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BIG TIME

IBM Expands Efforts in Big Data, Analytics

Anjul Bhambhri is vice president of big data products at IBM

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- Optimizing E-mail Marketing
- Getting FCR in a Multi-Channel World

Rich Tehrani, *CEO, TMC*

GM to Facebook: Your Ads Don't Work

When you are about to have one of the largest public offerings in the world – north of $100 billion, and much of the reason for the size of your IPO has to do with advertising revenue, there is nothing worse than having one of the world's largest and most sophisticated advertisers telling you your ads don't work. And that is exactly what just happened to Facebook when GM pulled the plug on a $10-million ad deal.

To put this in perspective, GM is the third largest advertiser in the U.S., and its budget is absolutely huge. Last year, in fact, it was $1.8 billion. The interesting part of the situation is that even though GM won't be continuing its ad spend this year, it plans on continuing to spend $30 million or so for Facebook content.

What this tells us is Facebook is just becoming a driver of the Splinternet or another Internet which advertisers and developers need to take into account. While having free content is great for Facebook and, moreover, GM will no doubt continue to drive massive web traffic Zuckerberg's way, the challenge becomes how to monetize it all.

Now one could argue that Facebook can just show ads from other companies on all the content GM creates, and it currently does this. The issue worth wondering about is what if other advertisers come to the same conclusion and there are no ads from major companies like Ford or Toyota to show on all the GM content.

Let's remember, people have likened advertising on social networks to an interruption of a conversation between friends, and this GM news seems to echo the sentiment.

Perhaps most importantly, if you had to surmise what sort of ad would be most successful on Facebook, you would no doubt say those targeting consumers – and automobiles would likely be at the top of the list. And here we have this massive consumer automobile advertising company complaining about advertising effectiveness.

Now it is worth pointing out that advertisers use different metrics to measure ad effectiveness. In my career I have seen one company decide an advertising product isn't for them, and their direct competitor loves the exact same product. This happens at trade shows as well where the booth of company A does poorly but company B competes directly with company A and has a full booth of people and signs up for a larger booth at the next event.

If this example becomes a trend, Facebook may have to refocus its ad push on advertising outside its network using the rich targeting data it continues to amass.

Let's further consider GM wastes massive amounts of its ad budget on TV. By waste I mean branding is a very tough business in that it is difficult to target branding ads directly to your audience. In other words, when you see an ad on TV for a Chevy truck – a category that only a percentage of the population would buy – the rest of the ad spend could be considered wasted.

So GM is comfortable with wasted ad spend – most companies realize this is just the way branding works.

But on the web there is more measurability, meaning that GM likely compared its click through rates on Facebook with other sites like Google, etc., and decided there weren't enough people clicking to keep the ad campaign running. Typically the online advertising division of companies is more results-oriented than those in the TV or radio arenas.

So this could be an issue of a single company using measurement tools that put a poor spotlight on Facebook's results.

But it could also be the equivalent of IBM pulling out of COMDEX and subsequently sinking the largest trade show in the U.S. virtually overnight.

Now I am not trying to be over-dramatic here – Facebook isn't going to go away any time soon. But if this example becomes a trend, it may have to refocus its ad push on advertising outside its network using the rich targeting data it continues to amass.

And while the Facebook IPO seems to be the hottest thing since the launch of the iPhone, it remains to be seen if in one year the stock becomes more like high flyer Google or sinking ship Vonage. CIS

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*

How to Make Your Customers Want to Schedule Service Appointments

If you've followed my column in CIS over the past few years, you know I've often criticized businesses for mishandling customers and underestimating the importance of quality customer care. It seems obvious yet, globally two out of every three people have ended relationships with a brand due to poor service costing billions of dollars to the most prominent service industries, including all forms of communications providers (nearly all of them took their hard-earned dollars to a competitive brand).

One of the common complaints is always the four-hour window given for service and delivery calls. Why four hours, especially early in the day? And why can't they confirm a more exact time later in the day, considering techs and delivery drivers all check in after each appointment?

The last time I was told I would get a call 30 minutes in advance, I was surprised to hear the tech call my cell phone to tell me he would be there in five minutes. Add that to the existing frustration from having to call the tech in the first place.

I was at The Cable Show in Boston a few weeks ago and, while most of my conversations focused on the next generation of video services and customized EPGs, I was intrigued by a colorful, simple, yet seemingly very useful piece of software at the TOA Technologies booth.

As it turned out, TOA has developed a mobile workforce management software that it says, among other things, allows businesses to reduce the service call window to one hour with 96 percent accuracy. Problem solved.

TOA has developed a mobile workforce management software that allows businesses to reduce the service call window to one hour with 96 percent accuracy.

Perhaps, but what TOA is really about, according to Susan McLaughlin, vice president of strategic sales in North America, is making the customer the focal point of the service appointment event. What does that mean? (Watch my conversation with Susan: http://tmcnet.com/59166.1)

For starters, end customers have the ability to go onto providers' websites to see their scheduled service time within that one-hour window, including the latest updates, so they know exactly where they fall in the queue, thanks to self-learning software that accurately estimates the time for each task. They can also request a 30-minute heads up call (which, Sue tells me, will actually come half an hour before the tech arrives and can be made via the customer's preferred communications medium). As if that's not already a huge improvement to what we're used to, end customers are able to confirm, cancel, or reschedule appointments via the web interface.

But even with the advanced software, unexpected delays arise and some appointments may take longer than expected. That's where Susan says TOA's advanced routing engine kicks into high gear, determining the most effective way to reassign delayed appointments – or, if the delay is deemed to be only minimal, notifying the customer of the situation.

For techs, an HTML5 application allows access to the latest schedules, notes, hardware inventory, and other job-related documentation – all from any web-enabled device. The data used to create an efficient service call process is collected from any other customer care, CRM, ticketing, or billing systems, easily accomplished via open APIs.

It all seems very easy – and convenient for the customer. But that's exactly what it was designed for – to simplify the process. Customers are provided an added layer of comfort and control, and techs are provided the resources to complete their jobs efficiently. In addition, because techs arrive on time for their appointments, they are not put in situations where the customer engagement begins with the customer already unhappy, increasing the likelihood of positive resolution, increased customer satisfaction, and a heightened sense of brand loyalty.

I'm not at all surprised this software exists. But, I'm shocked that it's not being used by every business that has mobile field workers. **CIS**

by Paula Bernier

Big Time

IBM Expands Efforts in Big Data, Analytics

IBM has helped organizations manage data for many decades by providing them with relational databases. But in the last year or two there's been a data boom, and lot of the data cropping up as part of that doesn't fit neatly into relational databases. That makes it more difficult for organizations to locate and leverage data effectively and efficiently. To address these new realities and requirements, IBM has committed to spend $100 million to research technologies and services that will enable clients to manage and exploit data as it continues to grow in diversity, speed and volume; rolled out some related new products; and done several acquisitions.

These new initiatives are important, given 83 percent of 3,000 CIOs recently surveyed indicated that applying analytics and business intelligence to their IT operations is the most important element of their strategic growth plans over the next three to five years, according to the 2011 IBM Global CIO Study.

However, while we keep hearing about how there's a gold mine of data out there just waiting to be uncovered, the fact that the volume of data is already huge and is growing at an unprecedented rate, and the fact that much of that data is unstructured, can sometimes make it very difficult to locate specific data and identify trends. IBM estimates 2.5 quintillion bytes of data are created by mobile devices, sensors, social media and out sources on a daily basis, and between 2011 and 2016 enterprise data is set to increase more than 650 percent – with 80 percent of that data expected to be unstructured.

"Navigating big data to uncover the right information is a key challenge for all industries," says Arvind Krishna, general manager of information management at IBM Software Group. "The winners in the era of big data will be those who unlock their information assets to drive innovation, make real-time decisions, and gain actionable insights to be more competitive."

That's why last year at about this time, IBM introduced a big data platform that helps enterprise customers handle large loads and different varieties of data, which may be structured or unstructured, coming from social media, machine data, data from call records (in the case of a telco), and/or other sources, says Bhambhri.

Anjul Bhambhri, vice president of big data products at IBM

InfoSphere BigInsights and Streams software introduced by IBM last year enable organizations to "integrate and analyze tens of petabytes of data in its native format and gain critical intelligence in sub-second response times," according to IBM. The company says its BigInsights software "incorporates Watson-like technologies, including unstructured text analytics and indexing that allows users to analyze rapidly changing data formats and types on the fly." InfoSphere

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Streams software, meanwhile, analyzes incoming data and flags in real time changes that may signify a new pattern or trend. This addresses such data as blogs, Twitter feeds, stock information, video and more. IBM announced this spring that it is has expanded its big data platform to run on third-party distributions of Apache Hadoop, beginning with Cloudera.

There are many current and potential uses for these kinds of solutions, and they go far beyond marketing and sales applications that might first come to mind when you think about this kind of thing. For example, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology is leveraging this IBM technology in its work monitoring, doing research on, and comparing the health of premature babies in Australia, Canada and China.

In addition to the new, Apache Hadoop-based analytics software, IBM last year came out with 20 new service offerings that provide business and IT people with predictive analytics capabilities so they can access, configure and design their operations to take advantage of their data. Specific services under this umbrella include Cloud Workload Analysis, which helps IT staff prioritize cloud deployment and migrations plans; Server and Storage optimization and analysis tools, which promise 80 percent faster implementation times; a Data Center Lifecycle Cost Analysis Tool, which can reduce total data center costs by up to 30 percent; and Security Analytic services, which identify known events and automatically handle them without human intervention.

While IBM already had a strong foundation in the analytics realm, the company has invested heavily in the data analytics space and continues to bring new organizations and solutions into the fold. As of last year at this time, IBM had invested more than $14 billion in 24 analytics acquisitions. And in the last few months it has acquired at least two more companies in this category. Those companies are Varicent and Vivisomo.

The Varicent solutions bring analytics to front-end business operations including finance, human resources, IT and sales departments. Vivisimo is known for its discovery and navigation software, which helps companies access and analyze big data. Vivisimo has more than 140 customers in the consumer goods, electronics, financial services, government, life sciences, and manufacturing verticals, among others; its clients include such large organizations as Airbus, the U.S. Air Force, Procter & Gamble, and LexisNexis.

"IBM sees enormous opportunity to apply advanced analytics to sales functions that can help organizations uncover new, untapped growth opportunities," says Bhambhri. "We anticipate business analytics revenue for IBM will reach $16 billion by 2015."

IBM reported first quarter revenue in its software division increased 7 percent and profit was up 12 percent; IBM's business analytics revenue was up 14 percent. Analytics and big data are certainly a good place to be right now, as IDC estimates the market for big data technology and services will reach $16.9 billion by 2015. As discussed, IBM is clearly moving on that opportunity both through internal development and via M&A.

"The Varicent acquisition – along with Algorithmics, Clarity Systems, Netezza, OpenPages, SPSS and Vivisimo deals – supports our long-term strategy of strengthening our portfolio of big data and business analytics solutions and industry expertise."

Bhambhri offers an example of how a retail organization can uncover new, untapped growth opportunities using the services and tools that IBM provides. All retailers get point-of-sale data, which helps brands and retailers understand what kinds of things shoppers are buying so they can do proper ordering and inventory. However, says Bhambhri, there's always lag time between the time the sale happens and the time the point-of-sale information becomes available; it's typically around 72 hours. That lag time wasn't much of an issue in the past, but it can prevent retailers from moving quickly enough to act on trends in today's age of the connected consumer. For example, let's says a YouTube video talking about how drinking juice is good for you went viral. That could trigger a temporary increase in the sale of juicers, so retailers might want to consider quickly putting out promotions for their juicers while the interest in such products is high. If they waited the 72 hours or more to receive and then analyze customer buying habits, retailers can completely miss out on this kind of opportunity.

"Specifically for retail, bringing in social media is going to be very key," Bhambhri says. "Not doing it can hurt the business."

Of course, it's no small task to comb through and make sense of data derived from social media. Bhambhri says wading through social media data, which she refers to as noisy data, to find valuable information can be like finding a needle in a haystack. That's because a single discussion on social media may mention 50 topics, but only one topic (a mention of a specific product, retailer or buying intention) about which the retailer would have an interest. The beauty of big data, however, is that somebody can capture all that data and use multiple applications to extract useful information from that same data and, if desired, combine it with data from other sources.

Bhambhri notes that organizations like retailers already have a lot of existing data repositories or applications, like CRM, so it's important to be able to be able to leverage those resources as well. By adding Vivisomo, which has federated capabilities for structured and unstructured data, IBM can bring in more big data sources and allow for more analysis, she says. However, she adds, IBM believes bringing analytics to the data (even if that data is in multiple databases or locations) rather than bringing the data to the analytics can render faster results. That's especially important in this age of big data, she says.

While IBM offers a full suite of big data and analytics hardware, software and services solutions, Bhambhri notes that customers don't have to buy everything from IBM, and that IBM will support analytics packages from other suppliers. **CIS**

by Steve Brubaker, Chief of Staff, InfoCision Management Corp.

Employing Creative Ways to Enhance Recruitment and Retention

In the call center industry – or any industry really – recruiting and retaining top talent is critical to success. People are the heart of our business, so attracting the right candidates can make all the difference. Holding on to top performers is equally important, enabling a company to avoid knowledge loss and attrition costs that can hinder growth.

So how do you bring the best candidates your way? And how do you keep top talent on board? To enhance your efforts on both fronts, you need to implement what I like to call a Continuum for Recruiting and Retention. This continuum focuses on four ongoing and overlapping goals:

Raise awareness to become an "employer of choice"

Think of a company where everyone wants to work – a company like Google. How can your company achieve the Google allure? Well, it starts with making a concentrated effort to be an "employer of choice". An "employer of choice" is a place where people are lining up and kicking down the door for a position. You may already consider your company to be an "employer of choice", but do your employees and potential employees?

To become an "employer of choice", you have to raise awareness. You have to get your name out there and tell your company story. Don't be afraid to toot your own horn. Let the community know about your unique work environment, and your employees and their notable achievements (at and outside work). Apply for awards recognizing great employers. When you win, let the media know; let potential employees know. Find ways to make your company stand out from the pack. Spotlight aspects of your company that are different or better: amenities, salary, opportunities for advancement, and the like.

Integrate effective human resources policies and procedures

On the human resources side, it all starts with best practices. Develop a diversity policy, and promote diversity in hiring.

Steve Brubaker

Encourage HR staff members to earn Society for Human Resource Management certification. Also, employ best practices for your industry and your region. Every region has its own pressing issues. Make sure you address them.

Be specific with your recruiting messages. Let potential employees know exactly what you are looking for. At InfoCision, we seek out communicators with age and experience. So, in our recruitment materials, we make it clear we're looking for people who want careers and not just jobs. It's also important to select the best channels (newspaper, television, Intranet, job fairs, social media) to reach your ideal candidate. Finally, don't be afraid to turn people away if they are not a good fit for your company. Hiring a candidate simply to fill a seat will only hurt your organization in the long run.


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Create an environment where employees can excel

"Employers of choice" provide employees opportunities to learn, grow and develop. You have to give employees the tools to succeed. That means job training and company training. Teach them your values and mission. Let them know your goals and business. Offer training to: help employees excel in their current roles; move into new roles; learn best practices and adapt to new technologies. These opportunities help you better single out individuals looking to advance.

Another aspect of creating an environment where employees can excel involves making life easier for your employees. A key question to ask: Can we offer that on site? At InfoCision, we offer amenities like on-site fitness centers, doctors' offices, child care facilities, and food service. These conveniences eliminate many everyday stresses for our employees (running to the doctor, finding time for the gym), helping them to be more focused and productive at work. Employees value these benefits, and they are a draw to job candidates.

Engage employees – help them achieve self-actualizing goals

There is a very easy way to find out what your employees want and need: ask them. With surveys, you can discover whether employees are happy with their benefits, training, work environment, etc. And, if they are unhappy, you can ask them how you can make improvements. You also can solicit feedback through open forums with senior management, suggestion boxes, performance and peer reviews, and even awards.

Providing employees fresh, consistent incentives to achieve goals is another great way to increase productivity, create value and improve retention. Use performance contests to inspire and motivate employees to work harder and be more proactive. Challenges and incentives keep employees engaged in their roles, and offer clear, attainable goals. They also help keep work fun, and spirits and energy high. Ultimately, a great work environment will be your field of dreams: If you build it, top talent will come – and stick around. **CIS**

Steve Brubaker is Chief of Staff at InfoCision Management Corp. Reach him at steve.brubaker@infocision.com. In business since 1982, InfoCision is the second-largest privately held teleservices company and a leading provider of direct marketing solutions for Fortune 100 companies, nonprofit organizations and small businesses. For more information, visit www.infocision.com.

by Paula Bernier

What's New in Social CRM

Aegis, HP Bring New Solutions to Market

Listening is often enough if you're a friend, a parent or a shrink. That's clearly not the case, however, if you're a company operating in this day and age of social media.

"Digital and social media are very important parts of the customer experience eco-system and have gained significant customer mindshare in recent times," notes Aparup Sengupta, managing director and global CEO of Aegis.

"With customer service, marketing and sales teams joining the drive, the demand has grown beyond pure listening and analyzing to include engaging with the end users," he adds. "Our research shows that social media is the top of the mind agenda around a brand with CXOs."

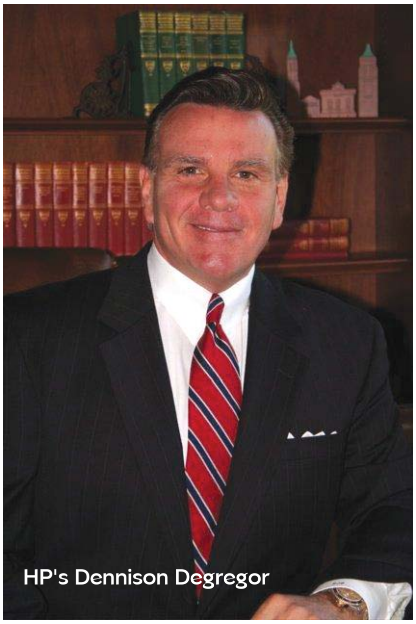
Aegis has been focused specifically on being a contact center company for most of the 25 years it's been in business, says Anil Modi, chief marketing officer for Aegis, and president of its Middle East North Africa region. But in recent years Aegis has looked at how customer relationships are changing, how different companies' product offering and pricing across specific verticals are often very similar to one another, and how it can help client companies differentiate themselves through user experience.

To move this effort forward, the company two years ago established Aegis Innovations Labs, where it does research and builds products that its customers can use to target and engage customers. The first deliverable on this front is the social media engagement solution known as AegisLISA. The LISA part stands for listen, interact, socialize, align.

Modi explains that AegisLISA, an outsourced solution that includes software and people, enables a brand to interact with its customers. Aegis already has been doing that with e-mail, voice, and chat, he says, but when the company looked at social solutions it found that most of them essentially were listening tools. The Facebook pages of many brands, he continues, are not capturing customer information and using it to their advantage. So the company designed AegisLISA to listen, but also to analyze that information, and to facilitate the appropriate interaction. Through analysis, he says, AegisLISA can help a company understand which interactions gleaned from social networking are sales or service opportunities, for example. Then the engagement piece takes over to put in place the people, processes and tools to move on those opportunities.

If a brand name is used in forums on a company's own Facebook page, or on another Facebook page or via Twitter, AegisLISA extracts that communication, brings it to a central site, analyzes it to understand if it's a potential sales or service opportunity, and then enables engagement relating to that communication. Modi adds that AegisLISA also addresses reputation management by providing live agents who are trained to respond to specific customer concerns.

AegisLISA, which is available now, is already in use by several customers. That includes a telecom organization in South Africa, consumer goods companies, and a sports club. The sports club has expensive athletes with huge fan followings on social media, explains Modi, so the club wants to use AegisLISA to engage with those fans via social media and ensure athletes are responding to fans in a way that is appropriate and helps rather than harms the business.


HP's Dennison Degregor

The upfront cost of AegisLISA is around $10,000. Monthly fees fall into the $2,000 to $3000 a month range. And human resources costs are added to that based on the number of people required. But Modi says the payoff for these investments can be significant and can come in the form of brand reputation, sales and churn control.

HP is another company that recently announced a new offering that marries customer relationship management and social media. The solution, called HP Social Enterprise Services, was unveiled in mid April.

Dennison Degregor, worldwide CRM executive at HP, notes that CRM has evolved from a push model into a customer engagement model in which peers manage their relationships with other peers – and through that model have assumed control in terms of comparing products and pricing.

HP Social Enterprise Services, which is part of HP Customer Engagement Management, bring social media channels into contact centers to give organizations a holistic view of customers so they can better understand, serve and build products and services that appeal to those customers.

"Social media has become a game changer in company-customer interactions, and it needs to be integrated into an organization's contact center," says Danila Meirlaen, vice president of business process outsourcing at HP. "HP Social Enterprise Services take customer relations to a new level with analytic tools that make it easy to engage with customers via social networks, turning those interactions into positive outcomes for both the customer and organization."

The solution includes two components that can be bundled or delivered separately. HP Agent Services was designed to enable organizations to engage with their customers in social media channels. HP Social Media Analysis helps businesses to extract information and insights on customers from social media.

HP's new offers leverage technology from HP entities Autonomy, HP Labs and Vertica. HP Labs provides the analytics piece, and Vertica provides a data warehousing platform that can optimize the processing of data from Autonomy, Degregor explains, adding that Autonomy analyzes unstructured data and makes it structured data that can be acted upon. **CIS**

Key features of HP Social Enterprise Services

Listening Service – monitors a client brand or product in social media channels to identify new engagement opportunities.

Analysis Service – leverages various analytics to gain insight into client, competitor and industry trends to refine the company's social media strategy.

Routing Service – directs engagement opportunities to internal stakeholders, such as customer service, marketing, sales and product development for prompt action.

Engagement Service – leverages insights derived from analytics to rapidly respond to customer inquiries and comments in social media channels.

Reporting Service – provides daily snapshots, weekly summaries and monthly reports of insights, analysis and opportunities to measure program success.

by Paula Bernier

Retail Case Study

Social Media Creates a Stream of New Opportunity

Social media is impacting the customer experience in important new ways. *Customer Interaction Solutions* recently interviewed Jason Brennan, co-founder of advertising agency Stream Companies about how one discount apparel retailer is leveraging social media.

VF Outlet, a discount apparel retailer with 70 stores nationwide, has been working with the firm on social, local and mobile initiatives, and has piloted projects that mix social media with the traditional in-store shopping experience.

As a result, VF Outlet's Facebook page has grown from having no social media presence to generating more than 33,000 Likes in under a year. It achieved those results through a combination of promotions, coupons, contests, and integration with other marketing efforts to achieve this.

"The client wanted to spend limited resources in social media," says Brennan. "With that in mind, we recommended that they should initially concentrate their efforts on Facebook. The strategy was to build a fan base through the use of e-mail lists, coupon offers and contests. We worked with the VF marketing department to manage daily operations of the page, creating and posting engaging content. We were also highly involved with creating conversations with their passionate fan base, responding to questions, and soliciting feedback. We were also hugely dedicated to collecting and analyzing data, which is a hallmark of how we approach all our accounts. This gave us a lot of insight, and we were able to make strategic recommendations on how to move forward."

As part of the effort, the companies integrated a lot of Facebook-only couponing. Stream looked at the whole business, studying the data and customer insights, so was able to make offers that people not only wanted and used for themselves, but were willing to share. For example, they held new store openings.

"Stream also integrated with an in-person event where the @VFOutletGirls, three VF Outlet marketing girls tweeting from behind the scenes on the VF Outlet store photo shoots, events, sales and everything in between," Brennan says. "This has been hugely popular and is a great way that VF Outlets is connecting its online social activities with its in-store activities."

The companies also have been exploring social flash sales, a new social commerce trend.

"Basically, VF chooses an outfit not available in stores – complete with dress, bag, and hat – and makes it available only to their nearly 40,000 Facebook fans for a limited time," Brennan explains. "We manage the promotion, social interaction, customer service, and feedback of these flash sales. They have provided us with some very interesting insights into what customers will want next and where we should be heading with our social and other marketing efforts to stay out front." **CIS**

How VF Outlet Benefitted from the Social Media Effort

- Increased number of Likes from 86 (May 2011) to 33,083 (March 2012)
- Current Likes: 38,573
- Weekly total reach: 411,812 (March 2012)
- Weekly talking about: 2,616 (March 2012)

Source: Stream Companies

by Paula Bernier

Ergonomics in the Contact Center

Interior Concepts Offers Guidance on Reducing Worker Fatigue, Increasing Productivity

Working in a call center can give the brain and the mouth a nice workout, but it's not always so great for the rest of the body. That's why it's important to design call center workplaces to maximize productivity by reducing user fatigue and discomfort. To get more details on how organizations can achieve all that, *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine recently interviewed Jennifer Way, marketing manager of Interior Concepts.

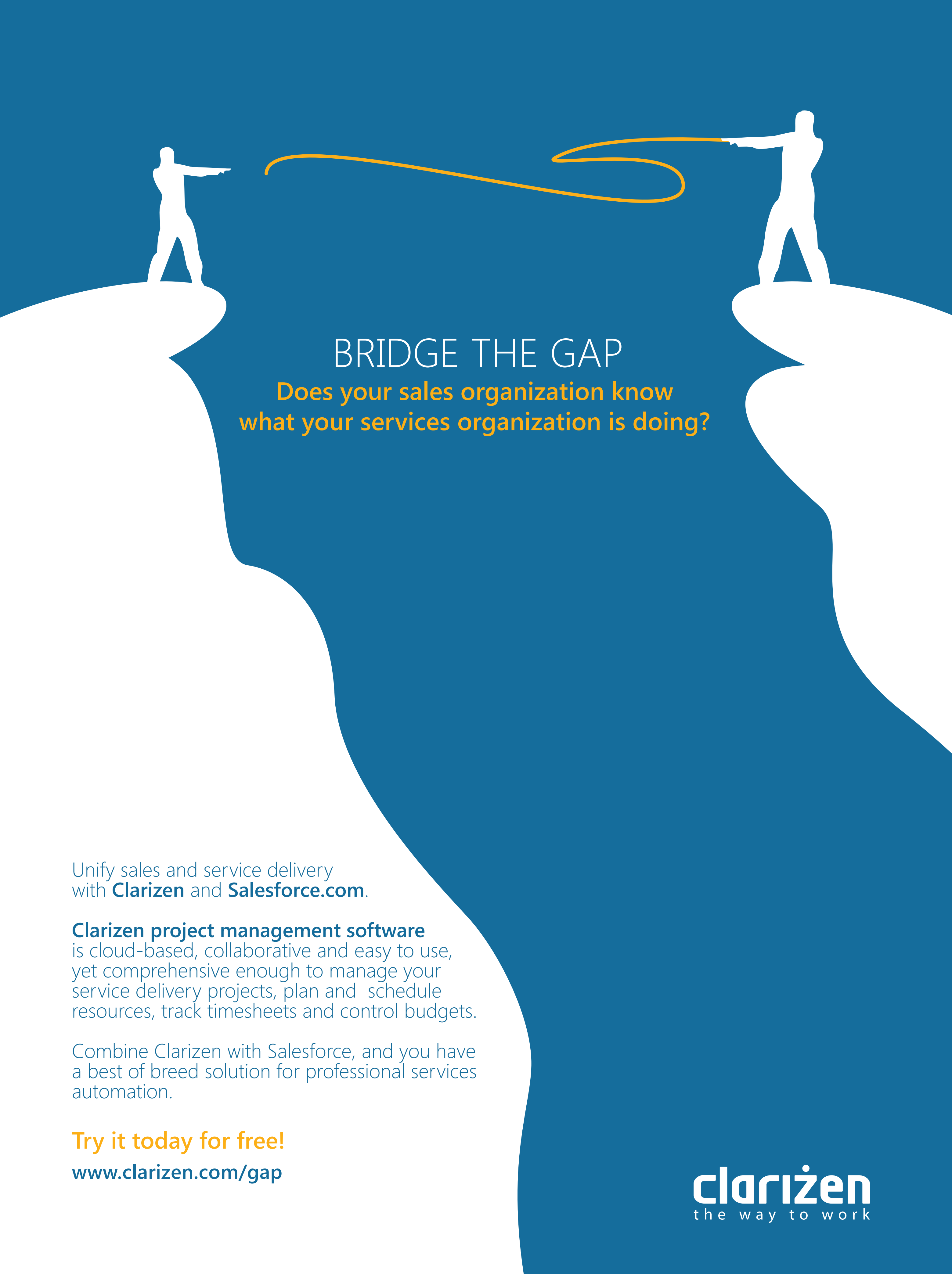
What are key features of an ergonomic chair?

Way: An ergonomic chair should be comfortable and adjustable to fit a variety of users. Typical adjustments are height, seat depth, lumbar support, and armrest height and width. The chair should fully support the back of the user while reclining slightly. Studies have shown that the best seated posture is a reclined posture of 100-110 degrees and not the upright 90-degree posture that was portrayed in the past. Also, mesh back chairs have gained popularity due to their increased breathability and comfort.

What are your thoughts about workers sitting on exercise balls?

Way: After researching various articles, the general consensus from ergonomists tends to be that exercise balls are not recommended for prolonged sitting. Also, some workplaces might be hesitant to introduce exercise balls because of the potential hazard. It is easy to fall or roll off of the ball while working. One positive of an exercise ball is that it

Adjustable keyboards promote ergonomic positioning and paper management systems keep items in easy reach.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promotes movement, but it should probably only be used in small amounts of time sporadically throughout the day.

What should organizations look for in an ergonomic desk/workstation?

Way: An ergonomic workstation should be designed to maximize productivity by reducing user fatigue and discomfort. The key to an ergonomic workstation is training on how to work in an ergonomically correct position, and using accessories like a monitor arm, or keyboard support to allow yourself to work in those positions.

What features are important in an ergonomic headset?

Way: According to Jabra, headsets offer carefully adjusted acoustics and feature light ergonomic designs. A headset provides increased call clarity and comfort to help to avoid aching muscles and neck strain from cradling the telephone handset between head and shoulder.

It would seem that lighting would also be key to an optimized work environment. What can you tell us about that?

Way: According to OSHA, studies estimate that 90 percent of the U.S. workforce using computers for more than three hours per day experience CVS, computer vision syndrome, in some form. Task lighting can reduce symptoms of CVS including eyestrain headaches and fatigue. When choosing task lighting, be aware of significant contrast between your screen and documents or surrounding areas. Your eyes should not have to re-adjust to light levels when your focus changes. This could lead to constant dilation, creating additional eyestrain.

What, if anything, can people do to make their existing desks, chairs, etc., be more ergonomic?

Way: First, use the chair adjustments to put yourself in the proper position to view the monitor and use your keyboard. The computer monitor should be in front and centered. Your back should be fully supported by the chair while reclining slightly, and your arms and wrists should be in a neutral position when using the keyboard.

How should workers position their legs and feet to avoid stress?

Way: Legs should remain uncrossed with feet on the floor. If needed, utilize a footrest to support the legs. A footrest can relieve pressure on the lower back and provide leg support for shorter users.

How often should workers take a break?

Way: A general rule referenced on many ergonomic websites is to take a 20-second break every 20 minutes. Try to stand up and move around every few hours as well. Stop by someone's desk to ask a question rather than sending an e-mail. Breaks and movement throughout the day will reduce stress on the body and promote circulation.

Some experts suggest that occasional stretching exercises during the work day can help workers avoid body strain and fatigue. What kinds of stretches do you recommend?

Decorative acrylic cubicle headers bring the outside in, and let more natural light into the workspace.

Way: We recommend contacting local workplace health experts. They will work with you to design a stretching program for your company and train employees on how to properly perform the stretches. A workplace health expert can also complete a walk-through service to provide ergonomic suggestions to employees while they work. Locally, we work with Hackley Workplace Health to develop stretches and provide training for our office and manufacturing facility.

What about standing? Should workers work standing rather than sitting?

Way: A few articles note that standing up all day can be equally as problematic as sitting. A better solution is probably to alternate between the two or take breaks to stand up and walk around.

Tell us about your sit-to-stand products.

Way: Interior Concepts offers several sit-to-stand product solutions. The first features a flat-screen computer monitor arm and keyboard mechanism with enough adjustment to work in either a sitting or standing position. The keyboard features a paddle level, so with one simple movement the keyboard is adjustable from sitting to standing. The monitor arm has an adjustable height column. Once the height is adjusted on the column the monitor can simply be gripped and move to the correct position. The second option is an electrical mechanism and moves the entire work surface from a sitting to standing position.

I saw a local news bit that featured computer workers completing tasks while on treadmills. What are your thoughts about that?

Way: Desks featuring treadmills are designed to allow the user to work while walking very slowly. In a few call center sites we have seen a small bank of treadmill desks where employees can choose to work a few hours a day at the treadmill desk. CIS

IVR Tips and Trends

When it comes to designing and implementing an IVR system at your business, simplicity is key. Self-service solutions leveraging IVR can offer great value if they're easy to use from the customer perspective, and easy to adopt from the business perspective.

But organizations shouldn't go overboard in leveraging IVR-based self service, says JR Sloan, product director of portfolio management at Enghouse Interactive, which touches on all aspects of customer interaction management. If they do, he says, they will risk frustrating current and potential customers, and negatively impacting their own businesses. IVR is not a customer avoidance tool, he adds, saying that businesses that use it as such may get their wish and keep customers away.

That's why it's important for organizations to choose the right things to automate, Sloan says, like information that can help route customers to the most appropriate resource. An IVR is also a good tool to help callers with transactions like bill payments, order status requests, password reassignments and the like, he says, adding that an agent doesn't add much value in completing such tasks. Using an IVR can also be a great way to do call backs to customers, so they are alerted as soon as possible that the power is back up, for example, Sloan adds.

Another tip to consider when implementing an IVR, Sloan says, is to be sure to deploy enough ports in your call center for the solution. That means you need to be able to estimate how many calls will involve self service.

Of course, one of the most common end user problems with IVR and self-service voice solutions is getting caught in a loop in which there's no escape and no chance to resolution.

To address that, Virtual Hold Technology recently introduced the Conversation Bridge, which offers immediate or scheduled callbacks that capture previously entered context data from any channel and passes it to agents using existing routing and screen-pop systems. It offers the ability to access live agents regardless of the channel the customer is contacting them through – smartphones, mobile apps, social media sites, websites and even gaming consoles.

"By 2016, more than 60 percent of inbound customer service calls will come from smartphones, laptops and devices other than landlines like gaming consoles, set-top boxes and store kiosks," says VHT CEO Kevin Sjodin. "Today's always-connected, app-enabled customers want answers quickly so they can solve problems and accomplish tasks. This means that after trying self service, sometimes they need to talk."

With that comment, Sjodin gets us to the trend part of this IVR discussion. Like virtually every other part of customer care, the IVR is being impacted by the major uptake of social networking and mobile services, and the resulting trend of multi-channel customer interaction.

For many years IVR was looked at as separate from the rest of the contact center, says Sloan of Enghouse. It was a separate purchase and a separate part of the discussion. But, Sloan says he's starting to see interest by customers who see the value of both now working together. That's good news for Enghouse, which delivers IVR as an integrated part of its multi-channel contact center solution.

Don Keane, vice president of marketing and business development at Angel, a cloud-based customer experience management company that delivers IVR, ACD and other multichannel options like chat, SMS, and voice biometrics – all integrated for contact center use, says the emergence of a variety of new trends and technologies is making it a pretty exciting time for the IVR, which goes all the way back to the 1950s. Traditionally, he says, IVR has not been very customer-centric or satisfying. But today the IVR is converging with analytics, mobility and multichannel solutions to change the whole equation.

Half of Angel's customers now use the company's business intelligence and analytics solution to analyze call flows and figure out where, when and how better to use IVR, he says. Meanwhile, the widespread availability of mobile networks and use of mobile devices is enabling contact center agents and supervisors to be more productive wherever they are, and resulting in more requests from customers coming in from mobile devices. Tied into that is the multi-channel trend. Contact centers that include chat, e-mail and SMS already are popular, says Keane, but he says Angel is getting more requests for solutions that include chat and voice biometrics. Angel even recently added a GPS component to its platform, which client companies can use in applications tied to customers or their own workers.

Not surprisingly, social networking is also becoming a part of Angel's strategy. Keane says that outbound communications is a place where social could play, and that Angel is doing work on this front. Indeed, Keane explains that Angel is using "social media information from platforms like Facebook and Google+ to develop customer end user outbound messages (via IVR) based on preferences, profiles and likes/dislikes for consumer packaged goods companies."

Kim Martin, director of marketing at Voxeo, says IVR typically brings to mind voice-based interactions, but that "these platforms are having to evolve to accommodate more channels because everyone is mobile and people have smartphones, and that trend is just going continue to that point that your landline phone is going to be a thing of the past." CIS

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SOTEL systems

by Paula Bernier

MonaVie Smile

Health and Wellness Distributor Realizes $500K in Savings Using ShoreTel

Several customers are using the ShoreTel Enterprise Contact Center solution in conjunction with a virtualization platform, and MonaVie is one of them. MonaVie, a multi-level marketing and community commerce organization that sells supplements and weight loss products, has employed ShoreTel technology to connect remote workers in its multiple contact centers internationally by email and chat.

The company's main contact center is in Utah, but MonaVie also is using ShoreTel in Taiwan and Thailand, and it plans to get its India and Korea locations up and running on the platform soon as well.

One of the fastest growing companies in the world, MonaVie has 500 employees in the U.S., but does business in 21 countries, and has offices in most of those places. The company has seen $500,000 in annual savings as a result of the ShoreTel Enterprise Contact Center solution, which helped the nutrition and wellness company manage its staffing requirements.

Joel Lewis, MonaVie's supervisor of contact center operations, said that when he started at the company it was using the contact center only to take phones, but that there's so much more to its call center operations today. In 2008, he said, MonaVie started to transition its contact center solution to include e-mail, chat and other communications. As a result, rather than requiring 15 reps to handle chat and e-mail outside the automated system, MonaVie can now do the same job with just two reps, said Lewis. In all, MonaVie has 110 reps at its U.S. contact center handling calls, IM, e-mail, outbound calls, etc. – and it funnels all those communications through a single tool. He added that the system also allows MonaVie to support its widely dispersed call center workforce, 85 percent of which works remotely. CIS

Call Center Headsets

Why These Tools are the No. 1 Factor in Creating Good Contact Center Work Environments

Most of us don't spend too much time thinking about headsets, but these solutions are indispensible tools for call center reps and managers.

A recent study from Frost & Sullivan and Jabra revealed that 73 percent of contact center managers surveyed believe quality headsets is the most important way to create a good work environment.

"One of the most prevalent issues reported by contact center managers is the noise disturbances that prevent 'good conversations' between the customer and agent from taking place," says Kelly Myers, senior director of marketing at Jabra North America. "Our headset solutions not only allow contact center employees to clearly communicate with customers, but they also provide the freedom to focus on the task at hand and therefore increase productivity."

Sound disturbances can affect productivity. In fact, 91 percent of the contact center managers surveyed try to eliminate or lessen background noise caused by office electronics and devices like coffee machines and copiers, and bare wood floors. And 89 percent are trying to improve the sound quality of the actual conversations. Seventy three percent of managers polled said a quality headset is the most important factor in creating a good work environment in the contact center. That number jumps to 91 percent in large contact centers.

"We firmly believe that contact centers of all sizes can realize the many benefits that a high-quality headset provides," says Brendan Read, industry analyst at Frost & Sullivan. "As our survey shows, the noise cancelation features of a quality headset are top of mind with contact center managers across the world. The added values of call clarity and reduced sound disturbance will eventually lead to improved customer conversations, greater productivity, fewer distractions, and compliance with noise-at-work regulations." CIS

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov) recently uncovered a scam operating out of Indian call centers. The Communications Workers of America says this just the latest example of overseas call centers victimizing American consumers. The CWA quotes an FTC press release that says "The defendants' scheme involved more than 2.7 million calls to at least 600,000 different phone numbers nationwide…. In less than two years, they fraudulently collected more than $5.2 million from consumers, many of whom were strapped for cash and thought the money they were paying would be applied to loans they owed, according to FTC documents filed with the court." CWA Communications Director Candice Johnson comments: "This latest report is further proof of what we've already learned through harsh experience – these countries lack the legal safeguards that U.S. call centers and U.S. laws already have in place to protect American consumers."

Knowlagent (www.knowlagent.com) and DMG Consulting LLC have published two white papers and two corresponding podcasts that demonstrate how call centers can improve enterprise performance and profitability by maximizing agent idle time. Both the whitepapers and podcasts identify real-time work allocation solutions as tools that enable dramatic improvements in service delivery while simultaneously reducing agent downtime. "We found that we can significantly impact several key call center metrics by deploying off-phone work during idle time while improving the agent experience," says Matt McConnell, Knowlagent CEO. "Using agent idle time to deliver activities such as training and important job-related communications, you can boost the overall productivity and quality of your agents' interaction. Not only will a call center manager see increased agent performance, but more importantly they will see improved customer experience."

NICE (www.nice.com) has introduced a customer interaction management offering that brings together the company's current offering with capabilities gained via the recent acquisitions of Fizzback and Merced. The solution integrates real-time analytics and guidance solutions with voice of the customer and workforce optimization. It was designed to maximize the value enterprises generate from customer interactions that occur across touch points, including the contact center, web, mobile, back office, branch and retail.

C3/CustomerContactChannels (www.c3connect.com) has an exclusive deal with Social Dynamx to become the first business process outsourcing company in the world to use its advanced platform for identifying prioritizing and managing one-on-one social conversations at scale. The web-based tool allows C3 team members to go beyond simple social media monitoring and allow them to identify and respond to relevant online conversations and postings, all to help provide a better customer service experience. "The ability to respond to customers through social media channels has become increasingly important as more people voice their opinions through Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and peer-to-peer forums," says Rick Ferry, president and chief operating officer of C3. "With these new advanced tools from Social Dynamx, we can now capture those conversations and proactively respond to customer needs with little delay. Having access to this technology should give us a big competitive advantage in the marketplace."

Interactive Intelligence Group Inc. (www.inin.com) has announced financial results for its first quarter ended March 31, 2012, during which cloud-based orders increased 19 percent and total orders increased 6 percent, both compared to the first quarter of 2011. The company signed 60 new customers during the first quarter of 2012, including 11 new customers for its cloud-based offering. The average new customer cloud-based order was $748,000, up from $488,000 during the same quarter last year. "Our first quarter was highlighted by rapid growth in cloud-based revenue, which continues to have a positive impact on the growth and scale of our overall recurring revenues," says Interactive Intelligence founder and CEO Donald Brown. "For the first quarter, a higher mix of cloud-based orders and the structure of certain product orders resulted in more revenues being deferred to future quarters. These factors also contributed to the 48 percent year-over-year growth in our total billed and unbilled deferred revenues. We are optimistic about our outlook for the remainder of the year, and we are maintaining our revenue, order growth and profitability guidance for 2012."

Envision (www.envisioninc.com) has announces the next major upgrade of its Envision Centricity Team Optimization Suite for workforce management, work force optimization, and coaching for the contact center. New are a tabbed UI for simple navigation and less clicks; more powerful supervisor workflow including the ability to create and deliver on-line eLearning for individual and group coaching more quickly; and a new, Silverlight AV player for creating searches, queries and evaluations in a browser-based format (including support for mobile and tablet formats).

Servion (servion.com), a specialist in customer interaction management, closed out its fiscal year with record sales from the U.S. Enterprise Business Unit. This fiscal year was the strongest sales performance for a single year for the business unit. During its most recent quarter, which ended March 31, the Enterprise Business Unit finished the quarter at 128 percent of expected sales. This fiscal year yielded a sales increase of 36 percent over the prior fiscal year. "We had a fantastic year in sales," says David Baker, vice president of sales for Servion. "We saw many of our customers upgrading old, end-of-life solutions as well as adding new applications to their existing systems."

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WE GET THE CLOUD

by Lisa Stockberger

First Contact Resolution in a Multi-Channel World

"Have I answered your questions today?" How often do you hear that when you're wrapping up a call with a customer service agent? Vanguard estimates that fewer than half of all contact centers measure first contact resolution, although customers consider it an important component for overall satisfaction.

In the past, looking at phone calls may have been enough, but in today's multi-channel world measuring FCR is much more complex. A customer who goes to a website and opens an account or books a flight has achieved first contact resolution. Yet in many organizations this is not captured as a customer service success, a FCR.

In addition, a customer may begin an activity on the corporate website, be unable to complete it and resort to making a phone call to complete the transaction. The contact center chalks this up as FCR. But from the customer's perspective, he contacted you twice – once on the web and then on the phone. Most organizations are blind to multi-channel contacts.

Why? It's most likely because each channel grew up in a different part of the organization. The business imperatives and goals of each department are different. As a result, success is measured differently. For example, marketing measures likes and followers over resolution in social media. In most cases, marketing is responsible for websites and social media, IT handles mobile applications, and customer service manages phone and e-mail support. Consequently, organizations lack a holistic view of the customer and when he or she achieves FCR.

Let's look at how FCR is being analyzed today and where it needs to be tomorrow to enable us to better serve our customers.

In call centers, a number of methods can be used to determine whether first contact resolution is achieved. Yet there is no generally agreed to formula for capturing FCR. That makes it difficult to compare success across organizations or even within an organization. Here are a few of the most common methods contact centers use to measure FCR. We recommend using at least two methods to more accurately measure resolution.

- Measure FCR through call reason and wrap codes. Agents tend to be overly optimistic, so don't use these stats in isolation since they tend to overstate FCR.

- Evaluate repeat calls from specific phone numbers within a certain timeframe (generally one to two weeks). While a repeat call may mean than an issue was not resolved the first time, it may also mean that the customer has a new question.

- Make FCR part of quality monitoring. A trained third party using a calibrated measurement tool is more likely to provide an unbiased assessment of whether a contact was resolved. Generally, only a sample of calls is evaluated, thus quality monitoring gives an indication rather than a firm handle on FCR for an organization. However, it's a great tool to improve FCR for agents.

- Analyze CRM data (e.g., account numbers, phone numbers, contact type, resolution) in conjunction with timeframes for a more sophisticated approach. This big data approach offers an opportunity finally to understand first contact resolution within the call center.

- Look within channels to measure completions. Check to see whether an e-mail response is once and done, if issues are resolved within Twitter or Facebook, or if they require additional channels to complete, measure completed transactions on the web and IVR.

But if you really want to understand your ability to achieve FCR, ask your customers. Use after contact surveys to provide insights. They generally should be completed within 48 hours of the contact. Go beyond the standard questions of the experience the customer had within the channel. Ask about the task the customer was trying to accomplish, what path(s) he or she took in an attempt to complete his or her task, and the level of satisfaction with the entire journey. Ask if his or her question was handled on the first contact.

In addition, tools that analyze multi-channel contact increasingly are available to help understand customer journeys. Multi-channel analytics have been around for a while. And we're seeing new solutions where an integrated agent desktop includes not only phone contacts, but Twitter, Facebook and e-mail.

While first contact resolution isn't the only measure of success, it can be a critical one for your customers. CIS

Lisa Stockberger is a vice president at Vanguard Communications Corp. (www.vanguard.net), a consulting firm specializing in customer contact, including contact center processes, operations and technology.


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by Chris Cashwell

How to Drive Improvement through Automation

In health care and in business, data insight typically leads to improved outcomes. In order to capture and enable the use of data, organizations need to extend their staffs' skills by giving them high-performance tools that can accelerate mission critical tasks through automation. Automation is an opportunity, not a threat.


Chris Cashwell

One need to look no further than the auto industry to see the benefits associated with automation.

The automobile industry initially applied automation to isolated areas of production, primarily to process operations such as the forging of crankshafts. This resulted in a pattern of integrated manufacturing steps, with functions performed by automated equipment followed by manual operations requiring human dexterity and flexibility. Business intelligence also knows a thing or two about automation as its primary responsibility is to get more out of operational data that is generated by business processes. For example, the BI group within a software company may automate the collection of pricing and competitive market info from millions of sources and compile the data into the company's BI system to make more informed decisions.

Today, health care organizations need to start thinking about how and where they can drive improvement through automation. A recent Premier Health Alliance study reported that unnecessary labor expenses can exceed five percent of a hospital's labor budget (equaling more than $6 million per year for an average-sized hospital). In that same study, it was found that excess readmissions and inappropriate lengths of stay were totaling up to 15 percent of a hospital's annual budget, a cost directly linked to an organizations inability to extract efficiently and effectively data needed to avoid these circumstances. The burdens mentioned above are at the heart of the health care system's battle with inefficiency. However, they can be addressed with automated clinical documentation and language understanding technologies, such as IBM's Watson supercomputer – best known for its appearance on Jeopardy!.

At the core of many health care IT solutions is the promise to turn data into information. This ability to find a needle in a haystack and find it consistently and efficiently is a game changer. A recent IBM study suggests that up to 80 percent of clinical documentation is outside of a template, living in what many refer to as a giant "word blob." Up to now, hospitals have relied on manual, hands-on document searches to find the information they need. By applying language understanding technology, providers can now automate data identification and extraction and, in doing so, empower employees to get their job done more efficiently without sacrificing quality of care.

Let's look at one example of how automated understanding technology can cut efficiencies and impact patient care:

Diagnosis and Symptom Tracking – Everyday, organizations run the risk of improper coding and billing based on misinformation associated with patient status or length of stay. Without an underlying condition such as a heart problem, a patient complaining of syncope would not warrant admission to a hospital, for example. If this patient is admitted and no other diagnosis is found, the hospital may over-bill for the stay – subjecting them to an audit and return of the excess charges to Medicare. However, with the power of automated language understanding technology, clinical queries can be created on demand to search all documentation for instances of syncope, and then cross reference the search against 3,000-plus combinations of diagnoses to find only those cases where no other diagnosis is noted. The result is a query list that clarifies syncope patients with no other diagnosis from others, a list that can lead to savings of up to $1 million or more per year in revenue at an average-sized hospital. Real-time, automated queries into vast amounts of clinical data are powerful and in this case can ensure that patients with an underlying heart problem are appropriately cared for and kept overnight for monitoring.

Today's automated technologies give a new meaning to the word automation and put the power of time, resources and added intelligence in the hands of those who need it most – businesses. Whether it is an auto plant or a software company, automation is providing opportunities to leverage staff talent for more humanistic, purpose-filled tasks. As shown through research findings and the clinical example above, automated data identification and extraction is important in health care; it gives clinical staff meaningful insight into data that otherwise is not accessible at the point-of-care and creates valuable time for patient interaction and care. Ultimately, better data insight leads to improved outcomes. **CIS**

Chris Cashwell is senior director of Nuance Healthcare, Clinical Language Understanding/Business Development (www.nuance.com/for-healthcare/).

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Avaya DevConnect Gold

by Paula Bernier

CIS, TMC Announce IP Contact Center Pioneer Award Winners

This month, *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine is happy to congratulate the winners of TMC's IP Contact Center Pioneer Awards.

"These companies have exhibited ingenuity in product development and design for the contact center environment," says Erik Linask, TMC Group Editor.

"These vendors have taken the needs of contact centers to heart and delivered IP-based solutions to help solve these needs in an effort to help them provide an enhanced level of customer care by leveraging the latest capabilities and technologies," he adds.

Here is a list of this year's CRM Excellence Award Winners. CIS

WINNERS

Autonomy, an HP Company
Autonomy Qfiniti

Calabrio
Calabrio ONE

Clarity, a division of Plantronics (NYSE: PLT)
ClarityLogic

Drishti-Soft Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
Ameyo

Enghouse Interactive
CosmoCall Universe

Enghouse Interactive
Syntellect CIM (Customer Interaction Management) 8.0

inContact
inContact CRM Plug-in Agent

IntelliResponse Systems
IntelliResponse Answer Suite

Interactive Intelligence
Interaction Mobilizer

LiveVox, Inc.
LiveVox Contact Center Platform

Mediatel Data SRL
MediaCallCenter

OAISYS
Tracer & Talkument version 7.2

simplyCT
simplyAPPS

TeamSupport.com
TeamSupport

Telax Hosted Call Center
Telax Hosted Call Center

Toshiba America Information Systems Inc., Telecom Sys Div.
Call Manager for IPedge

Verizon
Verizon Voice Call Back

Zeacom
Zeacom Communications Center 6.1

Hosted Contact Center Solutions: Setting the Record Straight

Hosted contact center infrastructure solutions such as software as a service and communications as a service are gaining ground in enterprises of all sizes, and in a variety of public and corporate verticals. There are several good reasons why. In addition to the minimal cash outlay they require, hosted solutions provide quick deployments, scalability, agility, and a reduced maintenance burden. Vendors also continue to expand hosted functionality with product enhancements and improved deployment and integration models, all with the opportunity to try before you buy. The collective result is rapid and quantifiable ROI, as well as ongoing investment protection.

IP- and SIP-based technologies have largely eliminated physical communications constraints, empowering enterprises to be more responsive to customers using the virtual and multichannel servicing infrastructures of hosted solutions. As enterprises look for ways to leverage these new infrastructures, contact center hosting is an ideal, cost-effective fit.

Yet even as this new generation of the hosted/CaaS-based contact center infrastructure has overcome the technical and functional limitations of older solutions, common misperceptions continue to hinder more widespread adoption. DMG's findings identify – and dispel – five of these misconceptions:

The myth: Hosting is only for small contact centers.

The reality: Ten years ago, when the first hosted contact center infrastructure vendors were looking for funding and sought to explain their value to the market, one of their standard arguments was that this new business model would democratize the world of the contact center. In other words, for small and mid-sized organizations that could not afford a premises-based contact center platform, hosting meant they could realize the same benefits as companies that had the financial and IT resources to acquire such a solution and support it on an ongoing basis.

Since then, hosting vendors have continued delivering new servicing capabilities that don't require small and mid-sized enterprises to compromise on functionality. DMG research shows in fact that the typical buyers of these solutions are mid-sized customers, and that the majority of hosted solutions are actually deployed to replace an existing premises-based contact center solution that no longer meets the organization's needs.

The myth: Hosted contact center solutions are functionally inadequate.

The reality: Just as no two premises-based solutions are alike, neither are the many hosted contact center infrastructure solutions now available – each of which offers its own unique design, architecture and functionality. (Note that some vendors have even built their hosted offerings on premises-based contact center platforms.)

As the market continues evolving, hosted providers are moving toward a common set of capabilities that include call routing and queuing, IVR, dialing, computer telephony integration, and recording. At a higher level, a select few vendors have further taken an all-in-one approach to add modules for the applications most commonly used by contact centers, such as workforce management, quality assurance, customer satisfaction surveys, performance management, coaching, and knowledge management. All told, and with various packaging and pricing strategies to choose from, hosted contact center infrastructure providers now offer some of the most competitive and functionally rich solutions in the market.

The myth: Hosted contact centers solutions are inflexible and not customizable.

The reality: Based on DMG's findings from hosted customer interviews, the opposite is true. In general, hosted end users consider their vendors and solutions to be both flexible and scalable, although there are significant differences among hosted contact center providers (as there likewise are among premises-based competitors). In weighing a hosted solution and vendor, pay particular attention to ease of setting up and modifying the application, and to the vendor's flexibility in making upgrades. For example, does a vendor enable your IT staff to add users and deploy new IVR services from your end, or do you have to rely on their people to perform such services for you?

Either way, a major advantage that most hosting vendors have over premises-based providers is the ease with which they can offer new functionality. Hosting vendors simply load software and make the new features immediately available. Hosted solutions are also highly scalable, and allow organizations to add and reduce users and functionality as needed to meet cyclical or seasonal volumes. Better, an organization pays only for as much contact center capacity as it uses, which is often negotiable with hosted vendors.

The myth: Hosted contact center implementations and integrations are more difficult than premises-based initiatives.

The reality: Few integration jobs are easy, whether solutions are premises-based or hosted. On the hosted side, however, some vendors have built their platforms using technology that's far more standards-based and open than many older premises-based contact center offerings, making integration easier.

Also, because they don't earn revenue until the system is in production, hosted solution vendors are highly motivated to get their offerings up and running as quickly as possible. Adding to the motivation is that most hosted end users have made it clear they chose a hosted offering to avoid an expensive and lengthy implementation. To that end, many hosted vendors offer fixed implementation and integration fees that compare favorably to the cost of premises-based efforts.

The myth: Hosting has a higher total cost of ownership than premises-based solutions.

The reality: There's a reason – or, several reasons – the CFOs in many companies now prefer to invest in hosted solutions rather than purchasing licenses for systems and applications. Hosted solutions require no capital investment; low implementation and integration fees, if any; payments that scale in line with business activity; no support costs; limited risk and obligations; and ongoing investment protection because any costs for upgrades fall to the vendor.

Consider as well that total cost of ownership looks at the cost of an asset or investment over its lifetime, taking into account the purchase price, hardware costs, maintenance and upgrade fees, and the cost of internal and external resources to support the solution overall. While TCO numbers vary for every acquisition, in general, DMG Consulting has found that, in a three-year host vs. buy analysis for a contact center solution – assuming no functional (hardware or software) upgrades, no maintenance fee increase, and a minimal IT and business resource requirement – purchasing looks to be less expensive than hosting. However, if the calculation includes the cost of upgrades and a significant amount of internal resources needed to support a premises-based solution, the hosted alternative will often have a lower TCO in the end. **CIS**

by Gregory Samson

E-mail Marketing, Optimized

The Case for Outsourcing Your Solution

Companies that want to get the most out of their e-mail marketing efforts eventually come to a point where they need to ask themselves: Do we want to focus on our message or the medium? You can either spend your time doing what marketing professionals do best — developing compelling offers, engaging with audiences and building customer relationships — or you can spend it dealing with deliverability issues, database maintenance and inbox monitoring. Today, marketers concerned with online channels would rarely learn everything possible about HTML or servers, as activities like building web pages and site hosting are usually handled by specialists so that marketing professionals can focus on the products and content. So why mess around with spam filters and resolving blocking problems if you don't have to? Our company, CheapAir.com, recently engaged with an e-mail service provider to make the switch from a homegrown to a hosted e-mail solution. That yielded a number of benefits, including the following.

List housekeeping

Prior to moving to an ESP, CheapAir.com's staff was spending way too much effort on basic e-mail delivery issues, handling spam complaints and keeping our list clean.

Sending unwanted e-mails to consumers is certainly not going to do your CRM strategy any favors, and repeated use of bad or abandoned addresses can also damage your company's reputation at receiving ISPs, so authentication and whitelisting (getting clearance from e-mail clients to send messages) are very important tasks. But list housekeeping can easily become overwhelming, especially because in-house IT resources are always limited. With an ESP, it's easier to monitor actively deliverability issues, automatically identify and remove addresses that are repeatedly bouncing and address spam problems quickly.

Better tracking for more relevant messages

Customer relationship management is all about getting to know your audience so that you can make offers that are compelling and relevant.

When it comes to e-mail marketing, blasting the same message to every subscriber on your list in the hopes that a significant enough percentage will open and respond is not really very effective from a relationship standpoint – especially as more and more consumers are getting fatigued by inbox overload and ISPs are blocking communications more rigorously. Capturing metrics about who's opening, who's clicking and who's responding to e-mails is incredibly important, as it can really help you better target and segment your communications based on a recipient's behavior, preferences and purchasing history.

An ESP will provide this type of reporting for you, offering visibility into all aspects of e-mail campaign performance and analysis. The net result is that your marketing organization will spend less time capturing, organizing and crunching data, and more time acting on it to develop relevant and engaging communications.

Right-time e-mail

CheapAir.com is a travel deal and booking site, and the timing of our marketing communications is especially critical. We want to be able to offer great travel deals as soon as we capture them – consumers looking for a good deal will go elsewhere if a competitor consistently finds better offers or communicates them faster; that's why delivering the right message at the right time is so essential.

With an ESP, marketers are better able to set up triggered and transactional e-mails to make right time e-mail closer to a reality. At CheapAir.com, for example, we are beginning to leverage our customer data and the functionality of our ESP to move away from batch and blast communications to messages triggered by a specific opportunity or subscriber preference.

Ready to give an ESP a go?

Before you start checking out providers, make a quick roadmap of exactly what you hope to accomplish in the first 12 to 18 months, and ask each vendor to explain how each of those items on your roadmap will be accomplished using its system. The details matter, so be sure someone very familiar with your data and systems is part of the conversation and evaluation.

In CheapAir.com's case, we decided that a hosted solution from Strongmail would be the best fit for us. We like the professionalism of its support team, the intuitive user interface, its model for data integration, and the expert services for setup, ISP remediation and delivery monitoring.

When it comes to email marketing, don't get bogged down managing all the technology behind it. With an ESP in place, you can devote much more of your effort to building the customer relationships that will drive your business. **CIS**

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MARKETPLACE

Paula Bernier, *Executive Editor*

Smartphones Change the Face of Customer Interaction

The May issue of *Customer Interaction Solutions* magazine featured a cover package of stories addressing how mobility is changing customer interactions.

That included a piece from SpeechCycle with the ominous headline: 2012 – The Year the Contact Center Dies. It talks about how connected devices like smartphones are becoming the preferred communication medium for many and how, according to SpeechCycle anyway, these smart devices will replace the call center as the primary interaction channel. This is happening both because the smart wireless device is the tool so many of us reach for when we want to communicate, and because mobile apps can offer tailored plans, products and promotions; mobile devices enable customers to proactively access the information they require; and smart devices enable customer interaction using virtually any medium type the end user prefers, SpeechCycle's Scott Kolman writes.

Indeed, Confirmit's Dave King, executive vice president of mobile solutions, who's featured in a Q&A in the same CIS issue, says that: "Thanks to the increasing adoption and capabilities of the smartphone, companies now have a dynamic and sky's the limit platform for interaction with audiences that far exceeds any other customer feedback channel previously available."

This subject matter for the May issue of CIS magazine was apparently right on time, as Confirmit, Genesys, NICE and Virtual Hold have all made recent announcements that address the intersection of mobile and customer service.

Confirmit recently announced the final touches of the integration of the mobile channel into its platform. Confirmit Horizons enables leading businesses and market research agencies worldwide to run multichannel voice of the customer, employee feedback, and market research programs. And the Confirmit Horizons platform now enables Confirmit to offer its customers the ability to use all mobile modes: SMS, browser and app-based data collection.

"The platform is now fully integrated with our Survey On-Demand Application platform, which powers the creation, deployment, and management of surveys on mobile devices, and which also allows the collection of photos, video and audio clips," King says. "As a result, organizations are able to develop and deliver surveys using mobile as just one of a range of feedback channels including the web, e-mail, telephone and IVR. The mobile part of the platform allows Confirmit customers to use mobile surveys, feedback, panel, ethnography, face-to-face and digital diary solutions to gather data about peoples' expectations, motivations and intentions on any mobile device.

"Users can also report on data gathered from mobile devices alongside the data gathered from all other channels, for a single and holistic view of feedback," he adds.

Meanwhile, Genesys has launched a solution that provides smartphone users with instant access to call center agents via branded mobile applications. American Airlines will be among the first to leverage Genesys Mobile Engagement.

"With Genesys Mobile Engagement, we're creating new conversations between today's mobile applications and customer service," says Paul Segre, president and CEO of Genesys. "With a press of a button on a mobile device, customers will now seamlessly transition from a mobile app to 'live' support– without repeating your mobile transaction, problem, or specific location."

In late April, NICE unveiled NICE Mobile Reach, yet another customer service solution targeting smartphone and tablet users. Udi Ziv, president of NICE Enterprise Group, explains that, "NICE Mobile Reach analyzes, in real time, a multitude of data sources from the mobile device and enterprise systems and then recommends for the customer the most suitable channel to continue the interaction when they need assistance."

And Virtual Hold Technology recently introduced the Conversation Bridge, which offers immediate or scheduled callbacks that capture previously entered context data from any channel and passes it to agents using existing routing and screen-pop systems. It offers the ability to access live agents regardless of the channel the customer is contacting them through – smartphones, mobile apps, social media sites, websites and even gaming consoles.

"By 2016, more than 60 percent of inbound customer service calls will come from smartphones, laptops and devices other than landlines like gaming consoles, set top boxes and store kiosks," says VHT CEO Kevin Sjodin. "Today's always-connected, app-enabled customers want answers quickly so they can solve problems and accomplish tasks. This means that after trying self service, sometimes they need to talk."

Shai Berger, CEO and co-founder at Fonolo, blogs that "The intersection of the call center and the smartphone has become one of the most exciting spaces to watch in enterprise IT." The fact that customer service is moving to address smartphone users is no surprise, given that's where customers are, he says. What's exciting here, he says, is that "We finally have a chance to fix what's wrong with the call center because the smartphone offers a rich and flexible interactive interface the traditional phone sorely lacks. (The dial pad was never meant to be a navigation system!)" CIS