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Rich Tehrani,
CEO, TMC

Backup DNS, The New Yellow Pages Scam

If you have ever registered a domain name you have no doubt been solicited by a number of companies you never heard of trying to renew your domain name. Lately I have noticed this trend has died down – no doubt because customers have wised up and realize if they registered with Network Solutions, GoDaddy or 1&1 then they should pay that company only.

Recently a relative presented me with a document that looks a lot like an invoice from a company called DNS Services. The company's logo looks very official – you might even make the point that the infinity symbol looks a bit like the NS logo preceding Network Solutions.

Putting that aside, if you aren't technical or you aren't reading carefully you may think this is a legitimate invoice. It isn't. In fact the fine print says: "This is a solicitation for the order of goods or services, or both, and not a bill, invoice or statement of account due. You are under no obligation to make any payments on account of this offer unless you accept this offer."

Note that you are given a statement date and an account number as well as an amount in yellow highlighting yet this document is not a bill or invoice.

Moreover, this offer is for backup DNS services – something only a handful of websites would need – assuming they are hosting their sites at a reputable facility. This isn't to take away from backup DNS providers that don't use such questionable tactics – it's just that companies that require backup DNS services know who they are, they certainly are very unlikely to need direct mail to get them to purchase.

And at the bottom right the text says: "Note: DNS Services is not affiliated with your current name services provider."

For decades a common direct mail scam was to send invoices to companies for snow plowing services, which were never performed. Typically these were seasonal bills and companies didn't scour them too carefully – it became easier to pay them than figure out if they were legitimate. In the past decade this scam seems to have diminished being replaced by useless directory listings leading you to believe they are the official Yellow Pages. A common ploy is sending a check, which you naturally sign and deposit and in doing so agree to purchase their online directory service. Lately these offers seem to have diminished as well.

There is a saying in the direct mail industry: If you want to know what is working, pay attention to the offers you get most often. If we start to see the backup DNS market ramp up their direct mail efforts, we'll know that the business of duping unsuspecting businesses is doing quite well.

There is a saying in the direct mail industry: If you want to know what is working, pay attention to the offers you get most often.

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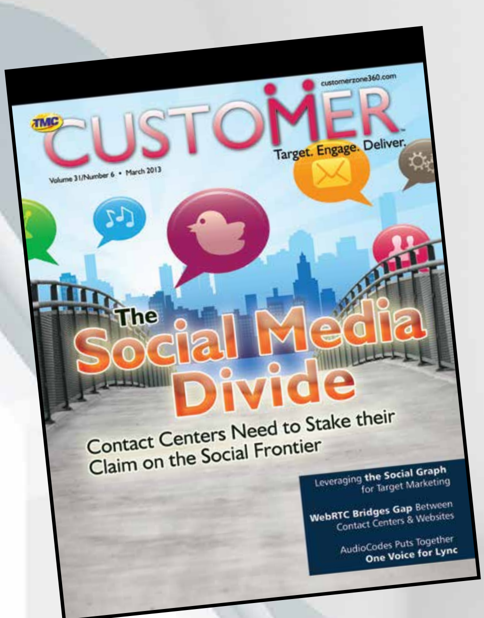

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ANGLE

Paula Bernier,
Executive Editor

WebRTC: Bridging the Gap Between Contact Centers & Websites

The vast majority of people who contact a business start out by visiting the company's website. Wouldn't it be great if we could enable a more seamless experience between website and contact center -- and even collect information from the individual's website visit so we can identify the person and track his or her behavior on the website, presenting that information on to the contact center agent?

That is exactly where things seem to be going, and a new technology called WebRTC can help us get there.

"WebRTC is a technology that lets developers build real-time communication into web pages," writes Tsahi Levent-Levi, direct of business solutions at Amdocs and BlogGeek.me blogger, in a Sept. 10 posting.

Phil Edholm of PKE Consulting LLC and UCStrategies.com, notes that organizations tend to have a website group and a contact center group.

"WebRTC is going to smush those two groups together," he adds.

That will lead companies to a crossroads at which they'll need to decide between old and new. That is, they'll need to choose between WebRTC-enabling their existing contact centers and integrating WebRTC into their websites, or adopting entirely new interaction centers that integrate contact center and website functionality and natively support WebRTC.

The decision is not unlike the one businesses and service providers faced relative to their PBXs when IP came along five or 10 years ago. The question then was: Do we IP enable our existing PBX, or do we rip and replace, investing in a pure IP PBX. (One prominent IP PBX vendor notably commented that a legacy PBX with IP added in was like a racecar with a horse tied to it.)

The question organizations face today relative to customer service is no less important. It's a huge decision because if businesses don't understand the potential impact of WebRTC, they could end up in a bad position while the competition thrives.

"With WebRTC, it is easy to have every web page be an on-ramp to the customer service and interaction arm of an enterprise, with the added value of details about how that contact came to need that interaction," says Edholm. "This detailed information can be used in two ways: to significantly enhance the effectiveness of the human interaction component by assuring it is optimized through the data gathered during the visit and form-based entries before the actual interaction. Secondly, detailed information about which parts of the website are generating the most need for human interaction can be used to further optimize the web experience, enhancing customers satisfaction and reducing transaction cost."

Mike Lauricella, CEO of communications platform provider Plivo agrees: "Communications is really not its own thing anymore, it's becoming a feature of the web."

WebRTC, he adds, will give people an easier way into the contact center, bringing along metadata in the process. That way, those that interact with customers can see what an individual has in his or her shopping cart, and the pages he or she visited in which there was no purchase activity. As a result, customer service representatives will be better positioned to cross-sell and upsell these individuals, and organizations will gain a better understanding of where they need to improve their websites. Sites that leverage WebRTC also can simplify the launch of real-time communications beyond chat so customer service representatives can provide website visitors with additional information to make them more comfortable purchasing large ticket items online, Lauricella adds.

To learn more about WebRTC and its impacts on customer service, please see the Experience column (page 48) in the December issue of CUSTOMER, and the cover story in the December issue of INTERNET TELEPHONY (http://www.tmcnet.com/voip/1212/table-of-contents.aspx), a sister magazine to CUSTOMER.

You can also learn more about WebRTC by attending WebRTC in Atlanta from June 25 through 27 at the Cobb Galleria. Here's a url at which you can find more information: http://www.webrtcworld.com/conference/

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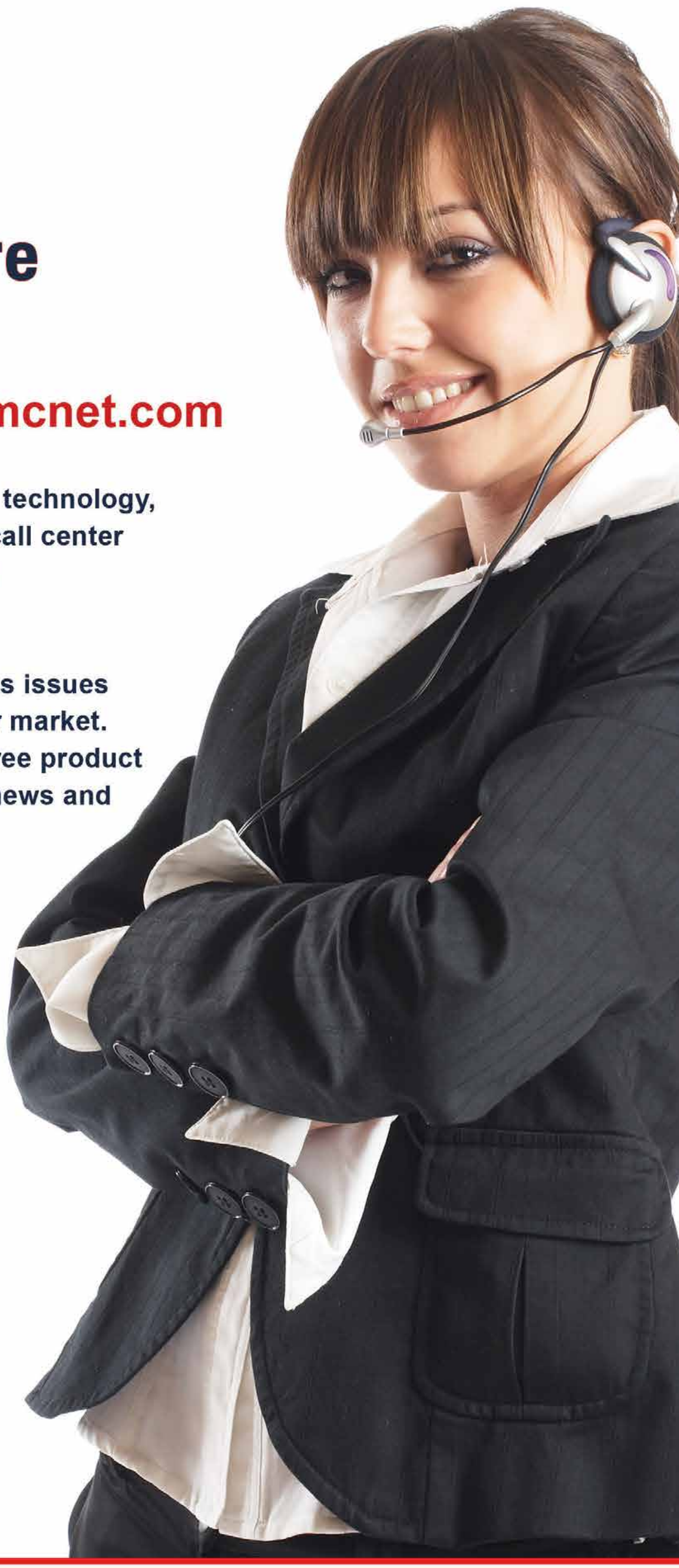

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by Paula Bernier

The Social Media Divide

Contact Centers Need to Stake their Claim on the Social Frontier

For all the talk about social media being just another channel in the multi-channel contact center, the fact is that few businesses today have a proactive approach to social media when it comes to customer service.

Sure, marketing folks are communicating their messages on social media – and may be listening and learning from Facebook, Twitter and other social media to better understand what consumers like and don't like. But because marketing departments typically take ownership of social media, customer service operations like contact centers often have little if any role in the social media play.

Web self-service and e-mail dominate the non-phone-call mix of contact channels, but social media are playing a critical role, according to CFI Group, which recently issued the results of its annual customer service study. The role of social media is not as a first-line service channel, according to CFI Group, but rather as a damage control mechanism.

Customers who posted their experience with a contact center in social media and then received subsequent follow-up via social media concerning their experience rated their final satisfaction with the contact center experience nearly 20 percent higher than those who received no follow-up, CFI Group says. Furthermore, consumers who ranked their likelihood to recommend the company in these cases increased by almost 15 percent.

But Terry Redding, director of product development and delivery at CFI Group, says that people who are looking for customer service are not really using social media as a way to reach out to companies. However, he adds that some of that may be a self-fulfilling prophesy given that most companies don't offer a customer service contact mechanism on their Facebook page. That's at least in part because, overwhelmingly, it's still the marketing group that owns social media, and marketing folks don't have much interest in the customer service side of things.

However Redding, among many others in the customer experience space, believes that contact centers will take some ownership of social media in the not-too-distant future.

That is probably a year or two into the future because of the state of available tools, Redding indicates. He adds that such tools are starting to come together quickly and are likely to make an appearance in contact centers in the next year.

John Hernandez, vice president and general manager of customer collaboration at Cisco, says that it already has a tool called Social Miner that is offered as part of its contact center solutions. Social Miner allows customers to take in all social interactions and present them as an actionable items that enables the contact rep to respond to them.

For example, Social Miner could enable an airline to identify a passenger who tweeted that his luggage was lost. The tool could also tie into the airline's customer database to see that the passenger is a frequent flier, so the airline could in turn text or email the individual to offer to have the passenger's luggage sent to his home via a courier, or that the passenger is not a regular with the airline, so the airline could simply send a message recognizing the inconvenience and suggesting where and when his luggage will be available.

So, as you can see, such tools do exist and can enable businesses to offer both a better experience and a more personalized one. However, while Social Miner is available as part of some 800,000 Cisco contact center licenses, Hernandez says this capability is sitting dormant on many of those systems waiting for the business communities' transition of social media from marketing to the contact center.

Companies who want to leverage social media both for customer service and/or for marketing purposes should look for a solution that integrates CRM into the mix, according to Ted Sapountzis, head of marketing and product development at NextPrinciples.

The company in late January launched Insight-To-Action, a solution designed to help medium-to-large organizations create, manage and monitor across all channels relationships with customers, influencers and prospects. NextPrinciples is integrated with CRM solutions from Salesforce.com, SugarCRM and Microsoft Dynamics.

"In today's fragmented marketplace, many social tools help brands either listen to or engage with customers," says Satya Krishnaswamy, founder and CEO of NextPrinciples. "Insight-To-Action not only provides an integrated platform for those social interactions but – most importantly – integrates seamlessly with CRM systems. CRM integration is crucial to providing a consistent and superior customer experience across all channels."

by Paula Bernier

Yours, Mine and Ours

Leveraging the Social Graph for Target Marketing

Facebook earlier this year announced that it now allows individual users the ability to do social search on Open Graph information. Open Graph is all the information Facebook collects on the people who use its social networking site; that can include personal information like a name or an e-mail, and/or the user interests, with whom a person is connected, brands he or she "likes", and even pictures posted.

As a result, a Facebook user who wants to take a trip to New York can easily identify friends who have been to the Big Apple, read their comments about NYC, and even check out photos they took while they were there.

What Kristin Hambelton, vice president of marketing at Neolane, says is even more interesting is harnessing the power of Open Graph to enable brands to deliver targeted messages to individuals who choose to opt in and receive such messages.

Brands using the Neolane solution can capture all the social graph information of an individual user, merge that data with other information – such as the e-mail behavior of the individual relative to particular offers, past purchasing selections, or even just what he or she put in an electronic shopping cart before abandoning it. Neolane's software as a service solution puts all that data into a single profile and then helps brands automate the creation of various offers, or catalogs, based on the profile data collected.

"Each month through Facebook applications, 25 million people share their music preferences, 16 million share videos they have viewed, and 30 million share the articles they have read. However, many marketers are still unable to integrate this data into their existing marketing systems to improve customer communications," says Stephane Dehoche, president and CEO at Neolane. "This customer and prospect data is a tremendous, untapped asset that marketers can't afford to ignore. By collecting users' actions through Open Graph, Neolane allows marketers to utilize this real-time information to deliver personalized cross-channel experiences that increase sales and build loyalty."

That can be huge competitive advantage for brands, says Hambelton.

For example, a women's apparel retailer might decide to present its gold-level offer to anyone who has been in database three years, spends $300 in an average transaction, and shops both in store and online, she says. And bronze- or silver-level offer could be presented to less frequent or high-spending shoppers.

Among the brands actually using the Neolane solution are Alcatel-Lucent, Barnes & Noble, Sears Canada and Sony Music. These companies are among those on the leading edge of leveraging big data to their advantage. Meanwhile, most companies seem to be adrift in the sea of big data.

The Direct Marketing Association and Neolane recently partnered on a big data survey, the objective of which was to look at the impact of big data on marketing organizations.

As predicted, the survey results showed that databases at companies are growing. More than half of the survey respondents said they are seeing annual database growth of 1 to 10 percent. Yet 60 percent of marketers surveyed either didn't have or weren't sure if their company had a big data strategy, Hambelton tells CUSTOMER magazine.

What's more, 53 percent of respondents said analysis and mining of data are key challenges for marketers. So, Hambelton says, that indicates that marketers know what to do with the data, but what they're struggling with is getting to the data and mining it.

Many consumers will undoubtedly find it helpful if the brands with which they already do business offer them targeted coupons and promotions based on their preferences. However, this writer would like to offer an editorial note here: It would be especially helpful if Amazon and other shopping destinations would filter out information related to my Christmas buying habits when they're providing an offer at other times of year. I do buy my young nieces and nephews toys and books at Christmas. But I don't want recommendations for items for tots during the summer, spring and autumn.

by Benjamin Lederer

So You Can Access Your Organization's Social Media Data – Now What?

Businesses rely significantly on social media to support sales, marketing and customer support goals. An organization's social channels allow it to reach customers instantly, understand customer needs, gauge brand sentiment, see how it compares competitively and much more. Many business professionals are gaining greater access to their company's social data but are not quite sure what to do with it. If you are among them, implementing social CRM processes can help you organize, analyze and act upon social data to achieve revenue-generating benefits.

A social CRM or contact management system can function as your business command center supplementing contact, company and industry information with social data including profiles and comments. Integrating your CRM database with MS Office, Gmail, e-mail marketing and other web services can help you better leverage this customer intelligence. With these essentials in place, you can begin building processes that aid business development. A sales representative, for example, may view a customer's LinkedIn profile inside a contact record to identify similar prospects who previously viewed the profile and send a connection request, a private message or include them in an industry-specific e-mail campaign.

Social CRM systems also let users proactively communicate with individuals or groups of customers and prospects using specific social channels right from within the system. An intuitive system can set hash tags to manage Twitter communications with a particular set of customers, such as a user group – broadcasting relevant information just for them, and receiving feedback just from them on any topics of choice.

Taking inventory of your company's core social media channels will help you identify which communication processes are most vital to your business. Examples include:

- establishing processes that connect customers who Like your company's Facebook page with sales reps who can contact them directly; and scanning for negative comments about your product and automatically opening a support ticket for someone to reach out to that customer;
- finding new leads by searching social profiles for connections through your best customers, the rationale being "a business friend of a business friend is a potential friend of my business";
- sending welcome letters to customers' social profiles letting them know who you are and that special Facebook friend offers are available; engaging people in their preferred social networks where they might also share referrals about their positive customer experiences.

Such activities develop warm leads for your sales team and create groups you can nurture with content marketing campaigns. Meanwhile, your CRM application tracks all customer interactions – social and otherwise such as e-mail, phone and sales visits – plus cross-functional employee actions that occur along the way.

Feeding your social data into analytics engines can provide data visualizations that help you recognize and drill into trends regarding your best sales influencers, brand or product sentiment, and who is or isn't being engaged properly within your customer base. These processes combine elements of social, mobile, and analytics to fully leverage the multiple customer data sources in your contact and customer management system.

Parsing through social media feeds to identify actionable keywords or phrases is yet another valuable process. For example, searching customer and prospect profiles for words indicating merger and acquisition activity can help a change management consultant identify new business development opportunities since M&A activity suggest his or her services are applicable.

Benjamin Lederer is senior product manager for the Sage ACT! (http://na.sage.com/sage-act) contact and customer management system, supporting more than 3 million individuals plus 60,000 additional business workgroups.

Genesys Buys UTOPY

Contact center outfit Genesys in late January announced plans to buy UTOPY. The acquired sells workforce optimization solutions, including speech and text analytics and voice of the customer applications. The deal, for which the financial terms were not disclosed, is expected to close this quarter. Eric Tamblyn, vice president of global innovations at Genesys, last month told CUSTOMER that the company found UTOPY interesting due to the growing interest of speech analytics in the marketplace; the ability of UTOPY to work with existing recording systems; and the interactions analytics across chat, e-mail, social media, text and voice. Genesys and UTOPY, he added, have been partners since 2011 and because both companies can adapt to customers' existing infrastructure or replace existing systems, and because they are both 100 percent software solutions, this was a natural marriage. What's more, it gives Genesys the ability to deliver a complete workforce management suite as part of an all-in-one contact center solution, while workforce optimization is generally offered as a siloed solution.

EG Gets Aspect Equity

Aspect Software has a new equity partnership with back office optimization software and services business eg solutions plc. The agreement provides Aspect exclusive distribution rights to eg's products and services in the Americas and the Asia Pacific region and formalizes the partnership model for both companies to address customers in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. "As the number of back office workers continues to grow in organizations, managers are being asked to improve productivity, cut costs, optimize employee utilization and reduce risk, while at the same time improve the customer experience. Back office workforce optimization suites have emerged in the last two years to assist enterprises with this challenge," says Donna Fluss, DMG Consulting president and contact center/back office industry analyst. "These suites are based on contact center staff optimization concepts and techniques that have been enhanced to address the dynamics of the back office."

Learning Platform Can Enhance Brand Lift

AdTheorent Inc., which runs a real-time mobile ad bidding service, says its new Real-Time Learning Machine generates data-driven predictive models on the fly. It analyzes 50,000 bid requests per second on a single server, filtering out bids with a low probability of click, conversion or awareness lift. "The value of data in media is immense and intelligent technology companies are now using that data across mobile devices. This is enabling real-time learning and prediction, which is presenting a great opportunity to move marketers toward data-driven results," said Sal Candela, mobile director at PHD Media. "These new developments offer real promise in enhanced performance and brand lift, a combination that will spark interest across the mobile marketplace."

Clark Pledges Allegiance

Voice of the customer solution provider Allegiance has named Carine Clark as its president and CEO, replacing company founder Adam Edmund in those roles beginning in January. Clark has 25 years of experience building successful software companies, having served as an executive at Symantec, Altiris and Novell. Edmund tells CUSTOMER magazine that Allegiance chose Clark because of her skill set, which should help the company meets its goal related to revenue growth, international expansion, and furthering the company's product capabilities. "I think M&A [possibly of a mobile or social player] could definitely be on our roadmap again," said Edmund, when asked whether acquisitions might be in the company's future. Edmund added that Clark has been involved in hundreds of acquisitions. Founder Edmund said he will continue with the company, with a focus of building out the Allegiance partner channel.

O'Brien Crowned at CrowdEngineering

Social CRM outfit CrowdEngineering Inc. has a new leader. Wesley O'Brien has come aboard as CEO, replacing Ron Guerriero, the director who has served as interim CEO since September 2012, and who continues as a board member. O'Brien was previously senior vice president of business development at SITEL.

ShoreTel Offers Details on ECC8

ShoreTel has released Enterprise Contact Center 8. Steve McElderry, ShoreTel's director of product management for contact center solutions, tells CUSTOMER magazine that this new release supports the IMAP protocol so it can interface with older e-mail systems. The new release also features a simplified agent interface so rep can respond to e-mail with a single click. ShoreTel improved formatting of some of the automated responses. And it improved routing so, for example, if an e-mail response to the consumer bounces, it is returned and flagged and routed for further follow up. ShoreTel also enhanced the reporting of e-mail handling that addresses such parameters as how quickly responses are being sent. And supervisors can now monitor multiple simultaneous webchat sessions.


Contact Center
Solutions

Debit Cards Reward Loyal Shoppers

White-label debit card provider Synchology recently launched its Co-Brand Jump Visa Prepaid Debit Card solution. Doug Bobenhouse, president and co-founder of Synchology, told CUSTOMER magazine that these cards are good way to enable retailers to promote their brands; offer customers more options for payment; and reward those customers for purchases using the debit card at the retailer's locations – and without costing the brand a dime. Bobenhouse said it charges $5 a month for a card, and when the card is used it receives 1.5 percent in interchange revenue, a third of which it returns to the consumer in the form of rewards value. Shoppers using the debit cards get one reward point for every $1 Visa signature purchase; 2,500 points for signing up for direct deposit; and 750 points for every deposit of $750 or more. "The earning opportunity is pretty strong," said Bobenhouse, adding the reward value will well exceed the fees end users pay. That's noteworthy, he added, particularly given debit cards don't typically include a rewards component. Accrue 3,000 points, and you get a $25 store gift card; 5,000 points gets you $50 towards thousands of catalog items; 7,500 points can mean $50 cash loaded back to your card; and 10,000 points can get card users $100 toward airfare.

NICE Intros Cloud-based WFO

A new cloud-based workforce optimization suite from NICE Systems offers recording, quality management, analytics, performance management, incentive compensation management, and voice of the customer capabilities. According to DMG Consulting's 2012-2013 Cloud-Based Contact Center Infrastructure Market Report, the number of cloud-based contact center seats grew by 80.2 percent in 2011, following a 42.4 percent increase in 2010. The report anticipates that by the end of 2015 more than 18 percent of contact center seats will be delivered by cloud-based contact center infrastructure providers.

Nuance Launches Channel Program

Nuance Communications, Inc. today introduced Nuance Connections, a program that provides tools and services for global contact center solutions providers to deliver advanced voice and natural language solutions to organizations across the globe. With the new channel program, Nuance partners will also have access to new solutions, including Nuance Call Steering Package, a rapid-development environment for creating VoiceXML natural language solutions more quickly and affordably. In addition, partners will have access to Nuance FastStart Solutions, packaged speech self-service offers that allow partners to resell Nuance Professional Services in pursuit of opportunities that require resources or specific skills not available from the partner.

Siebel Gains Altitude

Altitude Software now offers the Altitude+Siebel Connector for the Oracle Siebel 8.1 solution. This out-of-the-box integration enables automatic dialing in a unified multichannel environment for contacts through voice, e-mail, SMS or chat. In Brazil, a financial services company with two million customers has recently deployed the solution, integrated with the existing Altitude uCI solution in its 200-agent contact center, and reported an increase in sales and the ability to make more calls.

Companies Embrace Live Chat

Lenovo and Optus are using live chat solution [24]7 Assist. "[24]7's cloud-based predictive analytics platform has delivered real business results for Lenovo. Chat revenue used to be a very small part of our sales, less than one percent. Today chat revenue is a significant contributor to our revenue stream, representing over 30 percent of total online sales. The predictive analytics accurately tells us whom to target, when to intervene, how to help, and what to offer. Now we spend more time helping the right customers in the right ways," commented Lewis Broadnax, executive director of web sales and marketing at Lenovo.

Comm100 Integrates with Salesforce

Comm100, which sells customer service and communication solutions, has released an updated version of Live Chat that is integrated with Salesforce.

Partners Deliver Holistic Health Care Solution

Intelligent InSites Inc. has integrated its real-time operational intelligence solution for the health care vertical with Schedule-Anywhere, the online employee scheduling software from Atlas Business Solutions Inc. "By using the real-time information provided by Intelligent InSites' software platform, we are able to provide health care organizations with even more effective ways to manage their most scarce resource – their employees. With the added ability to see, in real time, the status and location of clinical and ancillary staff, hospitals will be able to respond immediately to changes in staffing needs – allowing care to become more efficient without compromising clinical effectiveness, quality of care, and patient safety," says Jon Forknell, vice president and general manager of Atlas Business Solutions.

by Eric Feinberg

Measuring Mobile Customer Experience Satisfaction

ABC Case Study Offers a View into How it Can Be Done

Delivering a high-quality customer experience is more important than ever. With the rise of the Internet and now with a surge in mobile users, it's easier and less costly than ever for customers to switch brands. In the past, consumers needed to travel to purchase alternatives – creating inconvenience loyalty, but now they can change brands with a few mouse clicks or finger taps.

In an era in which fickle consumers are empowered with always-on devices at their fingertips, creating brand loyalty is critical for organizations to remain competitive. Experience, however, is not just a one-time event; it builds over time and it's based on experiences from all touch points, including in store, web, mobile, contact centers, e-mail and social media. Monitoring and measuring that experience across channels has become a critical business initiative.

You Can't Manage What You Don't Measure

Traditional measurement includes monitoring customers' behaviors, including everything from transactions to clickstream analysis. Typically, however, these analyses are conducted in a silo, meaning that each set of data that is captured is examined independently, which fails to give an accurate picture of the omni-channel customer. Because today's consumers use multiple devices and touch points when engaging with an organization, it's difficult to understand what is driving their behavior without seeing the entire process.

A perfect example of this is the mobile-enabled customer. These customers will often research products with one device and purchase in store or with a tethered computer. When the mobile data is looked at in a silo, it appears that the shopping cart was abandoned, but in truth, it informed the consumers' decision and even encouraged the purchase. This is exactly why a comprehensive picture of customer experience is so important, and why understanding the customers' needs and how they interact with a brand is the key to improve the overall experience.

In a customer experience measurement initiative, there are three important questions to ask:

• How are we doing? This provides information about satisfaction, as well as insight into key drivers and desired outcomes.

• What should we do? This helps organizations define areas of focus that will have the biggest impact.

• Why should we do it? This question helps businesses understand the causal models that predict behaviors.

Customer Experience Analytics

Customer satisfaction analytics play a key role in helping organizations get a full picture of customers' satisfaction with their brand experience by garnering information about people's perspectives and channel priorities (i.e., in store, mobile, web), and what they were trying to accomplish. Modern customer satisfaction analytics provide insight into the whys of behavior and are able to predict what customers will do next – which can help inform strategic business decisions that will improve the overall customer experience.

However, in order for experience analytics to be predictive, they need to focus on a precise, reliable metric. Customers' satisfaction with their experience has proven to be that metric. Several studies have demonstrated a direct connection between satisfaction and financial results.

Satisfaction Analytics for Mobile

Measuring the relatively new mobile experience channel is an important element of comprehensive experience analytics. Based on ForeSee research, highly satisfied mobile shoppers are 72 percent more likely to recommend a brand and 58 percent more likely to use it again.

ABC, which is known for its high-quality television programming and its leadership in providing programs via digital platforms, was the first network to provide viewers the opportunity to watch their favorite series on a mobile device through the ABC iPad app. With the rapid expansion of their viewership, ABC needed insight into who was watching programming via the iPad app and how to leverage this touch point to increase consumer reach and engagement.

Before ABC could evaluate improvement areas or make any business decisions related to mobile, it sought analytics based on consumer feedback to understand who was using the mobile app, and the impact the experience was having on consumer engagement. While ABC could track downloads and the millions of video streams viewed, it needed better insight into the viewers' demographics and experience.

ABC turned to ForeSee to obtain viewer demographics and establish a reliable mobile app usage metric. The solution collects viewer feedback without taking them out of the ABC app. The survey's intuitive touch, swipe, and tap functionality aligned with the experience itself, allowing ABC to achieve a response rate much greater than traditional web surveys.

Defining the Mobile App Audience

ABC knew its mobile audience would vary from its television viewers and web viewers, but it wanted to establish parameters around the various groups that interacted with its app to inform advertisers and guide future improvements.

ForeSee analytics provided demographic and satisfaction data in aggregate, by demographic group, by device and by programming segment. This information delivered the research team customer-based feedback that could be used to identify app improvements.

The information on mobile app users and their viewing habits, as well as the insights and predictive nature of the analytics, allowed ABC to see how small updates could have a large impact on users' likelihood to continue using the app and recommend or view ABC programming through another channel. The analytics were used to support the sales team in their efforts to promote advertising across platforms and management that was seeking reliable demographic information.

Identifying Overlooked Viewer Segments

ABC had expected most viewers were using the app to catch up on episodes of their favorite series or to watch their usual programming at a more convenient time, but the satisfaction analytics revealed that a large segment of users were using the app to view a television series for the first time. Further analysis revealed this important viewer segment had different needs and levels of satisfaction than more frequent users. First-time viewers were less aware of some ABC programs, identifying the need for content updates such as series overviews and episode description information. This insight allowed ABC to evaluate improvements that would encourage viewers to return to view more programming and in turn support the advertising value of the app.

Staying at the Forefront of the Mobile Channel

A usability audit review helped ABC assess the mobile app and identify areas for improvement based on mobile best practices. While the overall user experience was quite strong, there were still enhancements that could be made to help ABC stay ahead of the curve and make the experience easier and more enjoyable for viewers. The usability team provided actionable insights aimed to help ABC increase its reach by encouraging the discovery of new programming for both new and existing users.

Eric Feinberg is the senior director of mobile, media & entertainment at customer experience analytics business ForeSee (www.foresee.com).

by Elaine Cascio

Use Outbound to Start Conversations With Your Customers

According to research sources, outbound customer service implementations are growing by leaps and bounds. From outbound calls for prescription refills to flight update notifications via text to Twitter and Facebook outage updates, outbound can be a valuable tool no matter what your industry. And outbound doesn't just help companies avoid costs, it can help them grow revenue. In the case of pharmacies, customers usually wait several days before refilling prescriptions. But calling customers one to two days before the expected renewal helps pharmacies recapture lost revenues.

If you're considering deploying outbound channels for your contact center, here are a few tips for building your strategy.

If you don't have lifecycle models, build them now.

If you read this column regularly, you've heard me talk about the value of building customer lifecycles to improve the customer experience. For outbound, it's critical to understand the key moments of truth that are triggers for outbound conversations and identify ways to meet your customers' needs at these critical moments.

Formulate an opt-in strategy.

For many outbound communications, you'll need customer agreement to have you contact them. It's especially important if the contact involves personal information. Design a way to acquire permission for proactive contact – this may be part of a new customer welcome package or triggered by a visit to your website, a call to the contact center, or download of a mobile app. Opt-in also helps you understand the customer's contact channel of choice for other communications.

Assess your channel options.

What outbound capabilities do you have available today – phone, web, mobile, social media, e-mail? Are you missing channels? Do you need to add capabilities (for example, you may have inbound IVR but need to add a module for outbound)? Understand that a conversation may cross several channels: An e-mail or text may contain a link to a website or a mobile app may turn into an inbound call. Are your customers able to move between channels seamlessly today or is it a challenge?

Map the outbound conversations you've identified to the appropriate channels.

Your lifecycle models help you understand where and when to reach out to customers. For each conversation, identify the data required and the business rules that will trigger the conversation. Define success and set up data gathering for your metrics.

Build the outbound applications and test with customers.

Use customer experience tools like personas and focus groups to help build customer friendly applications. Consider having customers opt in for a trial period and get their feedback before a general release. Use their feedback to refine your applications and as guidance for new applications.

Continue to monitor, measure and gather user feedback.

When you look at measuring success for outbound conversations, make sure that your measures are customer-centric, strategic, and make a difference in how the business operates. Make sure that you're supporting enterprise-wide and customer contact goals. Areas to measure include: renewal or repurchase rates, satisfaction rates (including Net Promoter Scores), social media sentiment, reduced inbound contacts and increased revenue. Also continue to evaluate new opportunities for outbound proactive contact with customers.

Whether you're already offering outbound or are inspired to get started, remember that it's all part of your customer experience, so keep it branded, consistent and customer friendly. Good luck!

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.

Key Elements for Outbound Success

- Access to real-time customer data to trigger contacts: Make sure you have data to put the outbound contact in context; for example, if a customer's flight is cancelled, have information on the next best option.
- Use of data from external sources to inform outbound conversations: Understand triggers that may generate contacts or the need for enhanced products or services, like a move, marriage, policy change, or a new baby. Make customers feel valued by sending coupons, outbound greetings for special occasions like birthdays or anniversaries.
- Flexible business rules that work across channels
- An understanding of the customer or customer segment through lifecycle models
- Expertise in multiple channels, including the ability to move between channels: One important factor is knowing when an inbound contact results from an outbound contact.
- Knowing when and how to communicate effectively: Don't overwhelm customers with outbound.

by Rob Vandenberg

Bringing the Alfresco Brand to the World

As companies go global, they are faced with new content challenges. How should a brand interact with foreign audiences who are using their services, or want to, but don't speak English? Companies have tried to address the challenge by using technology that can help manage their global presence as they expand into foreign markets.

Yet the technology isn't foolproof. The corporate landscape is littered with examples of corporations that made major faux pas in communicating to their international audience: HP faced challenges in China by not providing an offering specific to the Chinese language and culture. McDonald's botched its recent billboard ad aimed at Hmong populations, and Parker Pen famously translated an ad for one of its pens into Spanish resulting in an ad for a pen that "won't leak or make you pregnant!"

Traditionally there hasn't been a one-size-fits-all solution. While machine translation offers promise in helping companies to communicate with an international audience, it lacks cultural nuance on its own. Professional translation, the more established option, is costly and time-consuming given the amount of content that companies must translate in the new Web 2.0 environment.

Scaling Global Customer Support and Marketing

Alfresco, a content management company which enables companies to share, organize and protect their content, faced a large-scale translation and localization challenge in supporting nearly 8 million users in more than 180 countries. Customers leverage Alfresco technology to manage more than 3 billion files worldwide, on the go and in the office.

To provide its software to customers around the world and in many languages, Alfresco needed a way to manage its localized websites and to synchronize its marketing messages — and the company needed the process to be simple, scalable and cost-effective. With a quickly expanding footprint, Alfresco needed a solution that could also continue to carry its web content into new countries (and new languages) while maintaining synchronization with central corporate messages.

To achieve these goals, Alfresco embarked on a worldwide website localization project. One of the key strategies in this effort was the translation and localization of content. Alfresco wanted to start by translating its content into six languages, with the option of more as it expanded into new markets.

Elaborate International Workflow Needs

At first it seemed the only options were physically e-mailing around files, and sending them to professional translators for translation. Yet Alfresco's rapidly evolving translation workflow produced a continuous stream of content with which translation services had to keep pace. Alfresco content changed 50 to 100 times a month, and the company needed a solution that could keep pace with this translation workflow.

What's more, with each new language Alfresco added, its content doubled. The company couldn't afford to wait the length of time it took to manually pass around documents and keep track of any changes by hand. By the time the translated content arrived, it was already outdated.

Pure machine translation wouldn't work either. Alfresco needed highly accurate translations that could adapt to the specifics of local languages and their unique nuances. It was extremely important to ensure that all contingents were saying the same things in the same ways, despite varying languages. This included ensuring that idioms and metaphors were translated appropriately so that they did not lose their meaning in the translation.

To solve these issues, Alfresco selected Lingotek – Inside Drupal with the Collaborative Translation Platform, and as a result, the days of e-mailing files for translations are long gone. With Lingotek – Inside Drupal, all of the translations are handled inside Drupal, and Alfresco is provided with real-time statistics as to where content is in the translation process. Alfresco has leveraged Lingotek to launch its global websites, sync content and get real-time statistics of where the translations are in the process. This automated workflow frees Alfresco from manually managing the translation of content, and in a sense, removes the middleman in the translation process.

Lingotek's collaborative translation platform continuously and automatically translates Alfresco's global content, in real time. Alfresco, already a Drupal user, benefited from the fact that Lingotek's translation platform is embedded inside Drupal. The company was able to localize its content for each of its global markets without leaving the Drupal website.

Lingotek enables Alfresco to take advantage of several possible workflows: automatic machine translation, community (customer- or employee-based) translation and professional translation. Together, these workflows enable seamless multilingual publishing, automatically and in real time.

What's more, Lingotek's automation kicks off translation workflow whenever Alfresco's corporate website changes. This ensures that Alfresco's global sites are always synchronized, even though many incremental changes to content take place daily. As a result, all the translation is fully scaleable.

Rob Vandenberg is president and CEO of Lingotek|The Translation Network (www.lingotek.com).

by Alain Paquin

Mapping the Customer Journey

Are Marketers Taking the Wrong Approach?

In the last couple of years, mapping the customer journey has become a priority for many marketers. With marketing automation technologies, new communication channels and social media, customer interactions have multiplied tenfold. Unfortunately, as many marketers attempt to map the customer's journey from beginning to end, the process has become everything but linear.

Furthermore, the marketer can guess but not truly foresee how a customer's journey will change along the way. Even in the age of big data, unpredictability is here to stay. For these reasons, I believe that customer state marketing is a viable alternative to current cross-channel marketing practices. This new method allows marketers to build a complete enterprise marketing strategy iteratively rather than working within predefined paths.

Customer state marketing is a customer-centric, cross-channel approach to relationship marketing that directly and succinctly aligns marketing actions with customer behavior. The state is at the core of identifying who a customer is. For example, a state can be used to define the step of a process, but also live segmentation.

The idea is that you want to react differently, yet in an automated way, depending on the state of each individual customer. Customer behaviors will be interpreted and answered differently depending on the state of each individual customer. For example, an unknown customer will receive an e-mail after he visits a website. However, a frequent customer will not, as he represents a different state of the customer journey. In other words, customer state marketing takes into account individual attributes and behaviors to tailor timely marketing actions to be more relevant, more valuable, and more credible from the customer's perspective.

Examples of various states for different programs include the following:

sales funnel states;

suspect, prospect, lead, opportunity, proposal, client, lost, etc.;

enrollment or renewal program states;

new member, active member, solicited member, renewed member, inactive member, loyal member, etc.;

viral contest states;

registered, referred, ambassador, unregistered, winner, participant, etc.;

customer lifecycle states;

lead, new client, loyal client, at risk client, regular client, etc.;

client scoring states; and

high value client, low value client, one time buyer, inactive client, etc.

CSM differs from traditional marketing, which is a complex and overwhelming mapping task. Instead of creating campaigns with predefined paths that a lead can follow as in the lead nurturing process, CSM reflects the registered events that define the customer's buying path. This has the advantage of treating each customer individually according to his or her behavior and profile. It also takes into account the fact that customers rarely follow a predetermined path from awareness to purchase. CSM is centered on the individual's buying process, not the merchant's selling process. The ultimate goal is to identify each individual customer, to engage them in a meaningful way, and to track and monitor their behavior as they are nurtured toward a deeper, more diversified and stronger relationship.

The CSM approach has the benefit of eliminating data and profile consolidation as a prerequisite for cross-channel marketing. With today's marketing and cloud technology, all marketing programs can run on the cloud and the customer states can react automatically to actions and events happening in any application or platform. Data is still important, but data warehousing projects and centralization can be built after implementing your CSM programs rather than the other way around. Consequently, a marketer can start new programs and campaigns today and then focus on optimizing and building a data warehouse or customer centralization database. For example, one could start by implementing a customer reactivation program, move on with a cross-sales strategy, add more business intelligence, include social media in the mix, connect marketing programs with the CRM solution, and so forth.

CSM provides a refreshing alternative to the traditional marketing approach in my view. It has allowed me to build continuous marketing programs, optimize them with time and establish great marketing experience for customers. Beyond the ability to do better cross-channel and relationship marketing, the approach has had many positive results including quicker ROI, smaller initial costs, quicker implementation and increased marketing flexibility.

Alain Paquin is president and CEO of Whatsnexx (www.whatsnexx.com).

by Shai Berger

Fonolo Helps Credit Union's Mobile App Offer Enhanced Call Center Experience

Mobile apps have become must-have components for companies in the financial space. Most large and mid-size banks already have very full-featured mobile apps. But, sadly, many of them drop the ball when it comes to connecting with a live agent. Their Contact Us page does nothing more than display a phone number. This forces a customer who needs to speak to an agent to start over. What if that customer was about to apply for a loan? Chances are, he'll put his phone back in his pocket and that revenue opportunity is gone. That risk can be remedied by having a smarter connection to the call center.

That's exactly what 1st United Services Credit Union did with the latest update of its iPhone app. The app's Contact Us section, powered by Fonolo, lets their customers reach an agent with one tap — no phone menus, no waiting on hold.

Fonolo is a cloud-based call-back service that lets companies deliver a better call center experience. Its goal is to solve the top three complaints people have about the call center: waiting on hold, navigating phone menus, and repeating information to agents.

The deployment with 1st United shows how Fonolo is a truly multi-channel solution. 1st United is using Fonolo's click-to-call widget on its website, and using Fonolo's In-Call Rescue service for callers who dial-in directly. So customers are getting an enhanced hold-free experience regardless of the channel they use to connect.

A recent study conducted by Adcom surveyed users of mobile financial apps. Seventy percent of respondents complained about problems they experienced, and 80 percent said they want to request customer assistance from within the app they are using.

Today's consumer expects a mobile app that lets him or her connect with a live agent when needed, and the ability to make that transition while maintaining the context of what was going on. The good news is that it's not hard to make that happen. Fonolo can be easily added to any mobile app and will handle the connection with any existing call center.

The credit union added this functionality to it mobile app and the website using Fonolo, and it didn't have to change anything in the call center.

"It was remarkable how easy it was to get the Fonolo solution up and running. We are thrilled to be offering this improved experience to our members," said Mark Edelman, vice president of member contact at 1st United Services Credit Union.

To learn more, check out the webinar Fonolo did with 1st United and Fonolo on Feb 28. It's now available on demand at TMCnet.com.

Shai Berger is co-founder and CEO of Fonolo (www.fonolo.com).

by Dawn Keathley

Utilizing intelligent call routing for high-interest-level consumers

Direct response callers require unique strategy

What do you think? Will direct response callers, if sent to a higher performing agent, convert at higher rates? And, would these callers be willing to stay on hold a little longer because they have a higher level of interest in the product they are calling about?

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While working with one of our clients, we had a hunch DR callers would indeed remain on hold a little longer. And if this hunch was correct, we could then intelligently route the caller to the highest performing agents as they became available, increasing sales conversion rates without increasing abandon rates.

Direct response callers are different from most call-in consumers. They have a high level of interest in the product based on what they've seen, read or heard – certainly enough to compel them to pick up the phone. But, unlike traditional phone product orders, a direct response sale is not a given. While some people may arrive in your call center ready to buy, most require additional information and some sales finesse before they decide to seal the deal.

That's when your contact center agents become game changers. A good agent who understands the needs, motivations and reservations of the customer can mean the difference between a conversion and a lost sale. This is why it's imperative to deliver each and every call to the most experienced agent. Fortunately, technology is allowing us to do just that. By intelligently routing calls to agents, companies can increase phone sales conversions and build greater brand equity.

Providing a potential customer a great phone experience

Targeted routing, also commonly referred to as intelligent routing, is the system of matching specific contact center agents with calls based on their training or proficiency for a particular type of call. For example, if there are 100 agents trained on a particular program, the 10 best agents in the group would be given priority over the other agents when a call comes into the center. This technology helps ensure the best agent available to handle a call is the one on the line. Take it one step further and couple targeted routing with real-time script on screen technology that tailors the script to the person calling, and you are very close to true one-to-one marketing.

The major benefit of targeted routing is connecting consumers with agents more adept at answering consumer questions and intuitive in addressing issues or reservations and removing any obstacles. By providing a potential customer a great phone experience with a confident, knowledgeable agent, you are more likely to convert a call into a sale. Additionally, superior call center experiences lead to better brand impressions – which lay the groundwork for future purchases and the most effective direct response sales tool of all: customer recommendations.

Each program has a set of metrics that are determined upfront by the client's goals for a particular program. Depending on the program, these metrics could be a communicators ability to close a sale, upsell or cross sell, conversion rates, response rates, etc. However, targeted call routing is not a good fit for all campaigns. For example, it wouldn't be a good fit for a client who has low hold times, meaning the person calling in won't stay on hold for very long before hanging up. It's also not a good tool for call spikes because we need to be able to answer all of the calls coming in.

A great example of how a targeted routing strategy helped increase sales conversions is a test InfoCision conducted with a direct response company specializing in selling portable heating units. The case study can be downloaded by going to www.infocision.com/companyinfo/resources. The company was generating roughly 200,000 inbound calls each month through print advertisements in national publications. InfoCision was one of three contact centers employed by the company to handle these calls – including the company's own in-house call center. With conversion rates hovering around 22 percent, InfoCision decided to perform an in-depth analysis of the program to see where adjustments could be made to boost sales.

InfoCision began looking at call arrival patterns and quickly noticed a figure that stood out: above-average wait times. Callers were holding on the line longer without hanging up. InfoCision theorized that because callers had exhibited a high interest level in the product, they were willing to wait longer than the average hold time – approximately 45 seconds – before speaking with an agent (or communicator, as phone representatives at InfoCision are called). This discovery seemed to be distinct to direct response callers. It also indicated that callers exhibited high enough interest levels that having the right agent on the line could make a difference in conversions.

Route calls to top call center agents

The decision was made to test targeted routing on the direct response company's program in an attempt to improve conversions. InfoCision's test program involved 650 communicators who took calls for three months. These communicators were selected for the program based on tenure and direct response training. The communicators also received specialized training on the client and the product – including product demonstrations, best practice call reviews, and intensive role playing. As they went to work taking calls, InfoCision monitored their numbers.

Communicators were ranked based on their sales conversion rates. These statistics were the driving force behind the integration of targeted routing technology. Using the ranking system as a base, InfoCision set parameters on its dialers to hold calls, if necessary, for communicators with the best conversions – distributing more calls to better performing personnel. While this was happening, arrival patterns and hold times were being constantly monitored. Wait time thresholds were adjusted as needed to prevent an increase in abandon rate.

Higher conversion rates

The objective of the targeted routing test was to boost sales conversions and the DR company's return on investment without increasing InfoCision's abandon rate. The test was a success on both counts. As a result of implementing targeted call routing, InfoCision was able to improve its conversion rate by 2.17 percent. Simultaneously – and more surprisingly – the abandon rate actually decreased by more than 9 percent.

As a result of implementing targeted call routing, InfoCision was able to improve its conversion rate by 2.17 percent. Simultaneously – and more surprisingly – the abandon rate actually decreased by more than 9 percent.

With targeted routing, InfoCision's conversion rate was higher than the competing call center and even several percentage points higher than the client's in-house contact center. This test was the first time InfoCision used the targeted call routing strategy and, because of its success, it has been rolled out successfully to other clients across industries – including all direct response clients.

Targeted routing to the right agent

When it comes to direct response calls, the voice on the end of the line can make a big difference. Because consumers call in with a high level of product interest already established, sometimes all it takes is a little extra skill and polish to move the costumer toward a buying decision. Having a system in place to increase the likelihood your customer will talk to the most qualified agent also increases the likelihood you will convert the sale.

Through this test, integrating targeted call routing technology proved to be an effective method of increasing conversion rates. It also revealed that, with proper monitoring, targeted routing can assist in decreasing the number of abandoned calls. Ultimately, the potential benefits of targeted routing for companies can be many: additional sales, fewer hang-ups, enhanced brand value, and the marketing ripple effect of more positive customer experiences.

Dawn Keathley

To download the targeted routing case study, please go to www.infocision.com/Companyinfo/resources

Dawn Keathley is director of new business development at InfoCision Management Corp. InfoCision is a leading provider of contact center solutions for many verticals including direct response, consumer services, B2B, financial services, pharmaceutical and telecommunications, as well as providing inbound and outbound marketing for nonprofit, religious and political organizations. You can reach Dawn at Dawn.keathley@infocision.com

by Art Rosenberg

"Help Desk" Services For Mobile UC Customer Support

Consumers really want to do things by themselves as much as possible. This was reflected in a recent market study by Frost & Sullivan analysts, showing that "65 percent of consumers are now demanding self-service options around the clock." That should not be a big surprise, because who really wants to wait to talk to someone first before looking at information or performing a business transaction. It also drove consumers to buy their own home PCs to access web portals and exploit e-mail communications with people and online self-service applications.

Mobility, based on the huge consumer adoption of multi-modal smartphones and tablets, has opened up the customer service arena to greater complexity, both for the customers and for the customer service staff. This is especially true for self-service applications and mobile apps which, if not carefully designed, could lead to greater consumer frustration, dissatisfaction, and increased need for live assistance.

Customers, therefore, may be calling less for just business information questions, but just need help in using the self-service applications that are more easily accessible from their mobile devices. This help may be in the form of walking the customer through the online application procedure or fixing some parameters on the application. This will be applicable for both business applications as well as for communication applications.

UC-enabled Click-for-Assistance Is Ideal For Mobile Users

One of the benefits of UC-enablement for online applications is that it facilitates access to live assistance. However, that access is not necessarily instantly accomplished, nor is it necessarily required. A recent study by Adcom Group for Virtual Hold Technology focused on financial services and consumer needs for assistance while using mobile self-service applications. Although financial apps are among the most popular smartphone apps used by consumers today, reflecting that more than 50 percent of surveyed smartphone users use them, 70 percent of respondents complained about problems using those apps, and 80 percent said they want to request customer assistance from within the app they are using. Clearly, because such mobile users can be contacted in any way at any time, there is no reason to connect them into a call queue to wait for a connection. (Only the request has to be queued!)

The kind of problems users found with mobile financial apps included:

* dropped Internet connections;

* apps "freezing";

* problems opening and logging into an app;

* difficulties with initially setting up an app; and

* missing or still pending transactional data.

These problems cause customer dissatisfaction and drive the need for assistance. The question is what kind of live assistance needs to be provided?

"Help Desk" Customer Support In the Cloud

In the past, customer assistance could be provided by connecting with a consumers' desktop PC, sharing control of an application. With mobile devices, using a cloud environment should prove more efficient, since the mobile devices themselves won't store the applications and relevant data like a desktop PC. (Even those are becoming more virtualized.)

When mobile, multi-modal customers need live assistance, what they really need are the following:

*a simple way to quickly initiate a request for assistance, with a choice of response contact will be preferred, as well as time urgency; and

* their contextual information, i.e., identification, contact information, log of their current application activity, etc., which must be attached to their request so that the proper type of assistance is provided and that the responding agent is fully aware of what the customer situation is without having to ask a lot of questions first.

* The customer should be given an immediate confirmation response, along with any indications of when and

how that response should be expected. This may be an important consideration for what I call Unified Notification Management, where an expected incoming contact will be quickly recognized and brought to the attention of the recipient.

All the information required for efficient live assistance has to be easily accessible for both the customer and the live assistance provider. To this end, keeping such contextual information in a cloud environment makes a lot of sense, especially when the final form of assistance itself will require shared data access.

There are now so many ways that business operations can interact with consumers, that it really is necessary to differentiate contact functionality beyond inbound and outbound, or by type of interface medium (voice, text, pictures, video). Multi-modal mobile devices allow end users not only greater choice in the modes of initiating and receiving contacts from people and automated business applications, but UC enablement also allows end users to dynamically change modes as needed. So, if live assistance is provided initially by a text message and is responded to via chat, there is no reason that it can't be extended to voice or video.

The real bottom line for mobile access by customers to online self-service applications will be to satisfy customer needs directly, quickly, and easily, without the expense or delays of live assistance. However, it will be important to properly label the different types of such assistance, in order to align routing and staffing needs accordingly. So, let's use the good, old "Help Desk" label for customer technical support of mobile, online, UC enabled apps.

Art Rosenberg is an industry veteran and now blogs and does consulting. For more information, visit The Unified-View/ UC Strategies Expert

AudioCodes Puts Together One Voice for Lync

by Paula Bernier

Alan Percy

AudioCodes has launched the One Voice for Lync program, bringing a bundled offering to businesses looking to integrate Lync into their communications infrastructure.

The AudioCodes One Voice for Lync puts all of the company's voice-based UC hardware, as well as professional services and support, under one umbrella, explains Alan Percy, director of market development.

He notes that AudioCodes started with gateways, moved to E-SBCs, then added survivable branch appliances, and recently expanded to its IP phone line. (AudioCodes last year introduced its 420HD IP Phone. It is the first phone AudioCodes developed that is designed around Microsoft Lync. The phone was built from the ground up for unified communications applications, which means, for example, that it displays presence and manages presence from the phone screen as opposed to requiring the user to get that information from a PC.)

So, now that the company has all the hardware pieces in place to deliver voice-based UC, it wanted to create a branded suite.

Percy says the creation of this suite of products and services is particularly relevant for AudioCodes partners coming from the IT space. These folks are not as experienced in the voice realm, so can use a hand with integration, he says. One Voice for Lync gives IT-centric partners one place to go for all the voice pieces.

As of late February, nearly 70 AudioCodes channel partners had voiced their interest in participating in the One Voice for Lync program, Percy says, adding the company is working to bring partners onboard.

Meanwhile, the major contact center vendors have been lining up to demonstrate their integrations and support for Microsoft Lync. During ITEXPO Miami 2013, Genesys, Interactive Intelligence, Altigen, Acqueon, Zeacom and others showed their ability to offer contact center features for Microsoft Lync.

"With this focus on Lync and the extensive experience and certifications that AudioCodes already has with the major contact center platforms, the choice of where to go for voice-enablement technology, services and support should be clear," said Percy.

by Paula Bernier

Serving Up Solutions

Real-Time Information Enables Guidance for Agent Improvement and More

Some employees seem to have a sense for exactly what is required and how to accomplish it. Some require a little help.

But regardless of who is handling a customer interaction when a customer expresses the desire to drop your service or product, you want to ensure that representative has all the tools he or she needs to make the best attempt at keeping the customer from jumping ship.

With UTOPY now under its belt, contact center solution provider Genesys can now leverage speech analytics to enable businesses to help agents who need assistance in working with callers.

Eric Tamblyn, vice president of global innovations at Genesys, which is expected to close its acquisition of UTOPY this quarter, says that historically contact centers have used data mining or just randomly picked calls to monitor after the fact in an effort to better understand how to improve agent performance and customer satisfaction. But real-time speech analytics now enable organizations to identify calls that require attention while those calls are still in progress.

He adds that this can also be used in other situations, such as enabling the contact center to share conversations with product managers whose products are receiving a high number of inquiries. That way, he explains, the product manager can not only see there's an issue with the product, but can listen in on past or current conversations to understand the specifics of the problem and how to address them.

On a separate front, Verint recently launched a new effort called Personalized Guidance that can give needed assistance to new or lower performing contact center representatives so they can deliver the best results based on the particular situations with which they are confronted. It does that by guiding the agent through conversations with customers -- providing assistance as needed through prompts or data propagation on the rep's screen, explains Roger Woolley, Verint's vice president of marketing solutions.

Personalized Guidance uses commercially available Verint technology to identify agents who may be struggling. It does this by doing real-time speech analysis of live calls and by assessing what's happening on the agent's desktop.

Siobhan Miller, Verint's director of solutions marketing, explains that the solution has three key functions: It identifies opportunities for improvement, offers guidance on how to get better result, and then integrates the result.

Verint's Impact 360 Analysis Tools identify the root cause of challenges to understand where Personalized Guidance can have a positive impact. For example, it may recognize the opportunity to reduce repeat calls, improve customer satisfaction, increase upsells, ensure compliance, or lower handle times with one or more agents.

Personalized Guidance then ensures the agent receives the right guidance at the right time. For example, an analysis of the conversation might see that the customer is ripe for an upsell and, in turn, provide the agent with an appropriate script to present that customer a targeted offer. Or the speech recognition might hear the caller say "moving" and auto populate the agent's screen with a relocation form that already has the customer's information plugged into it. The system also features triggers to all for effective follow up – for example, it could e-mailed an assessor with the address of the caller's second property.

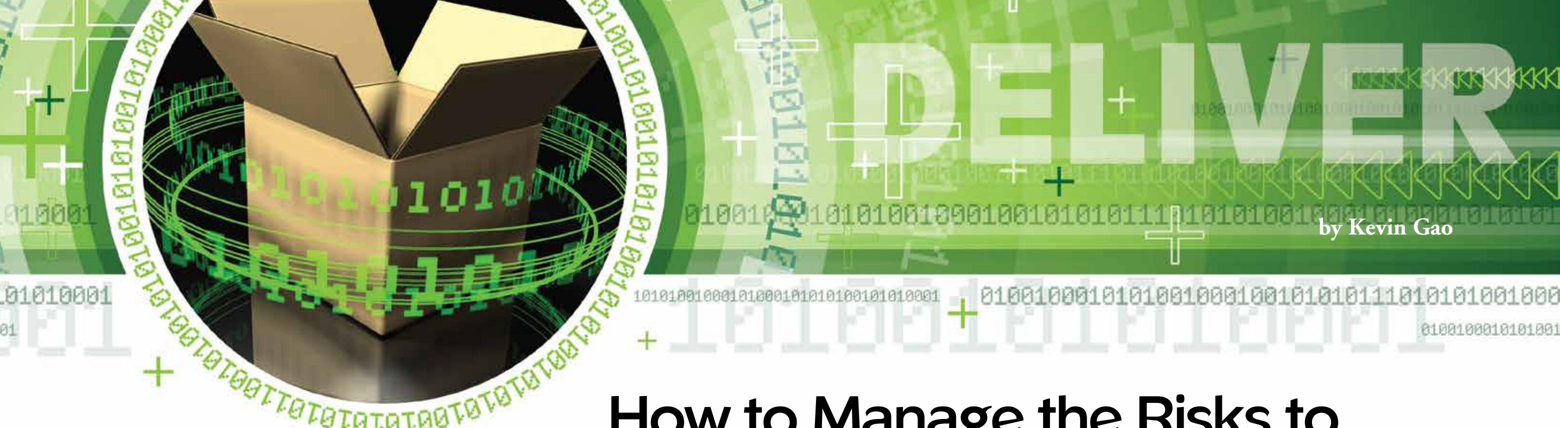
Once the interaction is complete, the system measures the quality of the call and the effectiveness of the guidance. That enables the company to do Voice of the Customer analytics in the future to help with coaching and streamline back office operations.

On a separate front, IntelliResponse this month is launching a voice of the customer analytics tool that sits on top of its existing platform, CEO David Lloyd tells CUSTOMER magazine. The Toronto-based company's existing platform uses virtual agent technology to enable companies to engage, access, answer and offer insights to and about customers across various channels and without requiring a human to be involved. The new feature, called Introspect, looks for themes around the questions customers are asking.

For example, if a caller says "I want to cancel an account" or "Why can't I open an account," the automated system could flag that interaction and respond accordingly.

Ten customers had previewed this new solution as of early February, and several of them were actively using it. One customer was leveraging the offering to gauge whether customers understood its mortgage promotion.

So many call centers record calls but never do anything with that information because combing through recordings is a massive job, he says. But if you have a tool to pull out themes in conversations and visualize that information things become a whole lot more manageable, he says.



by Kevin Gao

How to Manage the Risks to Your Business and Customers After Hackers Attack

Damages caused by hacking attacks are not only technical headaches, but they can also cause tension between the company and its customers. This tension can be especially acute in cases where the hacked company offers a hosted service to its customers, and that service's functions are at risk. Hackers understand how damaging their threats can be and the importance that firms will place on meeting customer needs above nearly all other concerns. Despite the risks, companies can employ several best practices to become a less inviting target to hackers and to minimize the damages after a threat.

Monitoring of server status is a sound first step for companies that want to know immediately when a threat begins. The right monitoring tool will send alerts to administrators and other technical staff who can begin to assess the damage. Protocols should also be put into place to alert the customer support team. If the hacking attempt will very likely interrupt or slow services provided for customers, then a quick and transparent explanation should be disseminated.

Enterprise-level hosted live chat, e-mail marketing, knowledge base, and help desk solution provider Comm100 recently experienced a distributed denial of service attack for which a hacker attempted to shut down the company's operations in exchange for blackmail payment. Comm100's core services are all hosted, so interruption of service means its global clients could not properly meet the needs of their own customers. The company took swift action to both combat the attack and inform its customers of the existence of the threat and the actions being taken to get services back online.

After the system admins at Comm100 analyzed the exact type of attack and its technical scope, they talked to the data center host to see if any network errors had occurred and to make sure they knew of the attack and were taking steps to guard the server. As the attack was confirmed, the company looked at more advanced defenses to help stop the hacker from repeating the attack, a popular tactic hackers use to extort companies.

Comm100 also knew multiple department coordination was vital to properly manage any threat. Its developers needed to adjust quickly any settings and work with a testing team to be sure any affected systems were functioning and ensure there would not be an interruption in service. The support team was tasked with gathering feedback from customers and keeping them informed of the issue and the likely timeframe for resolution. These communications were very transparent, as customer backlash could be severe if Comm100 did not disclose an outage.

For widespread public attacks, the marketing team should be involved to ensure the right messaging about the attack is provided to the public. Every department should understand its role before an attack occurs, so they can work quickly and collaboratively in a logical fashion to mitigate the damage to both technical systems and the company's reputation.

Once customers hear about the attack, they will naturally ask: Was my data compromised? Management of customer data is vital for any firm that offers a hosted service, and companies should be sure all data protection policies are sound to stop any intrusion. Hackers often try to infiltrate through passwords, so companies should ensure complex password verifications are a part of server login credentials. These credentials should be actively managed by select staff members who have a proven ability to follow the strictest of policies. All customer data should be encrypted to the highest standards, with very limited numbers of staff having access to the data. Monitoring should be in place to spot any port or bug scans and to log all system visits in case of unauthorized attempts. It's important for customers to know such procedures are in place so they have the added peace of mind that you have considered the possibility of hacking and are proactively taking steps to shield their data.

Properly trained staff members are essential for repelling and preventing attacks. System administrators should proactively learn about the latest threats and hacking techniques as well as the appropriate responses or patches. The non-technical staff that manages customer relationships should have enough technical training to be able to understand the threat and translate it into plain language for their customer contacts. How the hacking threat is described and managed by the company is as important to customers as the technical details of the threat itself. Staff members need to be transparent with their information, and be able to relay confidence in the technical team's ability to quickly stop any threat and get the company (and the customer) back in business.

Kevin Gao is president and CEO of Comm100 (www.comm100.com).

by Paula Bernier

InfoSys Addresses New Customer Services Challenges with AssistEdge

Outsourcing and consulting giant Infosys recently took the wraps off a new solution called AssistEdge, which aims to improve the overall customer experience by addressing contact center agent productivity and integrating service-related activities across all channels.

Gopal Devanahalli, vice president of products, platforms and solutions at Infosys, explains that the product – which is aimed at telcos, high tech firms, and financial services companies – addresses customer pain points around multi-channel customer service, self service, the disparate internal systems required for customer service, expert overload, and cost.

While everybody likes to talk about multi-channel customer service, Devanahalli notes that in most instances, the cross-channel experience is not very good, especially from the customer standpoint, and particularly when customers start the process with self-service. AssistEdge aims to solve that by offering an integrated experience in which input data and accessed information follows customers across as many as eight channels.

Infosys explains that this context-passing capability captures and sequences the history of a customer's interactions across such service channels as e-mail, chat, telephone, and Twitter. It then integrates the customer history from various enterprise systems. And then it presents all of the above to call center agents in a single window. That can allow for faster resolution for customers; encourage the use of self-service (which today is 30 percent); and enable companies to reduce their average call handling time by up to 50 percent, according to Infosys.

AssistEdge further improves self-help by making the process of interacting with a knowledge base more intuitive for the user, Infosys says. Rather than providing the same questions to all comers, AssistEdge tailors questions used in self-help inquiries for various scenarios, and the knowledge base is a living data store that gets updated over time to address new scenarios. Additionally, AssistEdge includes a loyalty system module that allows companies to award users with points for using self-service (as opposed to going through the contact center, a more expensive option for the company).

Devanahalli adds that contact center reps commonly have to log into multiple internal systems to address a customer request.

In many cases, a single interaction requires the rep to tap into 12 to 15 applications, he says, and update each of those apps or systems with new information. Obviously, that's not a very efficient process. So, to improve things, AssistEdge has a Smart User Environment module that allows the rep to see all the needed apps on a single screen, with the most important information displayed on the left side of the screen, and to enter information just once to populate multiple applications.

Another common pain point in customer service, according to Infosys, is that the experts to which the initial contact center reps forward specific inquiries often get overloaded by a multitude of inquiries. To help better distribute the load and prevent long wait times, AssistEdge routes queries only to experts available at that time, and experts can then initiate video chat or online chat interactions (more than one at a time, if desired) for fast resolution.

Cost is obviously another major concern related to customer service, which has traditionally been seen as a cost center. To help companies justify new investments in customer service, Devanahalli says Infosys delivers powerful analytics based on customer profile and other data like that from social media sites. That way, agents can make the best offers at the most optimal times, he says.

AssistEdge, which is available via license or as a cloud service, is typically implemented within three to six months. Return on investment, as result of lower call handling time, is slated for one year. Two large telcos, one in the U.S. and one in the U.K. (BT OpenReach), are early users of AssistEdge.

by Paula Bernier

CGS Focuses on Customer Solutions, Growth

A long and circuitous path that has taken CGS from it's beginnings several decades ago to where it is today, but the company is now a worldwide entity with $200 million in revenue.

CGS President and CEO Phil Friedman came to the U.S. from the former Soviet Union by way of Italy in 1976. Along the way he experienced a wonderful thing called pizza, and he cooked up an idea to bring the food to the American public. What he didn't know was that pizza already had arrived on U.S. shores years earlier.

So Friedman instead got job at now-defunct apparel manufacturer Charles Greenburg & Sons, where he installed a homegrown inventory system. IBM got wind of this and started showing its prospects the product. Friedman, understanding there was a market for this kind of thing, approached his employer, offering Charles Greenburg management an offer of his resignation and his desire to take sell services back to the company. His then-employer agreed, but said they wanted his new enterprise to include the name of Charles Greenburg, so Friedman called his organization CGS.

CGS started out selling inventory solutions to the apparel vertical -- a business in which it remains to this day. About 25 years ago it expanded into the call center space by providing a solution on this front to IBM in Atlanta.

Today, CGS operates 4,500 contact centers. This part of the company's business now accounts for 55 percent of its revenue.

Tom Christenson, president of the contact center division for CGS, who conveyed the above story to CUSTOMER magazine in a February interview, said that CGS's outsourced contact center business has traditionally focused on blue chip clients that have special language requirements. Among the companies using CGS contact center and BPO services including help desk and tech support are Avon, Cuisinart, Dell, Fuji-Film, Honeywell, Intercontinental Hotels Group, and Sprint.

Dell and IBM are key CGS go-to-market partners that deliver the company's help desk offer as part of their broader portfolios. CGS also has a direct sales force selling into this market.

However, the company is working to expand its reach even further in an effort to rev up growth, says Christenson.

It's doing that by expanding its business to also target mid-market customers; moving into new geographic markets; and retooling its strategy to be more proactive in reaching out to customers and prospects.

Christenson joined CGS last May to help move this strategy forward.

The company prides itself on its ability to offer services in a wide range of languages (18 and counting), its geographic reach (seven locations in North America, Europe and South America), and its local flavor. CGS services U.S. customers domestically, and all its non-U.S. centers have local businesses that speak in the native tongue. And Christenson says that the high level of expertise that CGS contact center/help desk reps possess speaks to the needs of today's businesses,

which are looking for a contact center partner that can engage with customers in a way that's higher value add and multichannel.

To date, CGS has been relatively quiet about these differentiators, relying on word-of-mouth and distribution partners, says Christenson. While the company has had a direct sales force in the past, he adds, many of those individuals came from big companies and were move accustomed to wining and dining customers than closing the deal. Starting last year, however, CGS began building a sales team that is proactive in matching solutions to customers. The company is also investing in an outbound marketing campaign focused on spreading the message via e-mail and phone campaigns, the press, as and trade shows. Vertical targets of the marketing effort include consumer products and technology, financial services, hospitality and retail.

by Elizabeth Cholawsky

New Demands for Service Excellence Push Companies to Rethink Support

Something radical is happening. As entrepreneur Marc Andreessen says, software is eating the world. From Netflix and Hulu to home security and heating systems, from smog tests to doctor's blood tests, the globe is being invaded by an entirely wired and programmed flow of easily accessible data and online decision-making tools.

As software bites off greater chunks of work and home, there's a corresponding hunger for tech support. Proliferating programs and cloud-connected devices cry out for the helping hand of IT help desks and customer contact centers. Employees and customers expect and depend on companies to make their software, programs and apps work and keep working.

What To Do?

It's time for companies to rethink how they deliver support to their employees and customers with their proliferating desktops, mobile devices and apps. Support organizations must re-envision how they keep networks up and running while replacing a raft of legacy support tools with new, effective cloud-based technologies. Streamlining work processes, avoiding pointless complexity and reducing support costs are probably some of your major goals in 2013.

Providing quick issue resolution that is consistently pleasant, seamless and trouble-free is really the new marketing for companies. A live, shared-screen support session is uniquely intimate and immediate. To some end users, it seems like magic. Deliver a remarkable support experience like this and your company can out-support the competition. It's a guaranteed way to help satisfy customers, retain them and ensure repeat sales. For your employees, it's all about ensuring they are always connected and productive.

Dwindling Resources, Increasing Demands

Like a tidal wave, the demand for support is intensifying as support is increasingly deemed strategically significant for the business. One small problem: Since the onset of the recession in 2008, manpower and money for support have dwindled. Even now with a recovering economy, IDC reports that renewed spending first goes to IT projects directed at generating competitive advantages and ensuring business agility. Funds for support remain flat or worse.

Both internal support of employees and external support of customers are hammered by a lack of resources. For both, the stress is on efficiency, accomplishing more with less. "Because of this," IDC reports, "support professionals should continue to demand products like clientless remote support tools, as they ultimately drive efficiency."

Convergence and All-Inclusive Support Offerings

Internal and external support share a common strategic imperative to service and satisfy clients. This is a key driver of convergence: Help desks and contact centers are beginning to mirror each other. Both are adopting the means and measures that through trial and error (and, yes, some debate) have proven to be essential to elevating the satisfaction of end users. Those techniques include first-contact resolution, reduction in call-handling times, easy access to self service and, of course, the surefire tool for efficiently resolving issues: next-generation integrated support tools.

Help desk managers and service center directors find their job descriptions aligned in staying on top of tech trends to identify new tactics or tools that might reduce the strain on support. In this context, a dominant trend in the industry is the replacement of legacy systems with cloud-based, integrated solutions that present an easy-to-use interface on one pane of glass.

In a just-released Technology Spotlight, sponsored by Citrix, industry analysts at IDC endorsed this shift to consolidated cloud-based toolsets. The Technology Spotlight details how unified toolsets "enable support teams to be more efficient and effective in delivering their services." Such integrated solutions, IDC noted, are "increasingly being used by IT and by groups that provide support to external customers."

In its recent Technology Spotlight, IDC explored how delivering multiple support services from one intuitive interface can help drive efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The Case of Vertex

Vertex Inc. is a great example of a company that is experiencing first-hand the convergence trend in its contact center operations. A global leader in tax technology, Vertex software helps the vast majority of Fortune 1000 companies calculate what taxes they owe in every jurisdiction, large or small, throughout the country. The service desk supervisor at Vertex, Casey Neff, says she started using the GoToAssist Remote Support solution initially to resolve issues for staff. Neff told us, "Our employees are so amazed at how quickly we can help them resolve any issues.... Using GoToAssist has made their jobs easier."

The effectiveness of the tool and the need to deliver sterling service pushed Vertex to take the next step: "We recently expanded usage of GoToAssist to our external customer support team," Neff says. "GoToAssist also allows us to easily evaluate our client's hardware and software for troubleshooting and to resolve more complex issues." As Vertex has shown, using the same support tools for delivering internal and external support can be very beneficial to all companies.

Another means to drive efficiency with tech tools has emerged with the multiplication of support channels. The addition of chat, social media and self service all have the virtue of not only catering to the preferences of customers and staff, but also offering lower costs per call.

The Benefits of Seamless Integration

But the ability of these new tech tools to enhance customer and staff satisfaction depends on their seamless integration and accessibility. Ideally all these channels operate as part of a unified cloud-based platform. Self service is the channel users prefer to use, but it also has the lowest customer satisfaction because answers are often not found. By connecting self service seamlessly with a chat session and, when needed, with full hands-on screen sharing, high rates of customer satisfaction are restored.

If integrated service is critical to the front-end user interface, it is doubly true of the back end. The essential tool bench for delivering tech support – remote support, ticketing and a self-service knowledge base, along with network monitoring, alerting and inventory management – should be supplied from one integrated toolset.

For example, when service desk management is integrated with a remote support tool, support professionals can launch a remote support session directly from an incident ticket. Session notes and recordings are saved back to the ticket and duplicate data entry is eliminated. In addition, the session recording can then be used as the basis for a knowledge-base video, showing support trainees (or even end users) how to fix the problem.

Processes and tools should be immediately available to a user without any additional complexity or confusion. Where possible, these processes should be automated. By accessing multiple tools from one easy-to-use interface, support centers can reduce the complexities in their daily work, accelerate efficiency and elevate support.

No wonder IDC recommends the adoption of consolidated technology tools. In its recent Technology Spotlight, IDC explored how delivering multiple support services from one intuitive interface can help drive efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Zooming to the Cloud

Tech research firm Gartner estimates that 15 percent of IT service support management tools in enterprise IT organizations are currently licensed under the SaaS model. Gartner states, "We expect this growth to continue, as demonstrated in our client inquiries conducted from June 2011 to June 2012, where organizations looking to acquire new IT service desk/ITSSM tools had SaaS solutions on their shortlists 75 percent of the time."

At the end of the day, IT support and customer support need to be able to assist both people and technology and collaborate in a team-based environment to be at their best. Support is now strategic, and companies must rethink how they provide support to cope with a proliferation of devices and software. Whether their focus is internal, external or both, they need new, more efficient technologies to survive and ensure the productive uptime of their customers and employees.

Elizabeth Cholawsky is vice president and general manager at Citrix (www.citrix.com).

by Paula Bernier & Erik Linask

TMC Announces MVP Quality Award Winners

CUSTOMER magazine and TMC proudly present the MVP Quality Awards. Though the technology they have at their disposal continues to evolve, these outsourcers represent the best of their community, leveraging the latest trends to set new standards for service excellence, customer care and support, without leaving behind their proven dedication to excellence in human interaction.

The members of this exclusive list have taken the time to complete an exhaustive 16-point essay, including a full customer case study detailing the program's success, as well as providing specific statistics regarding call center volumes, staffing, and technology. As we have come to expect – and as anyone who works with clients in any capacity knows – these industry leaders demonstrate clearly that neither technology nor agent quality alone can succeed in such a competitive environment. Rather, these providers combine the two, along with management commitment and organizational standards, to provide the highest levels of service to their diverse and often longstanding customers.

We congratulate the 2013 MVP Quality Award winners and are pleased to share some of the compelling comments from their essays, which exemplify their elite status among their teleservices counterparts.

Agero
www.agero.com

How has quality measurement evolved in your organization?

Over the last 30 years, Agero has continued to develop our call monitoring process. In the early years, we silently observed call monitoring in the live state from a supervisor workstation. In the early '90s, we invested in our first call recording system, Auto Quality. At the time, the new monitoring system enabled us to obtain and listen to a wide sample of recorded calls. The best feature of the system was that the associates did not know when they would be monitored. This allowed us to capture a true sample of their call quality.

A few years ago, we purchased the Witness eQuality call monitoring system. Witness has enabled us to capture both the voice and data portions of a recorded call. As an added benefit, the monitor form has been integrated into the system to allow us to simultaneously monitor and grade phone calls. The ability to run complex queries on the quality database has enabled us to identify trends and create training modules to correct them faster than we have ever been able to do in the past. We are very proud to say that we have greatly improved our ability to measure quality and identify opportunities for improvement at every level of the organization.

InfoCision Management Corp.
www.infocision.com

How has your organization leveraged technology to drive quality?

Whereas communicators used to wade through paper scripts of up to 30 pages, every appeal and conceivable objection is now easily and instantly accessible on their computer screens, which are custom-built by InfoCision's IT staff into a user-friendly application, Inscription. We use the latest Microsoft technology to ensure the script is on the communicator's screen in three-tenths of a second after the call is answered so that the conversation flows naturally. Our scripted approach to client programs also ensures the accuracy and integrity of our message, as well as compliance with all applicable laws. Using another application, ScriptPad, the account staff can create and edit scripts quickly and efficiently and send them to the call centers instantly.

Alorica

www.alorica.com

What key policies lead to operational quality in your organization?

Alorica customizes a quality plan for each client based on program-specific requirements and best practices within our enterprise. These requirements must be measurable and predictive of desired outcomes. Alorica Quality Assurance abides by regulated state laws regarding recorded calls. Our corporate counsel ensures that our clients and our company are compliant with federal and state telemarketing regulations. Alorica has customer care clients that require 100 percent recording of their calls. We utilize digital recording solutions to record calls for verification. Verifiers will listen to determine if all requirements have been met. Those requirements not met will be forwarded back to operations management to determine a course of action such as a customer call-back and re-verification process, retraining, or disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the infraction.

The Connection

www.the-connection.com

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

We offer our clients the best technology available in the industry. With this advanced technology, clients can rest assured that their calls are getting handled quickly by the appropriate trained agents. The Connection operates on a hub and spoke business model. Our Burnsville, Minn., headquarters contains our primary technology such as our Aspect ACDs, servers and RAID technology in a secure, temperature-controlled environment. Because of this system, we have the ability to instantaneously route calls to all four call center facilities simultaneously. Our call centers provide complete redundancy to our clients, so that their customer calls are never missed.

Aegis Ltd.

www.aegisglobal.com

What is your policy on quality?

Aegis focuses on the use of appropriate metrics to measure performance. Most quality monitoring tools, metrics and scoring methodologies do not provide an accurate picture of business performance, and most quality programs fail to link quality scores with customer satisfaction and business performance. Rather, they use simplistic or overall scoring measures that do not properly weigh evaluations or calculate quality scores. With Aegis' approach, we understand the attributes critical to our partner (client), end user transaction, as well as compliance requirements. The three quality scores are: customer affecting critical, business affecting critical, and compliance critical. We view the monitoring process as an opportunity to track the customer perspective and experience, providing an avenue to gather business intelligence on the customer experience and, hence, can respond to the ever-changing needs of the business and customers.

NCO Group/APAC Customer Services

www.ncogroup.com

www.apaccustomerservices.com

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

Long-term technology strategy – IT investments are central to our long-term strategy. Each of our objectives for growth and supporting seamless customer service require different levels of spending. APAC/NCO has focused on achieving flexibility to meet the need of its various customer segments. The higher costs of this approach to IT management are offset by the benefits of innovation and our ability to respond to customers' needs. APAC/NCO uses its investments in technology to provide consistent service across all customer segments. APAC/NCO's continued success is matched to our spending levels related to improvements in the IT strategy, not industry benchmarks. As an outsourcing partner, we understand the impact that technology can generate when cutting costs, and we have to be proactive with our solution delivery to include cutting edge products that will impact your ROI.

Synergy Solutions

www.synergysolutionsinc.com

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

We have uniform processes and organizational structure across all contact center facilities, which allows us to easily migrate from site to site as needed for program growth and redundancy and allows for efficient operations for clients whose program spans multiple centers. All of our technology is enterprise-wide, so there is no confusion with the communication of disparate systems. Our switching platforms are centralized and all data at the contact center level is collected real-time to provide redundancy and the ability to report across all channels in an integrated web platform. Our open systems are configured to easily communicate with our clients' systems, and our seasoned team of IT professionals is committed to client service and maximum flexibility.

Although pricing for each client program is specific to the requirements of the program, we believe in comprehensive pricing and we bundle all ancillary services into our call handling rate. Consequently, there are no hidden charges and clients are able to effectively forecast and budget for our services.

Ansafone Contact Centers

www.ansafone.com

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

Providing clients with the impression of quality and high ethical standards begins with having a solid, accountable quality program and actually having high ethical standards. Truth always speaks louder than impression. Through our Eye of the Customer program, which serves as our pathway to clearly understand our clients' vision, we are able to define and reinforce specific requirements and goals, our role in the process, and performance management strategies.

by Donna Fluss, Founder & President, DMG Consulting and Brandon Rowe, Solutions Marketing Manager, Interactive Intelligence

Improving Your Customer Strategy with Workforce Optimization

Workforce optimization isn't entirely new to the contact center industry. Yet many centers are still trying to figure out what technologies they need for a WFO solution, and exactly how a WFO approach fits in to their customer service strategies. These same contact centers also want to know what the true benefits of WFO are. The questions about WFO and its value are reasonable ones to ask, and in their Q&A-based whitepaper on the topic, two industry authorities answer them.

Here are some of those key questions and responses from Donna Fluss, founder and president of DMG Consulting, and Brandon Rowe, solutions marketing manager of Interactive Intelligence.

Q: What is a workforce optimization suite and what does it do?

Fluss: WFO suites are sophisticated solutions that include up to 10 distinct modules or applications. In all, these modules are recording, quality assurance/management, workforce management, agent coaching, e-learning, customer feedback surveying, performance management, speech analytics, desktop analytics, and text analytics. All of these applications are management-oriented and are intended to help improve contact center performance. A WFO vendor can develop the individual modules internally, obtain them through acquisition, or offer them as a partner-provided solution. WFO suite providers typically offer a base set of standard applications, such as recording and quality assurance, and then offer additional modules as optional add-ons. A major differentiator between vendor suites is the level of integration between the various modules. All WFO vendors claim that their suites are fully integrated. This is not the case, although it is a goal, since there's great potential for synergy and data sharing between the various suite modules.

Q: Of all the WFO modules and analytics solutions, which ones should we start with? (And why?)

Fluss: The two fundamental applications in WFO suites are recording and quality assurance. Call or screen recording is necessary to perform quality assurance and historical speech or text analytics. Recording is also a helpful feed into the coaching process, although it isn't necessary. Especially for sales organizations or groups that process credit/debit card transactions, but that don't have a recording solution in place, DMG recommends consulting with their legal department to decide if a recording solution is advisable to reduce liability risk.

Quality assurance is the second cornerstone of WFO suites, and is often the primary input into the coaching process. If your contact center already has recording and plans to purchase just one other application, we recommend that it be a speech analytics-enabled quality assurance application, Such an app gives organizations substantial input into the quality and performance of their staff. And even if you already have a QA application, consider upgrading to a speech analytics-enabled one, which is much more productive and effective for quality assurance initiatives.

Lastly, any organization that meets the criteria above, and that doesn't have a workforce management application, may want to consider purchasing a WFM solution. WFM can help reduce staff-related expenses and improve customer service quality by better matching callers' needs to agents' skills. Beyond recording, QA, and WFM, choosing additional applications really depends on what you want to accomplish, such as gauging customer sentiment with customer feedback surveying.

Q: What business benefits can be achieved through a workforce optimization solution?

Rowe: As more industries become commoditized and new entrants continue to enter a market, companies are using service as a way to differentiate themselves from their competitors. And since a contact center is usually a customer's first introduction to a company, the contact center must make sure to have all the tools in place to be successful. WFO helps organizations to examine the health of their contact center and discover issues that could impact their business in both the short and long term.

All WFO vendors claim that their suites are fully integrated. This is not the case, although it is a goal, since there's great potential for synergy and data sharing between the various suite modules.

A WFO suite can provide managers with insight into their contact center, and present a clear window into how their agents are performing and how customers view the business and its service. Managers use various WFO applications to look at a contact center's operational structure and analyze everything from customer feedback survey results to speech analytics trends and multichannel interactions. WFO apps also allow managers to ensure the proper scheduling and forecasting of agents.

These and other WFO applications help in identifying red flags such as an agent being out of adherence, or picking up on new trends being spotted through speech analytics. As a result, managers can use the information to make sure that agents are in place to handle any situation that can come up. In improving a customer strategy, the WFO approach can lead to better efficiency, improved productivity and increased service levels.

Download the complete whitepaper to learn more:

Improving Your Customer Strategy with Workforce Optimization

www.inin.com/whitepapers

TMC Remembers InfoCision's Gary Taylor

Gary L. Taylor, the founder of InfoCision, passed away Saturday, March 2. He was 59.

Taylor and his wife started Akron-based InfoCision in 1982 and built it into what is today a top-tier telephone marketing company. Today, InfoCision employs more than 4,200 people in 42 call centers throughout Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ontario, Canada. InfoCision raises more money for non-profit organizations over the phone than any other company in the world, and is a leading call center provider for Fortune 100 companies.

While the company has made its mark as a national leader in its space, Taylor retained a kind of family feel at InfoCision, where there are many close friendships and employees who have been with the firm since entering the workforce.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Gary," Steve Brubaker, InfoCision chief of staff, said in a written statement. "We have all lost a great friend and leader. Gary made this company what it is today through hard work, dedication and a strong sense of integrity. His mark is indelibly stamped on the industry, as well as on our company and its culture. The InfoCision family will miss him more than anyone will ever know."

Taylor was a lifelong resident of Akron. He graduated from the University of Akron, where he earned an MBA and met his wife. And in recent years InfoCision and the Taylor family provided the funding that enabled the University of Akron to launch the Taylor Marketing Institute. They were also sponsors of the U of A's new football stadium.

An avid golfer, Taylor also was principle owner of Granite Golf Properties, which owns and operates Medina Country Club, The Quarry in Canton and Shale Creek in Medina.

He is survived by his wife, Karen Sue, and his children, Lindsay Rose Tadsen and her husband Thomas David, and Craig Scott Taylor and his wife Mindi Michelle, and a grandson, Thomas David Tadssen III.

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Erik Linask,
Group Editorial Director, TMC

Using IP and UC in Virtual Environments to Improve Productivity

The economy continues to be a major concern. Housing is coming back and the stock market has seen a resurgence but, overall, the recovery still appears to be on hold or very weak at best. A bright spot, however, is that companies are being driven to focus on improving productivity by using the latest tools and automation. Philips Electronics NV even moved some manufacturing back to Europe from China by building an automated facility that requires few employees because the processes are almost entirely done by robots. It's is a great example of how increased productivity can be used to compete on a global level, regardless of labor costs.

Automating office and customer service operations can have similar benefits, and improve productivity to a globally competitive level. Importantly, it's not about job loss. In fact, automation affords businesses the opportunity to restructure operations and reassign responsibilities to better accommodate customer needs and ensure corporate health to ensure job cuts won't have to be made. Ultimately, by leveraging technology trends to automate and create process efficiencies, businesses enjoy higher customer satisfaction leading to customer retention and new customer acquisition, actually allowing them to add jobs.

Any customer-facing business is ideal, but those processing large volumes of data and information, like insurance, health care services and finance, are ideal candidates for automation.

VoIP, UC, Virtual Offices and cloud-based services can all improve productivity across entire organizations, reduce overhead costs, deliver mobility, and generally enhance the level of service an organization is able to deliver. Mobility is critical, not only because it allows road warriors to remain part of the service environment, but is equally important in extending opportunities beyond local geographies – business can hire the best people, regardless of their location, and equip them with the same resources as office-based employees. Statistically, home office workers put in more hours per week than their in-office counterparts, further increasing productivity. Plus, on average, WAH employees are happier in their jobs than their office-based counterparts – and happy employees are both productive and loyal employees, two requirements for sustained growth.

> The same technology that allows knowledge workers and sales teams to be more productive can drive the same results across entire enterprises, including customer service teams.

The simple fact is that the same technology that allows knowledge workers and sales teams to be more productive can drive the same results across entire enterprises, including customer service teams. IP communications allows businesses to tear down traditional departmental silos, enabling a better end-to-end customer experience.

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