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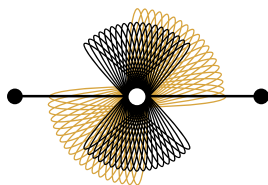
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Rich Tehrani, *CEO, TMC*



Vocalocity: One Cloud Provider's Path to Growth

Cloud computing providers are all the rage these days and cloud communications is no exception. Witness the growth of 8x8 as well as the M&A interest in the space evidenced by the recent acquisition of M5 Networks by ShoreTel, and the acquisition of Aptela by Vocalocity.

I recently had a chance to speak with Wain Kellum, the CEO of Vocalocity, to get a sense of how his company is differentiating itself from other hosted/cloud providers in the space.

First off, the combined company has more than 15,000 customers and more than 100,000 network endpoints. The main take away from the conversation to me is that voice is increasingly becoming a service integration and enhancement game. In other words, cloud-based dial tone is necessary but only a very small piece of what customers will come to expect from cloud communications companies.

In fact, Kellum told me the company adds new innovations each quarter for the same price. While we expect continuous upgrades from computer companies like Microsoft, Apple and Google's Android, this focus on increased innovation has become a bigger deal in telecom as the cloud has become more important.

Salesforce often will tell you that a reason to purchase service from the company is to avoid the disruption and compatibility issues inherent in typical premises-based upgrades. From an IT department's perspective, what could be better than coming in on a Monday morning and learning that your software-as-a-service solution has been upgraded automatically. Premises-based upgrades typically required IT teams to come in on weekends, and often these upgrades needed to be rolled back because they caused other compatibility issues. This, of course, explains why often, many organizations run old software – a few versions behind the current one – because they don't want to be on the bleeding edge of the product upgrade cycle.

So what sorts of innovations can a cloud-based communications provider deliver? One that Vocalocity employs is checking the IP address of phone calls every five seconds and in the case of an outage, transferring the call to a back-up number like a cell phone. In addition, the company has integration into standard CRM and accounting systems as well as integration in the insurance space through a recently announced joint venture with eAgent, an online insurance and document management company. Accounting integration with solutions such as NetSuite, Quickbooks and Sage

allows customers to see the payment history of companies when they are on the phone. This could be quite useful not only as an aid to the collections process but to ensure sales isn't spending excess time selling to customers who aren't paying their current bills.

The company also has big data analytics capabilities, allowing companies to determine which workers are less productive and which customers are consuming the most agent time.

Kellum also went into a story about an ice storm which hit Atlanta, where the company has its headquarters, and he said the company ran seamlessly – employees could take and receive calls from home, and he was able to manage everything from his iPhone. He added that none of his customers knew the city was shut down.

One of the interesting areas of growth he sees is enabling hybrid systems where the hosted solution sits in the background and connects multiple branches or offices. Using ATA adapters legacy phones become a "poor man's SIP phone," he explained, adding that the hosted solution can also be used as the redundant service.

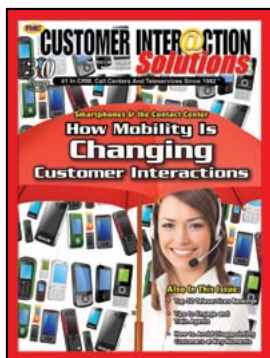
The company's backend systems consist of multiple cloud vendors' solutions and federation at the call level. Customer calls are lumped into small clusters and can be transitioned to another area of the country as a result of a catastrophic problem in one location.

The company plans to continue to acquire and thinks there is an opportunity to buy a number of hosted providers who aren't innovating and then rolling the customers over into its platform. It has no plans to go public at the moment and doesn't need to raise money, but may consider getting financing if it finds a very large acquisition target. Recently I opined about future acquisitions that will take place in the cloud market in response to the ShoreTel M5 merger and focused on the CPE companies like Cisco and Avaya. It should be clear to all of us that the cloud players too are looking to grow through M&A and companies like Vocalocity, 8x8 and others are obviously not standing still. **CIS**

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*



Being Something Special to Your Customers

You never get a second chance to make a first impression – so the saying goes. All the social media monitoring and response isn't going to make up for negative impressions and low C-SAT. Monitoring will let you know it's out there, and will allow you the opportunity to make amends, but it doesn't change what has happened, especially when customers have had a less-than-satisfactory encounter. That's why it is paramount for customer service staff to be at their best from the moment an interaction is transferred to them.

The problem is that those live interactions might not actually be the first customer service impressions between your organization and your customer. In fact, your agent may already be behind the proverbial eight ball at first contact.

Let's go back for a moment to grade school math and those wonderful word problems.

If a plane is scheduled to depart San Francisco at 11 p.m. heading to New York, it takes 6.5 hours for that plane to get from New York to San Francisco, and you check in at 9 a.m. in San Francisco, should American Airlines be telling its customers their flight is leaving on time when it hasn't yet left New York?

That was my experience recently. I had checked in in New York that morning – since I was traveling round trip on the same day, I wasn't given an option and was automatically checked in for both flights. When I arrived at the airport in San Francisco, I had just received e-mail confirmation that my seat upgrade had been granted and signage indicated an on-time departure. Evidently, it wasn't necessary to let me know that my flight had been cancelled.

I'll give credit where it's due – both the call center agent and the ticketing agent at the airport were as helpful and compassionate as they could be. Unfortunately, there was nothing they could do. However, had I been appropriately notified of the cancellation, there were several alternatives that would have gotten me back to the East Coast in a similar timeframe.

Now, regardless of what they were able to accomplish, my frustration level was sky-high as I dialed the first digit.

The agent is instantly placed in a no-win situation, since there is no way to avoid inconvenience at this point. In this age of social media proliferation, there's a reasonable chance the unhappy customer has already tweeted and Facebooked about the situation multiple times. And it's a safe bet this isn't an isolated case and there are many others in similar

situations – the airline can only hope none of them has the time and talent to put together a United Breaks Guitars-style video that goes viral.

With all the talk about social media and the tools and strategies being developed around it to help businesses succeed, what is often overlooked as the best social media strategy is to avoid negative social conversation by doing things right the first time.

Perhaps the reason this particular example is so frustrating is the technology and user data was all available to the airline to have made the situation as comfortable as possible. In this case, all it would've taken is automation combined with some common sense. As ironic as it seems, with all the focus on human sentiment being expressed in the social channel, is it possible the human element is what failed here?

Why has nobody at American Airlines figured out that this is need-to-know information? Why not use the technology already available to ensure customer satisfaction, at the very least, doesn't erode? It should be easy, considering the unified communications capabilities that can be integrated into other existing infrastructure to communicate critical information quickly and effectively.

Why do businesses feel it necessary to engage customers and technology reactively? Yes, social media is out there and growing, and tools are being developed and enhanced to monitor these networks and engage customers via them. And it's true that many social threads are based on positive experiences. The end game, though, is to create the maximum number of positive experiences while reducing the negative. The easiest way to achieve that is to not give customers a reason to become dissatisfied. Don't give them a reason to start using competitive providers.

It takes a combination of customer service skills, technology, and management. It seems American Airlines has the agents and technology, but it is far from something special these days when it comes to management. **CIS**

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Michael DeSalles

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2012 – The Year the Contact Center Dies

In 2011, we truly became a connected world – a world where it is a rare occurrence to find ourselves cut off from others. This has now extended to every facet of our lives.

Mobile phones are predicted by Gartner to overtake PCs as the most common web access devices worldwide. Wi-Fi is so widely available in major metropolitan areas that most tablet users don't even need a wireless data plan. Tablet sales grew 264 percent in 2011 over the previous year; and this year, Yankee Group is predicting the sale of almost 25 million tablets in the U.S. Mobile devices are showing up in a range of locations and instances – mobile and Internet-equipped automobiles, smart meters to provide near instantaneous readings of actual energy usage, Wi-Fi-equipped flights and more.

What this all translates to is an increase in the demands consumers and business users are placing on the companies they engage with, both in terms of the interaction channels and availability for accessing customer service. These connected devices are becoming the preferred communication medium for many, and in 2012, we'll see these smart devices start to replace the call center as the primary interaction channel.

It won't happen all at once, and not everyone will prefer this channel, but the benefits for both consumers and businesses are compelling enough that both will contribute to a major communication shift. Businesses want to strengthen and improve customer relationships; customers want the most value out of their products and services for the least amount of money. For this to occur in a competitive market, businesses need to not only provide that value, but make it visible to the customer.

With smartphone traffic on wireless networks expected to increase 700 percent over the next five years, according to Morgan Stanley data released in November 2010, customers will look to this channel as the primary communications portal for services and method of communication for several reasons.

A key benefit of customer service on smart devices is that it offers greater transparency into the value customers are receiving and products/services that are offered. Apps on these devices have the capability to offer tailored plans, products and promotions, based on their data usage, plan features and what they may find valuable based on past behavior and preferences. For example, if a customer has gone over his or her text messaging limit for a few months, a smart app can make the recommendation that it would be beneficial for the customer to upgrade to unlimited text messaging to get more value for



the money. Customers who purchase certain pay-per-view programs could receive a recommendation to upgrade their service to include one or more premium channels. The result is the delivery of relevant and tailored offerings.

It's not enough just to provide a mobile channel – mobile applications create an opportunity to provide greater access to information customers need. When calling a call center, customers are subject to the agent telling them something or giving them access to certain information. On mobile devices, customers can access billing information directly, troubleshoot and fix issues, view how to information on features and services, or ask questions.

Smart devices not only enhance accessibility, but they also improve the method of interaction – particularly when a customer seeks to troubleshoot a problem or find answers to questions. The benefit of touch, type and talk capabilities that smart devices provide is that customers can use the method that is most convenient for them at that time – and it may be a blended method. To be most effective, the mobile search options need to have a certain level of understanding. Intelligent apps will take what someone speaks or types and translate that to what their intent was based on deep knowledge of the



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customer. This results in the presentation of the correct answer or a significantly narrowed set of menu options.

In today's crowded market, companies are struggling to differentiate themselves from their competitors; in many cases, the playing field is level when it comes to products, services and pricing plans. Increasingly, customer service is becoming a key driver for organizations looking to distinguish themselves by providing unique and effective customer experiences. Smart devices have changed how consumers communicate with one another and the companies with which they do business. Companies that recognize this change and create customer service strategies and tools that leverage these connected devices will have a real opportunity to impact their bottom line and retain and grow their customer base.

By connecting with customers on the go, companies create a sense of customer loyalty, which translates to retention as customers choose to stay with the company, and ideally grow in what services they use, products they buy and the amount they spend.

And calls previously handled by contact center agents are addressed directly by consumers through direct access to information and troubleshooting tools and diagnostics. This will also aid in driving down costs.

By keeping information up to date and consistent through a smart mobile app, customers receive the same answer regardless

In 2012, we'll see these smart devices start to replace the call center as the primary interaction channel.



of channel. This enables a deeper understanding of customer relationships (types of products and services they use, current location, past usage, payments, preferences) to deliver a tailored and personalized experience.

In today's business environment, there's a heightened need to remain competitive. New and innovative smart devices are hitting the market rapidly and consumers are looking to them as the primary communication hub for all of their services. Blind loyalty cannot be expected as customers know they have choices, and will prefer to do business with those companies that can enhance the user experience and meet their needs when and where they are expecting it. As smart devices – tablets, smartphones and other tools – gain widespread adoption and providers offer rich service features on the go, call centers will become a secondary mode of communication, no longer preferred by the masses.

Scott Kolman is senior vice president of marketing at SpeechCycle (www.speechcycle.com).



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How Mobile is Impacting Customer Interactions, and How Companies Can Respond

As part of this month's cover story package about how mobility is changing customer interactions, *CIS* magazine provides this conversation with Dave King, executive vice president of Confrimit Mobile Solutions.

How is the mobile evolution changing the way businesses interact with customers?

King: Thanks to the increasing adoption and capabilities of the smartphone, companies now have a dynamic and sky's the limit platform for interacting with audiences that far exceeds any other customer feedback channel previously available.

In order to make the most of this exciting and evolving channel, businesses must think carefully about the survey experience they want to create for consumers. You cannot simply retrofit existing desktop surveys into mobile platforms and expect a good outcome. It is important to think of the mobile survey as a unique engagement event – or series of events – and find ways to make it enjoyable, fast and valuable to the consumer interacting with the survey on a smartphone (or other mobile device) at home, at work, or on the go.

Can a mobile strategy bridge the gap between what customers and stakeholders say in the moment and what they recall later?

King: Studies show a noticeable difference between how people respond in the moment vs. when asked to recall an experience after an event. For example, if asked at an event, a person having a bad time might provide specific details about what they like and don't like (e.g. music, food, guests, etc.). That same person, if asked a few days or weeks later about the same party, may respond that the event was 'OK'. The customer feedback system may categorize 'OK' as positive. Will that person buy tickets to your next event? Probably not.

A strong mobile strategy captures the true experiential voice of the customer and not

the 'I probably should be nice' voice. It provides the immediate, non-digitally remastered feedback that will help sell tickets to your next event and create stronger, more authentic relationships with your customers.

How can mobility impact survey completion results and improve customer insight?

King: Convenience and ease of experience drive successful survey results. When on-the-go technology is matched with great customer engagement, response rates can flourish.

Mobile technology enhances the quality of customer feedback because the methodology design causes respondents to choose to engage as opposed to feeling as though they are being interrupted. At Confrimit, we use touch screens, tablets, animation and modicums and have achieved as high as 90 percent compliance rates.

Here are a few other specific ways mobility improves survey completion results and improves customer insight.

The mobile interface makes going through survey questions quick and easy. Surveys can be done during down time like waiting in line, waiting for an appointment, etc.

Good things come in small packages. Mobile surveys are generally perceived as shorter, which boosts efficacy.

GPS on most smartphones allows for geo tracking (with consent) so companies can develop more targeted location-based engagement opportunities.

Photos, audio and video (playback and capture) can provide an incredibly rich experience and if implemented properly, be entertaining and engaging.

Confrimit's Dave King



What are some ways mobile campaigns and strategies can extend or enhance a company's overall voice of the customer program?

King: The days of single-channel, ask and answer surveys will soon be behind us. It is imperative that companies become much more sophisticated in engaging all the channels, all the time – whether through an on-line survey, social media interaction, web analytics or good old-fashioned interactive voice response. All channels are valid and together can be much more powerful than on their own.

We know that people are constantly looking for ways to stay connected as they go about their daily lives. Providing a VoC model with multiple feedback channels (i.e. direct, indirect and inferred feedback) gets companies so much closer to their target base, whether the respondent is a customer or an employee.

Mobile creates a trinity of offerings by bringing SMS, browser and app together in one device to form the makings of a very powerful, comprehensive, holistic feedback program. Add reporting, analysis and a clever way of managing it all – including the feeds from other sources – and companies are on their way to a sky's the limit VoC offering.

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Leveraging Mobile Apps for Call Center Efficiency

Call centers and smartphone are colliding in a big way. And now many companies, such as airlines, that already have their own mobile phone apps and also have large call centers are starting to realize they can leverage those smartphone apps to ask pre-call questions for more efficient call center operations and customer responsiveness.

So says Shai Berger, CEO and co-founder of Fonolo, whose cloud-based call center solutions provide companies with visual dialing and virtual queuing services.

Asking customers pre-call questions via their smartphone apps can make future interactions between company and customer a whole lot faster and more efficient, Berger says.

As discussed in a past TMCnet article, Fonolo says it's now important for customers to add intelligent agent calling to a mobile application without a requirement to make any changes to the call center. Mobile apps offer the ability to reduce operational costs and improve agent efficiency; create a differentiated customer experience; provide a uniform interface between the web and mobile; capture rapid, informative caller feedback; and convert more web visitors to callers.

Fonolo, in the article by TMCnet contributor David Sims, outlined what they see as three of the major challenges this addresses:

Decreasing cost-per-call without sacrificing the customer experience: Now, more than ever, financial companies place extremely high demands on their call centers. Agents must be highly trained to deal with the increasingly complicated and sensitive demands of their customers. It's no surprise that financial companies have the highest agent costs of any industry, leading to a high cost-per-call and a desire by companies to keep call handle times as short as possible.

Using the investment you are making in mobile applications to improve call center performance: Broad adoption of the smartphone has created opportunities for dramatically enhanced interaction with customers. This trend has been embraced by financial companies that were early adopters of

mobile applications. But a key piece is missing from these applications: connecting intelligently to the call center.

Reducing the burden of authentication for callers and agents while maintaining sufficient security for the transaction at hand: Naturally, caller authentication is a common aspect of call center transactions throughout the financial industry. This authentication process often has an automated component through the IVR as well as a live challenge and response component with an agent. Both components tend to increase the frustration of the caller. The latter can add significantly to call handle time and thus increase costs.

Fonolo recently extended its solution with the introduction of virtual queuing, another effort to improve customer experience and loyalty, and increase call center efficiency.

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Industry Veteran Genesys Has New Beginning

Genesys has long been a fixture in the communications space, and its ownership over the years has not been unlike a game of musical chairs. Now Genesys is once again a stand-alone company, and the company's management and new owners say it is uniquely positioned in the customer interaction solutions space of today.

The company got its start two decades ago. At the beginning, the company's vision was to provide capabilities for call centers in software using computer telephony integration. And it worked. Genesys became the leader in CTI.

So successful was Genesys in this hot new area called CTI that leading network infrastructure company Alcatel in September 1999 announced plans to buy the company for about \$1.5 billion. But Alcatel-Lucent recently decided to sell off these customer service-related assets, and it was able to do so last year via another \$1.5 billion deal, this one with Permira and Technology Crossover Ventures.

Permira is a Europe-based private equity firm that has committed \$30 billion in capital around the world. Brian Ruder, partner and head of the Menlo Park, Calif., office for Permira funds, says his company is excited by the long-term growth potential of Genesys. He adds that the company has a strong brand, what he calls differentiated technologies, and a blue-chip customer base.

"Genesys is generating a level of excitement in the market that we have not seen recently, and we are thrilled to be part of this evolving story," says Ruder. "We believe the company is not only poised for solid growth, but its unique mix of talented people, leading and disruptive technology and blue-chip customer base creates opportunities to transform the customer service and contact center markets."

The company offers a complete software suite for contact centers and customer service. Its application software started in the world of voice and IVR, but over the years the Genesys solution has gone multichannel, so it can now support

chat, e-mail, mobile, social and voice communications, explains Nicolas De Kouchkovsky, Genesys chief marketing offering. He adds that the company continues to strengthen its offerings in the growing areas of analytics, cloud computing, process workflow, social engagement, and workforce optimization.

"We completely focus on customer service with a pure software suite that is independent of the underlying infrastructure and that works across multiple channels," De Kouchkovsky says.

With 2010 sales of \$500 million, Genesys occupies the No. 2 market share position in the contact center space. The company's software handles more than 100 million customer interactions each day for 2,000 companies and government agencies in 80 countries.

As Ruder notes, some of the organizations using Genesys solutions are big dogs. Indeed, the solutions are leveraged by more than 60 percent of the Global 100, and in 2012 it intends to further extend that by increasing R&D by 14 percent.

But while Genesys has historically served the high end of market, it is now expanding down market, adds De Kouchkovsky. He notes that the company offers its solutions both on a license basis and via a software-as-a-service model; the Genesys SaaS solutions are delivered through partners like AT&T, Verizon, and Working Solutions. Genesys last year announced it had hit the 1,000 SaaS customer mark.

"Today we are building on the incredible story that is Genesys and launching the company into its new future," says Paul Segre, Genesys president and CEO. "We're now backed by the best in the business in the Permira funds and TCV, and we have the industry's most unique combination of customers, partners and people to innovate around the customer experience. We are on a singular mission to save the world from bad customer service."

New Board Members at Genesys

Stephen Davis, partner at Banneker Partners, a San Francisco-based private equity firm focused on investing in software/SaaS, Internet and business services companies with a goal of driving top line growth organically and through acquisitions and operational improvement. Davis has led the acquisitions of several software companies, including Applied Systems, BigMachines, Petroleum Place and Ventyx.

Tom Lister, co-managing partner, and **Brian Ruder**, partner, from Permira. Over the past 26 years the Permira funds have made nearly 200 private equity investments, more than 30 percent of which have been in the sector of technology, media and telecom. Those

investments include All3Media, NDS, Odigeo, and Renaissance Learning.

Jake Reynolds, general partner, Technology Crossover Ventures, a leading provider of growth capital to technology companies. With \$7.7 billion in capital under management, TCV has invested in more than 150 technology companies leading to 50 initial public offerings and more than 40 strategic sales or mergers. In addition to Genesys, the company has invested in Altiris, Ariba, EXL Service, Expedia, Facebook, Groupon, Netflix, and OSIsoft.

Paul Segre, Genesys, who has been a senior executive at the company since 2002.

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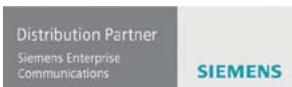
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Next Generation 911 A Unique Vertical for Unified Communications

UCStrategies.com, an industry resource on unified communications, provided a definition of UC in 2006 as follows: “Communications integrated to optimize business processes.”

The National Emergency Number Association has described Next Generation 911 as having “the ability to support interactive text messaging, policy based routing using location and several other factors, such as call type, target PSAP status, network status, and automatic acquisition of supportive data and its use within the system to control routing and other actions prior to delivery to the PSAP.”

Using the NENA definition, it is clear that UC is at the center of NG911. NG911 is starting to become a reality in some areas of the U.S., as testing on a number of conceptual ideas are under way. The most publicized and obvious example of communications being integrated for emergency services and currently being tested is the ability to text messages to 911. It’s important to note that the ability to text to 911 is still very limited. (If you are not sure that texting is an option in your geographic area, please call 911 from a wireline or cell phone.)

Central to the delivery of NG911 is the development and implementation of an ESInet, which stands for emergency service IP network. The ESInet is intended to be designed to provide a secure gateway and routing of all inbound 911 calls and deliver them to the most appropriate PSAP. This will enable public safety organizations to be able to share information on a secure, managed private network.

When the 911 network was first envisioned, the design did not include mobility as a key driver. In a recent forecast

from Cisco, it was suggested that “there will be more than 10 billion mobile Internet-connected devices in 2016, including machine-to-machine modules – exceeding the world’s projected population at that time of 7.3 billion.” The machine-to-machine connections include automobile GPS systems. There was also an indication that the mobile traffic consumption by tablets will grow 62 fold.

This type of forecasted growth and the capability of smartphone communication means that 911 needs to be able to adopt to change to meet the demands of a changed landscape. Today’s consumers expect to be able to communicate in a manner that meets their need and perhaps the circumstance of an emergency. There have already been examples of emergencies in which it would’ve been more appropriate to text details without revealing a hiding place.

There is so much more that a SIP-enabled NG911 center will be able to do. In addition to supporting traditional voice calls from wireline, cellular and VoIP systems, NG911 will also have the capability of supporting device calls (such as a heart monitor or heat sensor), video transmissions and photos.

An example of the type of device call that could be processed might include some or all of the following:

- a call to 911 identifying the type of emergency (heart attack) is generated from an implanted monitoring device;
- detailed information regarding current status (heart rate, or other health-related information);

- personal information (including name, address, name of family physician, etc.); and
- GPS location information.

This type of critical information can be the difference in a life saved when seconds matter. It also has the potential to be a significant game-changer in the way that police, fire and EMS personnel respond to calls. Just having GPS coordinates included in the NG911 call could be the difference maker. According to High Performance EMS, “GPS location is critical for efficient automated routing. This is especially true in areas of high driver turnover. GPS coordinates [are] also useful in very rural areas that lack addressing.”

It might be the opportunity to live-stream video from inside the campus to determine the location of individuals, or maybe access the hazardous materials list to properly prepare the firefighting response. Maybe it’s being able to overlay the GPS location of all callers using geospatial technology to ensure everyone’s safety, or leveraging the car’s computer system to determine the location and extent of the damages. There may also be the opportunity to live-conference an interpreter to provide assistance to the hearing impaired when placing a video call emergency.

Using a SIP-based protocol will enable critical information to be exchanged by the emergency caller and by those that respond to the call. Communications integrated to enable business process make next generation 911 an exciting development in unified communications.

Samantha Kane & Bill MacKay of Kane-MacKay & Associates Ltd. provided this column courtesy of UCStrategies (www.ucstrategies.com).

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Invodo Promotes the Power of Video in Customer Interaction Solutions

The world has gone multimedia, and video is a growing part of that. But this goes much further than just video for entertainment or videoconferencing. As Invodo explains, more companies are now leveraging video to help educate and inform their customers, often increasing customer satisfaction in the process. *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine recently interviewed Craig Wax, CEO of Invodo, about the power of video.

How and when did Invodo get its start?

Wax: We launched Invodo in 2007. We built the company on the idea that video marketing is the next step in the evolution of selling on the web. Brand manufacturers and retailers are looking for tools that can help them produce video content at scale, optimize them for search engines, distribute this content to every point of contact where their customers are, and measure how video impacts their customers' decision-making. Our offerings encompass the full lifecycle of video to help businesses drive their customers' actions. We offer production services to create customized video content, a comprehensive technology platform that allows for the distribution and management of that content so they can quickly and easily share it with customers via websites and mobile devices, and reporting tools that empower them to learn as much as they can from how their video content performs.

Who are your customers?

Wax: Invodo offers a complete video solution that helps drive business results for retailers and brand manufacturers. Invodo specializes in professionally-produced video content designed to drive conversion rates, reduce returns rates and abandoned shopping carts, and reduce service call volumes. We deliver this content on Invodo's video platform, which includes the Invodo inPlayer, hosting and streaming, video SEO, and analytics. We also help brands and retailers distribute their videos to social networks. Our clients include many of the top retailers, like Office Depot and Sports Authority,

along with leading brand manufacturers like Crocs and Lenovo.

You say that video is being used by more and more brands as part of their digital marketing strategies. By whom and how?

Wax: Recent research by the e-tailing group shows that 69 percent of retailers have at least some video at the product page level. That's in response to consumer demand as, increasingly, consumers want engaging rich content instead of just text and images. In the 2011 holiday shopping season, we measured the usage of videos across our base of nearly 100 clients, including Crocs, Golfsmith and Office Depot. We found there was an 813 percent increase in year-over-year video views on those retail sites, compared to 2010. Retailers and brands are realizing that video can replicate the in-store buying experience, giving consumers confidence in their decision to purchase a product.

Invodo recently conducted a study that dispels commonly held beliefs about video, such as the idea that consumers won't watch for more than 30 seconds. What were your findings in this realm?

Wax: The 30 second myth was one of the myths we examined in this study. It's perpetuated by video platforms that assume that all content is of equal quality and that the goal of a video is to be watched to completion. The myth says that, because viewing data shows that consumers have short attention spans and are likely to click away after a brief video view, businesses should only produce very short videos. Our study disproves this way of thinking. What

Craig Wax



we found is that consumers care less about the length of a video than about whether that video is helpful and useful to them. Thirty-seven percent of respondents said they watch videos longer than three minutes if the content is educational or demonstrates how to use a product. And the important thing is not whether a consumer watches the full video. If a consumer clicks away from the video to make a purchase, that's a good thing from a business perspective.

You say the survey data show that product videos executed the right way can help deflect incoming calls from customers needing more information or returns. Explain.

Wax: Our survey found that 52 percent of consumers agreed with the statement that they are more confident when they watch a product video online prior to making a purchase, and are less likely to return that product. In addition, two-thirds of consumers surveyed said that seeing a product demonstrated in a video makes it easier for them to understand how a product works, as opposed to reading text or watching pictures. Both of these findings show that video plays a key role in not only influencing a purchase but educating the consumers, making it less likely they will need to call for help in assembling a product, and they will be more

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sure of their decision to purchase that product in the first place, lessening the likelihood they will want to return it.

What other impact is video having on customer interactions including contact centers?

Wax: Video doesn't just deflect calls from going into a contact center. It improves your customer service and increases your customers' satisfaction with your company. It's not realistic for companies to staff contact centers to the extent that callers don't experience wait times, and many other problems beyond a company's control – such as a cell phone dropping the signal during a call – can reflect poorly on a shopper's experience with that company. By using video, you're satisfying customers proactively and mitigating the need for them to turn to your contact center, while helping them feel more confident and loyal as they do business with your brand.

What are the survey's other notable findings?

Wax: Our study also dispelled the myth that casually-produced, YouTube-style videos that are produced in-house are just as effective in selling products as professional videos. We found that 54 percent of respondents preferred watching a product video with high quality video production, including quality lighting and sound. We also found that

across all age groups, about 30 percent of consumers have watched at least one product video on their smartphone, which means that optimizing your videos for mobile devices is emerging as a must-have. Overall, the study reinforced that video content is having a truly impactful role on consumer behavior during the shopping process, and it is an area of opportunity that brands should be looking at sooner than they may have previously thought.

How and when was the survey conducted?

Wax: We conducted the survey in partnership with the e-tailing group. The online survey was deployed in November 2011 to 1,039 consumers (50 percent female / 50 percent male) who have watched product videos on retail or brand manufacturer websites.

If there's just one thing we need to know about this survey, what is that one thing?

Wax: Video isn't just a nice to have feature anymore. It's having a huge impact on consumers' purchase decisions and should be front and center in your online strategy. Video can impact your business in multiple ways, whether it be by increasing sales conversion, reducing calls to the contact center and improving customer service, or further extending your brand across retail channels.

by Paula Bernier

Avatars, Training Bring New Twist to Outsourced Call Center Solutions

Organizations that outsource their call centers to specialists in this realm can get the latest and greatest when it comes to things like agent training and interactive web responses.

So says Alicia Laszewski, vice president of corporate marketing and communications at C3/Customer Contact Channels. The company provides an Interactive Web Response solution involving avatars. Using avatars both creates a unique interface for end users and can enable call center representatives to draw more easily from a variety of data sources while delivering all such intelligence to the caller via a single interface. What's more, the avatars can be customized to match the industries and messaging of client customers. For example, a health care client might opt to use an avatar who is wearing scrubs.

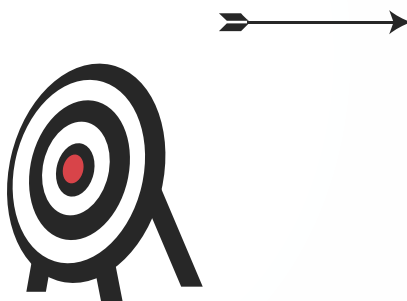
C3/Customer Contact Channels launched the avatar effort in September and as of late January was in a beta test with that application with one customer.

The company, which was founded in 1982 and in early 2010 started opening call centers, also prides itself on the way it trains and manages its workforce, which Laszewski says is unique in the industry. C3PO, a division within C3 that focuses specifically on this kind of thing, uses a training procedure that is highly interactive and repetitive. The trainer never talks too long, she says; instead, trainees learn by doing.

C3 also leverages something called a competency grid. Trainers and trainees follow this grid so every coaching session focuses on key competencies. Key areas vary, but they could include factors such as empathy and/or understanding the product. Trainees get tickets based on their performance, and at the end of day C3 coaches hand out rewards for good training results. The company can also coach call center representatives on upselling and customer retention. Through this effort, C3 has enabled one of its wireless carrier clients to increase sales by 77 percent, Laszewski says.

C3 uses these methods and procedures both internally within its own call centers, and for clients at their centers. C3 can even do training for clients at other locations, such as their retail stores, as it does for one client, a wireless service provider.

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



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Accenture (www.accenture.com) has entered into an agreement to acquire Neo Metrics Analytics S.L., a leading consulting firm specializing in optimization and predictive analytics based in Madrid, Spain. The former plans to add Neo Metrics' research and development capabilities and assets to its own analytics portfolio. Neo Metrics' advanced modeler solution automatically generates insight from any source of information and creates what Accenture says are industrialized, highly-accurate analytical models. That is expected to enhance Accenture's ability to help clients rapidly analyze and predict customer behavior and respond to key outcomes. Accenture will also gain new social network analysis capabilities such as the ability to identify hierarchies within online customer communities.

Aspect (www.aspect.com) now has a go-to-market relationship with Dell Services to deliver Microsoft-based unified communications solutions for the contact center and across the enterprise. The Aspect-Dell relationship provides customers the technology, services and contact center expertise to deliver dynamic and effective customer interaction solutions from a single source. The relationship also gives customers the ability to tailor their PBX and contact center solutions to their needs. Golfbreaks.com, Europe's leading golf tour operator, is implementing a Microsoft-based unified communications solution including a full multimedia contact center infrastructure to replace its aging PBX platform. When the telephony platform could no longer keep up with the service demands of its customers, the company sought out a contact center solution delivered by Dell and Aspect.

C3/ContactCenterChannels (www.c3connect.com) says it added 2,000 new jobs to the U.S. economy last year by opening up new call centers and expanding existing facilities. C3 opened new centers in Tucson, Ariz., and Waco, Texas, and expanded its Salt Lake City, Utah, and Twin Falls, Idaho, facilities. Since 2010, C3 has created 3,500 new jobs in the United States. Financial incentives ranging from tax breaks and credits to enterprise and development programs influenced the company's choice of where and when to open and expand the centers. "We're proud to be part of the economic recovery," says David Epstein, chairman and co-CEO of C3. "Our business is rapidly growing, we've seen an increase in new business, but also in existing clients looking to expand and extend contracts. Our clients recognize the value we bring to the business partnerships and to the community."

idomoo Ltd. (www.idomoo.com) recently announced a video as a service platform. The company is hawking idomoo VaaS as a solution that "combines the compelling power of video with personally relevant, individualized data to drive action throughout the customer lifecycle." The organization's tests indicate idomoo doubles the conversion rates versus traditional direct email. Companies with which idomoo is currently working include Generali, Porto Seguro, Harel Insurance, European triple-play provider UPC and others. "Personal communication

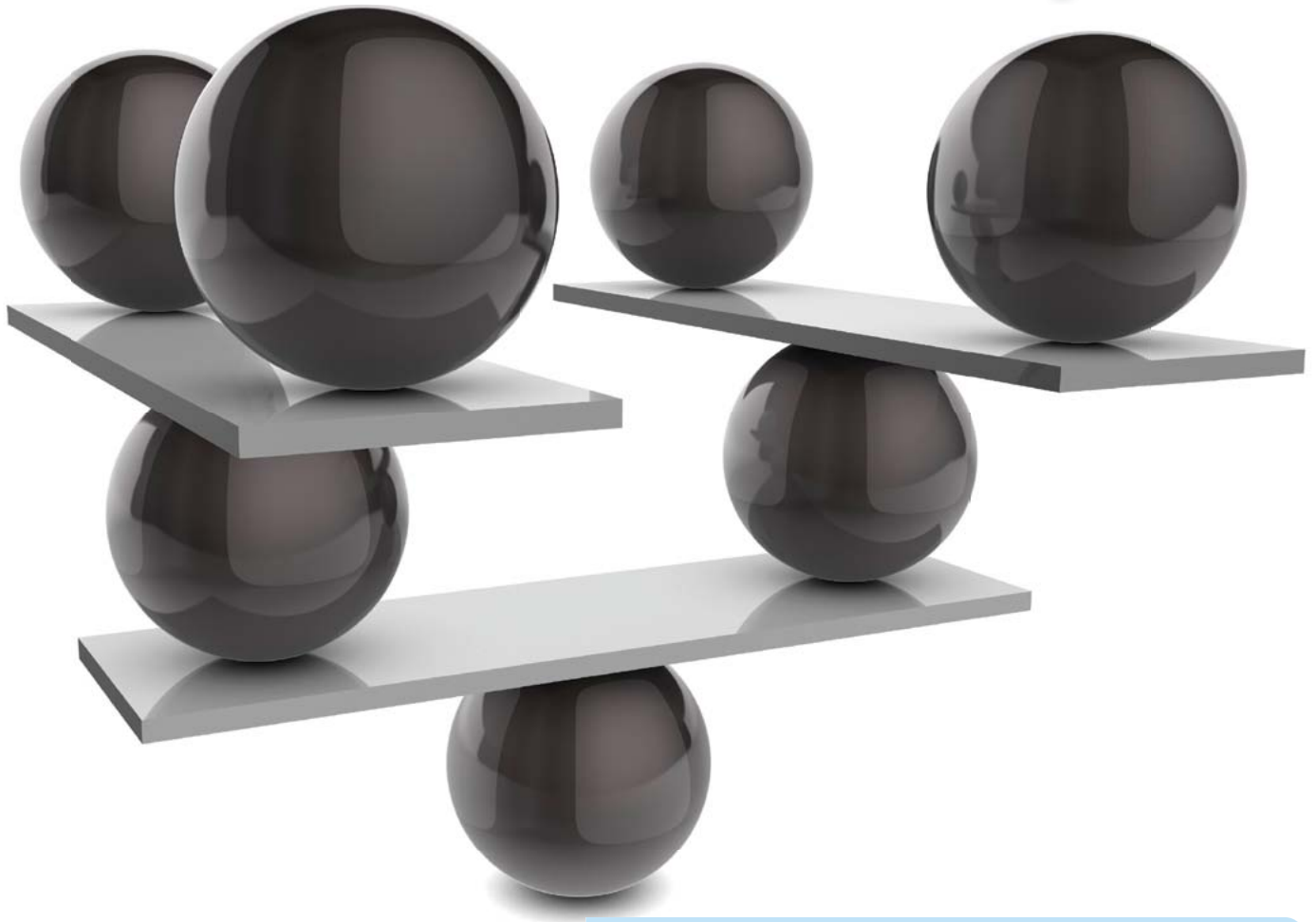
is a key success factor for any business, but speaking personally to each customer is simply not feasible. At the same time, written communication is often difficult for customers to understand. Combining the compelling impact of quality video with highly personalized messages enables companies to create a new and effective personal communication channel with their customers," says Danny Kalish, CTO and co-founder of idomoo. "From explaining a complex first bill, to extending an offer at the end of the contract period, idomoo helps companies engage and serve each customer personally, at every critical stage of the relationship."

VMware Inc. (www.vmware.com) and **Mitel (www.mitel.com)** recently unveiled the integration of Mitel's Contact Center Solution for VMware View, which can enable contact center managers to deploy and manage agents anywhere in the world, and to lower costs. This solution provides contact center agents with cloud-based access to contact center functionality as well as a unified desktop and communications device (soft phone or desk phone). In addition, Mitel announced the availability of Mitel's virtualized Unified Communicator Advanced client software for VMware. "We chose Mitel specifically because they were the only vendor we evaluated that could integrate with our VMware View-based virtual environment," says Russ Johnson, president of Fuse Networks. "The flexibility of Mitel's open UC architecture combined with VMware's leading virtualization solutions gave us a consolidated communications infrastructure that we could manage like any other virtual application."

Zeacom Communications Center contact center software is now available for Lync – Microsoft's software telephony platform. This follows a successful beta program that saw ZCC deployed at Lync sites in Northern Europe and Asia Pacific. Spotless Group, a \$2.5 billion facilities management company, migrated 600 Australian head office staff and its mission-critical IT help desk to Microsoft Lync without missing a call. Zeacom Vice President of Marketing Sam Williams says: "Zeacom's use of Microsoft's native UCMA architecture and trusted conferencing platform, allows us to offer a more expansive functionality. Our heritage of using other manufacturers' native method of integration gives us a proven track record in delivering highly functional call center and business process automation solutions." More than 4,000 sites rely on solutions from **Zeacom (www.zeacom)**, which was established in 1994.

Spanlink Communications (www.spanlink.com), a Minneapolis-based Cisco partner specialized in designing, deploying and supporting contact center and collaboration solutions, has been recognized by Cisco for Customer Satisfaction Excellence, the highest distinction a Cisco Channel Partner can receive. The customer satisfaction levels are measured by Cisco on a variety of criteria including overall customer satisfaction, geographical region and level of expertise of both pre and post-sales support capabilities. Spanlink's sales and engineering expertise, comprehensive support offerings, and ability to match Cisco technology to address business problems for quantifiable results, earned Spanlink the customer satisfaction award.

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Home Agent Programs Are a ‘Win-Win’

InfoCision Management Corp.’s partnership with the Cleveland Sight Center, through which it employs sight-impaired individuals as part of its call center business, has been such a success that the center’s new facility will house an InfoCision call center.

Steve Brubaker, chief of staff at InfoCision, explains that his company hired on a couple of individuals with vision impairments originally, but once it joined forces with the Cleveland Sight Center in January of 2011 “it has just been a win-win across the board.”

State and federal programs have enabled Cleveland Sight Clinic to support the effort. And vision-impaired call center reps use Magic and ZoomText PC screen view enlargement tools and something called Jaws, which reads what’s on a PC screen.

But InfoCision’s home agent program goes beyond its work with the Cleveland Sight Clinic. The company, which operates 39 call centers in three states (Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia), also allows for remote work situations for strong candidates that may be a bit outside its location areas and/or who have limitations that might prevent them from working on site. As of early March, InfoCision had 300 at-home agents.

Brubaker says that overall, its home-based agents are performing at an excellent level, and are some of the most dedicated employees at InfoCision. And while InfoCision doesn’t believe home agents will be a complete replacement for its staff, because not all customers want this kind of solution, sometimes this model is a perfect match.

To ensure remote agents feel invested in the organization, he adds, InfoCision ensures these workers have the same status and the same pay rate as its on-premises agents. InfoCision also provides online forums through which employees can share ideas and otherwise communicate, during work or off hours.





As discussed in the November issue of this magazine, Michele Rowan, president and CEO of At Home Customer Contacts, says that 15 to 20 percent of the total agent population in North America's 60,000 contact centers work from home. The share of home-based call center agents is forecast to reach 30 percent by the end of 2013.

Such major brands as JetBlue today rely exclusively on home-based call center agents. However, even businesses in verticals like finance and health care, which have stringent privacy requirements, are now embracing the virtual agent model, says Rowan.

They are "signing on to the remote agent model in droves," she adds.

The acceptance and adoption of the virtual agents model is being driven by several factors, including a desire to lower contact center costs, drive productivity, expand the workforce, allow for more flexibility, and gain expertise.

Embracing the virtual agent model can enable contact centers and their customers to realize savings on a number of fronts.

Rowan notes that it's cheaper because it doesn't require the call center to pay – or pay as much – rent and utilities.

Joe Jacoboni, president and CEO of outsourcer Contact Centers of America, says that its work-at-home agents also bring to the table their own computer and phone equipment, and related telecom/data services, eliminating call center costs in the process. And while some businesses hire on virtual agents full time, Contact Centers of America hires them on as independent contractors.

"The interesting thing is it alleviates all the [Social Security taxes and unemployment] taxes for us," he says.

Using virtual agents and call centers near college campuses just makes sense, Jacoboni adds, because it allows Contact Centers of America to compete better with offshore outfits. Contact Centers of America, which had just a dozen home agents as of September of 2011, also likes the home agent model because it allows the company to support seasonal efforts – such as outbound call center customers during the campaign season – without having to invest in new on-site infrastructure.

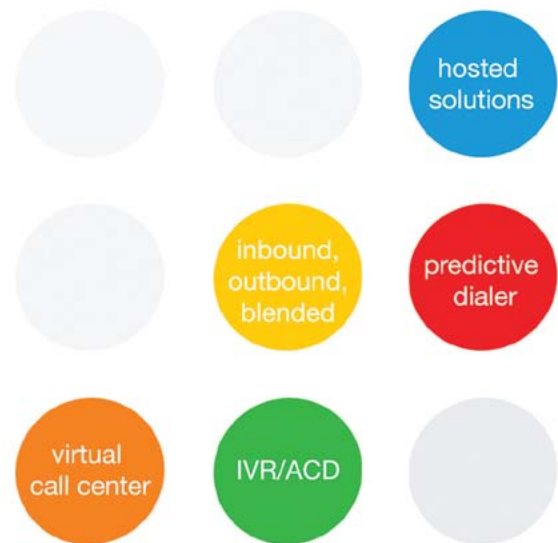
Virtual agents often are more productive than their in-office counterparts. The virtual agent model also can help improve customer satisfaction.

Rowan of At Home Customer Contacts says that, in general, customer satisfaction scores are better with home agents, as is employee satisfaction. Allowing reps to work at home also enables call centers to staff on the hour. And attendance tends to be better, she adds, perhaps because if reps are not feeling 100 percent, they still may opt to work because they can do so in the comfort of their own homes.

Because the virtual agent model opens the call center to telecommuters, contact centers also have a much larger potential base of employees at their disposal.

For example, Contact Centers of America has a home agent program that recruits disabled war veterans.

Cynthia Phillips, vice president of marketing of Alpine Access, which uses home-based agents exclusively, says the education and quality of the Alpine Access call center reps is much higher than reps at competitors' brick-and-mortar call centers because it can recruit from a much broader base of job candidates. She adds that Alpine Access also has older reps (which typically means more work experience) than is the norm in the industry and low employee turnover. Some of company's employees have been on the job for eight or 10 years. Many of these folks also have industry-specific expertise that Alpine Access matches up with the special requirements of its clients.



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How to Use Customer Lifecycle Analysis to Build Loyalty

Your customer calls, tweets, or sends a web form about an issue with service or billing. How you deal with that customer at that moment affects whether that customer will recommend your business or plaster the web with negative reviews.

There are four important steps at this moment of truth:

Response

Do you remain neutral and focus on the problem? Or do you let a tweet escalate in anger?

Resolution

Are you able to resolve the issue in one contact or one channel? If not, do you let the customer know exactly what to expect and a timeframe for resolution?

Follow through

Do you provide the customer with status updates for the case and when he or she can expect resolution? Do you keep your word?

Follow up

Do you follow up in writing if necessary to close the issue? Do you thank the customer for his or her business? Do you do that something extra to surprise the customer?

Ok, you're saying that all these things are simply good customer service. But are you sure you're providing good service on all channels on every moment of truth?

Understanding the Customer Lifecycle

Regardless of the type of business we're in, all our customers have unique lifecycles. Take this example of a PC customer lifecycle. If we don't meet their expectations at every step, they'll probably go with another brand when it's time to replace their PC. And they'll complain to anyone

who will listen if we fail them at any moment of truth.

So where in this lifecycle are there opportunities for you to provide amazing service? What are the key moments of truth?

Acquisition and Sale

Especially if the sale is made online, it's critical to let customers know the status of their orders. Mini Cooper lets buyers know the status of their cars – from when it's in manufacturing to custom paint jobs to transport. And Dell gives you updates on the progress of your PC from production (kitting, building, testing, and boxing) through shipment.

PC delivery and setup is the next critical moment of truth. Aside from making setup easy and intuitive, are there ways that you can reach out to customers? Send an e-mail or a text welcoming them to your "family" with links to frequently asked questions, or introduce them to online forums. Attentive onboarding can make a huge difference in customer loyalty.

Warranty issues and product fixes can be minefields for customer service. Regular outbound communication and sponsored customer forums can help. But remember to communicate with customers in their channel of choice whenever possible, and not force them into your preferred channel.

Ongoing support can also rapidly turn into a death spiral for customer service. If you understand what typical questions are for your product, be proactive. Either



offer tune-ups at critical times in equipment lifecycles or find partners who can offer such services. Best Buy's Geek Squad is a great local resource for many.

And finally, what happens at end of life? If you've done a super job at all the moments of truth, your customer is going to consider buying your product again. Help them out by offering a discount on a new PC at three years or so.

Like customer experience mapping, building customer lifecycles can be a real eye opener. I recommend that you create lifecycles for all of your customer types (you may have separate lifecycles for specific customer segments as well). Use the moments of truth you identify to create stronger bonds with your customers and ensure that the next time they're ready to buy, your product will be the first one they consider.

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.

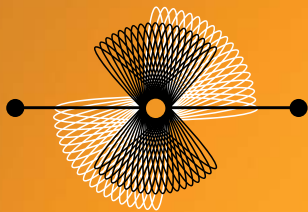
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Driving Performance with Technology to Engage and Train the Agent

Managers in any field must understand how to engage, train and motivate their employees effectively. This challenge is none more important than in contact centers, where agents are measured against daily performance metrics while managers must make adjustments throughout the day to meet service goals. Agent skill levels can vary greatly in every contact center and even more so now as the Generation Y workforce enters, armed with tech-savvy capabilities. As a contact center's workforce optimization strategy evolves, it's important for managers to explore and consider new ways to revitalize their efforts to drive the performance improvement process between managers, supervisors and agents.

Keeping the Bar High

Success in agent training and communication starts with setting the right performance expectation with employees. Supervisors react differently when agents are struggling to meet their metrics, causing some supervisors to think that the current goals are too rigorous for the average agent. This can convince them to adjust performance metrics for the overall contact center even if a select number of agents are meeting or exceeding those metrics. The effect, however, can be that the high-performing agents might feel less challenged with lowered expectations. Their motivation to excel begins to suffer, hurting the metrics for the contact center overall.

The Good, the Bad and the Agent

Today's WFO solutions feature quality management systems that are very capable at automatically flagging calls of interest for supervisors. The issue is that it can be common practice for supervisors to set their QM systems to flag only negative calls of interest. These calls are recorded and then used as training examples on how not to handle a situation. But if modern QM can flag negative calls of interest effectively, why not build morale and reinforce agent best practices by flagging positive calls of interest?

A Holistic, Role-based Desktop

Ease of use also can play a significant role in improving every individual's contribution to workforce optimization, from the agent to the supervisor to the executive. Users need not settle for irrelevant applications and a cumbersome workflow when new alternatives are more intuitive, easier to navigate, and reduce the number of clicks users must execute to get to applications. Each user has access to his or her unique view through a single sign-on to access all the applications needed for his or her responsibilities.

Effective workforce optimization tools should provide personalized views for each type of user. Executives may want a view to correlate contact center performance to business results. The conscientious agent may want to monitor his or her own performance to stay on track. Multi-tasking supervisors may need convenient access to all information from scheduling to customer interaction tools to the data that helps them understand where to focus coaching and training. A more organized and simplified desktop can dramatically improve how agents and supervisors view information, collaborate, and improve performance communicate and resolve.

A Mobile Revolution

Mobile phones and smartphones were among the first consumer technologies

to influence business operations and successfully mobilize the workforce. Now tablet computers are beginning to make their mark in workplace activities as well. In the near future, contact centers might integrate tablets into their day-to-day operations because of the technology's ease of use and mobile benefits.

Consider the power of WFO solutions that can be easily rendered and used on device formats such as smartphones and tablets. This ease of access to WFO applications on the tablet can potentially reveal opportunities for supervisors to conduct coaching sessions with their agents on a more personal level. For example, a supervisor may notice an agent is receiving stellar marks from customer surveys and outperforming metrics. The supervisor can use a tablet to bring up the agent's metrics and walk over to that agent's desk to acknowledge the strong efforts.

Alternatively, if a contact center supervisor sees an agent wrestling with performance issues, he or she can use a tablet to display the statistics and conduct a face-to-face coaching session. The supervisor can immediately push training sessions to the agent's desktop from the tablet and help improve contact center performance in real-time.

Tailor the Approach, Engage the Employees, Boost Performance

Opportunities to drive performance improvements more effectively are evolving, and workforce optimization should not be viewed with a one-size-fits-all mentality. Today's WFO solutions save time by streamlining workflows, improving accessibility, empowering agents and enabling supervisors to strengthen their interactions with agents. Adjusting management styles and best practices to match the strengths of new technology presents new opportunities for agents in the contact center to increase their performance and job satisfaction.

Kristen Jacobsen is director of marketing communications at Calabrio (www.calabrio.com).



WE GET THE CLOUD



BroadVision Expands Enterprise Social Networking Solution

BroadVision Inc. has expanded its enterprise social networking solution on a number of fronts. New are collaborative workspaces called Conduits, a social analytics module, and SharePoint integration.

Conduits are virtual spaces within a Clearvale network where external users, such as suppliers, customers or partners, can interface with a business and conduct their interactions in total privacy.

Guest members only have access to the Conduits that they have been given permission to use. There are closed invitation-only conduits, and there are open conduits. The latter might be used to invite all consumers to try a new product and offer input on it, explains Richard Hughes, BroadVision director of product strategy.

As for the new social analytics module, that can enable social networking in the business context to move to the next level, indicates Hughes. Some companies are experimenting with social networks today, he says, but they're not doing a lot of measurement related to social networks. The social analytics module from BroadVision both measures and allows users to respond to those measurements on a number of fronts. It rewards and recognizes key contributors to a network, and it gives organizations the tools to encourage participation and weigh use. It measures the volume of contributions across the enterprise. It looks at how widely a member interacts with other members. It does analysis to place a value on each user's and group's contribution to the network and related respect from other members within that

network. And it tracks cumulative use of the social network.

"You might be uploading 100 documents a day, but if only one person looks at them..." says Hughes, adding that the overall goal of the social analytics module is to encourage people to make use of the network.

There's a myth about social networking that indicates its adoption happens from the ground up, Hughes continues. But when it comes to enterprise social networks, he says, most organizations require a mandate to use such platforms.

Finally, BroadVision now offers SharePoint integration with its enterprise social network solution. Hughes notes that many organizations have SharePoint, but they might not want to use it in social networking. But the SharePoint integration now offered by BroadVision makes it easy by allowing users to store their SharePoint files in

Clearvale or SharePoint, and offering users the ability to initiate collaboration from either side.

"We see these two [solutions] as entirely complimentary," says Hughes.

Clearvale is the name of BroadVision's cloud-based enterprise social networking solution, which helps businesses engage with employees, customers and partners. It enables businesses to create separate social networks for each of these groups, but manage them together as a whole. The full-featured version of Clearvale is called Clearvale enterprise. Clearvale express is a lightweight, free version of the solution, which was designed to enable customers to try before they buy. And Clearvale passport gives BroadVision distribution partners (such as Japan's SOFTBANK) the ability to take the product on a test drive.

Mid-sized enterprises that are knowledge-centric are the sweet spot for BroadVision's Clearvale, says Erin Curtis, vice president of marketing, saying that includes companies in the telco, ISV, retail and travel verticals. But she says the company also sells into very large and very small companies.



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Customer Interaction Solutions 27th Annual Top 50 Inbound Teleservices Agencies Ranking

At the start of the second quarter of each year since 1986, *Customer Interaction Solutions* has delivered its Top 50 Teleservices Agency Ranking. True to form, for the 27th time, we present our rankings.

Our Top 50 rankings are based on extensive detail gleaned from an exhaustive application process in which teleservices vendors quantify their service delivery in terms of minutes usage in their various call center locations. Through more than a quarter

century of consistency in processing and evaluating applications, the Top 50 ranking has become the benchmark for businesses seeking high-capacity teleservices agencies.

Because the primary factor in our rankings is call volume, Customer Interaction Solutions has always relied on measurable, third-party-verifiable data to determine our rankings. Qualifying teleservices agencies were required to submit responses to a detailed questionnaire, indicating the nature of their operations and listing the number of billable minutes for the 12-month period. Verification, in the form of the signature of each agency's president/CEO was required, in addition to submitting a letter of verifica-



tion from each telephone service providers used, certifying the number of minutes for which the providers billed the agencies during the evaluation period.

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Outbound – U.S. Domestic

1. **DialAmerica** (Mahwah, N.J.)
www.dialamerica.com
2. **GC Services Limited Partnership** (Houston, Texas)
www.gcserv.com
3. **Alorica Inc.** (Chino, Calif.)
www.alorica.com
4. **PCCW Teleservices** (Dublin, Ohio)
www.pccwteleservices.com
5. **Agero** (Medford, Mass.)
www.agero.com
6. **USA800 Inc.** (Kansas City, Mo.)
www.usa800.com
7. **Thomas L. Cardella & Associates** (Cedar Rapids, Iowa)
www.tlcassociates.com
8. **TeleServices Direct** (Indianapolis, Ind.)
www.teleservicesdirect.com
9. **ACCENT Marketing Services** (Jeffersonville, Ind.)
www.accentonline.com
10. **VXI Global Solutions Inc.** (Los Angeles, Calif.)
www.vxi.com

11. **Telvista Inc.** (Dallas, Texas)
www.telvista.com
12. **The Results Companies** (Dania Beach, Fla.)
www.theresultcompanies.com
13. **24-7 Intouch** (Regina, SK)
www.24-7intouch.com
14. **AnswerNet** (Willow Grove, Pa.)
www.answernetnetwork.com
15. **Dialogue Marketing** (Troy, Mich.)
www.dialogue-marketing.com
16. **Ameridial Inc.** (North Canton, Ohio)
www.ameridial.com
17. **American Customer Care Inc.** (Bristol, Conn.)
www.americancustomercare.com
18. **Affinitas Corp.** (Omaha, Neb.)
www.affinitas.net
19. **Telerx** (Horsham, Pa.)
www.telerx.com
20. **NOVO 1** (Forth Worth, Texas)
www.novo1.com

Outbound – International

1. **Teleperformance** (Paris, France)
www.teleperformance.com

2. **PCCW Teleservices** (Hong Kong)
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3. **Telvista Inc.** (Dallas, Texas)
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by Blair Pleasant, president and principal analyst at COMMfusion LLC, and
Tim Passios, senior director of solutions marketing at Interactive Intelligence

A Realistic Look at Social Media and the Contact Center

Twitter and Facebook have given customers new ways to connect with businesses, get information, voice opinions — positive and negative — and generally assess and comment on companies and the products and services they provide. In enterprises wanting to make top-level service and support the standard for social consumers, integrating social media with the contact center is a practical way to do it.

In fact, contact center technology now makes it possible to manage social media as just another communication channel, allowing centers to route things like tweets and Facebook posts to agents the same way as phone calls, e-mail, and web chat sessions. At the same time, tools for real-time monitoring and alerting allow enterprises to track social networks and promptly respond to relevant customer comments and issues. So from a technology standpoint, the ability to integrate social media in the contact center isn't a question. Among CIOs, contact center managers and marketing managers, the bigger question now is: When integrating social media with customer care operations, what's the best way to move forward? It's a question that leads to still more questions.

For instance, what area of the business should own social media, customer service or marketing? Based on industry research and interviews with key stakeholders in businesses around the U.S., the consensus is that marketing should oversee social media initiatives. That then leads to another important question: Who should respond to customers on a social network when marketing doesn't have the answers?

While marketing is the best candidate to manage social media-based product promotions, branding and the like, it isn't always the best resource for handling all interactions with social media customers, especially responses to complaints. In the social media equation, most marketing departments actually respond to customers only after a customer already has engaged the company through a social network to ask a question or complete a transaction.

And when marketing does respond, the responses are typically issued through the traditional channels of voice, e-mail and chat, not through the social media channel the interaction originated on.

But no worries. If an enterprise and its contact center implement their social media initiative in four distinct stages, they can strategically make top-level service the norm for consumers in social media circles.

Stage 1: Manually monitor and respond ad hoc

Owner: Marketing

Process: Starting with free or low-cost tools such as TweetDeck/HootSuite and a variety of Facebook utilities that look for key words and phrases, enterprises can monitor public social media sites to see what's being said about their companies and products, as well as their competitors. This approach generates results by searching for keywords, company name and products, or by following hash tags on Twitter and entering in company or product-related names in Facebook. Marketing (or public relations) is typically responsible for responding to consumer comments. Responses can range from no response, to a simple acknowledgment of the comment, to an invitation to interact offline via the phone or e-mail.

Stage 2: Automated monitoring and manual routing

Owner: Marketing

Process: At this stage, implementing automated monitoring tools such as Radian6 (now part of Salesforce.com), SM2, Buzzient, or Social Mention enables a company to aggregate social feeds and receive notifications about when and how its brand is mentioned on social media sites. Alerts can be issued to deliver information on customer sentiment, such as "the customer is angry," at which point the customer's comments are manually triaged and sent (usually via e-mail) to the marketing department or appropriate individual for resolution. From there, depending on the specific inquiry or comments, interactions can be routed manually as required to associated departments such as accounting, customer support, etc.

Stage 3: Automated monitoring and automated routing

Owner: Marketing with Customer Service participation

Process: This stage involves automatically routing a social customer's comments based on keywords and agent or employee skills required to respond to the customer. To make sure the appropriately skilled person handles the interaction, an enterprise must usually integrate social media monitoring tools with contact center technologies — in this case, skills-based routing. It's at this stage that contact center agents become more central to the social media process, and that contact center technologies are extended to users in the marketing department and elsewhere in the enterprise for customer service. When integrated with the contact center platform, social media interactions can be treated just like phone calls, e-mail, or web chat. Contact center reports also can show how many interactions originate via social media, the response times for such interactions, whether the situation was resolved, and so on.

Stage 4: Full integration with contact center platform

Owner: Customer Service with Marketing involvement

Process: This ultimate step ties in automated monitoring and routing with other contact center tools such as workforce management, CRM, CTI, etc. By integrating with the CRM system, contact centers can push customer information from the CRM database to the agent handling the interaction, and can additionally provide the agent with the interaction history and context. Agents can then see, for example, whether the customer has already interacted with another agent, whether the customer received the information they needed, or whether the situation hasn't yet been resolved and is ongoing. As more customers turn to social media for service and support, it's imperative that individuals handling the interaction understand its context as much as possible.

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New Rules

There have been several significant developments of late related to regulation as it applies to the customer interactions solutions space – some good and some (if you're in this industry, anyway) not so good.

Let's leave the best for last.

In what could create new headaches for marketers, the Federal Communications Commission recently made changes to its telemarketing rules in an effort to "further protect consumers from unwanted autodialed or prerecorded calls." The FCC reports that unwanted telemarketing calls and texts were consistently in the top three consumer complaint categories at the FCC last year.

The new rules require telemarketers to obtain prior express written consent, including by electronic means such as a website form, before placing a robocall to a consumer; eliminates the "established business relationship" exemption to the requirement that telemarketing robocalls to residential wireline phones occur only with prior express consent from the consumer; requires telemarketers to provide an automated, interactive opt-out mechanism during

U.S. overseas grew to over five dozen members of the U.S. House of Representatives."

CWA says that more than 40 members of both parties have signed on to the bill in the last few weeks alone, and that more are expected to do the same in short order.

"Republicans and Democrats alike understand this bill is a dose of bi-partisan common sense at a time when such measures are in short supply in Washington," says CWA Chief of Staff Ron Collins, who began his career in a Maryland-based Verizon call center.

Collins adds that "Lawmakers of all stripes from around the country agree that there should be consequences for shipping good American jobs overseas while so many here at home are looking for work. They get the idea that only companies that create American jobs should get American taxpayer dollars."

New FCC rules require telemarketers to obtain prior express written consent, including by electronic means such as a website form, before placing a robocall to a consumer.

each robocall so that consumers can immediately tell the telemarketer to stop calling; and, strictly limits the number of abandoned or dead air calls that telemarketers can make within each calling campaign. Informational calls, such as those related to school closings and flight changes, appear to be exempted from this.

Meanwhile, the push to discourage call center offshoring seems to be gaining steam. A March press release issued by the Communications Workers of America trumpets the fact that "bi-partisan support on Capitol Hill for legislation that bans federal grants or guaranteed loans to American companies that move call center jobs from the

As discussed in my Logout column in the January/February issue of *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine, the proposed legislation was introduced by U.S. Reps. Tim Bishop (D, NY-1) and Dave McKinley (R, WV-1). If passed, domestic companies that locate their call centers overseas would lose the ability to get federal grants and loans, would be kept on a list at the U.S. Department of Labor, and would have to be able transfer callers to onshore call center representatives upon customer request.

On a separate but related note, Frontier Communications in early March announced plans to add 25 to 30 jobs at its Fort Wayne call center. That may be small beans when you look at the greater employment picture; but, hey, every bit helps.

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