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The Customer Experience Makeover

And the Winner is...

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Hard Data on the **Contact Center**

Social Networking Gets **Preppy**



PERSPECTIVE

Rich Tehrani, *CEO, TMC*

Top Business Scams to Watch For

As a young child I was fortunate enough to get to work with my father and he used to teach me about things to look out for in business. The first story I ever heard about unethical business practices was a company that sent small bills for snow plowing to companies and the accounts receivable departments assumed they were legitimate and just paid them. Only when they sent a bill to an area of the country where there was no snow did they get caught.

The premise of the scam was that a company is likely in need of the service you are fictitiously billing for, so there is a high degree of likelihood they will pay because the bill is too small to check.

Similarly, scammers are able to rely on implicit familiarity to generate revenue from the unsuspecting. For example, many people know the yellow pages directory but the name is not unique… In fact there are many companies who leverage this name in order to trick customers. A small bill from the yellow pages may seem as innocuous as one from a snow plow company in fact.

In 2005 I wrote about Yellow Pages scams, specifically warning people not to fall for companies offering them free listings. Almost a decade later, the scam is still going strong, costing small businesses millions of dollars. When I wrote about the problem, it was based on scammers sending a check to companies and in fine print it would commit those organizations to pay for listings.

Now these companies are using telemarketing and voice recordings to get their victims to pay. Here is how it works. They call to verify your address and other information and record the call. They then send a bill for a listing your company never authorized. If you call to inquire, they then play back a doctored recording, which makes it seem like your company requested the listing.

The FTC just went after a number of these companies operating in Montreal. A federal judge entered a $15.6 million judgment against the defendants and banned them from the directory business. The defendants are charged with law violations for misrepresenting that they had a preexisting business relationship with consumers that consumers had agreed to buy directory listings, and that consumers owed them money.

> **Who knew that the idea behind the snow plow scam would still be working really well so many decades later?**

The point here is look out for these scams. Companies apply the same principles when selling you on the URL hustle – scaring you by saying your web address is about to expire. I covered this in a post about the four scams you need to watch out for.

Another one I wrote about was backup DNS services – something you should toss out as soon as you receive such a bill. Finally there are SEO services – if you hire a company, please be sure they know what they are doing. Over the years, many of them have been hired and their method of operations caused them to load the web with crap comment spam. In other words they would find a review of a Honda Civic and at the bottom, place a comment like, “I just bought a new Samsung Galaxy S4 for $25 and you can too at cheapgalaxyphonesrus.com.” Search engines now penalize companies for these sorts of low-quality unrelated links and as a result, companies need to go and clean up the mess these “experts” left behind.

Bottom line: be careful – there are a lot of bad actors out there looking to help you part with your hard-earned money. Worst of all, there seems to be no jail time being given out here, meaning the expertise at deceiving the public may just get transferred to others who will launch a bunch of new companies targeting the unsuspecting. Who knew that the idea behind the snow plow scam would still be working really well so many decades later? M

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Paula Bernier, *Executive Editor*

True Cloud & the Retail Experience

This issue I'd like to address two key trends that we're seeing in communications at large and related to customer service in particular: the cloud and mobility.

Let's take the cloud conversation first.

Chuck Ciarlo, founder and CEO of Monet Software, says that the popularization of the term cloud has led some companies to rebrand existing products and services as cloud solutions without actually ensuring those offerings are true cloud solutions. That's frustrating to both Monet, which Ciarlo says has dedicated a lot of time, effort, and expense to provide a true cloud solution, and to organizations that are seeking cloud solutions but may have a hard time discerning what is and is not a true cloud offering – until, that is, they've invested in it and it's too late.

> **Some companies are rebranding products and services as cloud solutions without ensuring those offerings are true cloud solutions.**

True cloud solutions, says Ciarlo, are based on a distributed delivery model, allow for frequent updates, are able to be delivered with guaranteed service levels and up times, are multitenant and not managed per instance, and are scalable. These are capabilities not found in client-server products that are simply pushed up to a hosted facility the vendor controls but lack virtualization and scalability, he says.

Companies seeking cloud-based solutions related to the contact center, Ciarlo recommends, should perform due diligence on vendors they're considering by looking at the history of those suppliers' history of uptime, checking if those vendors guarantee service level, and ensuring those vendors are running their services out of an elastic and high-performance data center.

"These are really critical questions they should be asking when they buy," says Ciarlo.

Now let's turn to a discussion about mobility and the retail experience.

A couple of new reports have been issued recently that talk about retail strategies in the age of the connected consumer, and both of them emphasize the importance of mobile in this arena.

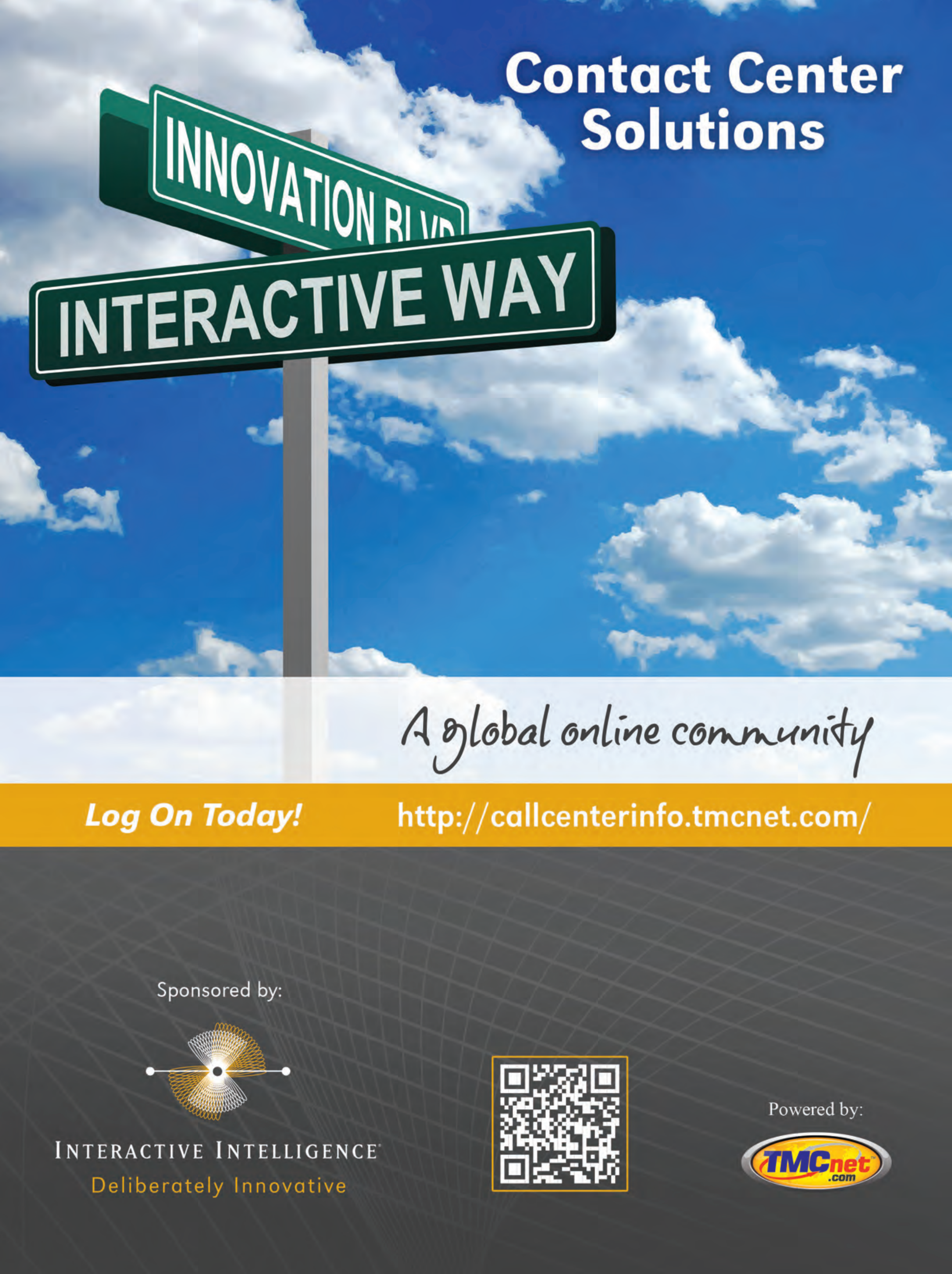
A report from CFI Group called the Retail Satisfaction Barometer indicates that nearly twice as many consumers (41 percent) this year are using mobile apps while shopping than did last year (21 percent). About half of those who use mobile apps for shopping do so to check product prices at competing retailers. And those in the millennial generation are most likely to use mobile apps while shopping – with 67 percent reporting they do so.

"It is crucial for retailers to keep up with advanced mobile capabilities to maintain high customer satisfaction," says Terry Redding, vice president of sales and marketing at CFI Group. "With consumers' demands to use mobile devices as a shopping tool, retailers must know how to connect with them digitally."

Redding notes that mobile applications are a way retailers can engage with customers any time and any where, and with tailored communications.

Meanwhile, in a new report by Capgemini Consulting titled Are You Ready? How to Create an Always-On, Always-Open Shopping Experience, lays out four critical components it says are required for a successful omnichannel strategy. Those four components include inventory visibility, web-ready products, predictive customer analytics, and a fulfillment strategy.

New standards like Electronic Product Code-enabled Radio Frequency Identification are helping with the inventory piece, according to the firm. And predictive analytics solutions are out there, and companies that use them may find it easier to create personalized shopping experiences, says Capgemini. On the fulfillment front, retailers are using their storefront locations as distribution centers, better positioning them to deliver products quickly and efficiently, the company notes. However, according to Capgemini, making products web-ready is an important but especially challenging aspect for many retailers today.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ART OF THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Art Rosenberg

Agents Skills for Mobile Customer Services

The fact that most customers will use multimodal smartphones and tablets rather than a POTS phone for customer service is opening the door to greater use of online self-service applications, as well as more opportunities for automated business process notifications. Both capabilities will help reduce support costs and increase customer satisfaction.

However, nothing is ever perfect, and the need for live assistance will still pop up whenever a mobile customer is interacting directly with a business application. The question is whether the old agent skills are good enough for the mobile online customer.

Unlike the situation when contact centers handled phone calls, e-mails, faxes, and even chats separately, multimodal customers may want to start in one mode of communication, but then change to another as the situation warrants. Don't expect as the communication mode changes that you can simply switch customers to different agents. As survey results have repeatedly shown, customers hate it when they get transferred from one agent to another, especially if they have to repeat all the information they have already given.

So, it is getting very obvious that a request for live assistance requires it to be confined to a single agent, not only for performance efficiency, but also to ensure efficient use of a customer's time. There are, however, some operational benefits to be gained from the fact that a mobile customer is both more accessible and can be helped in a variety of modes of interaction.

The Multimodal Agent Desktop

While there may indeed be times when customer assistance is provided by a mobile field service person or subject matter expert, the basic role of a customer service agent is typically handled from the desktop. Step one in planning for support for mobile customers is to provide desktop capabilities that enable the agent to interact with customers in any way they prefer.

A key consideration is that when voice conversations do not originate from the PSTN, but rather over the Internet from with a self-service mobile app. This approach has been widely promoted by Amazon via the Mayday Button video service designed for its Kindle HDX tablet users. With the huge growth of mobile apps, coupled with the likes of WebRTC for voice and video Internet connectivity, we are seeing more cloud service offerings that support both self-services and flexible click-for-assistance options for mobile customers.

Some of the capabilities that desktop agents will need are not really new, but must be expanded to exploit new capabilities of mobile customers. That includes the ability to:

- have convenient access to all customer information and activity data prior to the current contact;
- handle all forms of inbound and outbound forms of contact;
- launch on-camera interactions when video contact is required;
- control screen sharing with the customer, based on the customer's mobile device capabilities;
- exploit virtual queuing and call-backs; and
- appropriately respond to customer posts on social networks.

Customer Choice of Agents

Since mobile customers will be doing many of the simple tasks with self-services, e.g., status information, basic transactions, etc., requests for assistance will now require more specific agent skills. Rather than guess about selecting a particular agent who can best satisfy the customer's needs, it is now becoming practical to let the customer do the selection themselves, based on two factors: agent skills/experience, and agent availability to respond.

That kind of choice couldn't be made over a phone in the past, but with screen-based smartphones and tablets, it is now practical. (It is available as a service offering of Interactive Intelligence.)

With this capability, responsibility and control is passed on to the mobile customer, who can decide then what will be most practical and not waste any time for everyone concerned.

Art Rosenberg is with The Unified-View/ UC Strategies Expert.


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VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER


By Elaine Cascio & Lisa Stockberger

Is Your Contact Center Measuring the Right Things?

Is your contact center stuck in the last decade, measuring the same things you've always measured – service level, handle time, after call work? These types of operational metrics are important to running the center. But are you also measuring things that are strategic, customer centric, and that make a real difference in how the business operates?

Can you easily link what you measure to the success of your company, or are you left simply rattling off a batch of figures that don't mean anything to your CEO?

Link Metrics to Corporate Strategy and Goals

We strongly recommend that you look at measures from your CEO's perspective. Successful contact centers closely align their measure to strategic corporate goals. Some examples follow.

If your corporate goals are to reduce operating costs, key metrics include:

- adherence;
- attrition rate;
- average handle time (ATT + ACW);
- cost per contact;
- occupancy;
- service level; and
- self service completions.

On the other hand, organizations that are focused on customer experience and loyalty track the following measures:

- abandon rate;
- cost per contact;
- customer effort score;
- customer experience;
- employee engagement;
- first contact resolution;
- Net Promoter Score;
- quality of contact;
- service level; and
- transfer rate.

Note that these new or changing metrics may require changes not only in what you capture, but in the methodology and technology to gather and present the new data.

Develop Dashboards and Scorecards

Once you identify the metrics that support your strategy, develop balanced scorecards for each of your audiences. Provide different information to different audiences based on their specific focus.

- Define the audience for each measure (e.g., corporate leaders, contact center leaders, supervisors, reps).
- Identify how information will be provided and delivered (e.g., dashboards).
- Define the frequency of delivery (e.g., daily rep scorecards on individual first contact resolution, handle time or number of calls handled, weekly C-level dashboards that roll up statistics for the entire center).

Keep in mind that executive dashboards are meant to be quickly scanned and comprehended. The dashboard should be no more than six to eight key items that represent how the contact center is contributing to corporate goals. This type of snapshot should be delivered weekly or bi-weekly.

Don't Forget to Measure Multichannel

Another area where many contact centers are stuck in the past is understanding and measuring success across multiple channels. Let's move on from telephone-centric metrics into the world of social media, texts, chat and multimodal interactions and measure success on these channels in similar ways. If you measure first contact resolution in your voice calls, measure it on social media, mobile sites, chat and e-mail as well.

And as we add channels, it's especially important to quality monitor all channels to ensure a consistent, branded customer experience. If you are focused on improving the customer experience, measure how you deal with customers at key moments of truth such as filing a claim, contact during a warranty period, or renewing a service contract.

Finally, understand the costs associated with these metrics – if you can, understand the cost of a transaction that isn't once and done, on each channel and across channels, for example.

So next time you're stuck on the elevator with your CEO, you'll have meaningful information to share with him or her. And you'll be able to prove how valuable your contact center is to the corporation.

Elaine Cascio and Lisa Stockberger are vice presidents and practice leaders at Vanguard Communications Corp. (www.vanguard.net), a consulting firm specializing in customer experience, self service, contact center processes, change management, operations and technology.

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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MAKEOVER: CONTACT CENTER STYLE™

BY PAULA BERNIER

Everybody loves a Cinderella story – and the journey involved to get from basic to beautiful. That's why makeover shows have become a television staple. Recognizing the universal appeal of this kind of thing, Interactive Intelligence recently staged the Customer Experience Makeover: Contact Center Style contest.

"We launched the Customer Experience Makeover contest by looking for contact centers that were delivering less than optimal service because they had fallen behind in the technology and tools used by their agents," explains Tim Passios, vice president of solutions marketing for Interactive Intelligence. "One of the cool things about it is that, even globally, everybody was familiar with these makeover shows so people understood what we were doing."

Interactive Intelligence launched the Customer Experience Makeover: Contact Center Style contest as a fun way to cut through the clutter and do something unique that could both enable the lucky winner to have a great experience, and enable other organizations to benefit by following along in the process to see what could be accomplished with the latest tools and technologies.

The contest, which invited companies to submit applications about their contact center environments and why they were good candidates for a makeover, launched in March.

After evaluating the applicants based on factors such as age and type of technology, contact center size, and how open they were to making changes that Interactive Intelligence believed would yield positive results, the field was narrowed from 84 applicants to a handful of finalists.

You can follow BidPal's makeover journey at CustomerExperience-Makeover.com.

Ultimately, Interactive Intelligence selected fundraising software company BidPal as the winner. BidPal was officially announced as the winner the first week of June at the Interactive Intelligence INTERACTIONS 2014 customer and partner conference.

As the winner, BidPal is receiving cloud-based contact center technology from Interactive Intelligence. It's also receiving related technology, equipment and training from the company's contest sponsors.

"BidPal considered itself an innovative, fast-moving company with average contact center technology," Passios explains. "New contact center technology can help it more effectively manage spikes in call volume during busy auction nights, while giving it better insight into performance through functionality such as quality monitoring."

The new technology can also provide more advanced functionality. "With

And the Winner Is...

BidPal's Vice President of Product and Technology Rachel Clark at the company's contact center. ▲

options for workforce optimization, speech analytics and more, BidPal's new contact center solution can help it even more dramatically improve customer service and increase efficiencies," Passios adds.

The following complementary technology, equipment and services from contest sponsors will add additional value: gateways and related infrastructure from AudioCodes; do-not-call list compliance capabilities from Contact Center Compliance; contact center and best practice consulting services from ICMI; headsets from Plantronics; desktop phones from Polycom; and CRM software from Zendesk.

Interactive Intelligence welcomes other companies to bring their capabilities to the mix as well. If you'd like to contribute a product or service to the Customer Experience Makeover effort, email cxcontest@inin.com.

If you'd like to contribute a product or service to the Customer Experience Makeover, email cxcontest@inin.com.

BidPal's makeover journey is being documented by a video team and will be shared every step of the way for others to follow. The first video clips are available now at CustomerExperience-Makeover.com.

"Following the recession there was a realization that customers really are the most valuable assets organizations have – more important than money in the bank, than employees, than anything," Passios notes. "As a result, more companies have turned a laser-sharp focus on the customer experience and the technologies that support it.

"Launching our contest now is ideal because we can show just how much of an impact innovative contact center technology can have on the customer experience – and all backed by documentation that other contact centers can benefit from," Passios concludes.

OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT: Interactive Intelligence talking with makeover contest winner, BidPal, at INTERACTIONS 2014 via live video feed.

OPPOSITE PAGE RIGHT: Interactive Intelligence announcing makeover contest finalists at its annual INTERACTIONS 2014 customer and partner conference held in June in Indianapolis, Ind.

NICE Optimizes the Customer Journey

A year after launching Engagement Analytics, which offers a way to collect transaction data and information from interactions that happen in an organization, and combine that information to seek insights, NICE has come out with the Customer Journey Optimization solution. This new multichannel solution enables analysis of behavior between channels so organizations can see where customers are going on their paths of interaction with those organizations. As a result, those organizations can establish more efficient and consistent systems and processes with which to assist those customers.

Ericsson Delivers Expert Analytics

Ericsson Expert Analytics is a new big data analytics platform offered by telecommunications equipment and back office solutions company Ericsson. The platform can leverage data from network nodes, OSS/BSS systems, probes, social media, terminals, and other sources to address various needs related to customer care, marketing, operations, and/or network. An example of how Expert Analytics can be used is to identify symptoms and probable causes of customer experience issues for all individual customers. The platform can be used in concert with Ericsson Customer Experience Assurance in an effort to shorten call durations and improve first call resolution, as just one example of its use.

Democratizing Amazon Mayday

Vee24 recently announced a solution that CEO James Keller says is akin to a white label version of the Amazon Mayday button. The VeeStudio SDK allows clients to embed the Vee24 solution inside their own apps. Vee24 enables its clients to support customer engagements through the same agent backend they'd use to support any web-based or store-based engagements they already enable through Vee24. Video is a fundamental aspect of the SDK, says Keller, as it offers clients the ability to deliver live assistant in their apps. That way, if a customer of the client clicks the button for live assist they'll be looking at the agent. It's one-way video by default, but the customer can turn on his or her video if desired, Keller explains, adding that the two-way capability can be helpful in cases for which customers need help configuring or troubleshooting products.

Nexidia Enhances Analytics Solution

Nexidia has unveiled version 11 of its Interaction Analytics solution, which features a trademarked technology called Neural Phonetic Speech Analytics that leverages large vocabulary continuous speech recognition and phonetic indexing. With Neural Phonetic Speech Analytics all acoustic modeling to process the speech is put through a neural network. That produces word-level transcription, a phonetic index, and sentiment scores.

Ask.com Leverages Parature Solution

Unhappy with how its original CRM solution was working, popular online site Ask.com is now leveraging Parature customer care solutions to more quickly respond to common user inquiries, freeing up the company to spend more time finding and delivering answers to more complex and unusual questions, and to make support more flexible for its staff and personalized for its customers. Specifically, Ask.com uses Parature's EasyAnswer auto-suggest feature and automatic search engine indexing. The new solution makes it easier to update articles and information, and makes finding answers faster, according to the companies. The company saw a 60 percent reduction in the number of online tickets submitted within just two months of implementing the solution.

TeamSupport Raises $1.25M

A creator of customer support software for B2B technology companies, TeamSupport has raised $1.25 million in funding led by leading technology investors from Atlanta, Dallas, New York, and Toronto. The company's customers include such organizations as the American Lung Association, AT&T, Comcast, FujiFilm, the National Basketball Association, and Walmart.

Connect First Offers New Opportunity for Resellers

Connect First now offers contact center platform resellers the ability to earn a 15 percent commission for two years and determine their own pricing. Connect First Referral Partners receive recurring monthly revenues, access to high-level training, and 24/7 support resources, according to the company.

Timken Moves HR to the Cloud

Industrial technology outfit The Timken Company is moving its human resources system into the cloud in an implementation by Accenture s based on HR cloud solutions from SuccessFactors, an SAP company. As a result, Timken can manage its workforce with a single set of global processes and global governance.

Pipeliner CRM Gets Closer to Google Apps

Pipeliner CRM is now fully integrated with Google Apps including Gmail, Drive, Tasks, Contacts and Google +. "So much of a salesperson's daily schedule still revolves around e-mail, tasks, contacts, and documents," said Eric Quanstrom, CMO of Pipeliner CRM. "When your CRM is comprehensively integrated with your office suite, you're never wasting time or effort. Better still, your data is where it needs to be – right there with all your leads and opportunities."

Strategic Solutions series

Foundations for Delivering Self-Service Profitability and Customer Satisfaction

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Foundations for Delivering Self-Service Profitability *and* Customer Satisfaction

CUSTOMER Magazine recently spoke with Mark Miller, senior director of contact center solutions at J.D. Power, a leading market research company. We asked Mark to offer guidance to executives who are challenged to deliver both high customer satisfaction and high containment rates.

How do executives deliver cost reduction through higher self-service containment while also delivering improved customer satisfaction?

MARK MILLER
Senior Director, Contact Center Solutions, J.D. Power

We agree with the basic business principle: deliver the best possible service at the least possible cost. While organizations may begin this journey with the best intentions, unfortunately many lose sight of their customer's satisfaction and cannot resist the temptation to artificially drive up containment for the short-term cost savings. However, there is a price to be paid for ramping up containment. Our research shows that organizations employing strategies that achieve high containment in short periods of time typically suffer from lower customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. Indeed, it is very difficult to ramp up IVR containment quickly by limiting choices and forcing clients to go through longer menus and simultaneously increase customer satisfaction.

What are some keys to maximizing self-service usage without sacrificing satisfaction?

One key is to take the long view by carefully considering the impact of artificially high containment rates on long-term profitability and competitiveness. Artificially high containment rates are the result of strategies that actively limit customer choice and intentionally delay the ability of customers, who may want and actually need to communicate with a human being to get their needs met, to reach a representative for help.

The better approach is to put a multi-year strategic plan in place to inspire customers to willingly migrate from assisted channels to self-service channels. The premise behind this approach is that it is better to work with loyal customers who may take more time than others to move to self-service channels of their own volition than it is to save some support costs but risk reducing customer satisfaction, which can directly contribute to either the loss of share of wallet, or worse yet, the loss of customers. It is far more expensive to replace customers than it is to service them on their terms and maximize inspired self-service usage over time.

There are many approaches that center around the systemic education of customers regarding alternative self-service channels to entice customers to migrate over to those channels on their own, and we support this. Additionally, there are ways to significantly reduce the number of calls from the outset as well as improve the experience of the self-service channel. We are excited to offer such solutions and can help clients take these fundamental steps toward delivering both higher customer satisfaction and lower costs. These steps are integral parts of the multi-year strategy to which we have been referring.

Before self-service strategies can work, however, customers must authenticate within the self-service channel. Lower-than-possible authentication is an example of an area that affects almost all contact centers by driving up costs on multiple levels.

Do you struggle with callers who won't authenticate? We can help.

Recently, two of our clients each said that they have 40%-50% of callers who "pound out" (hit zero or other buttons until they get to a rep) when using the phone channel. This practice not only eliminates any opportunity for customers to self-serve, but also negatively affects talk time, transfers, and customer satisfaction. The bottom line is that non-authentication adds costs and diminishes satisfaction.

Although we certainly encourage customer-focused organizations to offer the option to get to an agent very quickly, we recognize that ideally this would be done post-authentication so the customer could have the best opportunity to get to someone who could help them immediately. How do we solve this challenge?

We apply sophisticated research methodologies and analyses to:

- Identify which customers are most likely and least likely to authenticate in the future
- Understand why some customers don't authenticate and determine how to change this behavior

The result is that organizations can target and inspire those customers with a proclivity to authenticate and stop wasting time and money on customers who will almost certainly never authenticate. When authentication rates increase, inspired containment also increases, and call handle time and transfers decrease, resulting in lower costs and higher customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

When organizations take the long view and strive to maximize inspired containment, they will ultimately improve customer satisfaction and both the top and bottom lines.

Strategic Solutions series

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Neustar Delivers with Information, Analytics

BY PAULA BERNIER

Neustar is probably best known for its work as a telecom number portability administrator. At its core, however, Neustar is a trusted provider of authoritative data – offering a wide array of information and analytics solutions that enable CIOs and marketing staff to leverage both internal and external data to better understand their customers, make business decisions based on more accurate and complete information, and drive new revenues and savings in the process.

"Companies are combining the data they collect from customers with data from third-party sources, like database providers and data marketplaces," Mark Jackley of Neustar Enterprise Services blogged earlier this year. "The ultimate goal is to form a single view of their customer across all channels."

The company's Wireless Do-Not-Call Service was a stepping-stone to Neustar's positioning as an information and analytics solution provider. Introduced several years ago, this service helps telemarketers meet Do-Not-Call List compliance requirements, which discourage them from using automated systems to call cell phones by setting up penalties for such practices. Neustar's Wireless Do-Not-Call Service makes clear to telemarketers what numbers are and are not wireless by providing them with access to the most current information about wireline-to-wireless and wireless-to-wireline number movements.

In 2011, Neustar moved its information and analytics strategy forward further still with the acquisition of TARGUS Information, which brought real-time intelligence and data analytics services for caller ID and online information to the table. As a result, explains Andrew Stickel, director of product management for numbering services at Neustar, Neustar enables organizations to verify the identity and contact information – including landline and mobile numbers, e-mail addresses, and mailing addresses – for every customer, prospect, and lead instantly. Clients can leverage such information to do credit scoring or assess a customer's propensity to buy a certain product or service, as just two examples, Stickel explains.

Aggregate Knowledge was another acquisition that helped Neustar expand its portfolio and build on its data expertise. That deal provided Neustar with software that chief marketing officers use to gain insight into where marketing messages and advertising offer the biggest bang for the buck.

Neustar's customer intelligence, media intelligence, and activation and targeting capabilities came together in March with the launch of PlatformOne, a cloud-based centralized marketing solution.

The customer intelligence component addresses identification, verification, and segmentation of customers, leads, and prospects. The media intelligence piece tracks real-time performance of key performance indicators for all media channels (including social media) and all audiences, and provides insights into the effectiveness and performance of online marketing. And the activation and targeting capabilities allow for personalized messaging via websites or other communications channels, and offer integration with existing CRM systems.

"Marketers now have a single go-to resource that provides an accurate portrait of their customers, and gives them the insights needed to present the right offers at the right time, and invest in the right media channels," Stickel says.

PlatformOne was designed to address the frustrating issues marketers confront daily in a complex marketing ecosystem, he explained.

"Today, marketers need to interact with brands across multiple offline and online channels, decipher a deluge of customer and media data, and then intelligently employ that data," notes Stickel. "PlatformOne does away with multiple point products, complexity and inefficiency, and instead provides one platform that integrates Neustar's best-in-industry solutions for a comprehensive approach to marketing."

Neustar's broad portfolio and data expertise, along with the fact that it's a neutral entity does not represent any one industry, makes it an ideal and trusted partner for organizations seeking information and analysis services, says Stickel. Indeed, several major institutions in the financial sector, among other verticals, use Neustar services today.

"We are an information and analytics leader," says Stickel, "and we can help you get the most out of your data – and create a more accurate big picture and granular views of what's happening and what is possible by supplementing and combining your information with third-party data."

That's important for businesses, he notes, because better understanding customers and prospects means reduced risk, and puts them in a better position for future growth.

AudioCodes

Are IP Phones Doomed?

BY ALAN D. PERCY, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, AUDIOCODES

EDITORIAL SERIES

The trusty old telephone on your desk is getting a lot of attention lately. The various blog and on-line magazines have seen plenty of discussion and debate on the future of IP phones. Some have declared them "doomed to the evolutionary dustbin" – an easy declaration to make, but highly unlikely. Heck, there are still fax machines in many offices!

The desk phone of old was a universal Swiss army knife of communications. It did a lot of things, but none of them really well. A side effect of the vertical integration and the silos created by the PBX manufacturers, they had to build a lot of the same thing to maximize profits (irrespective of whether it was the right thing for the right job).

Open standards and SIP have dramatically changed the IP phone – opening the door for purpose-built IP phones that better fit the task. From hand-held wireless and ruggedized devices designed for warehouse workers to IP phones for the contact center, it seems that the IP phone is actually evolving to a purpose-built communications-enabled appliance. Darwin would be proud.

No business sector is benefitting better from the evolution of the IP phone than the contact center with new devices that are designed from the ground up for the highly productive contact center agent.

An excellent example is the Interaction SIP Station, announced in 2013 and offered by Interactive Intelligence as part of its CIC contact center solution. The SIP Station was the brainchild of a visit to a contact center that

had been using traditional IP phones on the agent desktop, but because of confusion on what buttons the agent was allowed to press, someone had created a cardboard cover for the keypad that exposed only those buttons the agent was allowed to use. Answer, hang-up, volume up, volume down, and help were the only buttons the agent needed – the rest were hidden by the cardboard cover. The SIP Station puts those limited functions on a cost-optimized appliance and headset that takes up far less desk space than a traditional IP phone. More recently, Interactive Intelligence showed its new second-generation SIP Station IP Phone device (shown) that adds a number keypad and WebRTC capabilities, needed for its new PureCloud contact center offering.

Other examples of the evolving IP phone come from the unified communications space. New IP phones like the AudioCodes 400HD series devices, designed to be as adjuncts to the UC desktop client, allow users to answer and make calls without ALT-TABing their way back to the client and loosing valuable screen desktop space. Built-in presence LEDs with dynamic buddy list displays and high-quality speaker-phone features improve productivity while keeping the familiar user experience of a desktop phone. Desktop integration with "Better Together over Ethernet" for Microsoft Lync makes call handling seamless whether done from the client software or the desktop IP phone.

With greater productivity and better costs, I believe the evolving IP phone has a long and healthy future ahead, but as a purpose-built desktop appliance, not the phone of the past. Evolution is important – Darwin just didn't realize his theory applied to phones too.

Share your comments with Alan at alan.percy@audiocodes.com or at @AlanDPercy on Twitter.


Five9
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Five9 Outbound Contact Center
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EDITORIAL SERIES

How the Customer Experience
And What You Can Do for Best Results

Customers have long memories. So whether the customer service your company provides is terrific, terrible, or somewhere in between, chances are good that people will remember it today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

That's meaningful not only to your reputation, but also to your organization's short- and long-term prospects for growth.

Helping happy customers stay that way by providing them with helpful, timely assistance is, of course, an important aspect of that. But it's just one part.

To build and maintain a good reputation, and position your company for future success, it's also necessary to have the culture, people, processes, and tools in place to ensure you can quickly and effectively address the concerns of customers, some of which may be frustrated and require special attention.

Don't discount the value of providing a good experience for your outgoing customers either. Even they can wreak havoc or pay dividends for your business down the line.

Reap What You Sow

Let's begin this conversation on a positive note.

Recently, a story broke about three Lowe's employees in a New York store who stayed late to fix a veteran's wheelchair. This inspirational story went viral, which made everybody feel good.

It just goes to show that creating a culture in which top-notch service is the norm and not the exception is critical. Not only does it provide a good experience on the individual level, you never know when a customer experience is going to have an impact far beyond that one interaction.

Indeed, spending an extra minute or two to ensure a customer is completely satisfied can translate into years of loyalty. That's a tradeoff any business would love to make.

Be Responsive

Now that we've looked at a good example, let's move down to the other end of the spectrum.

This example involves British Airways, but it exemplifies a situation that any type of company could experience if it doesn't take steps to avoid it.

The airline recently found itself in the spotlight for misplacing a passenger's luggage and then failed to answer tweets from the man as he tried to get his belongings back. But the passenger took that a step further, and invested $1,000 to promote these tweets. That got the attention of the media, and it spread like wildfire.

The real problem with British Airways' handling of this situation was not misplacing the luggage, of course. While that is what triggered this scenario, had British Airways moved more quickly to address the customer's frustration and offered a fast response to his communications, this story would've been a blip instead of a boom. But the situation escalated because the airline was unresponsive to the passenger.

The lesson we can all learn from this example: Don't ignore your customers.

Can Impact Your Business

To make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen to you – and your valued customers – ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have enough agents to handle all interactions at peak times?
- Do your employees have the experience and expertise to deal with difficult circumstances?
- Is your supervisor-to-agent ratio low enough to allow for effective coaching and training?
- Do your representatives have the tools necessary to provide great service across all channels?
- Is running a contact center part of your core competencies?

Take the Long View

Our conversation so far has centered on the experiences – good, bad, and ugly – of existing customers. But there's another set of constituents you'll want to consider as well: Your departing customers.

Despite conventional wisdom, a former customer is as important to the future of your business as any other person who comes in contact with your company. We say this for a couple of reasons.

Former customers could, of course, opt to return to your company after trying something else. And they're likely to circle back only if you parted ways on good terms.

But even if that doesn't happen, former customers are walking, talking, typing, repositories of information about your company. That means these individuals could serve as brand advocates for – or critics of – your company now and down the line.

That's a particularly salient point given that news travels especially fast in the age of the connected consumer, and that while 87 percent of consumers are likely to share a positive experience, 95 percent of people will tell others about negative ones.

So make sure everybody in your organization understands they need to treat customers with the utmost respect and help them achieve their desired results whatever that might entail, even if that means they are moving on.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, there is actually no time like a cancellation call to distinguish your company as a customer service leader. Customers may already have their guards up when they get ready to make the call to stop service, so putting them at ease is likely to give them an unexpected warm feeling that they won't soon forget.

Not only does treating people well make the world a better place, it also saves money, frustration, and time.

Open the Toolbox

Not only does treating people well make the world a better place, it also saves money, frustration, and time.

Dealing with service issues costs Americans $108 billion annually, amounting to a yearly individual loss of about $750, according to a recent report from ClickSoftware. And ineffective customer service results in $900 of lost productivity per employee each year, totaling $130 billion in losses to businesses across the country.

So what can be done about that? Here are some suggestions on tools and techniques you can employ to help your company ensure it delivers customer experiences that are positive and enduring.

Customizable Screens
Based on information the customer service representative obtains throughout the call, top-of-the-line CRM solutions automatically adjust the agent's script to allow for a more personalized, effective response. Such customizable screens bolster productivity and promote first call resolution.

Interactive Voice Response
Customers must have their needs addressed as soon as possible or they'll be hanging up the phone in frustration and looking elsewhere for business. A user-friendly IVR solution that empowers customers who prefer to engage through self-service can help expedite those calls and create a positive customer service for the self-sufficient customer. Most importantly, ensuring a live agent is readily available to help customers who prefer to speak to someone directly is a critical part of providing great service.

Remote Call Monitoring
With remote call monitoring technology, call center managers are able to keep tabs on their customer service reps – to spot stellar and subpar behavior – whether they work down the hall or across the country. Such technology helps managers create customized reports that include clear metrics for both agent performance and script effectiveness so that any necessary adjustments can be made.

For more ideas on how your company can deliver the best possible customer experience, contact InfoCision today. Email Steve Brubaker at Steve.Brubaker@InfoCision.com for details.

Essential Steps for Providing a Great Cross-Channel Customer Experience

BY KARINA HOWELL

Customer communication preferences have changed significantly in recent years, leaving businesses with the challenge of managing an array of new service channels. Usage of web chat, SMS, social media, e-mail, mobile services, and web self-service have risen dramatically. In fact, according to a recent global survey conducted by Dimension Data, the majority of millennial consumers prefer web chat to the phone for service interactions, and generations Y and X are not far behind. This proliferation of new communications modes challenges businesses to do more than provide access to these channels on a stand-alone basis. The essential first step in providing a great cross-channel customer experience is integrating all channels to provide the consistent coherent experience that customers expect.

The shift from to a multichannel contact center can be tricky – especially for those inheriting technologies and business practices designed to support voice only service, but making this transition is essential to achieving positive customer results. Many have hesitated to add channels for fear of doing it ineffectively, leading to the adverse consequence of increased costs and decreased customer satisfaction. But the most recent wave of digital channel adoption means the time to hesitate has passed and the time for skillful planning and execution has come.

Think of up-leveling your cross-channel customer service as a journey. While there are no fast trains to the future of consumer communications, we can find maps to guide us along the path. Our experience helping businesses implement new channels has revealed the following best practices to help make the first steps skillful, leading to a journey of success.

Define Channel-Specific Business Goals

Multichannel service success requires clarity about both your customers' needs and your business objectives. Is your goal to automate simple inquiries through e-mail and proactive SMS? Is there an opportunity to close more online sales with web chat? Are text-based communications more effective for technical support? Live chat or automated service may be efficient ways for customers to obtain routine information, but in order to resolve complex matters shifting the conversation to the phone may be necessary. Will the interaction context transfer from one channel to another? Are service levels defined by channel? Most importantly, can your existing technology infrastructure support these goals, and transfer context across channels?

The multichannel world is new terrain that needs new tools and maps for successfully navigating the landscape. Metrics and goals created for a voice only world simply won't do. Chart your destination, giving each channel its due as a distinct player in the journey. Above all, don't forget to connect the dots and determine how individual channels contribute to your overarching service goals.

Seamlessly Blend Channels

Managing customer contact channels in siloes creates multiple and severe problems for meeting service goals. When a customer calls about the e-mail he or she sent yesterday and the phone agent is unaware of the interaction, the result is customer frustration and increased service costs as the customer must repeat information and the agent must redo work accomplished in another channel. The way to transform this negative scenario into a positive one is to blend Internet-based service requests seamlessly into a universal contact routing engine; this will ideally be managed according to consistent business rules with universal tracking of all contact types through unified reporting tools. This enables reduced service costs, more efficient agent handling, and personalized interactions that lead to long-term positive customer relationships.

The requirement of channel visibility is supported by consumer survey data. In a recent global customer experience survey we sponsored, 65 percent of respondents rated as "very important" to a quality customer experience the condition that "the staff has access to my history and current activities with that company." Customers not only expect to receive service across their preferred channels, they expect to transfer seamlessly from self to assisted service; they also expect agents to have access to the context of prior interactions, and to know who they are.

Optimize the Phone Channel for More Complex Interactions

The rise of digital channels does not mean the phone becomes obsolete. What's changing is that the phone is part of the overall customer experience, rather than the entire experience. This requires a new set of tools: reporting across channels, transfer of data from previous interactions, and an agent universal desktop displaying all interaction types. With these tools, agents are equipped to meet customer needs in complex matters when only direct conversation will do.

Conclusion

We are in the age of the empowered customer, as technologies such as mobile services and social media place increased influence in the hands of the average consumer. Consumers possess powerful computing power in their pockets with mobile smartphones. They expect to resolve service issues in their spare moments with instantaneous access to information. The results of these interactions – be the experience positive or negative – can be broadcast over social media channels. This latest wave of new communications channels, combined with the preferences of consumers raised as digital natives, challenge customer service centers to up-level the experience they provide across all channels. Voice is not disappearing, but as it comes to play a role in concert with other other forms of interaction, an integrated approach is essential.

Karina Howell has 15 years of experience in the contact center industry, and is currently Solutions Marketing Manager at Interactive Intelligence. She has broad expertise in the telecommunications space, having served as an industry analyst at Frost & Sullivan, product marketing manager at Genesys Telecommunications, and an independent consultant advising solutions vendors. Her experience includes advising end users on choosing the technology architectures to best fit their business needs, including traditional and virtual models using premises and cloud deployment models.

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by Paula Bernier

Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing means different things to different people and organizations, but what we can all agree on is that wirelessly connected devices have become central to our lives and to many of our shopping habits, and businesses are taking notice by introducing mobile apps, establishing mobile marketing strategies, and implementing omni-channel efforts that include mobile in the mix.

"Retailers are transforming their organizations and market approaches to leverage the power of digital and satisfy the needs of the ever-changing consumer," says Dan Albright, senior vice president of Capgemini Consulting, which in June published a report called Are You Ready? How to Create an Always-On, Always-Open Shopping Experience. "The digital transformation journey to omni-channel is multi-faceted and requires retailers to reevaluate every aspect of how they serve the market."

Critical components of an omni-channel strategy, according to Capgemini Consulting, include fulfillment strategy, which entails using storefront locations as distribution centers; inventory visibility, possibly employing electronic product code-enabled radio frequency identification; predictive customer analytics, which provides deeper insight into customer behavior; and web-ready products, which has to do with easily identifying products for online sale and potentially collaborating with others to expedite the introduction of new product to the online marketplace.

Here's a rundown of the some of the companies that consider themselves mobile marketing solution providers.

Confirmit
www.confirmit.com

Confirmit MyMobile enables you to harness the power of the mobile channel through a voice of the customer app that perfectly reflects your company's brand. The clean, simple interface makes it easy to feed the voice of the customer directly into your operations and drive decision-making. Confirmit MyMobile can help you build exit surveys for non-buyers to understand how to drive future purchases; enable customers to provide photos and videos to drive rich insight; replace paper with mobile to drive clear reporting and immediate action; and mine your richest source of customer insight – your employees. Confirmit SODA 3.0 enables enterprises and market research agencies to capture in-the-moment feedback from respondents, whether they are consumers or employees, providing unbeatable insights into experiences. Confirmit SODA also includes the industry's first automated back-checking capabilities for researchers to 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 than ever.

Mblox
www.mblox.com

Mblox is the largest, independent application-to-person SMS provider in the world with more than 100 direct commercial carrier and operator connections. As the industry's most experienced tier one SMS aggregator, Mblox specializes in the unique demands of large-scale mobile messaging programs. Mblox provides a mobile engagement platform that enables companies to reach individuals on virtually any mobile device worldwide with SMS, push, and rich push messaging. Its solutions empower intelligent business-to-person communications with relevant, targeted messaging triggered by a customer's location and activity. They are a personal, instant, and cost-effective way to reach customers with alerts, reminders, PIN requests, coupons, offers, surveys, customer service, and more. Mblox delivers a complete mobile engagement solution that combines the advantages of both push messaging and SMS mobile messaging – built on an understanding of how these tools fit within a broader multi-channel environment. Through its SMS gateway services, Mblox transmits billions of messages each year in more than 190 countries. Its on-the-ground support network means real expertise in the mobile regulatory environments of individual countries. Mblox provides high throughput solutions in mission-critical and time-sensitive use cases ranging from banking, customer support, security, and human resource management to mobile marketing and more.

NeoMedia Technologies Inc.
www.neom.com

NeoMedia is a leader and innovator in the mobile barcode ecosystem. NeoMedia's suite of products and services include mobile barcode creation, resolution, and management applications including QodeScan, a self-service QR code generator and management service, and NeoSphere, an enterprise-grade mobile barcode creation and management system which allows brands and agencies to create, manage, and monitor campaigns from start to finish. Its mobile barcode scanner, NeoReader, is currently installed on more than 50 million devices and free to download from all major app stores. NeoMedia has more than 60 patents awarded and pending in the QR code space worldwide. It has a long-term history providing barcode solutions, has launched thousands of successful campaigns, and has developed a sustainable business model that ensures it'll be here for years to come. NeoMedia ensures that its client's campaigns are licensed under its foundational patents, something few other providers can provide.

SAP
www.sap.com/pc/tech/cloud/software/cloud-for-customer/index.html.

SAP's Marketing Performance Dashboard delivers the combined sales and marketing insights today's executives require. It displays key marketing and sales performance measures in real time based on current operational data and delivers proactive intelligent notifications for exceptions that require immediate action, such as notice of budget overruns or under-performing campaigns or surprise successes like hit offers or over-performing product launches. The dashboard is available on any mobile device, is intuitive, easy to personalize, and allows leaders to quickly drill into details to understand the reasons behind metrics. The dashboard can present data from any connected source system so executives can leverage their existing marketing system landscape. It is pre-integrated with other SAP products, including the SAP CRM and SAP ERP applications, the SAP Customer Engagement Intelligence solution, and the SAP Jam social software platform as well as with products from SAP partners. SAP's Marketing Performance Dashboard leverages external data, internal data, and unstructured data to help sales and marketing professionals coordinate their activities across multiple channels. In a business landscape where sales and marketing need to collaborate and share data more closely than ever, SAP's Marketing Performance Dashboard truly delivers.

By Jerry W. Thomas

Loyalty, Lore, and Truisms

The many truisms of customer loyalty lore are mostly a set of myths created to deceive the gullible and exploit the innocent. Let us explore them and then talk about best practices for customer satisfaction and customer loyalty research.

The Myths

Rising customer satisfaction scores are positively correlated with increases in sales. Sometimes this is true, but just as often, rising satisfaction scores are inversely correlated to actual sales. For example, as sales go down, stores are less crowded and store employees have more time to spend with customers, and often retail prices fall as sales go down. All of these factors can result in rising satisfaction scores – while sales are falling. Retailers, in particular, can happily go out of business amid a rising tide of customer satisfaction scores.

It costs less to keep your current customers than to attract new customers. This is usually true, but not universally true. Keeping existing customers can become very expensive at times. Some customers are too costly to keep. The key is to focus on attracting and keeping the strategically profitable customers.

Companies should always strive to maximize customer satisfaction ratings. Companies can achieve the highest possible customer satisfaction scores by raising product quality, offering unlimited service, and lowering prices. But these actions will lead to bankruptcy. No, the goal should not be to maximize customer satisfaction. The goal should be to optimize customer satisfaction so that the company's long-term profits are maximized.

One magical question is the ultimate measure of customer satisfaction and the ultimate predictor of future success (the so-called Net Promoter Score). The Net Promoter Score is derived from a would-you-recommend-this-product/service question. Levels of recommendation, unfortunately, vary greatly by type of business and product category. You may recommend a car dealership or a restaurant (high-interest categories) but not mention a drugstore, gas station, bank, or funeral home (low-interest categories). A better strategy is to tailor the customer satisfaction questions to your industry, your product/service, and to your business goals. Use multiple questions that measure satisfaction from different perspectives. Don't buy into the illusion of universal truth. And don't fall for simple answers to complex questions.

Customer satisfaction scores are all-important, the ultimate determinant of a store's or a dealer's evaluation by senior management. Many senior executives are not aware that satisfaction scores vary by different regions within the U.S., vary by the demographic makeup of a retailer's customers, and vary by age of the store. These variances make it very difficult to compare the satisfaction scores from one store to the next, or across different parts of the country. Few companies use sophisticated modeling to adjust for all of these natural variances to level the playing field.

It's all about the customer experience, as though customer experience is a magical, ethereal, transcendental idea. What is so revolutionary about the notion of understanding customers? Haven't good companies been providing good customer experience since (and before) the coming of the Industrial Revolution? Isn't marketing research about understanding how customers think, feel, behave, and react – at all of the touch points? Might customer experience just be a new name for something good companies have been doing all along?

Key Questions

Okay, so it's easy to poke holes in the rhetoric surrounding customer satisfaction and loyalty measurement, but here are some of the questions to think about as you contemplate a customer satisfaction monitoring program:

- What are the objectives and goals of a customer satisfaction or customer loyalty program? Is such a program likely to achieve its goals?
- What are the relevant questions, the metrics that make sense for your industry and your company?
- How much measurement is enough? Are surveys once or twice a year sufficient to accomplish your goals? Not every company needs to continuously measure customer satisfaction.
- How do you interpret the results? Can the results be organized, weighted, normalized, analyzed, etc., so that the ratings are fair and useful?
- Is a customer satisfaction program really worth the money it will cost?

Best Practices

Let's assume you have done your homework and answered the above questions honestly, and feel that a customer satisfaction and loyalty program makes marketing sense and economic sense for your company. You have clearly defined the objectives for the program. What are the best practices to help ensure that your company gets the most out of its customer satisfaction and loyalty program?

Always begin with some type of qualitative research (focus groups, depth interviews, online forums, ethnography) to better understand your customers, their perceptions, their experiences, their language, their fears, and their issues and concerns. If you don't really understand your customers' feelings, knowledge levels, and perceptions, and don't understand how customers interact with your company, it's almost impossible to design a good customer satisfaction and loyalty monitoring program. The qualitative

research will make it possible to design a very good survey questionnaire. In fact, the qualitative research should be repeated every two or three years as a safety check to ensure that your satisfaction program remains relevant and on track.

Sampling

Who do you survey? If you only talk to your current customers, you may be overlooking a sea of dissatisfied former customers. Generally, the best practice is to focus your surveys on your current customers, but include cells of infrequent customers and former customers. If you conduct your surveys as visits or transactions occur, your sample will tend to be biased toward heavy users. This can be a good thing, since heavy users account for a large share of your business, but it can overstate your customer satisfaction scores because you are conducting a high share of surveys among your most loyal customers. It's like preaching to the choir.

Questionnaire Design

The first rule is do no harm. That is, your attempts to measure customer satisfaction should not lower your customers' satisfaction. This means that questionnaires should be simple, concise, and relevant. Use very simple rating scales (two-point, three-point, four-point scales). Short word-defined scales (e.g., excellent, good, fair, poor) are easy for customers to answer, and the results are easy to explain to executives and employees. Moreover, short scales work well on personal computers, tablet computers, and smartphones. Long, complicated scales should be avoided. The questionnaire should almost always begin with an open-ended question, to give the customer a chance to tell his or her story. An opening question might be: Please tell us about your recent experience of buying a new Lexus from our dealer in north Denver.

The questionnaire should always be pretested with 20 to 30 depth interviews. It's also best practice to do 500 or 1,000 surveys, as another type of pre-test, and factor analyze the answers. Often this will allow you to shorten the final questionnaire by eliminating redundant questions or attributes.

Survey Data Collection

The method of data collection should be tailored to the customer base. Mail surveys work extremely well for automotive purchases, for instance. Telephone surveys are widely used because interviewers add a personal touch and can ensure that any problems are immediately addressed by the correct person or department. Online surveys are probably the most widely used survey method for customer satisfaction. It's often the least expensive, if customers' e-mail addresses are systematically collected. Smartphones and tablet computers increasingly offer new ways to survey customers. Complaint tracking or problem tracking (types of customer satisfaction research) can be conducted via QR codes, interactive voice response, or survey invitations on invoices, sales receipts, paper coffee cups, etc.

Analysis

This is where most customer satisfaction measurement systems fail. If you are comparing different stores, or different geographical areas, you should normalize the survey results to make the comparisons fair and accurate. If you are looking at results for a particular store or division over time, you must be wary of seasonal variations. When the weather is very hot, or very cold, customers might tend to be more irritable. During the Christmas season, everyone tends to be emotionally stressed, and satisfaction scores can go down. The use of advanced statistical methods is essential.

The best practice is to build relevant and useful mathematical models to compensate for data biases and distortions, link together important measurements in sophisticated ways, and derive simple composite results that everyone, even senior executives, can understand and use.

Benchmarking is important. You should collect customer satisfaction data for your major competitors, if possible, so that you have a relevant measuring stick to analyze your own satisfaction data.

Economic Sense

Meeting the needs of customers and providing great service doesn't guarantee business success, but it sure improves the chances of winning. There are no simple, universal truths about customer satisfaction measurement and management. Each company is unique and must think carefully about its business model and its objectives to design a customer satisfaction and loyalty program that really works and makes economic sense. M

Jerry W. Thomas is president and CEO of Decision Analyst Inc. (www.decision-analyst.com), a Dallas-based marketing research and marketing consulting firm.

B2B Companies: Stop Wasting Your Money

BY ROBERT WOLLAN

While consumers are getting the majority of the attention, business customers have become just as demanding of the companies they deal with, and that will drive major changes in corporate selling and service over the next two years, according to a new survey of business-to-business executives by Accenture.

Our survey indicates that business customers have higher expectations, want more customized solutions, are more price-sensitive, and have greater knowledge of the product than ever before, which demands that B2B companies sharpen their focus on improving the customer experience. However, the research indicates that, while many companies realize how important it is to satisfy their customers' demands, too many don't have a clear idea whether or not they are just throwing money at the problem without creating significant and tangible business results.

While B2B companies are spending more to improve their customers' experiences, our research indicates that a majority – 76 percent – are wasting up to half their investments on ineffective customer experience initiatives. In fact, more than half of the executives surveyed say their investments in customer service improvements have resulted in little or no return when it comes to retaining customers and building global revenues.

So what is a business supplier to do?

Here are the top five ways B2B companies can get smarter about how they invest in the customer experience, and ultimately get more from their investment.

Assign a leader close to the P&L.

Ensure the leadership for customer experience initiatives is either the business leader most impacted by their success or reports directly to that person. Having someone in charge who is close to the profit and loss – and ultimately the business success – of the company will make sure that investments in customer experience are strategic and will be prioritized on their merit and results – not just improvements around the edges of the business.

Check your foundation.

Any good house begins with a strong foundation – this is also true when it comes to building an effective customer experience. In an age of pilots and existing programs, too often companies try to build new capabilities based on an outdated selling/operating model. But the way people – and companies – decide to buy something today has changed dramatically. With the increasing prevalence of digital technologies such as mobile, analytics and cloud, companies need to adapt to a sales and service model for the non-stop customer, in which the journey toward purchasing a product is much more fluid and continuous.

Be digital, but don't ignore traditional (analog) interactions.

B2B customers increasingly expect a digital experience – not at all unlike retail consumers who use digital for everyday purchases, like buying something online. Suppliers too need to offer their business customers a seamless digital experience, instead of forcing them to interact in non-digital ways. But let's not forget these analog interactions, which include things like seamless integration across call centers or field sales; they remain important parts of the mix, and a complement to digital capabilities.

Update how to choose investments.

The next step is to develop a framework for funding the right customer experience investments. A key part of this is putting a mechanism in place to determine which investments are both noticed and valued by the customer. Successful companies take care to align their customer experience efforts and metrics with those areas that matter most to their customers, instead of making improvements that may seem important, but don't clarify which customers will notice the change or how much they value them. This is perhaps one of the most important steps to fix.

Strengthen the experience.

Customer experience operations should be constantly measured and evaluated. What's more is that customer experience interactions need to be executed consistently and measured accurately, the results of which should be shared widely across the organization to encourage real-time improvement based on performance and feedback from customers.

Will these initiatives make a difference to your business? Our research found that the companies successfully implementing the above best practices yield, on average, up to twice the return on their customer experience investments.

So, what are you waiting for?

Robert Wollan is global managing director of the sales and customer services practice at Accenture (www.accenture.com).

Country Club Prep Thinks Social Networking is Simply Top Drawer

BY PAULA BERNIER

Being connected and social networking have always been important for the preppy set, but now Country Club Prep is taking that to a whole new next level with its marketing efforts on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter.

The retailer started life in March 2012 exclusively as an online purveyor of preppy goods such as Lilly Pulitzer clothing; Sperry Top-Sider shoes; and fraternity, sorority, and university sportswear. Today Country Club Prep is a profitable business that recently moved to a larger warehouse and just this summer opened its first brick-and-mortar store in Charlottesville, Va. (home of the University of Virginia), with more physical locations in the offing.

Country Club Prep was started by two now former attorneys, Stephen Glasgow and Matt Watson, who say they were eager to exit the law profession. Their goal with the new venture was to position themselves as experts of all things preppy, which the men view as a lifestyle rather than simply as a clothing style.

As such, the retailer not only aggregates preppy goods from both well-established and hot new brands, it has created its own brand, and Country Club Prep is building exposure for that brand via social media campaigns with plenty of giveaways and tie ins to popular events such as the Kentucky Derby.

Country Club Prep also recruits ambassadors to promote its efforts. The company currently has 400 ambassadors. Applications for ambassadors are accepted at the Country Club Prep website.

Ambassadors are college students from various universities that get rewards such as discounts and free product in exchange for posting photos and videos relating to Country Club Prep on popular social networks, and for handing out Country Club Prep giveaways on campus.

Giveaways are an important method Country Club Prep uses to promote its brand. In addition to the ambassador handouts, Country Club Prep offers free gift cards on Instagram, which encourages people to submit photos of themselves enjoying the company's products, and allows the retailer to stage best-of photo contests.

In the process, Country Club Prep has amassed about 45,000 Facebook and 19,000 Instagram likes (with Instagram likes growing at a rate of about 1,000 per month), and seen typical conversion rates of 2 to 3 percent – although conversion rates can be up to 50 percent in the first 48 hours following campaigns with a high level of customer engagement.

Glasgow and Watson say they are able to get these promising results with minimal investment in marketing. Country Club Prep spends about $200 a month for its e-mail, social media marketing, and retargeting ad campaign platform from Atlanta-based Springbot, in which HootSuite is embedded. Glasgow says Springbot is great because it makes just about everything traceable. That enables businesses like Country Club Prep to see the source of the visitor, understand whether that visitor converted, have visibility into where visitors abandoned their shopping carts, figure out the best time to engage with individual shoppers, and get other metrics.

Facebook recently started charging for some marketing-related efforts, they added, so Country Club Prep has pulled back a bit on its Facebook efforts and is dedicating more time and energy to doing giveaways and other marketing campaigns on Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter.

As Country Club Prep moves into the bricks-and-mortar realm, the company is working to bring the physical and online worlds together by providing store visitors with touchscreen TVs though which shoppers can easily order goods not available in the store. Country Club Prep has also extended its random acts of kindness giveaways, as it calls them, for visitors to its physical stores. Even if they don't make a purchase, no store visitor leaves without getting at least a small token – such as a free keychain – from Country Club Prep promoting its brand.

Founders
Matt Watson &
Stephen Glasgow

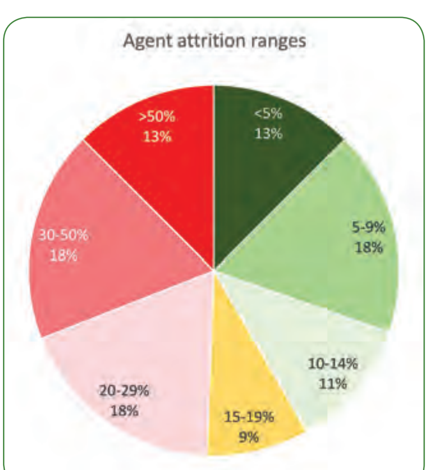
ContactBabel Details Recent Contact Center

Customer contact industry analyst firm ContactBabel recently published the "U.S. Contact Center HR & Operational Benchmarking Report (2014)," its annual report studying the quantified performance and human resources aspects of U.S. contact center operations. It is based on a detailed survey of hundreds of U.S. contact centers. Here some of the s key findings from the research.

Agent Attrition

After 2008's very high mean attrition rate of 42 percent, rates declined significantly in 2009, down to a mean of 34 percent, showing that the economic downturn had taken some of the HR pressures off, with 2010 data showing attrition levels again dropping to a mean of 32 percent. In 2011, mean attrition continued to fall to 27 percent, where it has remained since.

This average masks a very wide spread of attrition rates. While 13 percent of respondents have attrition rates in excess of 50 percent per annum, the same proportion have an attrition rate below 5 percent.



The outsourcing sector has a consistently high attrition rate – driven mainly by low salaries and lots of outbound telemarketing work – and this year, it has a mean average of 56 percent, far higher than most other sectors. The public and medical sectors once again report sub-20 percent attrition rates, and manufacturing respondents have very low attrition rates as well this year.

Salaries

Thirteen percent of this year's respondents reported agent salary increases over 5 percent p.a., and a further 44 percent saw more moderate gains. Forty percent saw little or no change, and only 3 percent reported a drop in salary levels.

ROLE	2014 MEAN AVERAGE SALARY
New agent	$27,542
Experienced agent	$34,777
Team leader / supervisor	$43,977
Contact center manager	$67,580

New agents in the public sector get paid the most this year ($32,667), and outsourcing agents remain among the lowest-paid on average ($19,498), as they have been for some time, although this includes only basic salary, not the sales-related bonuses that may be more relevant to this sector.

At a management level, manufacturing and public sector contact center managers are paid the highest ($78,000 and $76,182, respectively). The respondents from the entertainment and leisure and outsourcing sectors do not pay particularly well this year ($62,143 and $55,070, respectively), although again these are likely to add a significant bonus figure based on sales, especially those in the latter vertical market.

Operational Performance

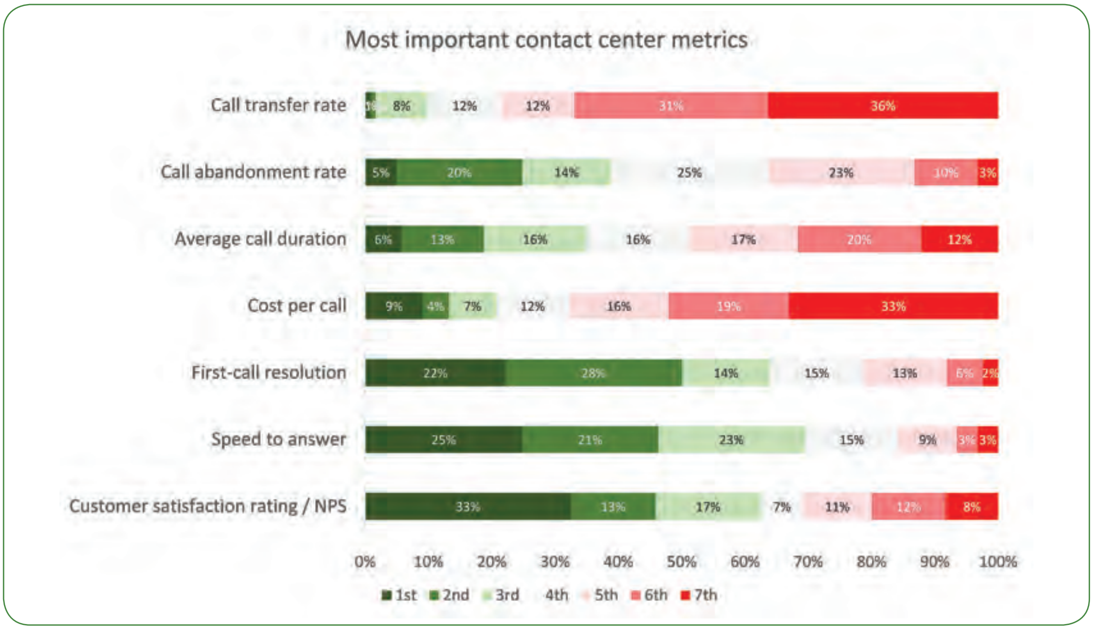
The report gives details of the performance of the contact center industry, as well as the actual and planned growth in headcount, and capex and opex budgetary elements.

Over the years the importance of contact center metrics have changed considerably. Ten years ago, average call duration and cost-per-call were considered to be perhaps the most important metrics, but respondents to recent reports consider them of minor importance compared to more customer-focused measurements.

Unsurprisingly, one-third of respondents chose customer satisfaction rating as being the most important measurement that a contact center tracks. However, first call resolution and speed to answer are very close behind. Both of these metrics are of huge importance to customer satisfaction (or the lack of it), and handling more calls effectively the first time is key to improving customer satisfaction and reducing repeat calls, which will impact positively upon queue lengths.

By Steve Morrell

HR & Operational Trends and Forecasts



First-Call Resolution

Mean average first call resolution increased to 74 percent from 71 percent this year, and the median moved up by two percentage points to 80 percent. The median is included as a few respondents have a very poor first-call resolution rate, which can drag the mean average down considerably. The first quartile (best 25 percent) FCR rate is 90 percent, with the third quartile at an FCR rate of 65 percent. Medical, retail, and services respondents report the highest levels of first call resolution, with technology/media/telecoms and manufacturing sectors the lowest.

Average Speed to Answer

While high-volume yet simple interactions, such as password reset and account balance, are carried out via self-service, whether through IVR or the website, the overall industry ASA mean average has stayed relatively steady since around 2005, at 25 to 30 seconds. This year's jump to 43 seconds may be a result of a small number of respondents with very long speeds to answer being present in the research, as the median of 24 seconds is quite similar to previous years.

Selected Performance Metrics

Detailed, in-depth analysis of all of the above performance and HR metrics, including historical changes, future predictions, and segmentations by vertical market, contact center size and type of activity are available in the report.

Steve Morrell is principal analyst at ContactBabel (www.contactbabel.com).

METRIC	MEAN AVERAGE	MEDIAN AVERAGE
Average speed to answer	43.3 seconds	24.0 seconds
Call abandonment rate	5.3%	4.0%
First-call resolution rate	74%	80%
Call duration (service)	381 seconds (6m 21s)	310 seconds (5m 10s)
Call duration (sales)	408 seconds (6m 48s)	325 seconds (5m 25s)
Call transfer rate (excl. receptionists)	8.5%	4.8%
Cost of inbound call	$5.84	$4.50
Cost of outbound call	$6.34	$4.53

NB: as a few respondents may show extreme results, data are not distributed symmetrically. Median values show the midpoint and may demonstrate the truer picture of a 'typical' operation. If calculating an industry-wide amount (e.g. total cost of calls, or total time spent waiting to answer), the mean average is more appropriate.

CUSTOMER Announces 2014 TMC Labs Innovation Award Winners

Each year TMC Labs analyzes a plethora of applicants looking for the most unique and innovative products. Some of the standouts this year include a few that focus on enterprise search such as HP Autonomy and RightAnswers as well as Cicero with its "record everything tool," Discovery. Votacall won with its Viper VoIP quality monitoring tool and Calabrio continues to innovate with its ONE platform.

In all, you'll find a wide-range of products, which handle numerous customer interaction tasks across a wide range of companies. As expected, more solutions are moving to a cloud-based or hybrid model. In all, there is an exciting group of winners here. Congratulations to them all.

Drishti-Soft Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
Ameyo
www.Ameyo.com

Ameyo is an all-in-one communication suite from Drishti. A multi-channel and multi-modal communication solution, it can be integrated easily in centralized and distributed (multi-site) contact centers, and improves efficiency and productivity. It helps build strong customer relationships; delivers enhanced customer satisfaction levels, low cost per contact, high contact center uptime and revenue per customer; ensures efficient management of your workforce, customers, processes, performance parameters; and provides capabilities for inbound, outbound, and blended campaigns.

Ameyo is a customer interaction management technology enabling companies to reach out to potential customers, connect with them, complete their orders, manage their complaints, deliveries, and provide feedback through an integrated interface.

The company has delivered lots of innovations to the contact center space such as IVR templates and intelligent predictive dialing, which takes into account agent skills when routing calls. In addition, the company provides agent-assisted IVR, which allows low-skilled agents to choose prompts to be played while receiving a call. Moreover, these calls can be quickly routed to skilled agents as needed.

The company provides many of the features of larger players in the market but does so at a lower cost. Moreover, its installation in a number of BPOs and financial companies means the technology is continuously tested at scale.

Recent improvements include enhanced compliance support, speech analytics tied into quality monitoring, improved voice quality through better echo cancellation and other audio enhancements, and a module designed for financial traders.

ac2 Solutions Inc.
Advanced Workforce Optimization (AWO) Portal
www.ac2solutions.com

ac2 Solutions is a leading provider of next generation contact center optimization and supply chain management technology, which the company provides using proprietary forecasting, simulation, optimal scheduling, performance optimization and strategic planning technologies, offering customers a sustainable cost and service quality advantage.

While patents are not necessary when building great products, the company currently holds five U.S. patents, with another about to be issued on its advanced workforce optimization, contact center, and supply chain integration technologies.

As a customer, this is important as these patents offer some protection against lawsuits brought from larger companies – not from patent trolls.

The company's AWO Portal is completely web-based, giving users access to Performance Optimizer and Agent/Supervisor Workstation. Many other WFM systems have client-server architecture but with ac2, there is no software to be installed or maintained on the workforce managers, supervisors, or agents' computers. The company touts this as a reason why its solution has much lower IT support costs and far easier upgrade cycles.

Other benefits include advanced time series forecasting methods including Box Jenkins ARIMA, Exponential Smoothing (10 versions), Multi-linear Seasonal Regression, Expert System for forecasting, the Palm Model for staffing with abandonments, advanced simulation skills-based scheduling, Concurrent Scheduling to optimize all agent schedules, integrated strategic planner, advanced performance optimizer and agent skills and routing manager.

Recent improvements include an upgraded forecasting module, upgraded reporting module, and an upgraded integration module. A partial list of clients includes Dell, Delta Airlines, DialAmerica, and Intuit.

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

Mattersight Predictive Behavioral Routing is used by organizations with contact centers, typically with 50 to 100 seats, to 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's solution matches callers with agents based upon personality, communication style, and behavioral characteristics decoded from customer-employee interactions. This is accomplished by utilizing a communications-based psychological model originally developed in conjunction with NASA for astronaut pairing.

The company takes advantage of the fact that customers have different expectations and behaviors while employees have different call handling strengths and weaknesses. By pairing the two in an optimal fashion outcomes are improved.

Mattersight's algorithms predict the best available agent to handle each specific caller based upon performance, personal strengths, and behavioral characteristics such as personality and communication style.

Although the solution is cloud-based, a small footprint server does reside on premises to interface with the client's telephony systems and interact with the rest of the cloud-based technology stack. Moreover, pairing/matching data is provided to the client's existing routing architecture in under 200 milliseconds for each call via a secure network connection.

Since last year, the company now offers a no-cost Impact Analysis, whereby it analyzes historic call center meta data, comparing it to the company's database of more than a billion interactions, to develop agent score cards. This helps demonstrate personality-based routing variability based upon caller personality and the overall lift in target metrics at a group, site, or company level.

Cicero Inc.
Cicero Discovery
www.ciceroinc.com

Cicero Discovery enables companies to gather Desktop Activity Intelligence by monitoring, capturing, storing, and reporting activities and events across applications in an effort to measure and manage how people, processes, and technology work together. DAI allows companies to focus on areas for improvement in business processes, compliance, training, and application usage as well as support other initiatives such as capturing the customer journey at various touch points within an organization.

Companies use it to evaluate how people work, to determine where coaching and training are needed, to root out repetitive manual tasks, to determine application response times, and to find out which unauthorized applications may be running.

Cicero Discovery is invisible to the end user – it gathers data about what they do, what applications they run, how those applications are used, the health of their computer, and the type of data with which they are working. This data is collected and stored centrally and can be tracked in real time or via deferred processing.

Using Cicero Discovery is an iterative process allowing companies to configure, deploy, collect, and analyze data from desktops across the enterprise. Once in production, additional processes and objects can be identified for monitoring and reporting and easily deployed using Cicero Discovery Studio. In addition, Cicero Discovery can be used to validate changes to processes or desktop applications that have been implemented.

An example of using this iterative process would be the handling of an insurance claim. Using Cicero Discovery, an insurance company's business analysts could define the attributes (status, amount, claimant, adjuster, etc.) of a claim it wants to track and define one or more processes to follow as templates. These initial templates define how the business analysts expect the claim to be processed probably at high-level 3-4 steps. As the actual claim goes through the processes, Cicero Discovery collects key data about who worked on it, what attributes changed, etc., as well as which defined step(s) the claim was in during the process. This data can then be used to compare how the claims were actually processed, versus how the analysts believed they were supposed to be processed. If additional information is needed, they can define further steps in the processes, deploy the changes, and collect the data for additional analysis. Furthermore, the business analysts can make changes to their processes and use Cicero Discovery to validate their changes, and identify other areas for improvement.

Recent improvements include the ability to track business objects through multiple applications, multiple workstations, multiple users, and multiple interactions throughout their lifecycle as well as the ability to run without back-end database and support for 64-bit server.

Empirix
Empirix Conference Bridge Monitoring
www.empirix.com

When a company has a conference call, it is generally the wrong time to learn there is a problem with call quality. In fact, a poor conference call experience can result in delayed decision-making and productivity loss among dozens or more people within an organization.

This is why Empirix Conference Bridge Monitoring was invented. It's an active voice monitoring solution that verifies conference server availability and measures voice quality of participants on a bridge. The solution uses scheduled voice calls to the conferencing platform to verify system availability, performance, and uptime. It places test calls into the conference bridge server to verify system availability and measure uptime. Each transaction verifies that the conference leader can successfully open the bridge and that each participant can successfully enter the bridge.

Where standard tools monitor network data feeds for packet loss, jitter, etc., this Empirix solution approaches monitoring from the user's perspective. It tests exactly what the user is hearing during conference calls by evaluating voice clips as they play through conference bridges. Think of it as a MOS score for conferencing.

Some of the areas of focus for this new tool are determining if access numbers work, if conferences are bleeding together, and if callers are dropping off. The solution automatically sets up conference bridges of up to eight participants, dials into the conference, and plays audio clips. The solution captures the audio on the other side of the bridge and evaluates it for degradation using the industry-standard PESQ (Perceptual Evaluation of Speech Quality) algorithm. Dashboard alarms alert network management staff to irregularities with a KPI that may signal a quality problem.

KPIs include call pass/fail and length, time-to-connect to conference, and participant voice latency and delay.

The solution provides network operations staff with active, real-time performance alerts, and passive monitoring of network data. This combination enables them to respond to performance issues immediately and remediate their root causes. Using data collected through network probes, the Conference Bridge Monitoring solution provides a logical drill down that helps network operators pinpoint if a specific phone number, carrier, location, or conference bridge server is having a problem.

It can further work as a stand-alone solution or integrate with existing network management infrastructures. When you realize that companies conduct billions of dollars of business over conference bridges, you begin to see the important niche this product fills.

HP Autonomy
HP Qfiniti 10
www.autonomy.com

HP Qfiniti 10 is HP's Workforce Optimization suite of unified products designed to optimize the costs associated with people. The Qfiniti 10 product suite includes tools for workforce management, quality monitoring, liability recording, coaching and eLearning, performance management, surveying, and multichannel analytics. Benefits include improving operational efficiency, driving interaction effectiveness, providing improved customer service, and reducing the cost of ownership.

The product allows contact center supervisors to understand, measure, improve, and track performance while managing all contact center data through a centralized system. Call logging and intelligent archiving deliver full support for compliance and quality monitoring strategies. A wide range of metrics can be monitored from a single interface, such as customer satisfaction levels, first-call resolution, handle times, and effective scheduling.

The HP Qfiniti 10 omnichannel analytics module, HP Explore, leverages the HP IDOL platform that was built to enhance enterprise search and provide connectors to more than 500 different data repositories and more than 1,000 different file types. In essence, this is a technology that was built to extract meaning – and therefore value – from the explosion of all the unstructured data that enterprises must now manage. And the contact center, the front line of real-time customer care, is a great beneficiary of this now-searchable data.

HP Qfiniti 10 is one of the only products that allows enterprises to deploy a single WFO platform for all their compliance, quality, and workforce optimization needs regardless of the number of agents and or telephony architecture. Quite often, competitive solutions require disparate islands of technology, which can require increased expense in to maximize product potential.

Recent improvements include:
- full browser-based user interface utilizing HTML5 for all eight product modules;
- SIP trunk recording using the IETF SIPREC protocol;
- evaluation plans that optimize the quality assurance process;
- ICE bookmarks that automatically attach bookmarks to the recording, enabling a user to find specific segments of a recording, such as where compliance regulations require that a sales verification was presented to the caller;
- desktop analytics modules that capture user activity at the desktop to reveal how users interact with their desktop applications, providing managers with tools for measuring and reporting on user processes;
- release of Qfiniti Optimize Workflow and Guidance, which allows users to map user activity to workflows and tasks to identify knowledge gaps and training opportunities, improve the customer experience and operational efficiency while better managing IT resources and spending; and
- release of the Qfiniti integrated forecasting, planning and scheduling module that makes quick work of any scheduling and forecasting task; Qfiniti Workforce delivers a flexible what-if analysis tool for staff planning that allows managers to accurately model a wide variety of industries and customer behaviors in addition to anticipating employee absences.

RightAnswers Inc.
RightAnswers SmartService
www.rightanswers.com

RightAnswers SmartService is a unique combination of cloud-based software, services, content, and knowledge automation. It is specifically designed for support organizations, allowing them to manage and share knowledge through agent-assisted service as well as through web, mobile and e-mail self-service, with the ultimate goal of improving support experiences.

Version 8, released this year, focuses on expanding the use of knowledge throughout the organization and through different support channels. It enhances social, mobile, video and multi-language support and enables persona-based targeting to quickly find solutions geared to specific audiences.

The company also introduced a video creation tool that lets agents create videos on-the-fly as they are working with customers and deliver them as solutions, improving customer engagement. Videos are also added to an indexed knowledgebase for subsequent access.

To encourage engagement with knowledge, the company added gamification aspects through real-time feedback to all knowledge contributors, and introduced a knowledge quality tool to manage information being added to the knowledgebase.

Moreover, the new federated knowledge cloud enriches the knowledgebase by incorporating solutions from public third-party websites, pulling relevant solutions into the results offered to those searching. More importantly, RightAnswers manages the analytics, feedback, and comments pertaining to these solutions so you can track and validate the use of third-party knowledge. Also enriching the knowledgebase is its Intelligent Knowledge Builder, which detects gaps in knowledge, based on agent and customer queries, and begins to fill those gaps by automatically creating new knowledge entries that agents are prompted to complete.

New dashboards, more than 40 standard reports and an unlimited number of custom reports, provide insight into the knowledge and knowledgebase and how to make them more effective.

Another innovative aspect of RightAnswers is its Knowledge as a Service offering, which provides services including knowledge review, authoring and maintenance, knowledge analysis and improvement, and a program that provides clients with ongoing training and mentoring to help them achieve superior results.

The company also provides social collaboration tools that enable anyone who touches the knowledge to provide feedback and comments, enhancing the knowledge in real time. Solutions crowdsourced by customers can also be added to the knowledgebase as searchable solutions. Customer comments and feedback determine the knowledge ranking and help agents and customers find the most useful answer quickly. Finally, the company's Intelligent Knowledge Builder is patented knowledge automation technology that finds gaps in the knowledgebase, based on unsuccessful searches, and begins to fill the gaps by prompting the creation of new articles.

Confirmit

Confirmit Horizons Version 18

www.confirmit.com

Managing the massive amounts of financial, customer, employee, and market data available is becoming one of the biggest challenges facing businesses today. Confirmit Horizons Version 18 introduces Confirmit SmartHub to resolve this business pain and empower organizations to make informed decisions for improving business processes and enhancing customer experience. Companies can now capture all interactions on all channels, map these across multiple data sources, and immediately initiate tactical and strategic actions to drive business performance improvements, all in an end-to-end closed-loop process.

A series of significant innovations in this latest release of Horizons marks Confirmit's determination to enable organizations to gain maximum value from all data sources, delivering richer business insights to empower smarter decision making and enable faster reactions to changing business needs.

Confirmit can be used as an on-premises or as a cloud-based solution.

Version 18 introduces Confirmit SmartHub, a customer engagement hub that enables businesses to capture, analyze, and respond to customer and market feedback across multiple channels and sources in real time. It leverages the new column store feature of the latest release of Microsoft SQL Server, which allows more intelligent management of the masses of data collected so that query performance can be improved. SmartHub sits at the heart of Confirmit Horizons V18, delivering the data management, modeling and mapping services that support the other new modules introduced in this release: Confirmit Instant Analytics, Confirmit Active Dashboards, and Confirmit Action Management.

Instant Analytics is a new analysis module that provides immediate, actionable insights with no setup or training. In addition, the new Active Dashboards module provides enhanced data visualization to enable stakeholders to analyze information and track trends immediately on a variety of devices. Horizons V18 also adds a new Action Management module to ensure businesses can automatically trigger actions, based on up-to-date customer, employee, or market information. Cases can be managed through to completion to ensure businesses drive change and close the loop on tactical and strategic actions.

Confirmit Horizons V18 delivers a very flexible solution to capture all the different voices from your customers, your competitors, and the market, much more power in the analytics you can perform and many more tools for driving action as a result of the insight you gain.

Recent improvements include:

Richer insights delivered by Confirmit SmartHub

- Listen across all preferred channels with new optimized support for Windows Phone 8 and Firefox OS on mobile devices, plus support for much larger telephony interviewing operations.
- Deliver a more engaging respondent experience with new support for photos and images in online surveys, and new push and continuous GPS tracking in offline surveys through SODA 3.0.
- Capture and map all insights in one central hub, Confirmit SmartHub, which integrates different data sources and intelligently maps feedback data with other business data.

Smarter decisions enabled by Active Dashboards and Reportal

- Design and manage surveys easily by using full text search across templates and surveys, and keep a full audit trail of changes in survey authoring.
- Interpret information easily using powerful dashboards created by a new wizard-based dashboard and a new chart engine for enhanced visualizations.
- Deliver relevant and immediate insight for all stakeholders on all devices and view performance and trends against Key Performance Indicators.

Faster reactions driven by Instant Analytics and Action Management

- Instantly analyze feedback to provide early insights into survey performance.
- Automate case creation based on real-time alerts and configure workflows and rules that reflect business processes.
- Easily close the loop by simply assigning cases, tracking progress, and escalating as needed.

Astute Solutions
Astute SRM (Social Relationship Management)
www.astutesolutions.com

Astute SRM enables you to easily track social media conversations, configure analysis, and engage consumers in a number of ways.

The cloud-based solution uses both API integrations and web crawlers to search more than 150 million social networks, blogs, news sites, or general websites in real time for relevant content about your company or brand. Astute SRM then analyzes this content by breaking down the conversation by sentiment, geographic location, social media source, author information, emotion, and several other customizable metrics to allow the user to monitor, generate reports, or engage when appropriate.

Astute SRM was early to use natural language processing with social to identify sentiment analysis. NLP has the ability to look at phrases and sentences as a whole to correctly identify the true sentiment of a social conversation or post. An example is telling the difference between "Your company is the bomb!" and "I want to bomb your company."

Astute SRM is completely integrated with Astute's CRM solution, ePowerCenter, where NLP is also used. This creates a rare solution, which seamlessly integrates social to the CRM system.

Astute Solutions has stayed on the leading edge of technology, building WebRTC into the solution so web visitors can connect with the brand or company through a browser-to-browser conversation. Moreover it was an early innovator in the mobile space.

Another area of differentiation is bundling more value into the base package – meaning customers don't have to worry about as many nickel and dime charges.

In addition the solution offers custom metrics, competitor tracking, automated reporting, topics analysis, and the ability to set up alerts/routing for critical conversations or mentions.

Recent improvements include:

- Private Messaging through Facebook – Users can resolve customer inquiries within Facebook private messaging, directly through Astute SRM. The ability to view, and respond to, private messaging through the SRM tool further streamlines the customer service process.
- Grammar Tree Parsing – This feature identifies key elements of social conversations. Astute SRM's Grammar Tree Parsing technology cuts through the clutter of social conversations by breaking down sentence structures and identifying the relevant parts of speech and phrases that apply to users' key search terms. The parsing technology can sift through captured social media posts to help brands determine when a customer is ready to make a purchase or is losing brand loyalty.
- Social Profile Tracking – This feature gives users the ability to capture and display historical data between brands and social profiles. It enables users to view an author's history with a number of different brands.
- Modification Review – Users can review brand responses before they are posted to social channels as well as review deleted brand interactions to assess their relevance.

TantaComm
Capture
www.TantaComm.com

TantaComm Capture is a versatile interaction recording tool that provides robust functionality with the ability to scale for both large and small operations. This interaction recording solution reliably records both audio and screen interactions for compliance and quality management. It further helps companies securely and easily manage storage, search, retrieval, and playback of the recorded interactions.

The platform allows businesses to analyze customer interactions. That enables them to optimize service levels, deliver high-quality customer experiences, improve operational excellence, mitigate risk (compliance, etc.), and increase customer insight and satisfaction.

Moreover, the solution is designed to boost sales performance and coaching capabilities, and meticulous care has been taken to ensure all calls get recorded. For example, there are fail safes and alerts, which have led to reliability rates as high as 99.98 percent, according to the company. Interestingly, it seems software upgrade conflicts are a main factor in why calls aren't recorded properly.

TantaComm offers both on-premises and cloud-based solutions.

Within the application, there is an hourly reconciliation report available to system administrators to view as needed. This report can be segmented based on time of day, date, client, program, workgroup, agent, and site. The UI provides the ability to establish minimum reconciliation thresholds at each layer of metadata described above. Proactive alerts are generated whenever conditions do not meet that minimum reliability threshold.

By building deep logging and alerting, TantaComm gets complete visibility to diverse environments and deployments. With continuous visibility and review of these alerts, TantaComm has enhanced its product over the years to effectively handle and record interactions across a myriad of telephony platforms, protocols, and use cases.

Additionally, embedded watermarking ensures that TantaComm clients know that the recording is foundational evidence that they will be able to prove that the recording wasn't tampered with at any stage of the data being saved.

Recently TantaComm Capture has been updated with the ability to reconcile events coming from Notify and Command Center to programs, workgroups, users, etc., at a client site. This data, along with the quantifiable reliability data, is stored in the database for historical reference.

Votacall
Votacall Viper
www.votacall.com

As great as VoIP can be, it often can cause quality problems due to configuration issues, denial of service or port attacks, or even an ISP-related problem.

Votacall introduced Votacall Viper to provide a better level of VoIP support through a cost-effective credit-card-sized node, which sits on the customer network monitoring the customer vLAN. It continuously captures, stores, and dumps four hours of real-time call data for review. Now, when a customer opens a support ticket and references a dropped call, you can see if there was a disconnect message on the far end indicating the other party disconnected, or if packet loss and jitter were the root causes.

This access to call data allows for ownership of the root cause of the problem to be assigned and swift action to be carried out. The company has found that customers simply want definitive answers, accountability, and follow-through based on data with minimal involvement in the process. Votacall Viper allows a company to deliver superior support and an enhanced customer experience as a result.

Most standard VoIP tools monitor and display data up to the network edge. Once a call leaves the customer site and hits the public Internet, providers lose visibility. Viper provides simple to review data for both ends of a call and therefore allows Votacall to truly support and promote call quality.

In addition, if audio is enabled and permission is granted, Votacall Viper can become a call recording device.

Calabrio
Calabrio ONE
www.calabrio.com

Calabrio ONE is a comprehensive suite of contact center workforce optimization software that's easy to implement, use, and maintain. It includes call recording, quality assurance, workforce management, bundled analytics, and performance-based dashboards and reporting. Calabrio ONE provides product bundles and add-ons that make it easy for customers to begin with the right set of applications and features for their business today, then builds on their success with new applications and features as their businesses mature and their needs evolve. The solution is built on a modern Web 2.0-based architecture that allows the contact center to integrate new applications easily, as well as personalize and optimize the desktop toolset for each user – agents, supervisors, managers, knowledge workers, and executives. It includes Calabrio Analytics, a completely bundled solution that includes desktop, text, and speech.

Calabrio servers and software reside at the hosted location along with the PBX, ACD, or SBC.

Furthermore, the company provides a dynamic, widget-based user interface that offers key personalization for users. Agents and supervisors alike can have the data they need most front and center.

Another area of differentiation is a simpler interface allowing companies to apply analytics to unstructured voice and data. A key advantage of Calabrio call recording is the ability for customers to choose the capture method or mix of methods to best suit the customer's business and technical requirements – whether it's a single center, a multi-site center, or home agents. One option, Gateway recording, provides a reliable option for capturing every call in even the most complex multi-gateway environments across the enterprise. Calabrio ONE supports robust 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.

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Erik Linask, *Group Editorial Director, TMC*

Social CRM Isn't an Option

Since the emergence of social media as a pseudo-legitimate form of communication (I say pseudo because of the varied, sometimes questionable, uses of such platforms, and also because of the injection of advertising in them), the issue for businesses has been how to effectively integrate the social channel into their existing customer contact technologies.

There are challenges, naturally, both technological as well as staffing and resource related but, as ISM president Barton Goldenberg recently explained, "How can you approach a client if all you have is transactional data from the CRM system, when you know there is social data out there that shows sentiment from your customers?"

He is spot on. Traditional CRM has worked well over the years, but it was based on data that was available at the time the CRM platforms were developed – they couldn't account for the explosion of social media and the volumes of data it would create that would need to be dissected and associated with other records. Now, with the volumes of data created in the socialsphere, businesses have a stream of data available to them that not only expresses sentiment, but also opens new marketing and sales opportunities, and allows more targeted interaction with customers, both on a one-to-one and one-to-many basis.

"I have been frustrated over the past three years by the slow uptake of social CRM, which I define simply as the integration of CRM and social," Goldenberg says. "Yes, some have moved along that path – feeding social pieces into systems – but the industry isn't coming along."

So, what's keeping the industry from progressing into a social-first world?

1. User generated content can be hard to tie back to real customers or prospects, especially in anonymous social interactions. This is one reason private social communities are critical to social CRM, as they require registration, which can be tied to an identity, making insight even more valuable. But, even anonymous insights are valuable in their own right, allowing aggregate data collection and analysis, as well as direct interaction via social interaction (which is also a medium already accepted and used by the individual, increasing chances for a successful interaction).
2. Successful businesses often are reticent to rock the boat and are extremely serious about what's said about them. They tend to be skeptical about embracing social due to the perception that it is likely to be harmful to the brand. The simple answer here is that people are going to talk – regardless of whether the brand is actively engaged or not, so the best practice is to be leading the charge, not following it.
3. Then, there is the challenge of deciphering the intent of social commentary – Goldenberg calls it "librarian science" and notes that, while some of the social listening engines are good, they aren't perfect.
4. And of course, there's the integration challenge, which includes not only listening and filtering, but also putting it into a usable format within your CRM system that allows not only recordkeeping, but also reciprocal response to the individual. The challenge is a combination of many different social sites and platforms being used, but also the fact that the industry hasn't embraced standards for social activity and integration.

These challenges notwithstanding, there are plenty of businesses that have embraced social media successfully, including integration into their CRM systems. Certainly, businesses can manage without social, but for how long? As the millennial generation moves into the workforce, social interactions are likely to continue to grow, but the platforms on which those interactions take place are also likely to multiply, and the smart business exec will have already implemented appropriate technology, strategy, and personnel.

"Nobody can doubt the significance of social media, and using social insight inside CRM makes you a whole lot smarter about what you sell and how you sell it," says Goldenberg. "You use the social data to engage the customer in ways that make sense."

Support with a Smile

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Don't settle for bad impressions. Take your contact center to the cloud at: www.incontact.com/premises-vs-cloud.

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