, companies should focus more attention on reducing the customer's effort during the service experience. This will increase both loyalty and repeat purchases. Improving the IVR is a good place to start and can have an immediate impact on CES while providing cost savings through increased automation. **CIS**

Phil Gray is responsible for leading marketing and business development at Interactions (www.interactions.net).



Customer spends 10 minutes trying to setup an automated payment on the company Website

Next he calls into the contact center and is forced through an authentication procedure where they ask him for the PIN he selected at sign up

After muddling through the authentication procedure, he then has to navigate through the IVR payment menu which takes another 2 minutes

Since the IVR can't help him sign up for autopay it transfers him to an agent queue

After waiting on hold for 4 minutes, an agent spends another 4 minutes on the phone with him setting up the autopay

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by Elaine Cascio

Time to Brush off Your Disaster Recovery Plan?

As I write this, the top news story is about a cruise ship that ran aground in the Mediterranean. Reports are that the captain and officers did little to help passengers get off the ship safely. Hearing about this type of tragedy gets me thinking about how well any of us are prepared to deal with disruptions of smaller magnitudes.

Whether it's an Amazon cloud outage that brought down numerous websites or instability created by the Missoni launch at Target, are companies effectively prepared to recover and continue with business as (nearly) usual?

Based on just the few very public examples above, I'd argue that many of us are woefully unprepared. But there's never a better time to take out, dust off and test your business continuity/disaster recovery plan – or put a new one together.

Disaster recovery and business continuity are two major components for ensuring that your contact center will continue to operate. Disaster recovery provides for the restoration of critical facilities and IT services such as hardware, software and telecommunications following a significant event. Business continuity enables you to protect your employees and continue the most critical business functions during periods in which facilities, people, or business functions are interrupted. What's important in any case is the safety of your employees and continuing to provide service seamlessly to your customers.

A DR/BC plan involves lots of moving parts, and there are often set processes in each organization. Here are some key steps to consider:

Identify possible scenarios.

These may run from cataclysmic events like an earthquake or hurricane to less disastrous network hiccups.

They can be categorized in a number of ways, including:

- technical failures such as loss of network, switch, LAN, voice self service, website, software or mainframe;
- physical site disasters including power failures, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes or fires;
- staffing issues resulting from snow storms, illness or building evacuations; and
- volume increases that result from product issues, other site shutdowns or disasters.

For each scenario, assess the potential business impacts and risks in order to prioritize your plan.

For example, loss of chat functionality is less critical and risky than having to evacuate a building for hours because of a bomb threat.

- Identify points of failure and loss scenarios.
- Identify criticality, impact, and potential duration of each scenario. Define tolerance time frames.
- Focus on mitigating short-term issues using technology and well-defined action plans.
- Focus on recovery (reroute, mobilize) for long-term disasters.

Next, develop your risk reduction and recovery measures.

These may include:

- rerouting contacts;
- system redundancy and backups;
- multiple geographically diverse sites;
- home agents and remote offices; and
- hosted service providers for systems or even agents.

Define what to do and when – a true action plan – for the various scenarios.

This includes technology, people and processes. For example, you may need to have agents log into different systems or use different tools to perform their jobs. Be sure to define processes and test them with agents.

Document and test plans and procedures.

Be sure to communicate plans to everyone involved – inside and outside of your company. Identify who owns each task. Then test them, and revise as needed.

As you add or replace technologies, expand offices or change support vendors, update plans and test.

Review your DR/BC plans at least annually.

For many companies with redundancy and distributed systems in place, risks may seem low. However, we've often seen that understanding all potential scenarios helps not only to refine DR/BC plans, but helps in building better technology roadmaps and contact center growth plans. **CIS**

Elaine Cascio is a vice president at Vanguard Communications Corp. (www.vanguard.net), a consulting firm specializing in customer experience, self service, contact center processes, operations and technology.

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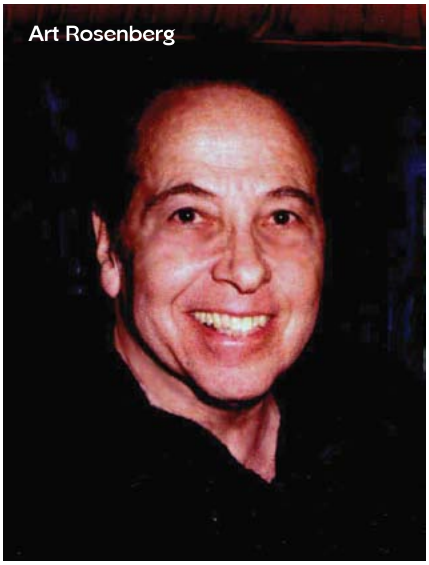
by Art Rosenberg

Multimodal Mobile Apps, Cloud Services, and UC VARs Make Telephone Contact Centers Grow Up

Unified communications is complex because it covers all forms of contact with a person, whether the person is initiating the contact or is the recipient/respondent to a contact. Inasmuch as organizational call/contact centers deal with communication technologies from both perspectives, as well as with automated self-service applications, they can benefit the most from UC-enabled flexibilities. It is therefore time for legacy call center technology silos to grow up and become multimodal through UC-enabled applications.


Art Rosenberg

The question is: How?

UC and smartphones enable different strokes for different folks for different needs.

Because consumers (customers, employees, business partners) are rapidly adopting multimodal, mobile devices (smartphones, tablets) for both business and personal contacts and online applications, the role of the traditional enterprise call center should no longer be focused just on inbound/outbound telephone calls with customers or internal employee help desks to be handled by live agents or voice-only IVR self-service applications. It is time that business contact technologies become interoperable and multimodal for all forms of communication activities, including the various types of messaging, between both people and automated applications (communications-enabled business processes).

Even when real-time live assistance is needed, UC will facilitate such on-demand access more efficiently and intelligently from mobile online applications through contextual application click-to-contact (chat, call, conference) options. In addition, UC and CEBP will be able to exploit mobility's increased accessibility to people for proactive (outbound) time-sensitive notifications that will make mission-critical business processes more efficient for all end users involved, whether internal or external to an organization (business partners, customers). So, the role of the traditional telephone-based contact center operation will be efficiently expanded by being UC-enabled to what I have labeled as the UC contact center.

What About the Cloud?

Cloud-based virtualization of software applications and servers is also facilitating implementation of UC because it enables both public and private clouds to coexist and interoperate across hybrid wired/wireless networks. This network flexibility is what individual end users really need to control and manage all their dual persona (personal, business) contacts with a single mobile endpoint device of their choice (BYOD). This interoperability will enable an individual end user to receive a notification alert in any form, anywhere, anytime and, most importantly, from any source, not just from one organization or business.

Needless to say, the complexities of UC, combined with the challenge of managing external cloud-based services, have raised concerns with traditional IT management in terms of implementation planning, cost implications, and application needs. Service providers now offer different system components as cloud services, including data center infrastructure, operating system platforms, software applications accessible through web browsers, and, lastly, communications as a service, which includes all elements of Internet-based contact connectivity and UC-enabled applications.

Interactive Intelligence recently announced the availability of a free trial of its simplified CaaS contact center applications including analytic performance tools, which can simplify and speed up an organization's migration to cloud-based technology. This strategy will be particularly useful for trialing new self-service applications, particularly with the help of knowledgeable consultants and UC VARs

The Emerging New Role for Old Telephony VARs

The rise of the cloud, along with mobile device BYOD policies, has also made the migration of premises-based hardware telephony to mobile UC difficult for traditional value-added resellers of telephony equipment. It is changing their old business models, i.e., revenue based on one-time equipment sales and maintenance support, as well as their relationships with communication vendors, other VARs, network services, and cloud service providers. They must now look for new directions and the new opportunities they can find with the combination of UC, mobility, and cloud-based services.

Because we see UC in organizations as being driven by the need to optimize business process performance through UC solutions, we expect that there will be new opportunities for VARs to participate in planning, prioritizing, trialing, training end users, and managing the performance of those business processes. This will be most applicable to VARs who specialize in particular vertical markets that can best exploit mobile UC and mobile apps, e.g., health care, financial services, education, field service, emergency response, etc.

This will also require greater skills akin to consulting services, which may lead to more partnerships between consultant groups and UC VARs.

Bottom Line for UC Planning

For these reasons, all business communications must become UC-enabled and interoperable under a common technology framework that will support both mobile and premises-based end users and their different business applications. This will put all legacy call centers on the top of the list for UC migration planning. Customer interactions will likewise be affected by changing CRM issues because of dynamic mobile contacts, both inbound and outbound, as well as the growing role of social networking.

Now is also the time for the enterprise to start trialing new UC-enabled, mobile self-service applications (mobile apps) for both customers and for internal users to insure that the user experience will be flexible, efficient, and effective. This will be particularly important for business organizations in defining new BYOD policies for their mobile operational staff. Such trials can be done more quickly and less expensively by exploiting standards-based, open CaaS offerings, before finalizing procurement and implementation decisions. **CIS**

Art Rosenberg is The Unified-View/UCStrategies Expert (www.ucstrategies.com).

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by Paula Bernier

Customer Interaction Solutions Announces MVP Quality Awards

This is the 19th year Customer Interaction Solutions proudly presents its MVP Quality Awards.

Each year, award winners 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.

This year is no different. Winners at all levels have completed an exhaustive 16-point essay (including a customer case study detailing the program's success) to accompany specific statistics on their call center volumes, staffing, and technology. This year's essays exemplify a continuing understanding that neither technology nor agent quality alone can succeed in such a competitive environment. Rather, the winners of this year's MVP Quality Awards have combined the two, along with management commitment and organizational standards to provide the highest levels of service to their varied customers.

We congratulate the 2012 MVP Quality Award winners and are pleased to share some of the compelling comments from their essays that exemplify their drive for excellence in outsourced teleservices.

WINNERS

GOLD

Agero (formerly Cross Country Automotive)

www.agero.com

What types of technologies do you use to enhance quality?
Any customer that calls upon Agero quickly finds out that we will never turn a caller away in their time of need. First and foremost, we verify their safety and dispatch emergency services if necessary. We also train our associates that customer service is our No. 1 priority and invest in our front line supervisors and associates to ensure that they have mastery of the latest techniques to provide customer delight. We have also certified our trainers in the Radclyffe call handling training. This training empowers associates to completely satisfy customer's needs. Our agents ask each caller if we have completely satisfied their request. If we have not, we will take the necessary action.

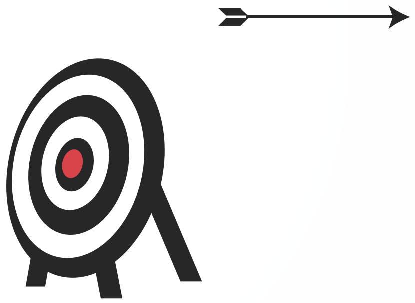
Agero manages four contact center sites; each is operated daily 24/7 and each is fully independent with its own telecom switch and can serve as a backup to any other site. Agero does not outsource call volume; customer calls do not leave the Agero environment. Agero maintains redundancy between all four contact centers so that calls can be dynamically routed between sites and utilizes Best Services Routing technology to route calls to the site that will deliver the best service level.

InfoCision Management Corp.

www.infocision.com

What is your policy and philosophy on quality?
We developed our Q3 quality assurance system to ensure quality remains consistent across the board. Our procedures on policy are so thorough that, when we add a new call center, within the first month we are able to match its quality and performance to that of existing call centers – all due to the detailed quality analyses of Q3, our proprietary quality assurance system, and targeted training methods. When we developed Q3, our goal was to identify the skills necessary to complete a quality phone call and create a form that measured them. Traditionally, many evaluation systems in the industry have one way of measuring procedures and another way of measuring skill sets. Our system blends these two categories together to form a comprehensive overview of easily quantifiable factors such as adherence to the script with qualitative factors such as internalization. The Q3 system brings these measurements together and allows evaluators to provide instantaneous feedback to the Communicator.

Selling the **right** product to the **wrong** customer?



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SILVER

Aegis Ltd.

www.aegisglobal.com

What is your policy and philosophy on quality?
At Aegis, our unique focus is at the business level – we focus on business performance, not agents.

The goal is to get an accurate picture of the business, not what is happening with transactions. We are interested in the key drivers that impact the business, our partners' customer lifetime value, and the end user experience. At the business level, these include some challenges such as: process limitation and deficiency, training and development of agents, communication challenges, and company policies and ethics causing dissatisfaction.

NCO Financial Systems Inc.

www.ncogroup.com

How has quality evolved in your contact center, and how it is sustained/measured?
We work with our clients during program implementation to identify the operational metrics to be included in our quality benchmarking; we tailor our tracking and reporting systems according to these metrics. The ability to gather and report data is an integral part of our quality framework. Performance data is essential to helping NCO identify opportunities for improvement, evaluating the effectiveness of process improvements, and monitoring the long-term success of those changes. We use a five-step process from COPC called CUIKA for quality reporting:

1. Collected – Data must be collected on all targets and performance.
2. Usable – There must be enough data gathered to provide insight into trends.
3. Integrity – All data must be relevant, accurate, and objective.
4. Known – Data must be disseminated to all appropriate personnel.
5. Actions – Actions must be taken if performance falls below target metrics.

The Connection

www.the-connection.com

What is special or unique about your staff that contributes to quality?
At The Connection, we have unique values and ideas regarding our staff that greatly contributes to our overall quality. We strongly believe in service values and employee-focused cultures that can often be found in rural communities. Three of our four call centers are located in rural communities throughout Nebraska and New York. We have found that we are able to invest in rural communities and attract top-notch skilled employees with strong work ethics. Another unique attribute is our bilingual capability, which allows us to provide a significant level of Spanish-language support to our clients. We have team supervisors and supervisors fluent in Spanish who evaluate CSRs in their native language.

Telvista

www.telvista.com

How do you measure customer satisfaction?
We have moved our focus from customer satisfaction to customer loyalty, which is a critical measure and indicator of a company's current and future success. NPS (Net Promoter Score) is measured by asking customers how likely they are to recommend a company to a friend or colleague based on our performance, and why they provided their particular rating. Each customer ranks their willingness to recommend (0 being not at all likely, 10 being extremely likely). Customers are segmented into one of three loyalty categories: Promoters (scores of 9 and 10) are highly loyal customers that will keep buying and refer others; passives (scores of 7 and 8) are satisfied customers but may consider competitive offerings; and detractors (scores from 0 to 6) are unhappy customers that are less likely to buy from you again and may spread negative word of mouth. With this information, we can determine how well we are performing on our clients' behalf and identify areas where we can improve the customer experience.

BRONZE

ACCENT Marketing Services

www.accentonline.com

What elements make it easy to do business with your firm?
As an engagement solutions provider, ACCENT continually educates clients on the importance of leveraging every customer interaction to solidify the relationship, provide excellent care, and ensure prompt issue resolution. This is accomplished by providing the right tools, strategies, and resources to positively impact customer satisfaction, engagement and retention. This includes utilizing a proprietary contact management system to initiate, track, and resolve customer inquiries across multiple channels, including phone, direct mail, e-mail, web-based chat, IVR, social media and fax.

We believe so strongly in our performance that we have developed a pay-for-performance model that further increases our vested interest in delivering against key performance indicators. This model is linked to engagement specialist performance, in which quality is a major factor in ensuring customer and client satisfaction. Additionally, this model is linked to customer buying and sales, which can be a direct reflection of engagement specialist performance.

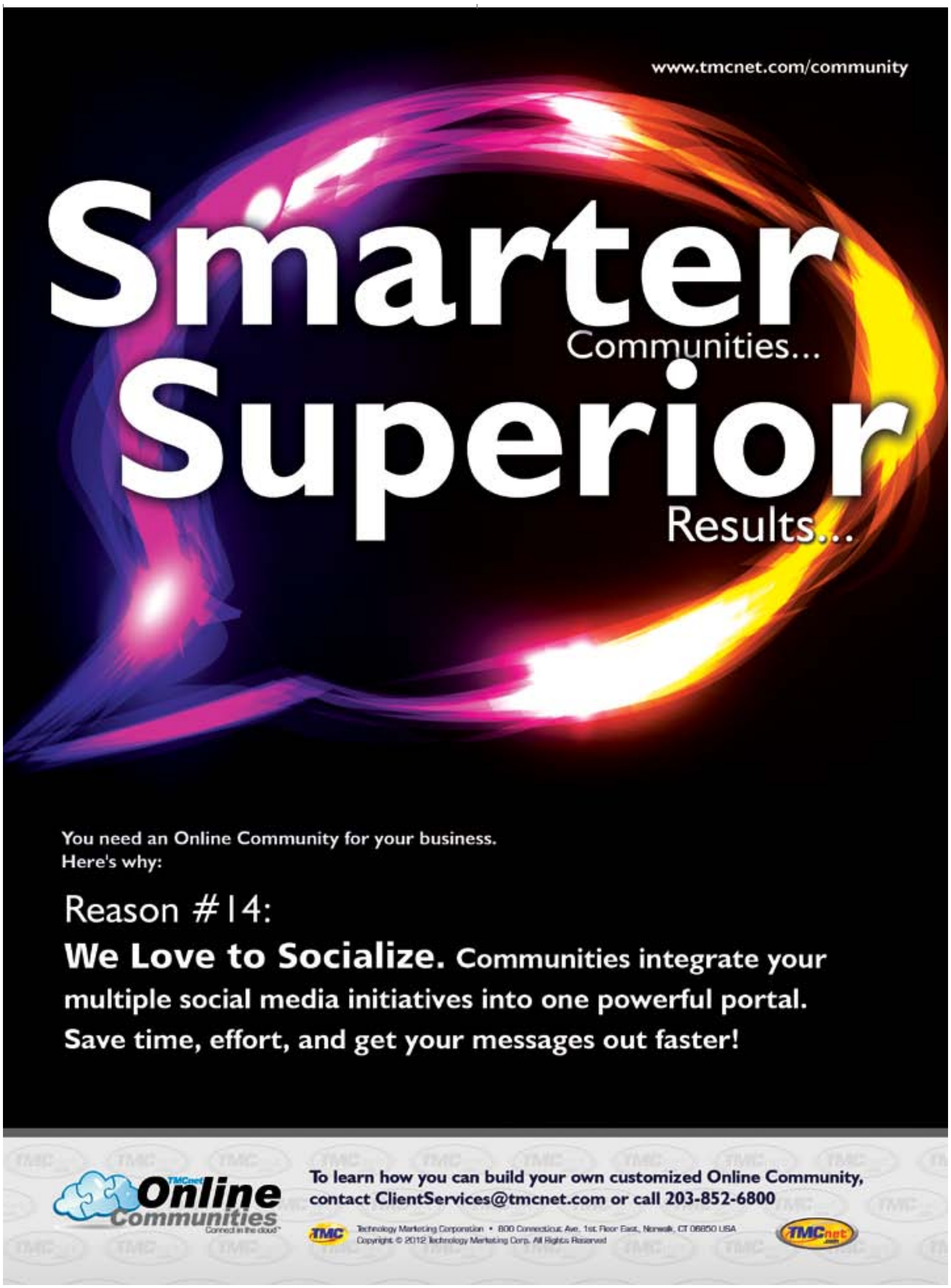
Alorica
www.alorica.com

What are your monitoring practices?
In the event a CSR is not consistently meeting the quality goal or is observed not adhering to Alorica or client policies and procedures during a customer transaction, an alert form is sent to the operations team. The alert form requires the quality assurance rep to document details of a customer transaction (phone, e-mail or fulfillment). Once feedback is given to an agent regarding an error, the error should be corrected immediately. The team manager is expected to provide QA with his or her response and take action as a result of the alert within 48 hours. Alerts also help keep track of repeat offenders and identify negative patterns or consistently low scores. This information is valuable in determining agent deficiencies and if they would benefit from additional training and or coaching. More than one alert could lead to disciplinary action. Conversely, "WOW" alerts allow us to recognize exceptional performance by focusing on positive agent conduct. These alerts are sent by QA and agents may be recognized with prizes, certificates or a simple pat on the back in front of their peers as a way of reinforcing service quality.

Ansafone Contact Centers
www.ansafone.com

How do you handle complaints from your clients' customers?
Handling complaints from our clients' customers is accomplished by never losing sight of our role as the voice of the customer, and by following client specific instructions along with practicing the basic common courtesy guidelines under which all Ansafone CSRs are trained, including:

- listening carefully to identify the caller's concern;
- displaying sincerity, empathy and understanding;
- maintaining a professional, confident and friendly demeanor, and by never taking angry comments personally or allowing a comment to effectively diminish our level of courtesy and professionalism;
- never promising beyond our capability to deliver and always reassuring the caller that his or her message or concern is very important to us and will be relayed expeditiously to the appropriate person or department; and
- expressing gratitude to the caller for bringing a specific issue or concern to our attention. **CIS**



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by Kyle Lyons,managing director at Ponvia Technology, and Gina Clarkin
product manager at Interactive Intelligence

The Evolving Role of Process Automation and the Customer Service Experience

Give contact centers credit. In their effort to improve customer service and increase the effectiveness of how service is provided, many centers have made significant investments in technology as well as people. One payoff has been contact center automation and the efficiency it produces for managing customer interactions. Yet, bottom line, the pressure remains to improve service processes overall and reduce costs at the same time.

To that end within the service chain, the process improvement focus is shifting from front line agents to back office support staff, subject matter experts, field service teams, etc. — components that indirectly serve the customer, but that directly impact cost and service outcomes. Can automation improve the way these indirect resources perform? Certainly it can. The key is to extend automation and its best practices from the contact center to customer service processes and touchpoints throughout the organization.

Process automation via the organization's communications platform

In the contact center, interactions of all different media types are initiated, routed, delivered and processed efficiently using processes automated via the communications platform. Information can be handled similarly. Think of routing a customer's account record alongside an incoming call so the agent gets a "full view" of that customer and can tailor service accordingly. Where service processes often break down is outside the contact center, in the hand-off of post interaction work activities to other areas. An emerging trend therefore is to leverage the organization's communications infrastructure to drive process automation across the enterprise, uniformly and consistently, as opposed to deploying various automation products at different stages of a service process and expecting them to work in sync.

Using a communications platform's ACD and push technology, for example, organizations can route and assign process work anywhere in the enterprise in an intelligent automated manner. In particular for post interaction work processes, an organization can leverage its communications platform to support complex logic operations such as parallel tasks, conditional branching, wait steps and similar functions. With a single system to automate and manage every touchpoint of an interaction — from the time a customer first connects with an agent through all the knowledge workers involved to provide service — the service process is more holistic, and far more likely to produce an improved outcome.

Make no mistake, however. Any sustainable process improvement for customer service involves more than just technology. Factors such as the culture of the organization, historical service performance and customer feedback, corporate objectives, the industry a business is in and associated regulatory considerations can influence which processes to address, and how those processes are redesigned or modified.

Interaction delivery processes to improve post interaction workflows

To handle incoming interactions with greater precision, an automated contact center process can typically integrate a rules-based workflow to match a customer's issue to an agent's skills and availability. Post interaction work, in most cases, is less structured. Beyond the agent, a customer's issue is often circulated to a pool of knowledge workers as a broadly defined request type, such as a billing question. With little insight as to the history of the request, its status, who should handle it and what's required to resolve the issue, managing the request after the initial interaction can get cluttered and leave a customer frustrated. One potential solution is an interaction delivery process.

Applied to post interaction work outside the contact center, interaction delivery best practices can be used to route requests accurately to the appropriate servicing entity in the enterprise, such as a knowledge worker in accounting. Post interaction work delivery can be based on operational business rules for servicing objectives (e.g., response time) and resource availability. Criteria for a specified customer and his or her request can also identify the knowledge worker type responsible for servicing the request. In almost all cases, delivery logic is executed via automation.

On a service level, an interaction delivery process for post interaction work can help ensure that accurate results are being provided to the customer, since those results are coming from a qualified resource assigned within the organization. On a cost level, by eliminating additional interactions from customers to request an update on their issue or rectify inaccurate information, the business reduces both the direct and indirect cost to re-service the request. Mostly, by automating service processes end to end and consistently meeting objectives such as response time and first call resolution, the customer experience is a more positive one. **CIS**

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Paula Bernier, *Executive Editor*

Customer Service: The New Marketing

> *"We live in a cynical world. A cynical world. And we work in a business of tough competitors."*

These words were uttered by Jerry Maguire, the title character played in the movie by Tom Cruise. Like the couch-jumping actor himself, this fictional sports agent became a cautionary tale of what can happen when you lose your bearings, even temporarily, in the business world. But, in the end, Jerry also demonstrates what can happen when you truly dedicate yourself to the customer. That is, you get a friend for life.

The mission statement that got Jerry Maguire fired included the statement: "With so many clients, we had forgotten what was important." And it brought to Jerry's mind the late, great sports agent Dicky Fox's credo: "The key to this business is personal relationships."

Back in 1996, when Jerry Maguire was released, these ideas were considered old fashioned. And I guess they still are. Nonetheless, the ideas of personal attention and customer service seem to be making a comeback.

I say this not only because I continue to hear the refrain that customer service is the new marketing, but also because I've experienced it on more than one occasion in recent months. After being reminded of the theme that customer service is the new marketing, which was a quote from one of the sources in CNBC's recent Customer (Dis)service special, I did a Google search on the term and received a lengthy list of relevant results.

Probably the most interesting one was a December 2011 Forbes article contributed by Matt Mickiewicz, the co-founder of 99designs, who started his piece with the words: "Treat your customers as if they were newspapers reporters; this is the new mantra for savvy companies of all sizes." As a former newspaper reporter, I certainly wouldn't suggest that any company treat a customer like a newspaper reporter, but we all get his point. The point is that, as human beings, we all need our love. And, as customers, especially when we're frustrated, a little TLC goes a long way.

As Shelle Rose-Cavet, a source in the above-mentioned CNBC report, noted: "When the customer is upset, everything changes."

Companies that want to keep customers in those situations clearly need to jump aboard the love train and do whatever they can to calm a shaken confidence.

But whether a company is in the midst of customer crisis management or just doing its regular day-to-day business, Mickiewicz suggests that organizations should think about their long-term reputations vs. short term profit, and that they ought to identify their top customers and make them feel special. The airline industry has been successful at implementing this second suggestion. And now companies of all stripes are looking at how they can be more responsive to existing customers and win the loyalty of both prospects and those with which they already have won business.

Building trust can start with marketing, according to Mickiewicz. "As consumers, we've become disenchanted with advertising and marketing of all sorts, having being duped, tricked or made to feel foolish on more than one occasion," he writes. "The last true medium that holds sway is referrals from friends, colleagues, or online reviews from the likes of Yelp, AngiesList or TripAdvisor. According to a survey by the American Marketing Association, 90 percent of consumers trust peer reviews and 70 percent trust online reviews. It's the last, true, medium that many consumers turn to when faced when inundated with choice, and confused by similar-sounding sales pitches."

Certainly, customer service these days is defined differently than it was in days of old. I marvel at the fact that my mother in law as a young woman worked in the baby section at Marshall Fields, where customers would sit in a chair and she would present them with whatever children's goods their hearts desired. Nonetheless, today the song remains the same: It's all about letting the customer know that you care.

Building an organization with that as a central goal is going to be very important if customer service is indeed the new marketing. That said, anyone in a customer-facing role could probably benefit by taking a page from the playbook of the late, great fictional sports agent Dicky Fox, who famously said: "I love the mornings! I clap my hands every morning and say, 'This is gonna be a great day!'" **CIS**

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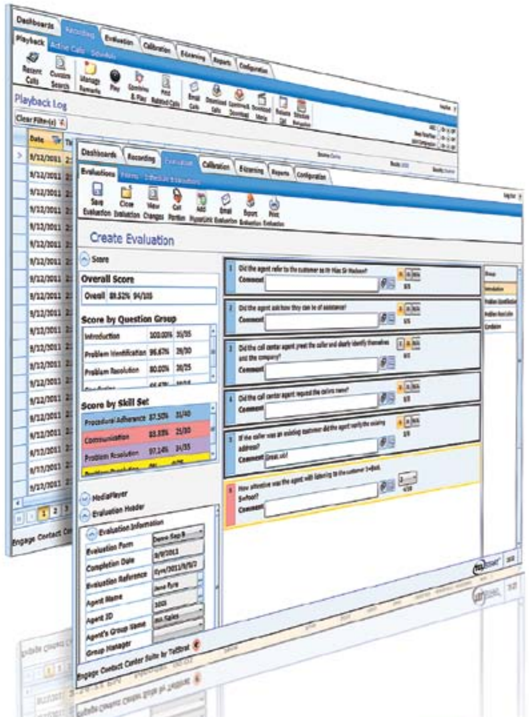

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