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Bringing Voice of the Customer to the C-Suite

MightyHive Achieves Contact Center and Web Ad **Integration**

Sorry Seems to Be **the Hardest Word**

TMC Labs **Innovation Awards**

Rich Tehrani,
CEO, TMC

MightyHive Achieves Contact Center and Web Ad Integration

The contact center is a billion dollar channel but has yet to exploit its true potential. Contact center data can now drive demand through another channel, online. To drive brand and business equity today, marketers must leverage consumer insights to create seamless experiences across channels where each interaction, regardless of channel, is relevant and consistent to lead consumers along the path to purchase.

In the late nineties it was fashionable to say the web would kill the contact center, as people would no longer need to speak on the phone when purchasing. While this has certainly happened to some degree, there is a serious argument to be made that customers or prospective customers who call into contact centers are more valuable than they have ever been. This is because they have made the effort to call and often are looking for personal assistance or advice on what they should purchase, or seeking to get help with adding services or products. In many cases a caller is looking to inquire about a support-related matter and ends up being upsold a service contract or some other helpful and beneficial product he or she wasn't aware of at the time of the call.

Still, in many cases the contact center has remained a silo from the web. In many cases, callers are also browsers but prefer personal interaction via the phone. Buyers who shop using multiple channels simultaneously contributed 70 percent of gross sales and 65 percent of total transactions in 2012, according to market research firm Epsilon.

Billions of dollars of transactions take place over the phone and there is enormous opportunity in getting the web to speak contact center, or vice versa. Contact center remarketing, or the ability to capture call data and determine the interest of callers and then use this information to display related ads when they surf the web, is a technology that will more closely tie the web to the contact center.

Dan Akre, a 17-year BPO/contact center veteran, and Peter Kim, a former executive from Google and Yahoo, are the worker bees behind a new contact center remarketing solution provider called MightyHive. Their mission is to manage, measure, and optimize the world's advertising budgets in real-time, leverage real-time data from a non-revenue producing channel, and create net new revenue streams.

"Every company experiences abandoned calls into their contact center," says Akre. "Additionally, every company contact center could benefit from exposing [its] brand, products and services to an already interested audience within the all important 24- to 48-hour window from point of contact."

MightyHive already has produced real-world results by putting its technology in action.

It worked with Extra Space Storage, a company with a market capitalization worth nearly $5 billion dollars and 950 properties, to increase self-storage sales. Within 24 hours of making a call, callers were presented with targeted ads for Extra Space Storage on Facebook, Google, Yahoo! and other sites.

Prior to the program, some prospects called but did not make a reservation. But after seeing custom ads, the rate of making a later reservation doubled, delivering a 1,092 percent ROI. A second group consisted of users who made reservations but sometimes would not show up. Once this group began seeing targeted ads, its conversion rate increased by 2.7 points resulting in a 1,549 percent ROI.

Contact centers, CRM systems and direct mail programs are sitting on a goldmine, says Kim, adding that MightHive can help them uncover it. Contact center retargeting will be the industry standard in the future given that contact centers are still the place for complicated sales where users need to ask questions and get advice, he continues.

At the moment the technology is able to match between 30 to 70 percent of an organization's records. This percentage should increase as more people get added to databases that track their computer usage and phone numbers.

One of the biggest concerns users have when it comes to advertising is how untargeted it can be. No one wants to be solicited for aluminum siding if they live in a brick apartment. Contact center ad retargeting makes ads more relevant and subsequently more effective. This should result in a win/win for all involved.

Yes, the web has reduced call traffic to contact centers, but the remaining calls are valuable – and will be even more so as a result of web ad retargeting.

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PAIT547

Paula Bernier,
Executive Editor

Consumer Protection, Do Not Call & Automatic Dialers

There's been a lot of recent action around the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, which prohibits such telemarketing practices as placing calls to phone numbers on the do not call list or using automatic dialing systems to make unsolicited calls to wireless phones.

As of August 2012, TCPA filing increased 54 percent from the prior year, according to insideARM.com. And a Bloomberg Law piece by James G. Snell and Carlos P. Mino titled "Telephone Consumer Protection Cases Are on the Rise," says: "Originally, the TCPA was viewed as a statute that could be enforced through small claims actions. However, it has been used by plaintiffs to assert class actions, and the courts and the FCC have in some instances interpreted broadly the prohibitions under the TCPA. Courts and regulators are also grappling with the application of the TCPA to technologies developed after the Act was passed."

In response to rising concerns within the industry about all of this – part of which was fueled by two federal cases in which plaintiffs tried to hold sellers liable for violations of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (and for which the court referred both cases to the FCC) – the Federal Communications Commission in May issued a declaratory ruling saying businesses using third parties for telemarketing are not automatically liable for violations of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, but that the businesses may still be liable under federal common law principles of agency. It should be noted, however, that there was some dissent within the FCC about this ruling, and that some believe the commission's ruling is fuzzy as it relates to cases brought under Section 227(c)(5).

Paul Bond and Henry Pietrkowski, attorneys with ReedSmith, in an Aug. 6 article opine that part of the reason for the explosion in TCPA litigation in the past three years is that the formula for plaintiff recovery is so simple.

"Did the defendant send the plaintiff a text message, or call the plaintiff and/or leave a message using a prerecorded voice? Did the defendant use an 'automatic telephone dialing system' to send that text or make that call?" they write. "If so, unless the message was for emergency purposes or the defendant had the plaintiff's prior express consent, the plaintiff will demand $500 in statutory damages per call or text. For willful violations, the TCPA provides a recovery of up to $1,500 per call or text. Because there is no statutory cap, class action damages under the TCPA can quickly mount to catastrophic levels."

However, there is an interesting twist to all of this in that evolving technology could help redefine or, probably more correctly, displace, legacy definitions on which some regulations on this front are now based.

Bond and Pietrkowski propose the boom in mobile phones with SMS texting capabilities has put what could be considered an automatic telephone dialing system into the hands of virtually every consumer.

"Virtually no consumers had previously owned autodialers capable of storing, producing and leaving messages, but sending group text messages today is a common occurrence," they write. "Smartphones and mobile devices can send group texts by downloading widely available applications. Any desktop or laptop computer can do the same by using web applications. Are all of these computers, smartphones and mobile devices therefore 'automatic telephone dialing systems' because they have the capacity to text random or sequential numbers?"

They go on to note that this is more than mere conjecture.

"The FCC currently is considering the petition of GroupMe Inc./Skype Communications S.A.R.L. because of putative class action litigation on this very point. The GroupMe application allows users to send text messages to groups of friends. The app is free to download and free to use. Users agree to use the application only for noncommercial purposes and they agree that they obtained prior express consent from the individuals they add to the group to receive text messages from GroupMe and from other group members.

"Nevertheless, one individual group member sued GroupMe Inc. in a putative nationwide class action alleging that GroupMe violates the TCPA when it sends one or more emails to members of a group either when they join a group or if they do not respond to the group creator's invitation to join a group. The first amended complaint alleges that marketers in general use bulk SMS to send mass texts without consent, but does not specifically allege that is the purpose of GroupMe's app or that GroupMe's app is used by marketers as such. (This claim has not been tested in discovery — as GroupMe notes in its petition, "Mom" and "Dad" are the most common group names on GroupMe's servers.)"

Bond and Pietrkowski go on to say that GroupMe has challenged the idea that computers, smartphones and devices used to send text messages are "automatic telephone dialing systems" under the TCPA.

Bringing Voice of the Customer to the C-Suite

The Chief Customer Officer has become widespread at companies of all sizes. The notion of a creating such a position in the C-suite began to take hold about a decade ago. Today CCOs exist at 40 percent of $1 billion-plus enterprises, 46 percent of enterprises with less than $250 million in revenues, and about 15 percent of mid-sized companies, says Curtis N. Bingham, the Chief Customer Officer Council's founder and executive director, who just completed a study revealing these numbers.

This would appear to be great news for business and its prospects for growth and customer satisfaction. Indeed, Bingham says some CCOs are already making their mark at such high-profile companies as Nationwide and Oracle. Of course, creating a new post is one thing; changing company culture and processes so the organization operates in a way that truly takes into the consideration customer needs, and delivers best results for both customer and company as a result, is something altogether different. That said, hiring a CCO seems to be a good start.

"The CCO post is rapidly becoming well entrenched in the business culture and is becoming a source of competitive advantage for many companies," says Bingham, whose background is in marketing at telecom equipment and service providers.

While duties vary by company, the typical role of the CCO is to increase the overall value of the customer as a strategic asset, says Bingham. If the customer view of your company is negative, the CCO figures out how to improve it; if it's positive, the CCO is charged with how to exploit that.

Companies have been talking about and implementing total quality management and voice of the customer for a long time, but Bingham says many of those efforts were managed and executed at low levels within organizations so systemic change never happened. Bringing a CCO to the table brings to the executive suite someone who embraces voice of the customer across the entire organization.

One of the best CCOs in Bingham's estimation is Jeb Dasteel of Oracle.

Dastell tells CUSTOMER magazine that as Oracle's chief customer officer, a position he's occupied since its creation in 2008, his main concern is keeping customers current on what they need to know and what products they need from Oracle. He does that by doing four key things. That includes representing the voice of the customer by collecting customer feedback from as many sources as possible; driving appropriate responses to that feedback; building programs that enable Oracle to better collaborate and partner with its customers; and creating a stable of references that Oracle has won over and are willing to share their positive experiences with others.

Specific efforts he and his team are working on include the Oracle key accounts program, its contracting and order management, and executive sponsorship.

Close to 250 accounts are involved in Oracle's key accounts program. One aspect of that program that is now being implemented is defining the process by which Oracle account teams take customers along through the customer lifecycle. Defining this path ensures Oracle is consistent in its behaviors and processes, says Dasteel, and that it understands the needs of its customers and the market dynamics in the marketplaces where they exist.

As a result of these recent changes, Oracle has seen dramatic benefits in terms of customer satisfaction and loyalty, says Dasteel. Specifically, Oracle has realized a 13 percent increase in customer satisfaction between this year and last.

On the contracting and order management front Oracle's improvements relative to contract templates and process workflow around order management has yielded the company a 6 percent increase in customer satisfaction for this metric.

And for executive sponsorship, Oracle maps specific top leaders within its organization to specific key accounts in an effort to enable stronger and consistent collaboration between the company and its largest customers.

"We find that's extremely helpful in engaging all the horsepower we have in a strong executive team and doing so in a very consistent way," says Dasteel.

In addition to Dasteel, Bingham says Jasmine Green of Nationwide is another leading CCO. Green, he says, has done a good job of working within her culture to leverage people's basic desire to care about customers.

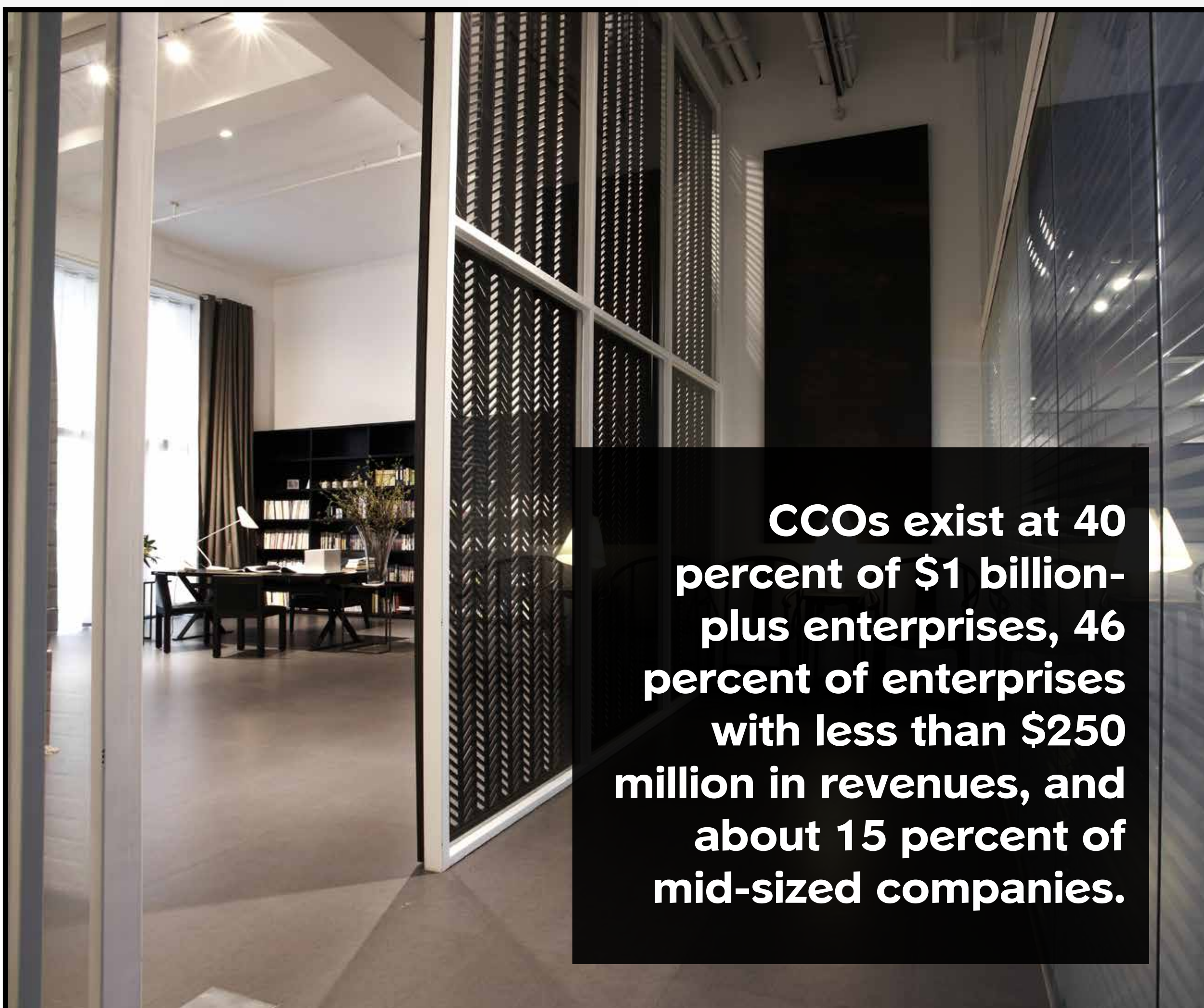
Culture, policy changes, product quality and social media are among the concerns that keep CCOs up at night, says Bingham.

In terms of culture, the challenge is how to turn a big ship that may have a history of abusing or neglecting customers. Bingham says that culture is an issue most CCOs don't anticipate being such a big part of their jobs until they get into the position for about a year. Policy relates to not just setting a new course, but instituting specific policies to get the desired results, and unwinding policies that make sense for the business but not for its customers.

Product quality has become table stakes and has improved dramatically, but still creates a lot of black eyes, adds Bingham. Social media is pretty good at creating black eyes as well, he says, noting that one disgruntled customer can leverage social media to undo the work of thousands of diligent employees.

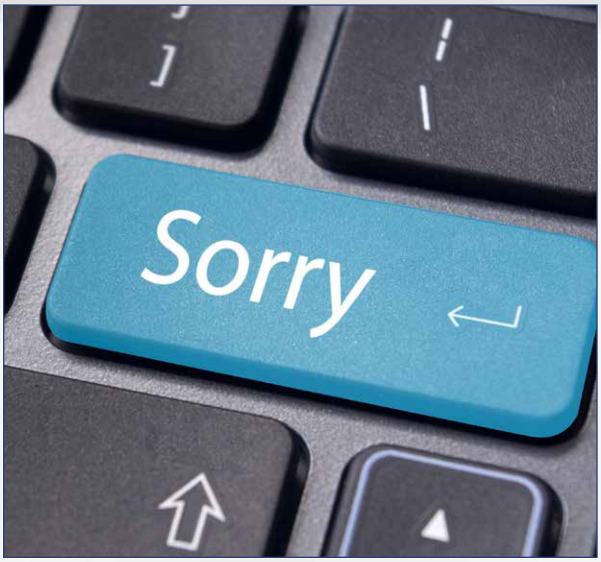
The Chief Customer Officer Council is helping CCOs address these challenges and others. At its October meeting the council will look at how CCOs, CMOs and other executives can work together to understand and meet the needs of the customer at every stage in the customer lifecycle – and how to systemize customer management across an entire organization and across different geographies. The group is also working to expand and refine the notion of customer engagement, which Bingham says he believes will replace Net Promoter scores.

Many businesses make decisions without regard for the customer. Engineering commonly throws products over the wall and hope that marketing and sales can sell them, Bingham notes. However, it makes more sense to put customers at the top of the funnel, he says, changing the model from the supply chain to the demand chain.



Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word

Companies are beginning to invest a lot of time and effort in figuring out what customers want and need, and delivering solutions and support to meet those requirements and even exceed expectations. But sometimes the solution to a customer support problem is as plain as the nose on your face. And that solution is to speak two simple words: I'm sorry.



This advice comes courtesy of Scott Broetzmann, founder of Customer Care Measurement and Consulting, which with Arizona State University conducts and publishes studies on customer rage.

This year marks the sixth study of this sort. So what have Broetzmann and his colleagues learned about customer rage so far? One key takeaway, he says, is that oftentimes the things that people want don't cost anything. Rather, what many customers who report a less than delightful experience are seeking is what Broetzmann refers to as psychological currency. And that, basically, is an apology.

For those concerned about the legal ramifications of offering an apology, Broetzmann says: "You can apologize without admitting blame."

While many companies indicate they invest richly in addressing customer complaints, Broetzmann says about half of the people who complain get nothing at all for their troubles – no apology, no financial reimbursement, and no other fix. To test those results, Broetzmann and company a few years back did a study called The Art of the Apology, for which they called 100 businesses and asked for their nearest retail location. The next day they called back and said the location provided was wrong, and they recorded information on how those businesses responded. Only a third of the companies apologized after the third customer interaction of complaint.

As for the larger customer rage survey, the next one is slated to be unveiled in November at ASU's Center for Services Leadership Symposium.

The survey efforts involve interacting with 1,000 people who have had a problem with a product or service in the last 12 months. The core set of questions in the surveys is much the same every time, but there is always a subset of questions that are newly created for each survey. Last year the new questions asked about social media and social networking. The year before that survey respondents were asked what goes into their decisions to buy something.

This time around the new questions focus on consumer education in an effort to understand the degree to which consumers in an ever competitive and complex marketplace are leveraging the tools (like warranties) companies provide to educate customers and prospects on their products and services. This is important, notes Broetzmann, given there's a strong relationship between consumer education and customer problems. Consumers live in an environment of constant threats (as an example, he mentions identity theft), Broetzmann says, so it would be interesting to find out if more vigilant individuals are less likely to experience rage. The jury is still out on that one, he says.

What we do know is that customer rage, he says, was at 68 percent between 2003 and 2001, dropped to 60 percent in 2011, but is still well above 50 percent.

"Companies today are all overreacting to the social media thing, to monitor social media and proactively respond to it, and to manage impressions," Broetzmann says. "Wouldn't it be better to actually fix problems and design better products than to manage fallout?"

Organizations also "need to be more concerned about managing the emotional side of these transactions, which they're often ill equipped to do" because they are focused on transactional processes, he adds. Using scripts makes sense, he continues, but at some point you need to teach people how to go off script and use their personalities to solve customer problems.

Elaine Cascio

Demystifying Customer Research

When asked, most companies admit that they don't spend enough time on user research when developing new customer applications or revamping existing apps. Often they are confused about types and purpose of research, and when to use tools like use cases, personas, focus groups and more.

What tools should you have in your customer research toolbox and when should you use them?

Focus Groups

Focus groups are valuable for understanding what customers want, how they use what you have available today, and what they would change. We use focus groups when developing or re-designing voice, web or mobile applications. If you have existing applications, ask customers what they like and dislike about them. Ask about other apps they use and why they like them. Probe to see how they feel about proposed changes – have samples or examples ready for them to react to.

Focus groups are an opportunity to understand your customers' mental models, the words and terminology they use and what they view as key components of useful design. We often use card sorting exercises or give participants sticky notes so they can design their own apps. The insights you get from this kind of participatory design can feed directly into your specifications.

Finally, by getting insight into what is important to customers, focus groups help us start to identify customer centric measures of success.

Key Benefit: Identifying user needs

Personas

While focus groups help us understand what our customers say they will do, personas help us understand their behaviors. Often, market research or customer experience departments have developed personas that can be leveraged across the enterprise.

Personas capture demographic details but more importantly, they capture behavioral details. For example, a health insurance provider will have multiple personas that are derived from customer lifecycles as well as interviews with actual customers or ethnographic data. These personas may include a mother caring for her children, an elderly widow, or a middle-aged blue collar worker. By understanding the different motivations and behaviors of these different personas, we are better able to predict their responses to stimuli as we design applications.

Key Benefit: Help to create designs that meet the needs of key constituencies

Use Cases

Use cases are often misunderstood and sometimes confused with personas. At a basic level, a use case includes an actor, his or her purpose or goal, and a scenario, or the steps the actor takes to accomplish the goal. Use cases are developed early in design, used to generate functional requirements, understand roadblocks during design, and often for user acceptance testing.

An example of a use case is a bank customer (actor) getting money from an ATM (goal). We can all envision the steps to this scenario and understand how they play out in design. By walking through each step and discussing if/then scenarios, use cases not only help with functional requirements, they also help us identify the variables that play a critical role in design.

Key Benefit: Create a framework for design and design decisions

Usability Testing

Usability testing is conducted after a beta or a prototype of an application is developed. The purpose is to make sure that customers understand and can use the application. For example, is the sequence of events intuitive, is the language understandable?

Traditional usability testing has testers work their way through a set of exercises with a facilitator. You are able to see rich visual clues from participants that help you understand their experience. At the end of each exercise, the facilitator asks questions to understand how easy it was to complete the exercise, and how the application can be improved.

Key Benefit: Ensure a positive customer experience, reduce risk and rework

Elaine Cascio is a vice president at Vanguard Communications Corp. (www.vanguard.net).

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Art Rosenberg

Is Your Contact Center Ready For All Mobile Customer Interactions?

As all forms of person-to-person and process-to-person contacts converge under BYOD for multi-modal, mobile devices to accommodate the dynamic needs of mobile customers, it is getting more difficult to quantify business communications infrastructure requirements for any organization. That is why there is such a big interest in migrating to cloud-based, hosted and managed services, rather than investing in a traditional, premises-based telephony system that works with the wired PSTN. This is, however, an evolutionary transition for most organizations that have existing legacy PBX and desktop technologies that still work for customer interactions and contact center operations.

The UC Strategies Experts were headed in the right direction when they defined unified communications as "communications integrated to optimize business processes." That is a fundamental perspective of the technology for making both person-to-person and process-to-person communication applications more interoperable and integrated.

However, UC doesn't describe what has become even more important to the adoption of technology, i.e., the different user interfaces and modalities for flexibly and seamlessly exploiting all forms of contact and interactions (both inbound and outbound) between people and with automated business process applications.

Correlating Business Processes with Specific Customers & Staff

Most importantly, it has now become more difficult for organizations to quantify their operational interaction/communication needs (functionality, network capacities, interfaces, etc.) for their many different end users, both inside and outside the organization. That includes business partners and consumers/customers, and particularly customer-facing personnel (agents, experts). However, the flexibility of private or public network (cloud) solutions can help the selective transition of an organization's existing business communications to the next generation of what I have started to call business interactions. Communications flexibility is not just for a particular business process, e.g., often referred to as communications-enabled business processes, but must also include the personalized contact and interaction needs between customer assistance staff and individual customers involved with that specific process.

One way to plan for that perspective of more flexible and interoperable business interactions is to recognize that most business organizations in major vertical industries have similar business processes that need to integrate with communication applications on a personalized customer basis. That is where BYOD and interaction flexibility comes into play, i.e., each type of end user involved in a key business process needs to be identified in terms of his or her individual role, as well as the communication facilities that he or she will utilize. That must also include roles of consumers, who are part of a business process. This will be the new way that business interaction requirements will have to be defined to exploit more flexible communication efficiencies for optimized business processes.

Start with a Business Process for Customer Interaction Needs

While the technology is still developing the new tools and services for business interactions, and marketing is looking for the right term to describe how both customers and automated business process applications will dynamically interact, business organizations of all sizes should start reviewing the new needs of mobile customers with smartphones, who will now be more multi-modal and flexible when it comes to business interactions with self-services or with live assistance. Within that context, new agent skill requirements and agent interfaces (visual, voice) must be identified and implemented.

In addition to making and responding to customer contacts, both self-service applications and customer-facing staff will also need access to more comprehensive, contextual information about an individual customer (history, status, etc.). So, start planning on IP-based click-for-assistance from online applications as the primary way that consumers will initiate contact with your business, using federated presence information for calls or IM to gradually replace legacy blind phone calls over the PSTN. That's where telephony is going, and the migration is starting now.

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

Strategic Solutions series

If You Can't Measure It, You Can't Manage It

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If You Can't Measure It, You Can't Manage It …

If you were asked to draw a line exactly 17 cm long, could you do it? You could probably give it a good guess, but unless you had a ruler in your back pocket you just can't be sure.

Measuring the quality of a customer contact has progressed into a science that can ultimately uncover market intelligence, training needs, process improvements and usable feedback to the agents … but only if it's objective, fair and quantifiable. BPA Quality believes that in order for Quality to capture beneficial information, then it must be clear and well defined … you need a Quality Ruler.

Who is BPA Quality? BPA Quality is the leading global provider of remote call monitoring, customer satisfaction surveys, mystery calling, social media monitoring, speech analytics and training services. With over 25 years in the study and application of Quality Call Center Science, BPA helps its clients take data and turn it into actionable observations that allow managers, supervisors and agents to modify the behaviors of call center activities to build an awesome Quality Customer Experience.

The proof is in the pudding, as the saying goes…Recently, while working with a large telecommunications company BPA developed a model to head off unnecessary in house service calls. BPA was able to help reduce these service calls as much as 17% per month that translated into millions of dollars of potential savings. BPA has also helped a car service company reduce customer complaints by 90% and improved a credit collections firm increase their collected accounts by 20% ... all by using the science and application provided by BPA Quality.

These great results are a reflection of the BPA Quality mission statement … to be the global leader in the delivery and development of services that improve the customer experience for contact centers around the world.

This mission begins in the incredibly rich culture of the company. "We provide services in over 45 different languages, and all of them are conducted in the native language of the analyst," adds Craig Antonucci, VP of Client Awesomeness of BPA. He adds, "We have analysts, managers and professionals from all over the world all with an incredible amount of experience. The fact that we have this cultural diversity allows us to be the world leader in our market, and in the end, we help our clients deliver an awesome customer experience."

This rich culture started with the vision of Lisa Renda, President and Founder of BPA Quality. She noted in a recent interview, "We didn't want BPA to just be known for excellent output, we wanted our clients to also enjoy working with the BPA staff and to feel that they were dealing with good, honest people who care. We work hard at creating a team that is undoubtedly excellent in their field, but one which also shares common ideals and a sense of integrity." Even BPA Quality's customers feel the same way about BPA:

> *'I have worked with a number of suppliers offering similar services over the past 18 years. None have offered the exceptional high standards, good value, passion and flexibility to a client's needs as I experienced so far with the BPA staff.' ~Contact Centre Manager / Samsung Electronics*

Milena Maric', Trainer and Performance Manager, said before joining the BPA team, she was a customer and that BPA became synonymous with high standards of customer service, practical ways of achieving sales and / or customer satisfaction, taking control of the call and also self reflection. BPA taught her a lot of things, which resonated with how she wanted customer service to be.

Awesome people, rich in culture and consistently delivering results to its customers, BPA exemplifies that defining Call Center Quality goes beyond just a simple checklist. Quality is a Science, a science delivered by smart experienced people. So when you ask the question, "Without the correct ruler for measurement, how can you manage it?" the answer is BPA Quality.

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PCI DSS COMPLIANT

by Gopal Devanahalli

Rethink Your Contact Center for 2013 and Beyond

In 2012, Western Power's contact center beat 1,500 contenders to be named the best medium-sized contact center in the Asia Pacific at the Contact Center World Awards. The facility receives 100,000 calls per month and answers 90 percent of them within 30 seconds. But that's hardly remarkable in this business.

What's unique about Western Power is its thinking. Whereas most call centers are just that, this company takes an exemplary approach to customer service. One example: During major events and emergencies, 150 office employees come on board to help with the calls. They also proactively call customers to check about power disruption and restoration, thereby ensuring that field resources are deployed only where necessary.

Although stories of contact center excellence are still few and far between, the tribe of customerized enters, raising the standard of service and experience, is slowly expanding. Think about it. Isn't it surprising how customer service channels – and I include in this list contact centers – have always functioned as problem fixers, rather than as a medium of service delivery to create customer delight?

Today, it's not likely that the consumer will continue to stand for this. Look at her – the consumer. There is so much information at her disposal. Her expectations are being shaped by collective experience and social interactions. Her preferences are constantly evolving through a pan-industry expectation spillover. As she discovers newer experiences and conveniences, as a consumer, in one sphere, she expects to enjoy the same or better experience in another. Her logic goes something like this: "If I can choose to pay only a fraction of the cost of my favorite daily to read just the lifestyle section, why can't I buy insurance, at the airport, to cover me only through that one plane journey, instead of investing on comprehensive travel insurance? If FedEx can let me track the status of my delivery in real time, what's keeping my bank from letting me know, in real time, the value of my investments?" Suddenly, every enterprise is up against crisscrossing expectations shaped by consumer experiences in a vertical that it never thought to look at. That's why consumers are also becoming increasingly demanding with respect to the products and services they consume. And after-sales service is no exception.

If I had to list what differentiates customerized centers from the run of the mill, it would be that they are seamlessly integrated with the other customer service channels; that they are enhanced with self-service features to improve the customer service experience; and that they think and act like a revenue generator – if not a profit center – of the business.

So, why are these important?

First, because today's customers are channel-mobile. When they're asked to repeat to a contact center agent a problem that they've already narrated in detail on e-mail, it annoys them to no end. Indeed, research says that this is their single biggest source of contact center frustration. Regardless of industry or brand, they prefer a more personalized process when they interact with customer care centers. However, the challenge in delivering this personalized experience is figuring out how agents can gain access to accurate knowledge bases across internal repositories and social media for their customers. Without an efficient and seamless process, customers often experience delayed service and, in turn, dissatisfaction. To improve customer service, agents must have access to the full history of a customer's prior interactions over all communication channels – voice, chat and e-mail, as well as social channels like Facebook and Twitter – thereby eliminating the need for a customer to repeat his or her request and personal information. The way around that is to deploy a customer service solution, which can capture and integrate each and every customer interaction on every channel, and present it to the contact center agent in a single window.

Enabling self service on an assisted channel may appear counterintuitive, but isn't actually so. Customers themselves are all for it; when surveyed, most say that they would willingly use a self-service channel, provided it works. And that's the key. A little probing reveals that less than half of those customers actually follow through on their intent, because they find these channels both inaccurate and incomplete. Again, that issue can be easily resolved with a customer service solution that sits atop a unified knowledge base, updated in real time with new service scenarios as and when they occur. It is also possible to take the solution's self-service aspect to a new level by endowing it with social capability.

Enterprises find it hard to justify the long payback period on their contact center investments, often as long as 12 to 21 months. With the right solutions, they can significantly improve customer satisfaction rates, and derivatively, those of right-selling, and bring down time to ROI significantly. But, it's important to determine that opportune moment to right sell – because no one ever sold more to a dissatisfied customer seeking assistance.

In the not so distant future, I am convinced, these will lay down the foundation that supports the norm for contact centers, not the exception.

Gopal Devanahalli is vice president of products, platforms and solutions at Infosys (www.infosys.com).

by Steve Brubaker

Exceed Rising Customer Service Expectations

Innovative technology and training can help you build consistent and highly effective customer service interactions

Many consumers believe that customer service levels are at an all-time low. Those of us in the industry would likely disagree, but perception is reality. If public perception says your organization provides poor customer service, it can undermine everything else your organization is doing, no matter how well you do it.

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Every time a person receives outstanding customer service, their threshold for anything less becomes smaller. A hundred years of "the customer is always right" has slowly but steadily raised expectations for customer service, and it is our job as professionals to see that those expectations are met or exceeded. With Internet and mobile technologies providing instant access to products, services and information, consumers have come to expect their needs to be filled immediately. The solution to customer issues shouldn't only be right; it needs to be right now.

How technology can enhance your customer service

There have been great advances in the way consumer information is collected and applied, especially in the contact center environment. Through data acquisition, you have the unique opportunity to listen to them.

But how can you take everything you know about a person and use it to speak to them in the most effective way? That's where technology comes into play.

There are several analytics applications that can be used to drive more efficient and effective customer service. Using the data you collect to create profiles for each unique customer from your consumer database gives insight into who they are, when they make purchases and how often they need customer service. You can utilize data enhancement to apply demographic information from your consumer database. Additionally, predictive modeling allows you to take the information in consumer profiles and determine when and how each customer should be contacted, as well as provide customized offers based on their unique characteristics.

On the telephone, using technology to determine service level differentiations can help you increase customer value and drive long-term growth. You can use the information you know about customers from their profiles to score them instantly when they call for support, a technology known as "real-time scoring." Utilizing this tool, you can direct calls to agents most likely to provide quick first-call resolution for the specific products or services they have purchased, and even recommend other products or services. It allows you to boost conversion rates by creating more satisfied customers, and improve customer service through prompt resolution of issues. You can even customize call center scripts to lead the conversation in one of several directions based upon their personal preferences and characteristics. For instance, if a cell phone service provider receives a call from a customer who regularly upgrades his or her cell phone, the script would cue agents to let them know about deals on the newest phones the company offers. This customized approach to individual customers can help companies drive sales through traditional service calls.

Accelerated lead conversion

As more and more people adopt the Internet as a standard method of communication, organizations are seeing web-generated leads double or even triple. That's good news. The problem arises when companies lack the capacity or strategy to effectively respond to increasing online lead intake. This can be a critical oversight. These days, a lot of people use the Internet to make initial contact with an organization. This is their first impression of the organization, and the speed of your response can make all the difference.

We're not talking hours here; rather minutes – maybe even seconds. By waiting a day or more to contact a web-generated lead, you essentially negate your chances of ever qualifying or converting them.

Despite the importance of a quick call, speed is not the only difference maker. As always: people matter. Even if you contact a lead instantly, it will only be effective if the right person makes the call. By "right" person, we mean someone who is knowledgeable about the specific program/service/product in which the individual is interested. Even if the person making the call is just the first contact, the answering agent should be able to answer initial questions and reinforce interest in the organization and the product or service. The focus cannot just be on getting a sale today; we need to ensure a positive customer experience, leading to a long-term relationship.

Integrated multichannel communication

Advances in technology have made it feasible and cost-effective for most companies today to develop one-to-one customer communication strategies. Being able to integrate traditional channels with emerging channels through a multichannel strategy is the best way to serve the vastly different mix of people that make up your customer base. For instance, a younger consumer who makes most of his or her purchases online probably does not want to communicate through phone calls or receive traditional "snail mail," but would be open to communicating through online chat or a social media platform.

We've reached an age where technology can actually bring businesses and customers closer together. A marketing piece delivered through traditional mail might prompt a customer to check out a personalized website. In turn, that website might list a phone number the consumer calls to get more information and ultimately make a purchase. After the customer makes the purchase, he/she might become a fan of the company's Facebook page and follow it on Twitter; and use those avenues to talk about products with other customers or even seek customer service help. However, if a company is going to initiate a multichannel campaign it needs to leverage collected data so that when it reaches out to the customer, it is through the preferred channel.

How innovative agent training can improve the customer experience

All the above tactics are aimed at putting your customer service agents in the best position to succeed. But there must also be focus on the agents themselves, because no matter how great the position we put them in, they must ultimately be trained well enough to effectively deal with any of the myriad of issues a customer might face.

Unfortunately, branding – the cornerstone of all customer contact efforts – can get lost in contact centers because representatives concentrate on completing specific tasks – taking orders, quickly resolving customer issues – rather than fortifying your brand. So even when an order is submitted successfully or the customer's issue has been resolved satisfactorily, you may miss out on a golden opportunity to bolster brand perception. However, by employing brand ambassadors on the phones rather than traditional agents, companies can enhance their brand value with every call.

Brand ambassadors differ from typical call center representatives in that they are trained to be extremely knowledgeable of your company and your products – not just the specific task in front of them. They not only help customers accomplish goals, they reinforce your brand identity.

Customized hiring and training

This isn't your dad's customer service job anymore. As a result of the trend toward multiple communication channels, so goes the need for agents to be able to free flow conversations and not always work off a script. Agents continually will have to evolve and be expected to interact at various levels, blending email, chat, phone, social media. They need to be versatile and have the computer skills to manage several platforms in order to be true brand ambassadors, in addition to soaking up the in-depth training.

Training agents to be brand ambassadors involves agents actually getting to know the products by touching them, testing them and getting to know how they work. This gives agents more of a personal connection. The biggest investment involved in this specialized training is time; and spending time is a necessity if you truly want your agents to be brand ambassadors.

> By employing brand ambassadors on the phones rather than traditional agents, companies can enhance their brand value with every call.

Steve Brubaker

Employing brand ambassadors offers companies benefits that are both immediate and enduring. And while they require more training time up front, brand ambassadors generate results that ultimately give you a higher return on investment. Perhaps most importantly, brand ambassadors build customer loyalty, cultivate repeat business and lay the foundation for future success.

The bottom line is that customer service will continue to change in scope and become more and more challenging. However, by making a commitment to utilizing technology and people to maximize the potential of each interaction, we can continue to build outstanding customer interactions that will enhance brand value and keep customers coming back well into the future.

by Meridith Elliott Powell

Winning Over The New Consumer

When the economy started to struggle in late 2008, so did the consumer – emotionally as well as financially. At first, consumers, like businesses, contentedly waited for the economy to bounce back. But, as the bounces took longer and were far less impressive than expected, consumer confidence began to wane.

Trust is not going to come easy with your customers. Study after study is showing that the spending habits of consumers have greatly changed since 2008. This economy is uncertain. The constant fluctuations have created a more cautious consumer. Consumers are thinking longer and more carefully about every purchase they make.

So today when consumers do want to buy – and they do want to buy – they also want to be sure about what they are investing in and with whom they are investing. It is not the product or service that consumers are searching for these days; it is the opportunity to find and work with professionals they can trust and those who value them as customers.

Globalization, advancement in technology and increased competition have put the consumer in the driver's seat. They can easily find an alternate source for a product online, and some studies say as many as 90 percent of us Google before we ever call, visit or engage with a business.

Technology has advanced, but our human capacity to process information doesn't match the flood of choices in today's buying decisions. While all this choice might seem great, it can also be debilitating.

A survey of more than 7,000 worldwide consumers cited in the May 2012 Harvard Business Review shows that choices can actually breed discontent. The study found that consumers spend much more time research-


Meridith Elliott Powell

ing products today compared with the past, and yet 70 percent don't decide definitively which brand to buy until the point of purchase. Ironically, post-purchase, one-fifth of consumers actually continue to research the product to affirm their choice. And 40 percent of consumers report feeling anxious about their decision after they've completed the transaction.

This information is invaluable. Your job from this day forward is to help your customers find their way through the clutter and make that buying decision easy. Remember, today's consumers are not looking for a product or service, they are looking for someone they can trust to provide them with value for their dollar.

The challenge here is that trust and value cannot be traditionally sold. They have to be built. And don't forget that while technology presents our consumers with unlimited choices, it also gives us business owners incredible capabilities to touch our consumers in ways that can help us start the process of building trust and value. We can now easily capture and manage relevant information, so we can engage with customers in meaningful ways and establish mutually beneficial relationships.

Here's a few ways you can start reaching today's complex consumers and keep your current clients happy.

1. To Keep Up, Out Pace the Customers

In the area of customer service, you cannot sit on your laurels. You must consistently evaluate and enhance the level of service you offer. The effort you are putting into retaining customers today is not good enough to keep them next year.

When people set out to make a purchase now, they are interested in the entire experience, not just in taking home a fancy box with a product inside. If your company does not make them feel as though they (and their business) are valued and important, they will move on to another provider that will make the extra effort to give them a positive experience.

2. The Sale is for the Customer, Not You

Chuck Walker, vice president of sales and marketing at Silver-Line Plastics, credits putting actions behind the words customers first as what has kept them exceeding sales expectations during these challenging times.

3. Put Everyone on Your Team in Sales

The truth is that people do not like to think of themselves as in sales. As a society, we just don't like the word or the profession. Most of us like to believe it is someone else's job. However, in the current economy, every member of your organization needs to become a professional sales person.

It is a myth that the only people in your organization who are involved in sales are your sales representatives. Though sales professionals do, by definition, lead the way in generating revenue for your business, they are only a part of the equation. Everyone on your team needs to an active part of this effort.

From the first moment that a potential client comes in contact with a member of your organization, you and your employees are forming the very image that customer or prospect will have of your company. Since confidence in your company is an essential component in helping a buyer decide to purchase from you, every interaction at every level, no matter how big or how small, is a sales-related interaction.

4. Excel at Customer Service

When I worked in banking, we had studies that indicated that most people were reluctant to change banks because they believed the experience would be just as bad somewhere else. Isn't that sad? Most

Many companies pressure their employees to make quotas, or offer incentives to people who reach goals, but these things must be accompanied by teaching what it takes to make the customer feel heard, important and valued.

"Getting our sales and service departments working together to put the customer relationship first and foremost has been key in our ability to continue to grow in less than perfect economic times," says Walker. "We have placed major emphasis on ensuring our sales team is well trained and owns the sale from start to finish."

Walker has educated his entire team, invested in training his team, and held his team accountable to make sure no matter what – whether it is a sales issue, a service issue or an operations issue – that the sales team stays engaged. In addition, he has ensured that the service and operations team have been given training, motivation and support to move more into a sales role.

"While we know that things will turn around, on some level we are grateful for the challenges we have gone through, as now we are fully prepared to weather any storm," reports Walker.

Since this economy started to shift, competition increased, and customers became more price sensitive, yet Walker and his team have seen growth rates of around 20 percent.

Many companies pressure their employees to make quotas, or offer incentives to people who reach goals, but these things must be accompanied by teaching what it takes to make the customer feel heard, important and valued.

people tolerate being treated at a level they feel is subpar because they have no faith that another company would treat them any better.

If this is what your customer is expecting, be the company that surprises them. Adopt a new approach and engage your entire team in the sales process. Doing so will ensure every interaction this new customer has with your organization, every interaction with your team, is about enriching and enhancing both their relationship with you and the overall goals of their company. Every member of your team understands and knows how to go further with the customer, to do more than just handle the issue the customer has called about.

It really all comes back to putting your customers' needs first, which should be the guiding rule for anyone who is in business in this economy. Your company exists because your products or services are capable of meeting the real, important needs of your customers and your prospects. Helping your team to see themselves as partners in a wide, mutually beneficial network with your customers will encourage them to not only seek to understand the issues clients face, but also to look for ways in which your company can be a part of the solution. M

Meridith Elliott Powell is an international speaker, certified coach, and strategist who helps businesses and people master the relational skills needed to be successful in today's competitive environment. She is the author of three books, including the recently published Winning in the Trust & Value Economy, and hosts the Secrets to Success Podcast.

by Paula Bernier

Hyfiniti Delivers Next-Generation Social Analytics, Engagement, and Mobile Care

A company that got its start a couple years ago offering a mobile call-back customer service application called Hold-Free has since introduced two additional services, which Hyfiniti CEO Lance Fried says are more in the social vein of customer service.

"Most businesses, even Fortune 500 ones, have no accountability for social programs," says Fried. "That's starting to change."

Founded in 2009, Hyfiniti is a San Diego-based operation with offices in Atlanta and Madrid. It's the holding company of three brands that address the socially-connected, the smartphone-connected, and the generally impatient consumer, Fried explains. In addition to the call-back and queue management solution mentioned above, the company now offers SoCoCare and InAppCare.

SoCoCare is a social engagement and social analytics platform for customer care. This solution enables social media listening and filtering, service feedback, and customer engagement center and social service process analysis. The company's partner Telligent brings to the table peer-to-peer community support, and enterprise social networking.

Unlike early popular social media listening tools for which 90 percent of the feeds are inactionable, and which require agents to read through thousands of posts to get to the valuable 10 percent, SoCoCare leverages the company's own natural language processing and rules engine to locate words that signal action on these comments might be of value.

SoCoCare also does what Fried describes as Advanced Engagement, so it can identify incoming callers and show past interactions with them, and the sentiment of those interactions. This solution features enterprise and role-based analytics as well. That means users can look at how my social queues are stacking up and move some agents into some different groups. Fried says it's like the Doppler radar; it shows where the heat is as far as what kind of requests are coming in. It also allows users to see average handle times or process times.

SoCoCare leverages the company's own natural language processing and rules engine to locate words that signal action on these comments might be of value.

Since its launch in February, SoCoCare has a dozen customers moving on to the platform, which Fried says signals very good traction. Customers can get up and running on the SaaS-based platform in under a month, he says.

As for InAppCare, that is a mobile care platform for customer care. It drops into an enterprise's existing smartphone app to do sentiment feedback, mobile customer care (like a concierge callback, for example), and customer experience analytics. To the last point, this solution can allow users to look at the experience of customers as they're moving through the app and can track inefficiencies, which Hyfiniti can then help corporate customers fix.

AudioCodes

by Alan Percy

SIP Trunking and Demarcation

SIP trunking is widely recognized as an alternative to legacy PRI circuits, delivering voice services to businesses over IP at reduced costs with greater flexibility. Partners are also seeing opportunities to resell SIP trunking to their business customers, creating a revenue stream and earning residual commissions.

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However, delivering and maintaining voice quality that matches the expectations of businesses migrating from PRI circuits is critical to success. Having a clear point of demarcation between the SIP trunk and the business voice network where voice quality can be measured is becoming increasingly important for partners, businesses and service providers. As with legacy TDM trunking, a point of demarcation allows partners to identify whether the issue is the responsibility of the service provider or an issue in the customer's network. Without it, voice quality issues turn into a circus of costly finger pointing with little access to hard data to prove responsibility and help isolate the issue.

Demarcation for SIP trunks is a natural role for enterprise session border controllers – specifically designed for positioning at the enterprise premises (or their private cloud data center), already providing a number of important functions:

Interoperability – allowing different implementations of SIP to interoperate via message header manipulation, dial plan fixes and even conversion of the media streams from one codec to another (transcoding). The interoperability role has shown to be especially important when integrating Microsoft Lync to SIP trunking providers or other SIP-based applications.

Security – by protecting the enterprise network from attack and theft of services, session border controllers are essentially firewalls on steroids, using an understanding of the SIP protocol to dynamically open and close UDP ports for media, detect and protect against registration floods, authenticate access and a variety of other means to guard against abhorrent behavior that would otherwise disrupt business activities.

Survivability – detecting network or service provider interruptions and redirecting traffic to alternate providers, either back-up last-mile facilities, SIP trunking services or legacy PSTN circuits.

Only recently has the role of voice quality monitor and demarcation with SIP trunks been fully recognized as a primary driver for use of E-SBCs. E-SBCs facilitate voice quality monitoring on media streams as they traverse the E-SBC, measuring jitter, dropped packets and other network statistics, and then periodically reporting statistical information to a centralized network management systems.

We at AudioCodes facilitate voice quality monitoring and demarcation by offering a combination of our Mediant E-SBCs with embedded quality of experience software, along with our Session Experience Management centralized network management tool. The combination provides a visual dashboard that shows network performance status and history at a glance. With AudioCodes E-SBCs and SEM, partners can improve customer visibility to voice quality, more quickly isolate and resolve issues, and reduce costly finger pointing.

AudioCodes Mediant Enterprise Session Border Controllers and Session Experience Management software along with other related network elements are all part of AudioCodes' One Voice for Lync offering, a comprehensive portfolio of voice network elements, a team of highly-experienced professional services, and a global support network together from one source. By teaming with AudioCodes and leveraging One Voice for Lync, partners can be more efficient, win more deals and in the end, be more successful.

AudioCodes, a Microsoft Communications Gold Competency partner, designs, develops and sells AudioCodes One Voice for Lync, a comprehensive portfolio of voice networking technology, professional services and global support, optimized for Microsoft Lync and Exchange Unified Communications solutions. Sold through a global network of highly-trained reseller partner community, AudioCodes One Voice for Lync simplifies the selection, implementation and support of Unified Communications. Whether deployed on premises or in the cloud, AudioCodes is the One Source for Microsoft-certified products and services.

Alan Percy is senior director of marketing at AudioCodes (www.audiocodes.com/Microsoft). He can be reached at alan.percy@audiocodes.com or on Twitter @AlanDPercy.

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SalesPanda.com Launches Lead Exchange Platform

In an effort to make generating leads a less daunting challenge, SalesPanda.com has introduced a platform that enables technology sellers to share their business leads that are relevant but cannot be addressed by their company. “In SalesPanda we have formalized the well-worn practice of sharing information amongst sellers by putting a metrics driven incentive process. Sellers are closest to the customer, and they have the most up-to-date information. We are just facilitating sharing and partnering between sellers to benefit everyone involved,” says Samit Arora, founder director at SalesPanda.

WebRTC Powers Click-to-Call Solution

A company called FreeCRM.com recently introduced a click-to-call solution based on WebRTC. It’s easier than Skype, Facetime, Google Talk, or similar solutions, according to the company, because it does not require VoIP or any phones, but instead turns your browser into a communication device.

Dassault Introduces EXALEAD OneCall

The new EXALEAD OneCall application from Dassault Systèmes provides customer-facing agents with needed information to help consumers. It brings all relevant information about the customer and the sold products directly to an agent’s desktop in a simplified way, such as natural language and semantic discovery, customer history, multi-channel look-up, and contextual cross-selling/upselling. “EXALEAD OneCall provides our operators with a new level of efficiency in their interaction with customers. We’ve moved from nine applications to a single interface bringing together all relevant and in-context information in order to respond effectively,” said Mamadou Bamba, managing director of Orange Côte d’Ivoire Telecom. “Calls are optimized and handled more smoothly. Beyond customer satisfaction, EXALEAD OneCall has also allowed us to reduce the cost of a call by about 30 percent.”

BPMonline 7.0 Focuses on Ease of Use

CRM and business process management outfit BPMonline has come out with version 7.0 of its solution. The new platform gives users the ability to concentrate only on key modules and functions, which, together with increased speed of displaying information, reduce time spent on routine operations. Katerina Kostereva, CEO and managing partner at BPMonline, says: “Working with BPMonline 7.0 will make users feel like they’re interacting with the personal assistant that provides only necessary information at the right time.”

LiveLOOK Delivers V4 Co-Browse Solution

Version 4 of LiveLOOK’s Co-Browse eliminates reliance on Java for launch; allows for faster customer launch; and promises an improved agent experience. “With the issues surrounding Java earlier this year, our team made it a priority to eliminate reliance on Java in customer environments in order to launch a co-browse session,” said Chris Czekaj, senior vice president of sales and marketing at LiveLOOK.

Human Demand Aims to Change Mobile App Marketing

Mobile ad technology company Human Demand now offers an app re-engagement platform to help developers retain users through mobile re-engagement and retargeting. “It’s an exciting time in the app market for those who understand the true value in focusing on lifetime value and figuring out how to keep users engaged for the long haul,” said Howie Schwartz, CEO and founder of Human Demand. “Even Apple is taking a hard stance against incentivized installs and modifying the iTunes Charts to reflect this way of thinking – one of quality vs. just quantity.”

Immediate Credit Recovery Partners With Castel

Dialer suite and voice analysis solutions from Castel Communications LLC are being installed at Immediate Credit Recovery’s call centers in Wappinger Falls, N.Y., and Marietta, Ga.

Instaply Wants to Strengthen C2B Connections

San Francisco-based Instaply this summer launched its company and flagship product, which it says is the first mobile messaging app for direct consumer-to-business texting. “Instaply wants to fundamentally change the way consumers and businesses interact,” said Fabien Degaugue, Instaply CEO. “When it comes to contacting businesses, the existing communication channels are too restrictive, slow and unsatisfying and break down rather than build up relationships. With Instaply, customers and businesses can finally keep in touch and enjoy great customer relationships via texting.”

Sam just **pleased** **5 customers** without 1 "Please hold."

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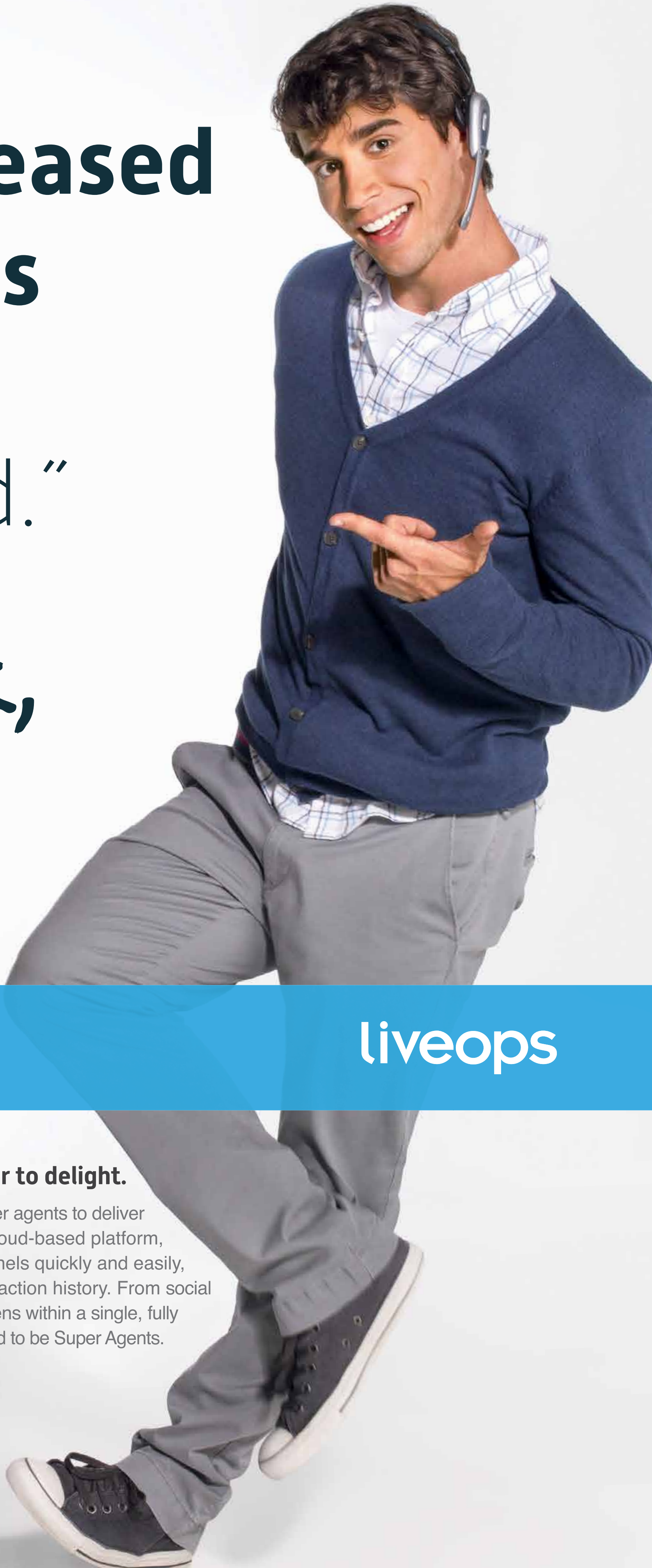

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SUCCESS

by Matt Matsui

Multichannel Strategy Drives Customer, Employee Experience to New Heights

Efficiency, reduced costs, increased customer satisfaction and boosted revenues are on the wish list of every organization. In the contact center, multichannel communication systems are turning these goals into reality by converging management of any support service medium into one comprehensive tool.

Historically, many contact centers developed and deployed applications separately, leaving them unable to easily correlate and compare data to share throughout the enterprise. The emergence of new multichannel approaches has enabled a more unified and user-friendly strategy to managing contact center operations.

Polaris Industries Inc., an on-road and off-road power sport vehicle manufacturer, has found value in a multichannel workforce optimization approach. With a passion for delivering the ultimate customer experience, the company set about finding a solution that would measure agent consistency, as well as monitor service level changes and quality of support provided to the 1,800 dealers that are part of the global Polaris dealer network.

Polaris' contact center operations consist of 70 agents across six contact center sites that assist via traditional voice calls and an Ask Polaris website, so the company required a solution that could integrate multiple communication mediums into one comprehensive report. Polaris needed to identify standard phrases and delivery processes for agents to ensure a consistent and better user experience, as well as provide these agents a standard set of evaluation metrics.

Historically, Polaris only performed quality monitoring on its traditional voice calls, leaving inquires and interactions on Ask Polaris unmonitored. To compare online cases with voice calls, call center managers would have to manually review and compare transactions – a method that is inconsistent, inefficient and did not provide a lot of value.

Polaris selected a Web 2.0-based Calabrio ONE Quality Management solution to deliver consistent evaluation metrics for agents across dealer, technical and customer service teams, as well as seamlessly incorporate critical website support features. With the multichannel platform, Polaris is easily integrating these cases into the system so agents have a complete record of interaction, whether it is through the website or the call center, and can turn that into more effective communications.

For example, each month Polaris agent and managerial teams meet to review and evaluate customer support transactions and discuss best practices. The groups get together and decide what needs to be worked on, focused on and/or changed.

During the review of one online interaction, an agent greeted a written case by typing the word hello. The dealer on the opposite end of the transaction interpreted the word condescendingly as "hello, you should know the answer" instead of a simple greeting. During the best practices discussion, the Polaris team decided that agents should engage more with online inquiries before using a standard script, and those agents should begin each online conversation addressing inquirers by name.

By integrating multiple channels of monitoring and reporting into its QM strategy, Polaris is able to evaluate support services more comprehensively and easily present the information to active team members for review and assessment. Polaris' best practices discussions utilize this information to engage and empower the organization's teams, allowing them to hear what people are saying, what they might not be saying, and approach it as a group.

Polaris is currently taking its multichannel strategy even further. By using the data received from its Calabrio ONE Workforce Management solution, Polaris is able to monitor service level changes when the Ask Polaris website goes down. Unsurprisingly, call volumes tend to spike when that occurs. Polaris is not only able to adjust staffing requirements accordingly, but is also able to evaluate and flag any potential issues across the organization. Communication levels remain high as the WFM analysts are able to highlight the downstream impact of the website outage to other channels within the call center team.

As a result, Polaris' multichannel strategy is achieving greater consistency and communication across teams regardless of the application. Everyone has a clear understanding of what's expected of themselves and others, lending to greater confidence from agents, evaluators and management during evaluations. Service levels can remain high with monitoring across the organization when one channel is impacted. And Polaris agents are empowered and motivated to deliver the highest quality of support and, in turn, high customer satisfaction.

Matt Matsui is vice president of product and marketing at Calabrio (www.calabrio.com).

by Mark Wilburn

How to Build a Better IVR

While I am sure the majority of contributors for this month's issue of How to Build a Better IVR will be focused on inbound IVR processes like customer service, I feel compelled to answer this question from the outbound perspective.

Companies are steadily increasing their use of IVR and other automated contact channels to coordinate outbound communications to their customers. Whether to confirm appointments, notify customers of service-effecting issues, offer estimated time of arrival information for repair/delivery/installation services or to efficiently gather missing information from customers, outbound IVR, while getting less media attention, is critical to the customer experience and the overall performance of the bottom line.

So with this lens attached, how do you build a better outbound IVR?

Step 1 – Customer-Centricity

First, you must realize that the customer contact landscape has changed and the challenge of effectively reaching customers is evolving, diminishing the one-size reaches all IVR strategies of the past. Customers are now increasingly more multi-channel, more sensitive to how and when they are contacted, and more channel-responsive – meaning more likely to respond to a call, an e-mail, a text message or in a combination of the three.

So to build a better IVR, you have to start with a contact platform that can offer advanced IVR capabilities to make contact by phone more dynamic, individualized and intelligent. You need to start factoring past contact history in how and when you contact next, you need to utilize a broader set of messages to better align to individual circumstances, and you need to be able to easily test different tactics across newer channels like text messaging to evaluate their impact on key performance metrics like reach rates, confirm rates, and appointment no-shows.

However, don't be enticed solely by the technology. Even though these capabilities will establish a new baseline of what is possible for your customer contact operation you still need to muster the commitment and the resources to actually put them to work to improve the customer experience, minimize the amount of inbound support calls, and of course improve contact performance and quality.

Step 2 – Integration & Extensibility

The second main component of building a better IVR is integration. Whether you switch platforms to something more extensible or you mash integration points into your current IVR/contact management platform, your current customer contact operation can no longer stand in isolation. With customers expecting more real-time, proactive and intelligent communications coming from their service providers, tailoring your contact strategy based on real-time data updates from your enterprise systems is essential to providing this new level of minimally expected customer contact dynamic. Whether it's a change in your billing system to change the customer's account status, an update from the workforce management system impacting the estimated time of arrival on a repair appointment, or a notice from the CRM/customer service system indicating the customer has called in on an related issue, your IVR/contact management system needs to accommodate this real-time intelligence and act accordingly to minimize inaccurate, duplicative or no-longer-required customer contact.

Step 3 – Advanced Contact Dynamics

The third piece of the build a better IVR equation is more technical. Your IVR/contact management solution needs to be more intelligent and dynamic in the actual processes of making calls to your customers. There is a wealth of opportunity to improve your cost-efficiency (IVR minutes spent) by employing more advanced contact management tactics that can more accurately understood and adjust contact dynamics based on individual customer scenarios. For example, you can detect customer voicemail prompts and cut calls short or play different messages accordingly, incorporating look-backs on individual customer contact histories to predict the number of rings that historically produced an answer, or being able to dynamically incorporate or switch to text or e-mail contact modes based on the result of initial contact attempts. You also need an IVR platform that can throttle the amount of outbound call attempts to match resources on hand so as not to overload your inbound customer care centers.

This is where the difference between inbound and outbound IVR are highlighted the most. With inbound IVR applications there is a common set of working assumptions; the customer is calling, contact will happen in this time period, and based on past history here is the amount of resources required to handle the anticipated volume. With outbound IVR there are no assumptions, other than this information has to reach this base of customers and the greater the confirmation of message delivery and acknowledgement the better. Therefore to do outbound IVR right you need the systems, the resources, and the experience to continually optimize the performance of your outbound customer contact efforts by measuring results; incorporating lessons learned; and developing, extrapolating and refining best practices.

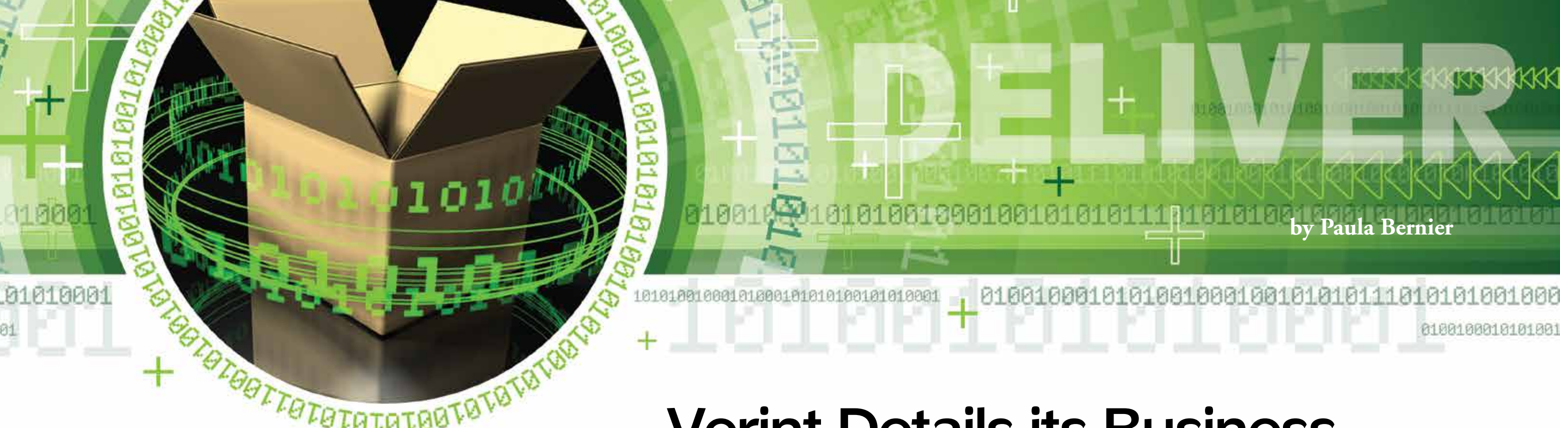
Bonus Step – Integrate Experience Management

For extra credit in managing outbound IVR contact, customer contact managers should be looking to integrate experience management capabilities to collect data on the quality and timing of the contact experience and use this information to further process improvements and to factor results into the individual contact history for use in future contact efforts.

The Positive Impacts of Outbound IVR on Inbound IVR

These steps also benefit the efficiency and performance of your inbound IVR processes. By integrating the results of your outbound IVR interactions with customers with your inbound IVR systems, your inbound processes can be improved to more effectively manage inbound support. Everything from having the recent customer contact record on hand to guiding the live CSR interaction or to making more status-based routing decisions on inbound support calls helps make your inbound IVR better, smarter and more efficient.

Mark Wilburn is the CTO for SkyCreek (www.skycreek.com).



by Paula Bernier

Verint Details its Business Impact Solution Initiative

Verint Systems Inc. has introduced what it calls a robust set of products to address specific business needs. Under the Business Impact Solution umbrella, Verint now offers High-Efficiency Performance Management, Regulatory Compliance, Personalized Guidance, and Operational Excellence offerings. And it has an offering called Voice of the Employee in the Business Impact Solution pipeline.

High-Efficiency Performance Management, which was unveiled in mid July, is aimed at helping organizations drive efficiency and increase performance across contact center, back-office and retail branch operations. It does that by delivering scorecards, coaching, and desktop and process analytics and workforce management.

“Enterprises’ increased willingness to spend on contact center technology has been met with a wider array of contact center performance management offerings, and improved solutions or delivery platforms,” says Donna Fluss, principal, DMG Consulting LLC. “Investments are focused on making contact center performance management solutions more actionable, to facilitate their use in consolidating findings from other workforce optimization modules, and to identify the right actions to effect positive change in agents, contact centers and other operating groups.”

As for the other solutions, Verint unveiled Business Impact Solution Regulatory Compliance early this summer at its Driving Innovation 2013 Global User Conference in Baltimore, which had some 1,000 attendees. Ryan Hollenbeck, Verint’s senior vice president of global marketing, explains that Business Impact Solution Regulatory Compliance helps businesses, such as financial and health care organizations, leverage customer complaints coming into their contact centers to detect potential compliance issues within their organizations. It does this by using Verint’s desktop and process analytics and recording solutions to look for words that convey confusion or frustration. Such words could potentially signal that a customer doesn’t understand what’s going on, which could indicate a possible compliance problem, explains Hollenbeck.

Some of Verint’s customers record millions of calls, but its tools can correlate words of complaint or frustration so just a few hundred calls are flagged for review, Hollenbeck says. The organizations can then share those calls with their compliance departments, which can assess whether there are compliance issues. If there are compliane issues, the organizations can then elect to use the Verint system’s e-learning component to adapt agent interactions so they comply with regulations going forward.

As for Verint’s Business Impact Solution for Personalized Guidance, that enables managers to help agents in real time as needed, even if those agents are in the middle of a call.

Another Business Impact Solution, this one addressing Operational Excellence, addresses three things: Cost-to-Serve, Call Avoidance, and Service Recovery. Cost-to-Serve employs Verint’s recording and speech analytics solutions to help businesses understand how much it costs to serve each one of their customers, the value of each customer, and the value of specific programs within those businesses. Call Avoidance, meanwhile, helps organizations prevent contact center calls by identifying and addressing problems before customers reach out to companies for a solution. It does that by using workforce optimization tools within the back office to do quality checks and manage workloads, for example. And Service Recovery helps organizations reduce customer churn and recapture lost customers by assessing the sentiment of contact center calls so businesses can get a supervisor involved, or take other steps, to prevent churn. Service Recovery also can facilitate post-call outreach, and can mine customer surveys for information that could signal dissatisfaction.

Verint also expects to add a Voice of the Employee component to its Business Impact Solution line in short order. Hollenbeck says that will enable organizations to survey their employees to get their input on how to improve their businesses. There’s a lot of talk about voice of the customer, he says, yet little about voice of the employee. But the two are clearly linked, says Hollenbeck, who adds that there’s a lot of research indicating employee engagement can help with customer satisfaction.

by Paula Bernier

Intradiem Expands on Intraday Management

Organizations can realize a 20 percent increase in the performance of their contact centers by introducing intraday management, which can positively impact employee productivity and the customer experience.

That's the word from John Wolf, chief marketing officer of Intradiem.

Intradiem has made its name delivering solutions for intraday management, which enable contact centers to shift their agents to other activities – such as coaching, training, or back office work – when call volumes dip temporarily. About three years ago, the company expanded to also enable its intraday management system to push agents in their idle time not only to training and coaching, but also to do administrative tasks and back office work. That has enabled Intradiem to grow more than 40 percent every year since, and it's allowed customers to realize new savings and cost avoidance benefits from their contact centers, says Wolf.

The company in January introduced release 9.0, which increased its ability to link with applications that allow agents to do more tasks during down time. It can connect with all major ACDs, all major workforce management systems, as well as with performance management systems. And this quarter Intradiem expects to roll out release 9.5, which will feature intraday staff, queue management, and alerts and notifications, all of which are new with this release.

In other recent news from Intradiem, the company has announced the addition to its staff of Nita Pennardt. As the director of customer success, Pennardt manages and develops Intradiem's Success Managers to ensure they are well-trained and equipped to support Intradiem's customer requests and product adoption. Her previous work includes 22 years with Coca-Cola Enterprises ,where she filled various roles within the company including establishing a profitable sales and service center with a highly engaged agent culture.

"Fundamentally, Intradiem is a company that helps organizations identify opportunities to improve efficiencies and run their businesses in a more streamlined manner. That is also what I've focused on over the years in my various roles throughout my professional career," says Pennardt. "Working with Intradiem in this capacity is a natural progression for me, and I'm excited for the new opportunities my role presents."

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WebRTC Areas of Focus

Enterprise Collaboration, B-B & B-C, New Business Models)

WebRTC Standards
- Standards Reports & Issues
- W3C Activities
- IETF Activities
- Browser, Codec & Oher Challenges

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by Brent Holland

Candidate Pre-Screening

How to Better Predict Contact Center Agent Success

Contact center representatives draw on an array of skills to achieve the level of customer engagement, call handling efficiency and revenue production companies expect, and most industry insiders recognize the inherent complexities of these jobs. Nevertheless, few contact centers have incorporated candidate screening processes that accurately match applicants' core competencies with those of a high-performing, well-tenured representative. The primary obstacle inhibiting centers from identifying the most talented candidates is the disconnect between the jobs and the processes centers use to evaluate candidates' potential.

Organizations have used screening tools to align people and jobs for years with varying levels of success. The most common assessment – the employment interview – is one of the least accurate predictors of future performance. Many well designed and validated assessments improve the hiring process via indirect measurement, which means an assessment measures characteristics of a candidate (e.g., personality trait or numerical ability) that predict job performance in the absence of clear, unambiguous overlap with the job. The lack of overlap is one reason why these types of assessments often result in more error and, therefore, less accurate hiring decisions.

The more closely an assessment aligns with a job's tasks and activities, the greater the likelihood it will predict post-hire performance. In contrast to the axiom that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance, which is often used to justify the use of a behavioral interview or bio-data questions, research unequivocally supports the superiority of assessments that measure a candidate's actual performance in lifelike settings (i.e., work simulations and work samples) over all other types of pre-hire assessments. Simulations predict future performance well because, more than any other type of assessment, they measure each candidate's job-specific competencies directly in a realistic, work-like setting. Thus, the best way to predict future job performance is to audition candidates using a realistic job simulation.

Contact Center Skills

Many companies depend on contact centers to give customers access to immediate, on-demand service, sales and support. Modern contact centers operate at a rapid pace and use advanced technologies to route customers seamlessly to employees dispersed around the world. Contact center jobs demand that employees interact with a constant stream of emotionally-charged customers while navigating a complex array of systems. Representatives generally work under time pressure and with systems and supervisors monitoring every activity. The confluence of complexity, speed, oversight and large volumes of customers creates a high-pressure environment that overwhelms unprepared representatives.

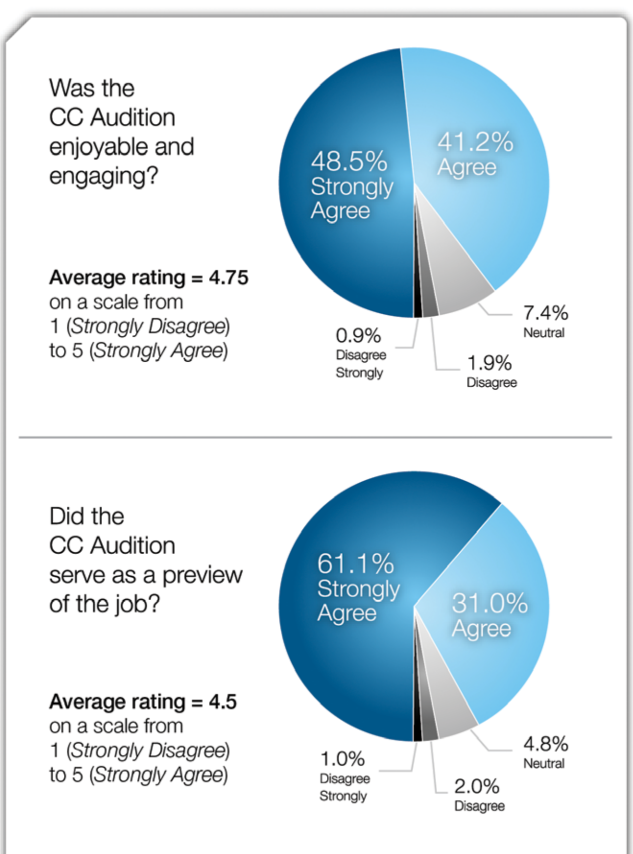
Inbound contact center jobs require numerous core competencies, though three skills are particularly important. First, virtually all contact center jobs require candidates to possess basic computer skills to complete training and perform essential job duties. Representatives that lack these skills may struggle to complete training and, if they manage to graduate, typically succumb to the pressure of performing quality work in the allotted time. Second, the jobs require representatives to use keyboarding skills to enter information and data quickly and accurately to access information and document the customer engagement. Finally, perhaps the most important single contact center skill – multitasking – also happens to be the most difficult to measure. Representatives must interact with customers while entering or searching for information. Industry experts commonly regard the skill to perform two or more activities simultaneously as a critical determinant of a representative's eventual success or failure.

Hiring representatives with the qualities needed to achieve long-term success gives companies a competitive advantage. Many contact centers are turning to multimedia simulations to more precisely measure candidates' potential to deliver results. Leading contact center simulations are microcosms of contact centers, complete with training, dashboards, performance monitors and branching technology that allows candidates to use a variety of job-relevant skills to manage a customer's emotional response. Asking a candidate to audition for a contact center job creates an engaging, immersive experience that gives the contact center's hiring team insight into a candidate's likelihood to perform well.

Profile of a Contact Center Simulation

The value of any contact center simulation depends on its ability to immerse a candidate into a job realistically while simultaneously measuring competencies that predict future job performance. The best solutions should begin with a description of the contact center environment and then transition to classroom training, where candidates are introduced to the simulation's interactive dashboards and taught how to perform the virtual contact center job. Once out of classroom training, a brief nesting period should be given to allow candidates to practice interacting with a customer before moving into the scored, production environment, where a series of sequential customer calls can provide candidates the opportunity to demonstrate the skills essential for on-the-job success.

The extent to which a simulation predicts future job performance accurately determines its usefulness as a pre-hire screening tool. A simulation that replicates the look of a contact center but fails to predict future performance is useless as a pre-hire screening tool. This is a central reason why it is essential to continuously accumulate evidence showing that a simulation's results predict indices of job performance (e.g., customer satisfaction, sales, quality and retention). In perhaps the largest published empirical review of contact center simulations, my colleagues and I found that a well-designed contact center simulation predicted key performance indices across job types and companies remarkably well. In fact, the results suggested that the simulation's validity was on par with cognitive ability assessments and outperformed all other major types of assessments.



Simulations should also create an engaging candidate experience. Job seekers spend hours conducting job searches and completing pre-hire applications and assessments. An organization that is capable of creating an engaging pre-hire process is better positioned to hire the most coveted candidates. The figure below highlights survey results from more than 5,200 contact center job candidates. Using a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), contact center job applicants rated a multimedia simulation as both engaging and enjoyable (Mean = 4.74) and realistic (Mean = 4.50). The feedback reinforces the potential for multimedia contact center simulations to enhance the candidate experience by providing a lifelike window into the job.

Word of Caution

The talent management market is growing at an unprecedented rate. A landscape once dominated by test publishers and entrepreneurial psychologists has become the target of large companies and private equity firms attempting to cash in on the bonanza. The influx of capital has brought new entrants into the market, and many of these upstart companies are bringing fresh and creative ideas that will almost certainly propel the field forward. However, the dark side of investment is that new technology makes it possible for any company to turn a traditional situational judgment test (i.e., job relevant vignettes that ask a candidate what he or she would or should do in that situation) into an avatar-based, quasi-interactive assessment that capitalizes on the simulation label. These imposter simulations, which I refer to as situimulations, misrepresent their potential value while diluting public perception on the value of actual simulations.

The difference between a contact center simulation and a situimulation is that an actual simulation recreates the contact center job. During a simulation, candidates must perform a real contact center job, complete with customer interactions, while sophisticated technology monitors performance in the background. Of course, many of the monitors and scoring routines occur behind the scenes, so it is critical to ask detailed questions and request documentation to ensure that the assessment encapsulates the sophistication of the contact center job.

Brent Holland is vice president of research and consulting at Furst-Person (www.furstperson.com).

by Marne Martin

How Telecom Companies Can Use Technology to Improve Customer Service

Telecom companies often struggle to achieve two important metrics – customer satisfaction and retention. In the digital era, it's becoming increasingly difficult for telecom companies to deliver a high level of customer service across new technological branches and far-reaching geographic areas.

Many telecom companies fail the first time a customer contacts the company for assistance because they're not able to quickly response to requests. The customer experience often gets even worse from there as technicians in the field show up late, can't fix a problem, or simply don't know what they're doing.

As demand for data continues to rise, telecom companies need to identify new strategies for improving customer service in the field.

Four Areas Where Telecoms Fail

Many telecom companies are unable to decrease costs and cycle time, while simultaneously increasing productivity, profitability and field utilization. According to a workforce management guide published by Aberdeen, most field-service organizations experience failures for the following reasons:

Poor scheduling process: Customers who call for service are often seeking immediate attention, and a large component of customer dissatisfaction comes from telecoms that are unable to handle same-day or next-day appointments.

Neglected appointments: Failing to send technicians during the scheduled appointment time causes customers to become frustrated and upset. When technicians miss their arrival times without warning, customers feel that their time and money has been wasted.

Numerous visits: Field technicians should be able to complete the job on the first visit. When telecom companies prolong the process by sending a second technician because the first is unable to fix the problem or install the product, they risk losing future business.

Insufficient technology: Telecom companies need to empower their technicians with the right on-site field technology to handle extraneous customer issues, such as providing bill estimates, scheduling additional appointments and finding parts. Technicians should be empowered to address unexpected customer issues that arise at the time of service.

Telecom companies must overcome these challenges to avoid losing future business or damaging their brand reputation with poor customer reviews.

Four Ways to Improve Customer Service

Placing a larger emphasis on all aspects of the customer experience can help telecom companies perform more efficiently and ensure customer satisfaction every step of the way. There are several things telecom companies can do to address the four major areas of failure and improve customer service in the field.

Centralize scheduling management: To best meet customer requirements, scheduling systems should be centrally managed so technicians can serve customers as soon as they need help. Optimizing the schedule system will enable telecom companies to assist customers more efficiently. Telecoms should implement systems that integrate labor pools so full-time employees and third-party contractors can be managed seamlessly to meet fluctuations in demand. When telecoms create field schedules, they should consider the technicians' abilities, knowledge of the geographic area, and travel conditions.

Empower technicians with mobile resources: Technicians in the field need mobile technology to view their jobs, schedule appointments, access parts, and handle billing and payment processes. Telecoms need to provide field technicians with the right tools and technologies to efficiently meet customer requests. Device-agnostic mobile systems allow technicians access to all the real-time information they need in the field so they don't miss appointments or show up late. Field-service mobile solutions also allow telecoms to see the exact location of all technicians and check on the status of a particular job.

Integrated parts: Telecom companies can reduce costs and improve manual processes by better organizing the allocation of parts in the field. Combining field stocking locations with optimized transportation routes ensures that technicians can easily access the parts they need to perform installation or repair services. Telecoms should closely monitor stocking locations to ensure that customers aren't kept waiting because technicians don't have the right parts. This will reduce the number of repeat visits that drive customers crazy.

Cloud-based technology: Deploying cloud-based workforce management platforms allows telecom companies to collect real-time data, enabling them to improve productivity, margins and customer satisfaction. Built-in performance tools allow executives to track metrics such as job cost, travel times, job complete times, technician skills, schedule adherence and productivity. Cloud tools provide access to important metrics across the company, providing key insights that wouldn't otherwise be available.

If telecoms embrace these solutions, they can shed their reputation for poor customer service and improve retention.

Marne Martin is interim CEO of ServicePower (www.servicepower.com).

by Paul Stockford, Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research and
Joe Staples, Chief Marketing Officer, Interactive Intelligence, Inc.

Contact Center Metrics that Matter

Contact centers thrive on performance metrics. Yet while standard metrics like average speed of answer (ASA), average handle time (AHT), hold time, and abandon rate are still widely accepted, they aren't always relevant beyond phone-based transactions. As new communications channels like SMS and social media emerge, however, and as customer service efficiency is redefined, new performance metrics are gaining traction.

Here are some of the metrics that acknowledge and address the changing attitudes, objectives and definition of the contemporary contact center. Already, these and other similarly new measurements are transforming the focus toward results that will improve customer service levels — dramatically.

Voice of the Customer

Going to the source and asking the customers how they rate their service experience positions VoC to carry considerable weight. But according to decision makers in the contact center, this approach poses two challenges. The first is that some metrics to gauge customer satisfaction, such as Net Promoter Score, are too generalized to have meaning and be actionable. This is a fair point, although the ability to slice VoC data more granularly is available, and is integral to putting such data to good use.

The second challenge is getting a sufficient number of survey responses to make VoC information reliable and statistically accurate. Given the survey overload among consumers these days, and the unwillingness of many consumers to participate in post-service surveys, contact centers must simplify their surveying methods to generate larger sample sizes. (This is often easier to do in high-transaction consumer companies, such as retailers.) With an appropriate survey sample size, the information is applicable to measure the contact center's overall performance, rather than that of individual agents.

First Contact Resolution

First Contact Resolution (FCR), still termed First Call Resolution in some circles, is the new average handle time. Although FCR might take more of an agent's time, it largely eliminates the duplication of effort if a customer's issue isn't resolved in the first contact. While there aren't yet any generally accepted standards for performance measurement relative to FCR, customer survey is one method contact centers currently use to gauge FCR. Speech analytics also offers a means of capturing FCR via the analysis of calls taken by agents. (To capture data from non-voice transactions like SMS and chat, solutions such as text analytics are slowly emerging to fill that gap.)

Sales per Contact/per Hour

For some contact centers, the sale of products comprise the entire objective of the center, or at least some portion of its purpose. The trap that many of these centers fall into is over-simplifying the metric and just measuring total sales and sales per agent. In reality, agents are often pulled in multiple directions — training, follow up, product resolution, and so on. Sales per contact/per hour therefore is a more appropriate metric. This refined form of measurement gives management a better look at how effective the agent is at selling product during each conversation. Better, it removes the ambiguity often introduced by non-selling activities. When coupled with results for total sales per agent, sales per contact/per hour delivers a much greater level of detailed information actionable by management.

Transactions per Headcount

Transactions per Headcount (TPH) is a relatively new metric that for many contact centers is replacing standard sales performance metrics. TPH is reflective of two distinct characteristics that weren't necessarily true only a few years ago. First, transactions in today's contact center take all forms: telephone calls, emails, chat, faxes, snail mail and others. Second, rather than just agents, the entire customer service group is responsible for the success of customer contacts and transactions. Nor are transactions measured on an hourly basis (as are calls per representative); they are rolled into monthly averages, and then into sales or transactions per head. This way, success is consistently measured at the contact center level rather than the individual representative level.

Associate Satisfaction

Top producing contact centers pay close attention to the satisfaction levels of their agents. This metric is based on the premise that agents who are satisfied in their role offer a better service experience to the customer. Contented agents also help stem turnover, and lend to a more experienced workforce delivering a higher level of service. Associate Satisfaction is best measured using these four factors: 1) agent satisfaction scores; 2) availability, measured in customer time/staff time; 3) agent satisfaction, measured through the eyes of the customer; and 4) agent attrition rate.

Social Media

This is arguably the most interesting category of valuable new metrics, in that social media as a customer service tool is defining itself in real-time, with the rules of engagement established on the fly. For the "social" customer experience, three distinct metrics qualify as ones that matter most.

Recovery

This metric serves as a means of justifying a social media engagement and measuring the impact the engagement has on customer relations. In and of itself, Recovery is not intended to measure changes in customer behavior — it's to let the customer know the contact center is listening to them, and to track when a social media engagement changes from negative to positive.

Tweets to Resolution

The objective here is to track the number of tweets exchanged in the course of a customer care conversation, or more specifically, to track the number of tweets exchanged to a pre-determined limit before changing the communication strategy to get the problem resolved. For instance, the contact center can eventually initialize a phone call or a Facebook private message with customers to resolve their issues, and then post the positive outcome on social networks.

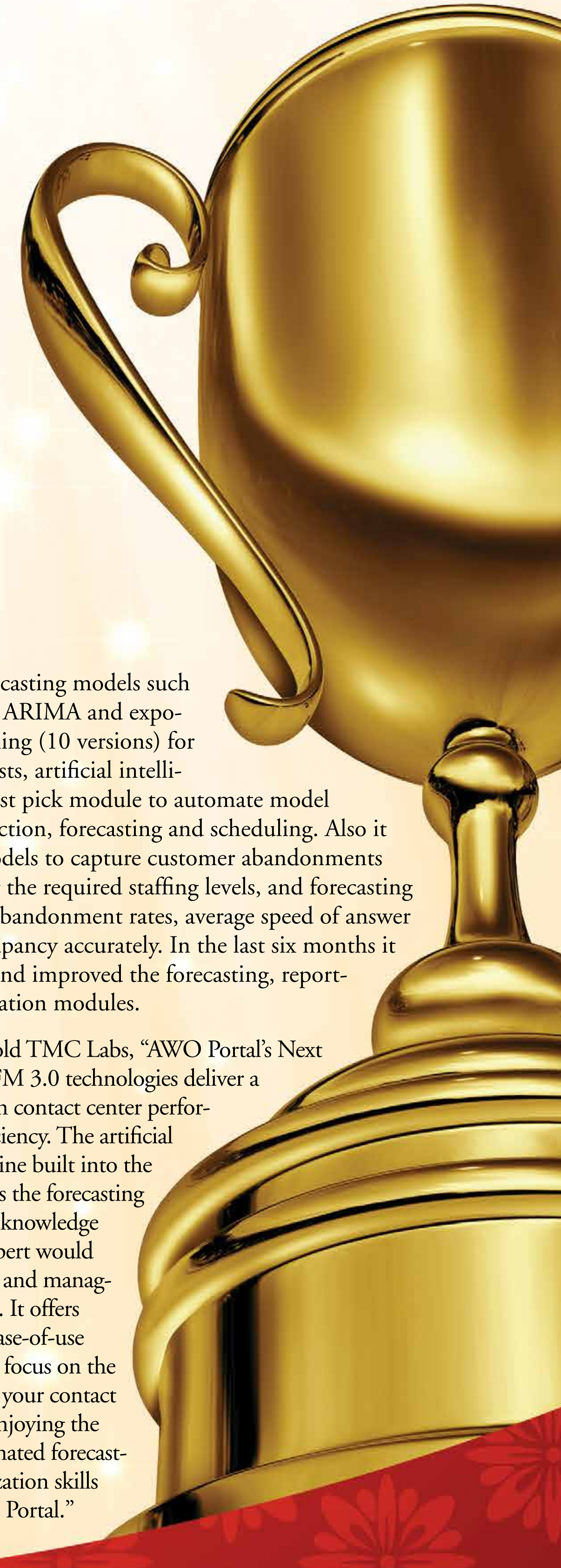
First Social Contact Resolution

First Social Contact Resolution (FSCR) might seem similar to First Contact Resolution (FCR). But considering the consumers who flock to social media for customer service (opposed to the phone or email), FSCR is very different. In essence, most "social" customers turn solely to social networks to voice their opinions about a company and its products and services, usually regarding a poor service experience. Conversely, traditionally-minded customers still call or email, and turn to social media only as a last resort when their issue goes unresolved. In any case, contact centers should look at social media contact without regard to past communications. The objective is to solve the customer's issue with the initial exchange of social media posts. And while the measurement of success for this metric is not as clear-cut as with other social media metrics, the outcome is equally important.

Download the complete whitepaper to learn more:
Contact Center Metrics that Matter
www.inin.com/whitepapers

by Tom Keating

TMC Labs Innovation Awards Uncovers Some Exciting New Solutions



2013 marks the 14th annual TMC Labs Innovation Awards for CUSTOMER magazine. Each year TMC Labs analyzes dozens of applicants to find the most unique and innovative products. In past years we've had several innovative workforce management solutions win, and this year is no exception. But we have some new unique and truly innovative categories this year, including a predictive behavioral routing algorithm from Mattersight Corp., which opened our eyes to the potential for personality matchmaking within the contact center. Mobile and social media categories also made a strong showing this year. We are proud to bestow this award to 14 innovative products that truly improve both the customer and the contact center agent experience.

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Advanced Workforce Optimization (AWO) Portal
www.ac2solutions.com

Workforce management solutions have existed for many years and while they aren't the sexiest technology, they are at the core of every well-run, efficient contact center. ac2 Solutions is an innovative provider of next-gen contact center optimization technologies. Its solutions offer forecasting, simulation, optimal scheduling, performance optimization and strategic planning technologies. ac2 Solutions currently holds five U.S. patents with another two U.S. patents about to be issued on its advanced workforce optimization, contact center and supply chain integration technologies. The AWO Portal is a 100 percent web-based application. The customer pushes data out of its switch to the hosting site using either a secure ftp site, web service or API.

AWO offers regular time-series and special event forecasting, what if forecasting and scenario analysis, as well as automated forecast accuracy tracking. Similarly, it features concurrent optimal scheduling, comprehensive strategic planning using advanced time series forecasting and staffing models, and forecasting and scheduling for multiple skills, sites, and channels. Its granular scheduling controls offer both agent and supervisor schedule management, including exceptions, shift swapping, overtime, vacation planning, and volunteer time off. Users can perform schedule assignment also by agent availability, preferences, and even bidding. It also has real-time adherence and contact traffic tracking, plus dashboards and scorecards. With the increase in home workers, it also offers home agent schedule management.

Innovative and sophisticated features (some of which have been patented) include time series forecasting models such as Box-Jenkins ARIMA and exponential smoothing (10 versions) for accurate forecasts, artificial intelligence-based best pick module to automate model fitting and selection, forecasting and scheduling. Also it has staffing models to capture customer abandonments in determining the required staffing levels, and forecasting service levels, abandonment rates, average speed of answer and agent occupancy accurately. In the last six months it has upgraded and improved the forecasting, reporting, and integration modules.

ac2 Solutions told TMC Labs, "AWO Portal's Next Generation WFM 3.0 technologies deliver a quantum leap in contact center performance and efficiency. The artificial intelligence engine built into the AWO Portal has the forecasting and scheduling knowledge and skills an expert would use in planning and managing a workforce. It offers the utmost in ease-of-use allowing you to focus on the performance of your contact centers, while enjoying the advanced automated forecasting and optimization skills provided by the Portal."

Company	Product	Website
ac2 Solutions Inc.	Advanced Workforce Optimization (AWO) Portal	www.ac2solutions.com
Aegis Ltd.	AegisLISA	www.aegisglobal.com
Calabrio	Calabrio One	www.calabrio.com
Confirmit	Confirmit Mobile	www.confirmit.com
Drishti-Soft Solutions Pvt. Ltd.	Ameyo Communications Suite	www.drishti-soft.com
Empolis Information Management GmbH	Empolis Service Resolution Management	www.empolis.com
Jibe Mobile	Joyn by Jibe	www.joynmobile.com
LiveOps	LiveOps Engage	www.liveops.com
Mattersight Corp.	Mattersight Predictive Behavioral Routing	www.mattersight.com
Nice Systems	NICE Customer Engagement Analytics	www.nice.com
Pegasystems	Pega CRM	www.pega.com
PowerNet Global	NetDialer	www.powernetglobal.com
RightAnswers	Unified Knowledge Platform Version 7.1	www.rightanswers.com
SoCoCare	Social CIM (Customer Interaction Management)	sococare.com

Aegis Ltd.
AegisLISAn
www.aegisglobal.com

There are many touch points between an organization and its customers, including customer care/support, cross-selling, order processing, customer surveys, customer acquisition and prospecting, as well as the dirty work of billing, which includes reminder calls, pre-charge off, collections, post charge off and more. Then of course there is managing all the data for customers and reporting and analyzing that data. Aegis, a global outsourcing and technology company, enhances the customer experience across all touch points and channels to result in better customer acquisition and retention.

The company manages end user customer experience through its hosted customer lifecycle management solution called AegisLISAn, which tracks and monitors conversation threads from a large number of streams across various channels such as Twitter, Facebook, discussion boards, YouTube, news forums, blogs, review sites, e-commerce sites, and other sites related to your business. The built-in analytical capabilities, dashboard, and reports assist in competitive analysis, as well as Twitter, Facebook, volume and sentiment. In the last year it has added support for Google, LinkedIn groups and YouTube Channel comments.

Aegis Limited explained, "The social media chatter between two friends or between a consumer and a brand has opened up a high impact customer services, interaction and engagement channel. This chatter throws up sales, service and reputation management opportunities, therefore an opportunity for the organizations to engage with their consumers on social spaces to gain a significant mindshare of customer experience management through these opportunities." They added, "With the current state of competition, having a well-defined target market is imperative. AegisLISAn is a social media engagement solution, providing the ability of listening, interacting, socializing and adapting with the online community of a brand via a single solution platform."

Calabrio
Calabrio ONE
www.calabrio.com

Calabrio ONE is a comprehensive suite of contact center workforce optimization software that features call recording, quality assurance, workforce management, as well as speech analytics and performance-based dashboards and reporting. Calabrio ONE's hosted offering utilizes a dynamic, widget-based user interface that is customized to suit agents or supervisors required information.

Calabrio explained, "Contact centers are sitting on endless amounts of useful data. However, many are not extracting the valuable insight this data can hold because the information is highly unstructured. Furthermore, traditional analytic technology has been very complex, which makes adoption difficult and unattractive." The company continued, "When left to traditional approaches to analyzing voice data – where contact centers are forced to manually listen to calls in order to pinpoint essential transactions, trends and take action – enormous business opportunities can be lost because users can't literally listen to every call, so they don't have a complete view of what customers and agents are saying. Calabrio ONE's Speech Analytics component is more intuitive, making the process of turning unstructured phone transactions into big data that can be sorted, evaluated and acted upon more easily and cost effectively."

Some innovative features include a 3x increase in throughput efficiency for concurrent recordings, signaling enhancements that support reliability in the event of a server failover, and meta-data enhancements to provide rich call and customer-related context for calls captured at the gateway. Calabrio ONE supports recording of the full customer experience on every call to the enterprise regardless of capture method, including the ability to associate contact-rich metadata with every call, record and associate multiple legs of a call, and the ability to associate IVR interactions with each call.

Calabrio claims that ONE's installation and implementation time is significantly lower than those of well-known competitors NICE and Verint. The company adds that Calabrio ONE is fully scalable, giving small contact centers the same features and results that larger centers can afford to experience.

Confirmit
Confirmit Mobile
www.confirmit.com

Confirmit Mobile includes a range of survey solutions to ensure companies can engage their customers and gather feedback with a strong focus on mobile surveys, since people today are loathe to pick up a pen and paper and fill out a paper survey. Further, digital surveys are faster to fill out, have higher response rates, can offer immediate incentives (such as immediate lottery spin upon submission to win something), and more demographics on the user, such as location data.

Confirmit can be used as an on-premises or on-demand offering. For on-premises customers, all information is stored on their own servers. The SaaS platform provides access to a shared, secure environment via the web.

Several surveying methods are supported, such as mobile computer assisted personal interviewing solutions, enabling businesses to conduct face-to-face and field research using a wide range of mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets. They also support mobile diary research, where businesses provide respondents with mobile devices and a customized survey app to understand the individual experience over a period of time. Prompt responses with alarms and reminders; capture photo, video and voice evidence; and gather location information through GPS are also included. It integrates with photo, video, audio and GPS capture capabilities to provide rich feedback. Other options include inviting users to download the Confirmit Mobile survey app, which can then be filled out at any time regardless of any wireless data availability. Further, it supports consumer engagement and field audits with the ability to create a two-way dialogue with customers on their own mobile devices and a company-specific social network for wider engagement. Surveys can be submitted via SMS, mobile browser, as well as mobile research apps previously mentioned.

In June 2013, Confirmit debuted the industry's first automated back-checking capabilities, creating an efficient and automated process for data quality checks. With Confirmit Mobile back-checking, researchers can now verify data collected in the field via mobile devices using a desktop or mobile device, an app or a browser, making verification easier and faster. In addition to Confirmit's back-checking capabilities, Confirmit claims to be the first to introduce signature capture, photo capture and GPS capture in the industry.

Drishti-Soft Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
Ameyo Communications Suite
www.drishti-soft.com

Drishti-Soft's Ameyo Communications Suite is simply what TMC Labs would like to call an all-in-one contact center in-a-box due to its plethora of features and components all seamlessly integrated to offer advanced capabilities for inbound, outbound and blended processes. The platform is like a one-stop shop to build a contact center. It includes pre-integrated core components like ACD, IVR, dialer, voice logger, predictive dialer, reporting, CTI, quality monitoring, campaign management and multimedia (e-mail, SMS, chat, fax, web and social media) communications and IP PBX functionality.

TMC Labs would like to highlight Ameyo Stats Manager, an innovative automation tool primarily used to provide accurate real-time information to effectively manage a contact center. Dhrishti-Soft Solutions explained, "In a normal scenario a manager of a contact center would rely on rows of data often derived from historical reports. This can be eased through the use of a wallboard, which can provide condensed information to the manager." The company continued, "However, this approach to consolidating information quickly and easily has its drawbacks. The most notable drawback is the lag in the information that is presented. This is due to the delay in parsing the information and representing it in a form that is easily understood. The delay in the presentation of the information would mean that the contact center manager would be viewing information that is outdated at that point in time and therefore rectification would be ineffective."

Ameyo Stats Manager is not only real time, but it also acts intelligently by pushing the right information at the right time and shows the manager of the contact center the relevant information for him or her to make an informed decision. This is beneficial in the modern-day business scenario where quick action is required to rectify a dip in performance or a massive spike in call volume.

One other tool that truly makes this an all-in-one contact center in-a-box is Ameyo Social Interaction Manager, a powerful tool that enables businesses to reach out and be easily accessible by their customers and prospects on popular social media platforms. Businesses can track mentions about their business on social media and respond to queries as they occur.

Empolis Information Management GmbH
Empolis Service Resolution Management
www.empolis.com

The Empolis Service Resolution Management knowledge management solution helps deliver the right information with its ability to determine the correct answers from internal and external sources and supports in communicating these in a competent and consistent manner. Users receive the answer or solution by being guided through a number of questions and suggestions so that even non-specialists find the right answers and identify solutions quickly. Empolis SRM is available both on premises as well as a hosted cloud solution. Empolis Information Management explained, "The solution supports service center staff, for example, or customers with web self-service. In practical day-to-day use, the solution has improved the first call fix rate from 56 percent to 77 percent, has increased resolved trouble tickets within 24 hours from 39 percent to 54 percent, and has achieved an ROI within seven months."

Empolis SRM offers Adaptive Decision Trees, a powerful extension of standard decision tree technology that allows deep integration with other systems to fetch information automatically. The Adaptive Decision Trees can take different roles and knowledge levels of users into account, such that the same decision tree configurations can be applied in different environments but will adapt to the specific user, such as a web self-service solution and an in-house call center.

Empolis SRM features highly scalable semantic search based on the Empolis Information Access System. This allows users to incorporate large document collections, including from external sources, and interpret and analyze these based on a semantic model such that these documents can be truly understood in the context of a particular problem. That results in shorter problem resolutions and call handling times.

It provides tight integration of content and knowledge management, allowing more explicit knowledge such as documents or databases and the more implicit knowledge by subject matter experts enabling users to pull the desired information. Uniquely, the scalable semantic search is based on a sophisticated linguistic technology covering more than 30 languages.

Jibe Mobile
Joyn by Jibe
www.jibemobile.com

Joyn is the carriers' answer to Skype, a voice, video, and IM communications platform, except with tighter integration into carriers' services like SMS/MMS. The joyn initiative is the first time attempt from carriers to introduce a new, interoperable global service since the introduction of SMS. Unfortunately, not all carriers have rolled out joyn, and that's where Jibe Mobile comes into play.

Jibe's cloud is the secret sauce that allows any carrier in any market to launch new joyn services and provide a complete cross-carrier solution that works both in-network and across networks. Joyn by Jibe provides in-network and cloud-based joyn capabilities to mobile users on any network, giving them the ability to share, video call and group chat. It can also perform one-on-one private sharing, allowing mobile users to share videos and photos, request friends' locations, and share their own location. Other innovative features include group file share, in-call video sharing, contact discovery, chat store and forward, and file share store and forward.

"Jibe Mobile has incorporated SMS/MMS as a mode of communication into the user experience, allowing SMS/MMS to be utilized as a fallback mode in case joyn capabilities are not available – so no friend is left behind. With this approach, users are able to upgrade their mobile experience while remaining connected to all of the contacts in their address book. By providing a fully interoperable joyn service in-network, and the use of Jibe's cloud, Jibe Mobile enables every market to have 100 percent joyn reach from day one," explained a Jibe Mobile representative.

In the last six months, Jibe's 1.0 joyn by Jibe was released to carriers. The video and audio quality has been improved over the last several months with the inclusion of dynamic bit-rate adaptation, voice activity detection, half duplex operation and automatic gain control. Supported video codecs include H.264 and VP8. Supported audio codecs are AMR-WB, AMR-NB, OPUS, G.729, G.726, G.722, G.722.1, ILBC, G.711 (PCM a-Law/u-Law). The encryption employed is Secure Real-Time Transport Protocol (SRTP/SRTCP).

LiveOps
LiveOps Engage
www.liveops.com

LiveOps Engage is a cloud-based contact center application that brings together the social, mobile and traditional contact center channels within a single, integrated agent desktop. LiveOps Engage simplifies the user experience to increase agent productivity and improve customer experience across all channels on a single screen, including voice, e-mail, chat, SMS, Twitter, and Facebook. As a cloud-based application based on HTML5 technologies, LiveOps Engage requires no additional hardware or software and works with any HTML browser.

LiveOps Engage supports all the various communications channels that a customer may want to use to interact. That includes voice, e-mail, chat, SMS, and social. This array of choices not only improves customer loyalty, but also increases agent productivity and results in improved first call resolution. It supports inbound/outbound PSTN and VoIP phone capabilities, including on-demand outbound functionality to rapidly configure and deploy outbound telemarketing, surveys, telesales or fundraising campaigns. It also has a feature-rich IVR, enabling self-service, with support for speech-enabled applications, touch-tone call routing, and call surveys.

Mattersight Corp.
Mattersight Predictive Behavioral Routing
www.mattersight.com

Having a real connection or a mismatch with a particular agent happens because we all have our own personalities, speaking styles, skill sets, and behavioral characteristics. What if as a business you could connect the best matching employee with the customer based on the employee's personality? That's what Mattersight aims to do with Mattersight Predictive Behavioral Routing, an innovative approach to matching up the right agent with the right customer.

As a SaaS solution, Mattersight Predictive Behavioral Routing is used by large enterprises and other organizations with sizeable contact centers, typically over 200 seats. Mattersight told TMC Labs, "Our customers improve customer-employee interactions to increase sales conversion rates, reduce cost of service, increase first contact resolution, and improve customer experience and satisfaction or other contact center business metrics that drive value."

The company explained that while one particular competitor utilizes publicly-available demographic data to match callers with contact center agents, it conducts no analysis on the actual agent performance or customer behavior and personality. Mattersight's solution is unique in that it matches callers with agents based upon personality, communication style, and behavioral characteristics decoded from actual customer-employee interactions.

The solution captures, analyzes, and stores every second of every interaction in a robust data mart where advanced algorithms respond in milliseconds with a ranked agent availability list. Pairing/matching data is provided to the client's existing routing architecture in under 200 milliseconds for each call via a secure network connection.

The company claims its Process Communication Model is the only communications-based psychological behavioral model, and was developed by Dr. Taibi Kahler in the 1970s with NASA for astronaut selection. The way people communicate (tone, tempo, words, emotional syntax, etc.) are advertisements of their personality style, psychological needs and communication preferences. NASA used the model to pair astronauts in space to ensure strong communication and a successful mission. Mattersight has an exclusive license from Kahler to use this model in CRM applications in contact centers.

To TMC Labs, it almost seems voodoo science to measure or quantify human behavioral characteristics in an accurate fashion, but the company has some impressive customers and references, not to mention Dr. Kahler's esteemed credentials and research into speech patterns. Automating the application of psychological behavioral models for contact center call routing is truly a unique and innovative approach to solving the problem of routing calls to the best possible agent.

NICE Systems
NICE Customer Engagement Analytics
www.nice.com

Customer Engagement Analytics is a new hosted platform, launched earlier this year, designed to serve large enterprises and service providers that engage their customers across multiple channels and touch points. The product analyzes customer transactions (e.g. bill payment), interactions (e.g. customer calls, e-mails, chat), and feedback (e.g. surveys) for a complete view of the customer journey. It analyzes cross-channel trends at the mass level, as well as drills down to show an individual customer journey across channels and touch points.

One innovative feature is customer journey visualization, which allows users to see all the channels (social media, phone, web, retail store, IVR self-service, e-mail) that the customer uses to interactwith the organization, including percentages for each. Further, it features interaction analytics, including speech and text analytics to get to the root cause of customer issues, such as "no service" mentioned a lot or "keeps freezing". Importantly, reports and dashboards with KPIs come out of the box to assist managers in reaching certain metric goals. Finally, it allows users to close the loop to make business impact with performance management, coaching, real time guidance, and direct customer engagement.

NICE told TMC Labs, "Interaction analytics vendors on the market track and analyze contacts such as calls, e-mail, and chat but have little visibility into events outside of interactions, such as bill payments, account change, etc. Transaction analytics vendors on the market analyze transactions and customer events, but offer no visibility into what was said or written during the interaction, without relying on third-party solutions. NICE Customer Engagement Analytics offers both in an integrated solution that covers the entire cross-channel customer journey."

Not only can users visualize the customer journey on two levels, the mass and the individual customer, but they can drill down to individual customer interactions such as playing back a customer call, which was NICE's core competency until it expanded far beyond simple call recording. To support large volumes of interactions and transactions, NICE leverages the IBM big data (Hadoop) technology stack to bring big data capabilities together with NICE's customer service domain expertise. The product leverages a big data platform to combine data from a very large number of data sources such as customer calls, web logs, chat logs, IVR logs, CRM data, billing data, branch/retail transactions, social media and more to sequence customer events and provide a holistic view of the customer experience.

NICE explained, "Taking a cross-channel view of customer journeys is challenging. Customer identities are often different across channels; for example, the user login to a web account is not the same as the customer identification over the phone or the customer account number, even though it's the same customer. Therefore, most organizations have no way to identify such repeat contacts across channels. Our product uses a unique customer identifier to resolve customer identity across all channels and touch points, thus enabling a true holistic view of the customer experience."

Pegasystems
Pega CRM
www.pega.com

Pega CRM software is a flexible CRM solution combining CRM with industry-leading BPM technology enabling organizations to improve customer satisfaction. Traditional data-centric CRM relied heavily on employees to take the right steps to resolve customer issues, meaning that a customer's experience can vary greatly depending on the manual processes and efficiency of the staff at any given organization.

With Pega CRM organizations can, in real time, understand and adapt to their customers' needs, automate work execution, and continuously deliver a multichannel experience directly aligned with business goals and objectives. Process-centric CRM provides service that

is personal, quick, and also cost-efficient to deliver the best customer experience. Further, BPM solutions are fundamentally different because they aren't isolated or siloed – they manage work from end-to-end and can incorporate human tasks as well as data and functions from other systems into efficient, streamlined customer-centric processes.

Customer requests are intelligently managed through a guided process across channels to ensure successful and cost-effective resolution. Recently the company added real-time collaboration among customers, customer service representatives, and supporting back-office teams across the enterprise. It leverages next-best-action analytics, to help improve customer service, retention, and profit. Newly enhanced social capabilities allow real-time collaboration and improved productivity across customer support functions.

PowerNet Global
NetDialer
www.powernetglobal.com

NetDialer is PowerNet Global's outbound dialer long-distance service. It is specifically designed for businesses that need dialer and outbound call centers that require a cost-effective, stable, and long-term outbound calling solution. PowerNet Global offers Tier 1 call quality on high velocity, short duration calls without incurring costly short duration fees.

PowerNet Global recently added inbound SIP DIDs, which allows national call centers to give out local phone numbers to their clients, as well as a partnet with Gryphon, a well-known Do Not Call compliance solution. The company also has worked with two other large carriers to provide direct inward dialing numbers. To ensure the quality of the service, the company collaborated with software IP tool providers that outfitted it with tools to track and view call flows, find any/all issues, and improve the quality of service being provided to customers.

PowerNet Global told TMC Labs, "What makes PowerNet Global's call center solution, NetDialer, so unique is its ability to get businesses up and running within just a few days with their outbound SIP long-distance service, compared to traditional dedicated circuits that can take up to a month or more to be installed. Another unique feature is flexibility on capacity to allow room for growth. We ensure that you aren't stuck with a certain amount of capacity, as opposed to dedicated circuits that are fixed capacity."

RightAnswers Inc.
Unified Knowledge Platform Version 7.1
www.rightanswers.com

The Unified Knowledge Platform is a cloud-based knowledge management and web self-service solution designed to improve customer service by enabling organizations to create, manage and share knowledge. The Unified Knowledge Platform features powerful search, customer-friendly interfaces, and was designed and built to integrate into clients' CRM/customer service systems such as NetSuite, Salesforce, SAP and more.

RightAnswers told TMC Labs, "the platform has been enhanced with a new interface, integration with social media outlets, social forums, interactive forms, a guided search to help narrow results, and more. The platform elevates the web self-service experience from simple search to self-sufficiency, improving customer satisfaction rates and easing the strain on the service organization."

The RightAnswers Unified Knowledge Platform is offered both via the cloud and on premises, while the clients typically access RightAnswers through via a browser or via the embedding of RightAnswers components within their own corporate portal or Internet site. RightAnswers claims to be the first vendor to offer a cloud-based knowledge management platform, introduced back in 2001. It has developed a new interface, which joins together a client's knowledge base, CRM platform, social media and learning management system.

Another RightAnswers innovative concept is the Client Success Program, which is offered to clients at no additional cost. RightAnswers stated, "While other vendors stop supporting clients after the initial installation, RightAnswers starts by providing a unique success program that goes well beyond the initial deployment to ensure clients have a successful knowledge strategy. Our Client Success Program enables clients to develop, deliver and maintain an effective adoption strategy and on-going knowledge initiative."

SoCoCare
Social CIM (Customer Interaction Management)
sococare.com

SoCoCare's solution, Social CIM, is a social engagement solution for customer service and sales organizations that helps organizations manage what is happening in social media. Social CIM provides social agents and supervisors with rich social feeds including blogs, articles, and social network posts with the ability to reply and direct-message authors all on one unified platform. SoCoCare leverages advanced natural language processing and business rules engines to eliminate social spam that can waste an agent's time. Agents also have the ability to filter on a specific topic grouping, type of consumer sentiment, or level of social and enterprise influence, and more.

It leverages heads-up displays, dashboards and strong analytics to gain insights into what is happening in the social media world. It also provides best practice tools including pre-approved responses, rules-based next best actions, author search and conversation threading, callback offerings, and more. Social CIM can also be customized based on enterprise rules and best practices. Rules-based auto-dispositioning can prioritize, close or categorize posts based on the systems natural language understanding intelligence. As with any contact center solution, analytics and reporting metrics are key. SoCoCare's advanced analytics provide agents and supervisors with KPI and workgroup analytics, agent and group SLAs, outreach, spam, workload, and cluster summaries, top voices, top sources, relevancy, and sentiment dashboards, trending clusters, volume trends, and more.

SoCoCare told TMC Labs, "While a handful of social engagement products preceded the SoCoCare solution, none were purpose built for the social contact center. Many of the competing products on the market are simply first generation social marketing tools repurposed for customer care. These repurposed products fail to deliver the tools and analytics that are necessary for contact center success. SoCoCare was purpose built from the ground up for the social contact center by social pioneers and contact center experts."

Tom Keating is vice president, CTO and executive technology editor/SEO director of TMC.

Erik Linask,
Group Editorial Director, TMC

NSA's PRISM not Distorting the Future of Cloud Computing

In a recent blog entry, TMC CEO Rich Tehrani discusses the potential impact of the recent revelations surrounding the NSA's PRISM program on tech companies. While he may be right, and there may be some impact, it will not likely be far reaching or long-lasting. The fact is we have become too accustomed to having access to data, resources, and information at our fingertips and are hardly willing to engage a technological regression for the sake of protecting a few bytes of data.

Think about it: when did you last pick up a physical map or phone book? If you don't have young kids, how long has it been since you played a board game? (But I bet you've played Candy Crush or Angry Birds.) Do you still have a physical newspaper or TV Guide delivered to your home? (Yes, there are many who do, but that number is significantly smaller than it was pre-iPhone).

The point, simply, is we have become slaves to technology.

The same holds for business, especially at a time when our personal and business lives have become so intertwined it's sometimes hard to separate them. We work on weekends and while away on vacation, and likewise, we often manage our personal affairs from the office. It's the new normal.

Knowing that, I took the opportunity to ask some members of the cloud computing industry what they felt the impact of the PRISM leaks might be on their market. I received several interesting responses, but most, in some capacity, acknowledged the revelations may cause concern, but there is little we can do about it and the ultimate impact will be negligible.

Whether for business of personal use, most of us use multiple devices and many different applications and services to be efficient in our various capacities. Many of these services leverage the cloud. We know it, and we will continue to use them because they enrich our lives.

"People kind of assume anything you put on the Internet can be found; as soon as you turn on your computer, your data is available to anybody," says Cloudant's Sam Bisbee. "That's the price we pay for the cool functionality we want and this connected world."

Does it mean we become ignorant to the fact our data may be exposed? Certainly not. In fact, as BIA's Alon Israely notes, it may result in an added level of due diligence when selecting cloud providers and vetting their security measures.

The consensus seems to revolve around the fact that we've always believed Big Brother is out there – now it's merely been confirmed, which isn't really going to change our behavior much.

"We are all tracking what people do on our websites – Google is tracking everything we're doing and profiting from it. We also know security demands are being driven by the same government that is doing similar tracking," notes Hostway's Aaron Hollobaugh. "I don't think what's been revealed recently by the NSA will have a dramatic impact on the type of trusted relationships we can create with partners and customers."

Sandy Steier from 1010 Data and Chris Smith from Cloud Technology Partners agree. While the confirmation that our government has access to some of our data may be disconcerting, we shouldn't be surprised. Nor should that realization be cause for undue concern, as the NSA's reach will extend into the cloud or into your own data centers, and we may as well become comfortable with that knowledge and the governance and regulatory controls that come with it.

Wiretapping has always been a reality, so the fact that federal agencies are now looking at our data should come as no surprise – it was only a matter of time after our communications began moving from circuit- to packet-switched networks. That time is here.

"As much as we may be scared of Big Brother, at the same time, we leverage technology and there are a number of great tools you can add to your inbox or data stores that deliver a lot of great analytics," notes Israely. "That's a third party potentially watching your data – is that worse than the NSA?"

So while this has become a topic of conversation, this isn't likely to have a significant business impact – though it may have an impact on people's view of the federal government, painting the NSA and other entities as the new bogeyman. Nobody is running to Verizon stores to turn in their phones; people aren't shuttering their Facebook accounts; and Android phones are outselling Apple at last count.


VERINT
Verint Systems and Carlson Craft
invite you to share the joy of
20% higher service levels
and
15-second shorter calls
by embracing
Voice of the Customer Analytics™
A leading printer of wedding and social stationery is
pushing customer service through the roof
with the help of Verint solutions.
How can we help *your* enterprise?
When Carlson Craft®, a leading printer of wedding and social stationery, added Verint® Voice of the Customer Analytics™ to its contact center, it was a match made in heaven. By analyzing its calls, the company reduced average handle times by 15 seconds and increased service levels by 20 percent, all while shortening shipping times. **It's another example of a solution built around the needs of the customer.** Learn how Verint solutions can help your enterprise achieve Customer-Inspired Excellence.™ Visit verint.com/excellence or give us a ring at 1-800-4VERINT.
Carlson CRAFT
customer-inspired **excellence**™
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Results may not be typical.