

# Call Center Times

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**Social Media's Transformation of the Business Landscape – A College Kid's Perspective** by Jimin Zheng, Centergistic Solutions

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**12th Annual Call Center Week - June 13-17, 2011**

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# HERE ARE THE LOGOS OF THE LEADING PROVIDERS OF CALL CENTER PRODUCTS AND SERVICES...CLICK ON LOGO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH COMPANY!





# RANTS & RAVES!

## Randomly Timed Musings

### PR for Internal Communications - Who's Your Information Gatekeeper?

By Kathleen M. Peterson

Chief Vision Officer, PowerHouse Consulting, Inc.

Public Relations (PR) budgets are found in nearly every major business on the planet. PR folks are often aligned to the legal and executive branches (perhaps “siloeed” is a better term). Marketing also gets a piece of this from time to time, but only if there is a message the PR folks determine is relevant to their activities. In my view, Marketing has traditionally been a form of “push” communication - who we are, what we're doing, promises made, etc. While PR is responsible for managing external communications from both a “push” and “pull” position, PR announces and “spins” when necessary; they manage crisis communications and generally are the “brand” spokespeople when the big “things” hit. So be it.

The question that has been haunting me lately is ... *If there are budget dollars allocated to external communications, what kind of budget is allocated to INTERNAL communications?* Having asked this question of audiences many times, the response I generally receive is a kind of hushed giggle. While I understand that this is a funny question, it happens to be “uncomfortable” funny and a question that we'd best be paying attention to if the enterprise is serious about Customer Experience alignment to strategy, brand, revenue, market share, and profitability.

I have written extensively on the topic of information

management. Yet it remains in my “operational” view as the single most confused, neglected, and risky arena in business today. Since “information” is a huge topic, I found a whittled-down definition at [www.businessdictionary.com](http://www.businessdictionary.com)

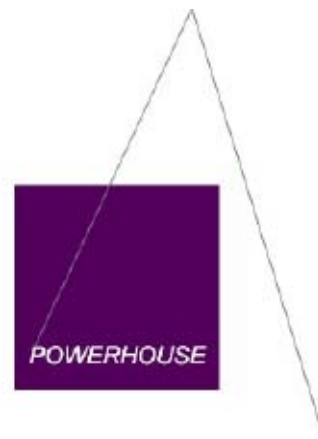
“Information is data that (1) has been verified to be accurate and timely, (2) is specific and organized for a purpose, (3) is presented within a context that gives it meaning and relevance, and (4) that can lead to an increase in understanding and decrease in uncertainty. The value of information lies solely in its ability to **affect** a behavior, **decision**, or **outcome**. A piece of information is considered valueless if, after receiving it, things remain unchanged.”

*If this definition were to be used as a scorecard for your Contact Center on INTERNAL communications, how would you fair? Sadly many would fail. So I thought I might write a little story around this definition.*

#### Data that has been verified to be accurate and timely

The Contact Center is a very “information needy” environment. Front line staff are those most likely to have need of accurate and timely “data” to perform well. The challenge is often one of both “push” and “pull.” On the “push” side, in many organizations anyone with a computer (that means pretty much everyone) has the ability to “push” information to the Contact Center. This may be considered a good thing by some. However, when no “information gatekeeper” is in place to assess content for accuracy and timeliness, the risk is that the front line is overwhelmed with information, often conflicting, and coming from too many sources.

For the purposes of this story, we'll use a new product



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## Randomly Timed Musings

launch as an example. Let's say that your front line receives this information from a caller ... "I'm calling about the new \_\_\_ (discount, bag, package, shoes, rates). I received an email ..." *What if your front line has no idea what the caller is talking about?* To this day I have witnessed front line agents asking the caller to forward the offer to them so they can see it! What an act of desperation! The front line is blind sighted by the lack of accurate and timely information. They are often made to feel dumb, abandoned, and unable to execute their role in delivering on the Customer Experience. This is not because the front line is inept, but because there is no information management process. The INTERNAL PR program has failed. **A process must be in place to align all touch points in order for the front line to deliver.** The gatekeeper role is the "go to" contact for others in the enterprise to "push" necessary information to the frontline. Without this role, pandemonium takes place and failures occur. **Who is your information gatekeeper?**

### Is specific and organized for a purpose

See number one! In order for information to be relevant and actionable for the benefit of the Customer Experience, it is best if it is specific. The term "specific" answers the question of "what exactly is the recipient supposed TO DO with the information? *Do standards exist for how information should be stated and organized?* If everything that flows to the front line is free form and presented in "hey, guess what?" fashion, it is unlikely that appropriate actions will follow.

*What are your standards for the organization and presentation of information to the front line?* The information gatekeeper plays a key role in reviewing and

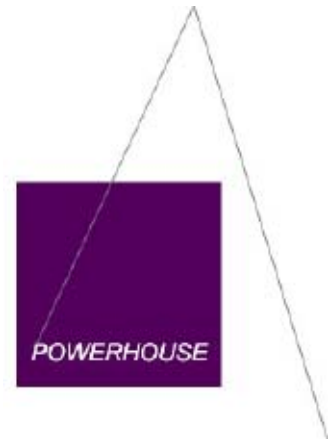
aligning information that may offer greater "intelligence" than simply presenting random information. In some of the more advanced and sophisticated operations, the Contact Center information gatekeeper (or another suitable title) is charged with reviewing every *communication* sent to customers, prospects, etc. Continuing with our first example ... if an offer is being sent to customers by whatever means, the information gatekeeper reviews, comments, and suggests if the content strikes as confusing or likely to cause contacts to flow to the front line. The gatekeeper may choose to confirm that all action steps have been tested. Think of a promotion code offered via email that DOESN'T WORK when the customer enters it on the website. The next step is to CALL or EMAIL ... guess who ... Customer Service! If the front line has no idea what is being referenced, well, see number one!

If a gatekeeper role exists (e.g., manager or member of the workforce management team), they may be in possession of information relevant to the *timing* of initiatives. Perhaps they can share with Marketing the timing of the promotion to be the same as a system upgrade or promotions from other entities. This may influence the scheduling of events to maximize return and the best utilization of resources.

**Who is your information gatekeeper?**

### Is presented within a context that gives it meaning and relevance

Context is everything when it comes to determining relevance of information. The ideal situation is that the front line has strong association to providing a branded experience, one that delivers on Customer Experience promises. Communications of all sorts become more relevant when contextualized as part of a bigger picture. .



# RANTS & RAVES!

## Randomly Timed Musings

There seems to be a tendency to push relevance to performance measurement in Contact Centers.

Assume that the front line has received information regarding our previously stated example ... there is a special promotion and they will be measured on how many conversions or sales they make. This makes the context extremely narrow and may lead to misrepresentation and a potential derailment of the true purpose of the promotion. No product promotion is about an individual. It is about serving the marketplace, enhancing the Customer Experience, and deepening the relationship with the brand. I often see programs delivered in the context of individual performance that do not generate long term behaviors. If you demand that the front line makes 10 conversions, 10 sales, etc., the thing to watch is whether you ever get to 11. If the answer is no, you have influenced temporary behaviors. These are related solely to individual performance rather than the nurturing, through context and relevance, the development of Customer Experience “ambassadors.” This context must be defined within the Contact Center and applied and adopted consistently. ***Who is your information gatekeeper?***

### Can lead to an increase in understanding and decrease in uncertainty

The frontline will become the “force for good” by improved understanding of why the business is sharing information, why the business has multiple promotions, what the intent is, and how the processes will work. Uncertainty is the formula for errors and rework. When the front line simply doesn’t know - promotion code example - their choice of behaviors are very limited. They may ask the caller to send them the information they received; this is really only a way to make the enterprise look dumb. Or the front line may

make up an answer ... “Sorry, that was cancelled” ... now the customer looks dumb. Perhaps they will spend 45 minutes with the customer trying to figure out how to process the promise without benefit of the promotion code (Just give them the darn thing!) There is no really good outcome when information is lacking or haphazardly presented.

Relevant and actionable information in today’s marketplace is critical; it is the responsibility of the enterprise to facilitate such practices. This means everyone. I have become weary of Contact Center leaders complaining that “Marketing never tells us anything.” *If you KNOW this, why aren’t you ASKING?* If the Contact Center information needs have become *invisible* to the enterprise, it is not a good practice to sit and wait for it to change. Perhaps a better solution is to designate an information gatekeeper role. The gatekeeper proactively seeks information and provides formats, routing, and support to those cross-functional units depending on the Contact Center to fulfill the promises and promotions. ***Who is your information gatekeeper?***

Contextualize the need for a gatekeeper role in terms of an internal Public Relations budget request. *What have you got to lose?*

All the best,  
Kathleen

*(#48, PR for Internal Communications - Who’s Your Information Gatekeeper, May 2011)*

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\*Highlights indicate added and/or corrected data.

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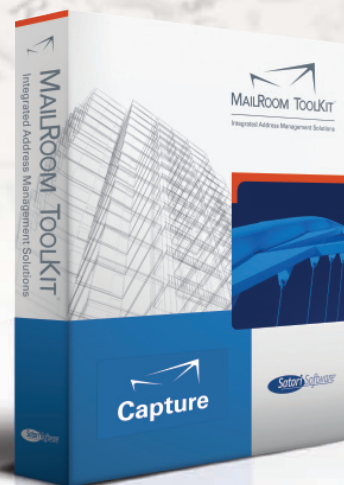
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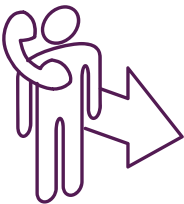
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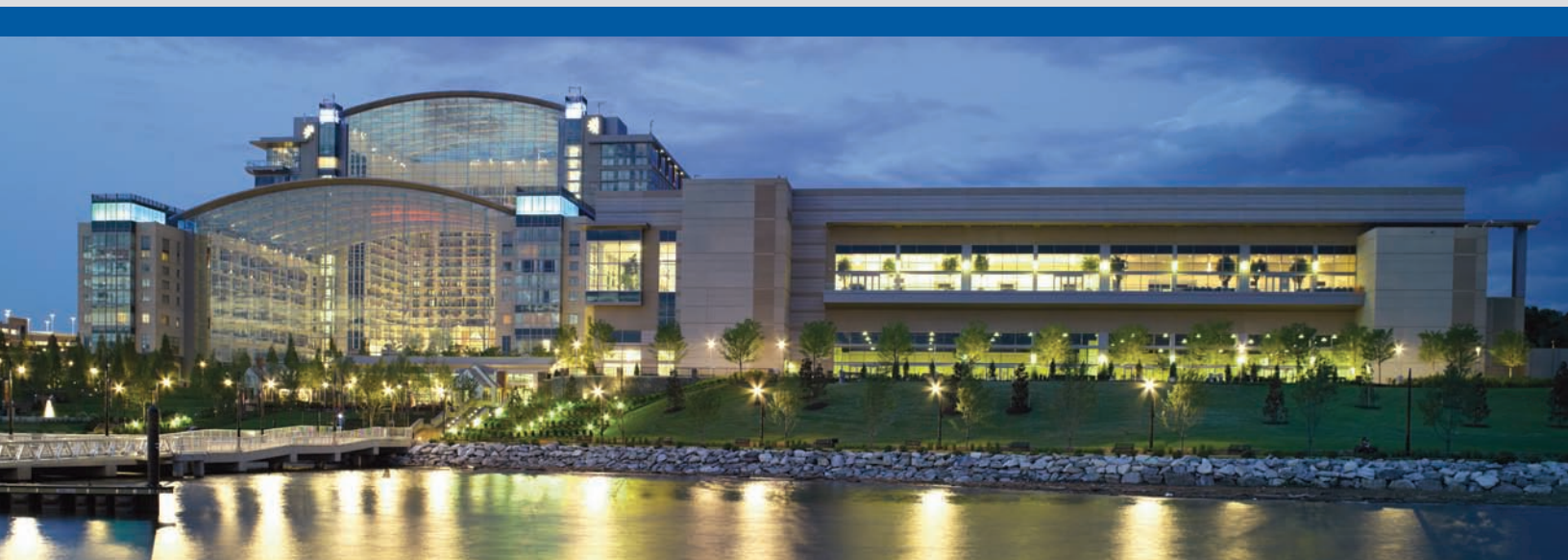
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# Call Center Times

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