

Call Center Times

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Best Practices and Technology for Small Contact Centers

Introduction

You might forgive managers of smaller contact centers for feeling a little slighted these days. They are seeing an explosion of exciting new technologies and applications all around them, from sophisticated workforce management software that can accurately forecast agent requirements down to 15 minute intervals to amazing speech and data analytics tools that can quickly scan thousands of interactions searching for the precious few that can shine a light on the root causes of customer disaffection or uncover valuable information nuggets that lead to innovative marketing campaigns. But none of this matters to smaller contact centers with modest capital investment budgets and small hard-pressed IT resources.

There are many reasons why contact centers of all sizes have not shared equally in the bounty. The major factor is that smaller operations simply don't have the high six and even seven-figure capital budgets to invest in all the hot new technologies. As a result, they don't always get a lot of attention from the top vendors. The good news is that is changing. Innovative technology companies like SER Solutions have launched new solutions designed and priced to meet the needs of small to mid-sized contact centers.

We will get to this in more detail, but first it is important to explain the important role of small contact centers and explore some of the special challenges and opportunities confronting the sector. This paper will also provide some practical ideas managers of smaller contact centers can take to make sure that their performance is as good as or better than their peers.

Importance of small contact centers

Employment in giant contact centers is stable or even declining, due to business consolidations, self-service, and outsourcing. On the other hand, small to mid-size contact centers, defined as fewer than 150 agents, are thriving. At The PELORUS Group, we estimate that 94 percent of U.S. contact centers have 150 or fewer agents. These small to mid-size contact centers employ nearly half of all agents.

Contact Centers and Agents by Agent Size
USA (2006)

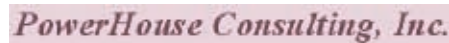
| Number of agents: | Contact Centers: | | Agents: | |
|-------------------|------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Value | Percent | Value | Percent |
| 150 or fewer | 62040 | 94% | 1503000 | 48% |
| 151 or greater | 3060 | 6% | 1716000 | 52% |
| Totals: | 66000 | 100% | 3300000 | 100% |

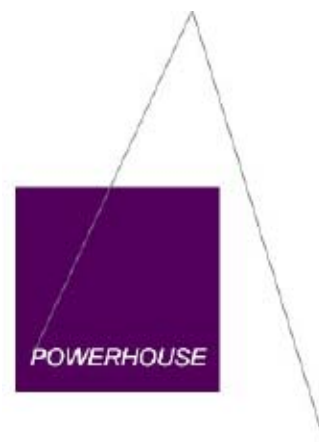
Source: The PELORUS Group

If these numbers seem surprising, we need only reflect on the composition of U.S. business establishments. In fact, 86 percent of U.S. employment locations have fewer than 500 employees. Small business is the growth engine of the U.S. economy. From 2003 - 2004 businesses with 500 or fewer employees added 1.6 million new jobs. Businesses with 500 or more employees lost 181,122 jobs.



WE ARE NOT DROPPING NAMES...WE ARE JUST THANKFUL FOR THE COMMITMENT OF THESE COMPANIES FOR ONE MORE YEAR!





RANTS & RAVES!

Randomly Timed Musings

Brand and Culture - A Powerful Union

By Kathleen M. Peterson
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Brand is about “meaning not marketing,” says Tom Peters. *What does brand mean in your company? Is it about quality products, speedy delivery, accurate orders? Or does it mean slogans, spin, packaging, advertising?* Brand may mean any or all of these things. These elements of brand represent the external view of a company. When brand begins to involve the customer, the brand deepens. But when it begins to involve all elements of the enterprise - from employees to processes, procedures, collaboration, and even the environment - then it is *culture*.

Many organizations have abandoned the term culture. However, I have had some recent experiences that remind me that culture is a player in fueling that internal furnace of Brand Energy™. I had a conversation with a retired executive (“persuaded” to leave his position - been there too long - earned too

much - and “this is the *last time* we will make this kind of retirement plan offer”) from a major corporation. We were discussing the evolution of brand as an element of employee experience, cross-functional collaboration, leadership, and overall enthusiasm for the job and the company. He paused, with a sort of nostalgic sigh said, “Yup ... we used to call that culture.”

And so it was. *How strong can the brand be in the market without aligning it to your culture?* I believe that the brand weakens - even though the product may be strong - if the customer’s interactions with the company are with people that are dissatisfied, poorly managed, minimally trained, underappreciated, and apt to leave the company. The experience will not match the brand. You risk customer defection - *loss of market share and lower revenue*. Nice move.

Today in the lust to cut costs, we see leaders focusing on a culture of budget. These people are not real leaders; they are what one woman called “evil financial overlords.” This leads to what borders on employee and customer *neglect and abuse* in some organizations. I received a

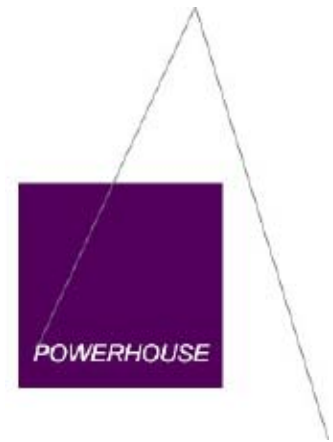
phone call yesterday from a woman asking what opportunities I might know of for an experienced Call Center manager; her company was taking actions that were damaging to the employees, the customers, and the brand. The woman’s explanation was that the executives and the board had not left their offices for six months. They had no clue that their isolated, budget-only decisions impacted both their people and their customers. This woman’s personal brand is *at risk* and she is looking to take her talent elsewhere. The risk here is defection of talent that leads to loss of experience, higher costs to replace and develop, potential poaching of other talent by the departed, and discomfort for those left behind. Nice move.

I recently discovered a company (and it seems I am a bit late to this party) that has a FANTASTIC merger of brand and culture - Zappos.com. They say they are a “service company that sells shoes.” After hearing Alfred Lin, Zappos’ COO, speak at the 2008 NCOF conference I was blown away. I figured that I had to experience buying something from them - and really, what woman doesn’t need another pair of shoes? So onto the website I



RANTS & RAVES!

Randomly Timed Musings



went. I found a truly cool pair of Mephisto sandals (the website told me that there were only three pairs left in my size), ordered quickly, and received free shipping. Shipping at Zappos.com is ALWAYS FREE (both ways) and you can return the purchase (for any reason) within a generous 365-day window. The site promised a three-four day delivery. Well, imagine my surprise when THE NEXT DAY my shoes were delivered! I was BLOWN away, delighted, and the shoes are genuinely cool.

At the conference every attendee (and there were at least 1000) received a book from Zappos.com called "Culture." It was the 2007 edition - the sixth or seventh such book. In the book, the CEO describes the culture of Zappos.com quite simply: "We want to WOW everyone we come in contact with - not just customers, co-workers, partners, suppliers - but everyone." The book is a collection of testimonials by staff from ALL departments (Legal, Finance, HR, Call Center, Warehouse, Executives, Everyone!) writing on the culture at Zappos.com. These folks are happy to go to work every day.

What about the culture of your

organization/operation? What would such a book be like in your company? I have seen companies that are afraid to conduct an employee satisfaction survey because if they know how dissatisfied the staff really is, they may actually have to do something about it. Ignorance is bliss I guess.

If you have a brand but no culture, you can close the gap and offer richer experiences for your customers and for your people - even for the CFO and all the other executives that are on the hook for financial performance. The challenge is *change*; cultures are there by design or default. To alter a default culture may seem overwhelming, so just start small. You can begin by simply borrowing one value from Zappos.com - kindness. Imagine this 800 million dollar company (with projections to reach one billion in sales for 2008) embracing kindness as a core value. *Does that cost too much?*

Just for the record, the Great Place to Work Institute (manages Fortune's Top 100 Places to Work Annual Edition), has found that the "Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For" financial performance surpassed that of the average

public company performance by a landslide.

So take some time to explore the relationship between your brand and your culture. Culture is the internal furnace that energizes the brand. Brand Energy Power™ is everyone's job. Try building a culture around that!



Small business succeeds because of its vitality, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes our economy. While there are a lot of challenges in running a small to mid-size organization, there are also advantages. One of these is greater customer intimacy. Small businesses grew to become bigger businesses because they took care of their customers. For many businesses, the person on the phone may be the primary or even the only human contact customers have with the firm. These individuals are in a unique position to shape customer perceptions and thereby influence customer retention. Satisfied, or more accurately, **delighted** customers are the best advertising there is. One thing competitors cannot match is the quality of customer care. Properly managed and supported, the contact center can become a major strategic advantage over larger more powerful competitors.

The converse of poor customer care can spell disaster for even the largest companies. Where once it was well understood that a highly dissatisfied customer would tell an average of nine others; now, with tens of millions of blogs and social networking sites, unhappy customers can get the word out to thousands of people within hours.

You do have a contact center – probably several

Our table showed that there are about 66,000 “formal” contact centers in the USA. That’s a big number but it still substantially undercounts the actual number of contact centers. The operative term is “formal.” In fact, we can reasonably assume that nearly every enterprise of 50 or more employees has a contact center – possibly several.

If your company has dedicated staff that does any of the following, you have a contact center:

- *Take orders by phone or email*
- *Handle complaints*
- *Make sales calls to set appointments*
- *Collect overdue accounts*
- *Receive large volumes of customer emails*
- *Provide a customer help desk*
- *Have an inside sales department*
- *Conduct promotional campaigns*

A contact center is any group of individuals that spends a large proportion of their time answering or placing external calls. Examples could include order takers, help desks, sales support teams, accounts receivable clerks, purchasing agents, service advisors, reservationists, and admissions clerks.

Channeling customer queries to a dedicated team of call-handling professionals has many benefits to the organization;



- *Goals are aligned with broader corporate objectives.*
- *Queries are handled courteously, consistently, and accurately.*
- *The process is continuously measured, evaluated, and reported.*
- *A monitoring process is in place to assure compliance with laws and regulations.*
- *Operating costs are identified, budgeted, and controlled.*
- *Revenues grow via higher levels of customer retention and/or direct sales.*
- *Most importantly, customers are treated with the highest standards of care reasonably achievable by the organization.*

Special Challenges of Smaller Contact Centers

All contact centers regardless of size have the same basic needs to drive customer satisfaction, grow revenues, control costs and capture and convey valuable market intelligence. While under-150 agent contact centers have the same missions, there are some significant challenges.

Hard to maintain service levels

Calling patterns in smaller contact centers tend to exhibit greater variation than in very large contact centers. Sharp spurts can be followed by periods of relative inactivity. This complicates the manager's ability to develop work schedules that are both cost-effective and maintain desired service levels.

Little room for experts

Agents can be expected to handle multiple situations, like taking orders, tracking deliveries, answering billing questions, addressing quality issues, and even providing basic technical assistance. When agents have multiple tasks, handle time will increase. Contact center applications like customer relationship management and interactive voice response can help cut handle time without compromising service quality.

Limited information technology (IT) support

A large enterprise will have a substantial staff of information technology (IT) professionals. A smaller organization may have a handful of people whose primary interest is in supporting production, inventory control, order management, and accounting. In many cases there may not be an IT department at all. The organization will contract with a third-party to handle its needs. In the former case, the idea of supporting sophisticated contact center applications with which they have had little prior experience is not always welcome. In the latter case, every call to the outside company rings the cash register to the tune of at least \$200.

The IT support issue is exacerbated when the contact center chooses point solutions, each with their own integration and database management issues, service contracts, and uncoordinated software release schedules. Fortunately, there are suite-based solutions available today in which each application is pre-integrated with the ACD and each other. Databases are entered only once and the entire suite is centrally administered.

Absenteeism and adherence deviations have outsize impact on service levels

Absenteeism and schedule deviations can wreak havoc on smaller centers' service levels and agent morale. Jeff Theiler, call center manager for Hancock Bank put it

Best Practices and Technology for Small Contact Centers



this way, "When you're in a smaller call center, if you lose two or three people, you're just hammered." That's easy to understand. In a call center of 30 agents, if three go to lunch or take breaks at the same time occupancy for that time period falls by 10% and service levels deteriorate.

Insufficient time for coaching agent evaluations

Evaluating, coaching, and developing agents is the most important part of the supervisor's job. Smaller contact centers that rely on manual systems could relieve supervisors of time wasting activities by investing in modern quality monitoring systems. Take evaluations for example. In order to perform just one monthly evaluation per agent a supervisor will typically live monitor for at least 35 minutes to find just one call worthy of evaluation. Even a modest sample for evaluation purposes would require five calls. That's 5 x 35 or 2.9 hours per agent per month. If the contact center has 30 agents total monitoring time (not including the time it takes to complete the evaluation form), this would amount to 87 hours. At an average supervisor cost of \$35/hour, the total time **just listening** comes to over \$3,000 per month! Then, what do you do with the completed evaluation forms? Paper forms are not easily retrievable for developing the pattern analysis needed to identify training and coaching skills.

Assuring compliance with laws and regulations

There are many laws and regulations contact centers need to comply with. A short list includes the:

- *Telemarketing and Consumer Fraud and Abuse Prevention Act*
- *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)*
- *Fair Debt Collection Practices Act*
- *Family and Medical Leave Act*
- *State single party and two-party consent statutes*
- *Payment card industry compliance standards*

For smaller firms, simply knowing the rules can be a challenge. They may not have access to attorneys that specialize in FCC and fraud prevention matters. Small companies may be exempt from some of these regulations but is very important to have the facts so they can make this determination. Whether or not your company is legally required to comply, it is *always* good practice to get caller prior permission to record calls. You also need to tightly control access to sensitive customer data, and treat every caller – even those that are way behind on payments – with courtesy and respect. Managers are encouraged to join a professional association to keep abreast of regulatory developments.

Another important consideration is liability. Disputes can often arise between what agents say and what customers thought they heard. Consider insurance claims reported by phone, delivery dates, negotiated prices, promises to pay, and the use of offensive language.

Retention is critical

Agent retention is a challenge in every contact center but especially in smaller contact centers. Large contact centers have other resources to pick up the slack and have already forecasted in some level of shrinkage. Shrinkage refers to unanticipated reductions in staff capacity due to weather, sickness, school closings,



network problems, sudden resignations, and other unforeseen events. Because there is often a higher spirit of camaraderie in smaller centers the loss of a popular agent can adversely impact morale as well as service levels. In smaller companies, customers get to know and like their agents, like favorite tellers at the local bank branch. This is an advantage smaller companies want to leverage. In massive contact centers customers may never speak with the same agent twice.

Overcoming the challenges

While smaller contact centers have their share of challenges they also have inherent advantages. These include;

- *Agents and supervisors get to know each other on a personal level*
- *The contact center is more closely looped into sales, marketing and other customer-facing functions*
- *Easier to gain access to subject matter experts*
- *More flexibility in arranging or rearranging schedules and assignments*

In light of these inherent advantages, there are many actions smaller contact centers can take to stand out against their peers, often at little or no additional cost.

Achieving service levels goals

Regarding service levels, the first priority is to establish attainable objectives. Small contact centers cannot afford the idle time to make sure that the "80/20" rule (80 percent of calls must be answered in 20 seconds) is consistently attained. A 70/30 objective during the busiest hours may be more realistic. You can boost service level by confining more calls to the IVR. In banks, it is not unusual for 80 percent of inbound calls to be properly handled through the IVR. For smaller contact centers, it is important that the IVR include a scripting tool so you can make changes to the IVR menu without having to call in professional programmers.

Quancor Marketing provides reliable, cost effective outbound and inbound telemarketing programs designed to generate above average results for its clients. The company operates an outbound contact center with 88 agents. At any given time they are running 30-40 campaigns. Quancor recently added IVR from SER Solutions. Marie Korn, co-owner of the company, remarked "The IVR is a very valuable feature to our company because of the way we are structured. A company calling in can enter an account code or press 1 for English, 2 for Spanish, etc. We use it for transferring calls after hours. You can program as simple or as complicated as you wish. The ENSERCLE product allows you to do that – and it is not complicated to build." Marie added "You don't need a programmer anymore for the IVR system. If a call center wants to create a quick IVR they can go in and create it themselves."

Some tips – always provide callers with the option of using self service – don't force them into it. Keep menu trees short – maximum of four choices. Web self-service is another option and, if available, it should be mentioned during the IVR greeting. Remember, the caller is looking for answers – not necessarily conversation. A well designed IVR is just as effective in building customer satisfaction as personal dialogue.

Most importantly, you need to staff the contact center to closely match traffic flow. Workforce management software is designed to consider the multidimensional problem of building schedules and forecasts in highly dynamic environments but is difficult to justify in smaller environments. More economic choices are to purchase

Best Practices and Technology for Small Contact Centers



off-the-shelf basic scheduling software and to use Excel spreadsheets to do the forecasting and scheduling internally. In any event, you need an ACD to collect and report the raw data.

Part of the scheduling process is to build work rules that help assure that call coverage follows call flow. For example, try to schedule lunch breaks during slow traffic hours and limit the number of agents that can be away from the phones at any one time. The same concept applies to training and coaching. Time these sessions on days and day-parts when calling activity is lightest.

Agent retention

While turnover is a fact of life, there are actions management can take to make the agent's job more satisfying and rewarding. In fact, smaller contact centers generally have higher agent retention rates than very large contact centers. An important advantage of smaller contact centers is greater management flexibility. They can adjust hours to help agents balance work and family responsibilities. Incentive compensation and contests don't require five levels of management approval. There are more options for creating career paths. For example, establishing a career ladder with a step-wise progression between agent and supervisor is a workable option. Titles can be "Team Leader" or "Senior Agent" or words to that effect. This individual – or individuals – can support the supervisor with training, coaching, evaluation, and reporting duties. This position also provides a relief valve for the supervisor when he or she cannot be at work.

Another major advantage of smaller organizations is greater viability within the enterprise. In large contact centers employees often leave because there is no where to progress within the organization. Hidden away in command centers or confined to their desks, agents do not have the opportunity to foster relationships with mentors outside the contact center. Managers should encourage agents to use idle time productively, by meeting with product managers and other subject matter experts. This way, they learn valuable information and gain exposure that could lead to advancement opportunities within the organization.

Investments in technology can also promote longer agent retention. Modern agent desktop software makes the job easier for the agent and more satisfying for customers. Intelligent screens with built-in business process routines, like processing credit card payments, automatically present workflows in a logical sequence. This helps assure accuracy, reduces handle time, and relieves agents from the need to open multiple applications or enter the same information repetitively.

Managing absenteeism

Large contact centers factor in some value for shrinkage in their workforce planning models. Similar to overbooking at an airline, the concept is to schedule extra people to account for the number you can reasonably expect to be absent on any given day or be away from the phone for scheduled activities. Small contact centers depend on people showing up for work. However, there will always be absences. In a 200 agent contact center one absence means a drop off in capacity of 0.5%. In a ten-agent contact center, that's a 10% drop and can wreak havoc with service levels and customer satisfaction.



Calling on remote agents to cover for absentees or to handle call spikes is a realistic option if you have the infrastructure to securely distribute calls and caller data over the Internet. Remote agents must be able to instantaneously view the same desktop screens used at the central operation. Systems like ENSERCLE™ from SER Solutions have that capability. Home workers are more likely to be available on short notice and do not have to incur the expense of traveling to a central hub.

Another way to deal with shrinkage is to cross-train workers to handle contact center as well as other administrative duties. Similarly, agents can assume other internal responsibilities during slack times. This approach is very hard to implement in large organizations because of rigid work rules and turf battles between managers.

Making time for evaluation and coaching

Modern quality monitoring software can quickly search through thousands of hours of recorded voice looking for calls that meet specific criteria; such as extended handle times, long holding periods, and multiple transfers. Some systems today enable supervisors to review screen actions and voice at the same time. Supervisors can spot problems in workflows, accessing databases, and the use of shortcuts that can significantly reduce handle time. Advanced quality monitoring systems also include evaluation software. Supervisors can use the basic evaluation templates provided with the application or design their own – including weighting factors that account for the relative importance of each performance attribute. Performance records are electronically stored and can be viewed anytime in graphical format. Supervisors can spot trends and indicators that highlight agent's strengths and areas that need improvement. Especially effective interactions can be saved as model calls for use in training and coaching sessions.

Managers need to carefully consider the metrics they use to evaluate agent performance. These metrics need to be directly tied to the core missions of the contact center and they need to be controllable by the agent. Every contact center, regardless of size, has four core missions;

- *To delight customers*
- *To sustain or grow revenues*
- *To control operating costs*
- *To share valuable consumer insights with management*

If a KPI does not directly or indirectly measure progress toward one or more of these goals then you need to question its usefulness. Further, metrics used to evaluate agent performance must be controllable by the agent. This excludes many of the commonly used KPI's, such as numbers of calls processed, occupancy, time-to-answer, cost per call, and abandonment rates. These are largely a function of call traffic, staffing levels, network capacity, and the power of your ACD. Focusing on "Metrics that Matter" reduces the management time to perform evaluations and sharpens the process.

Compliance and liability

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to monitor compliance without automated interaction recording systems. These devices can capture, archive, and retrieve **all**

Best Practices and Technology for Small Contact Centers



voice interactions. In addition to compliance with applicable laws and regulations, there is the issue of potential liability. Lacking a tangible record of what actually transpired, disputes may devolve into unpleasant he-said, she-said arguments where nobody wins. Liability protection is especially important to smaller contact centers as litigation can be very costly and agents are often pressed to become experts on multiple subjects. Scripting tools are also valuable to help assure that mandatory disclosures are accurately communicated.

Contact centers that engage in heavy volumes of outbound calling should consider investing in a predictive dialer. Dialers are major productivity boosters and help assure that calls are not directed to people that have registered on the FCC’s do-not-call list. Built in work flows also help prevent violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

Technology requirements

Rather surprisingly, a minority of smaller contact centers have invested in the time and money-saving contact center applications available today.

| | Agents in Contact Center | |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| | 25-50 | 500 - 1000 |
| Interactive voice response | 46% | 66% |
| Interaction recording | 35% | 90% |
| Predictive dialers | 11% | 21% |
| Workforce management software | 8% | 85% |
| <i>Performance management software</i> | <1% | 10 - 13% |

Source: Contact Babel, The PELORUS Group

While manual processes, such as side-by-side agent monitoring, are common in small contact centers, they are not very productive and become unworkable once a contact center grows to 20 – 30 agents, depending on call volume. Listed below are essential and desirable applications.

| Must Haves | Should Haves |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| • IVR w/self-service | • Forecasting/scheduling |
| • Intelligent call routing | • Predictive dialing |
| • Screen pops | • Speech analytics |
| • Scripting | • Open architecture design |
| • Digital call recording | • VoIP enabled |
| • Messaging | • Dashboards |
| | • Campaign management |

Interactive voice response (IVR)

An IVR not only answers and directs calls but also provides self-service options. The basic systems use touchtone response to announced menu selections. The most advanced IVR’s use automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology to accept caller voice commands and reply in computerized speech.



Intelligent call routing

Highly successful contact centers need a dedicated call routing system to terminate and distribute inbound calls. Very small operations can function reasonably well with hunt groups from the PBX or service provider but these are very limited in flexibility and provide minimal reporting features. Intelligent call distributors such as ENSERCLE from SER Solutions can direct calls based on several variables including the identity of the caller and the unique skill sets of the agent.

Screen pops

Screen pops provide agents with valuable customer information at the time they take the call. The type of information depends on the integrations between the call distributor and other databases within the contact center. Access to up-to-date details about the caller and their prior history with the contact center speeds the call handling process and relieves the caller from repeating basic details like name, address, account number, etc. each time they contact the call center or get transferred to another individual. The screens are generated from caller input, such as the calling number or account number.

Scripting tools

Scripting tools allow contact center management to devise scripts agents should follow. Applications include mandatory disclosures; Q&A's to refer to during the call, tests, training materials, IVR menus, customer surveys, and others. The application includes authoring capability.

Automated call recording

Digital recording systems are essential for quality monitoring and compliance. Other methods, like remote monitoring and side-by-side observation are workable in small environments but are of little value for coaching, evaluations, calibration, and compliance. You need a permanent record. Many systems have easy to use search and retrieval features and even include evaluation forms.

Messaging

Agents usually do not have access to enterprise messaging systems or Internet applications like Microsoft Outlook. Messaging software confined to the contact center provides a quick and easy way to communicate with agents. These systems are typically one-way only, from supervisor to agent.

Scheduling software

Sophisticated workforce management software is rarely used in small contact centers. The cost is simply too great and small centers do not need the advanced features. Basic off-the-shelf employee scheduling software is inexpensive and helpful. Erlang calculators are readily available to help predict agent needs at different levels of call flow given defined service level goals. Once you determine coverage requirements based on the Erlang call calculations, you can build spreadsheets that identify agent needs by day of week and time of day.

Predictive dialing

Automated dialers are great time savers if you do a lot of outbound calling. Call lists are fed into the dialer and the device automatically places the calls. The systems are smart enough to disregard answering machines, busy lines, no answers, and voice

Best Practices and Technology for Small Contact Centers



mail. When a call is answered by a live person, the call is directed to a live agent along with a screen pop.

Speech analytics

Speech analytics is a technology that can quickly scan large volumes of recorded voice searching for specific words, phrases, or combination of words. More advanced applications categorize human utterances so users can see what topics and questions prompt the most caller queries. These applications are invaluable for compliance verification and can lead to valuable insights about customer attitudes. A good example is SERTAINTY™, by SER Solutions which is designed and priced to meet the needs of all contact centers.

Open architecture design

Open architecture design allows for easily adding, upgrading, and swapping components. Unlike closed or proprietary designs, users can purchase off-the-shelf devices and software to expand or modify their application. Another important advantage is easier interoperability with other systems and applications. Open architecture running on industry standard platforms is especially important if you need to modify the software to meet special requirements. Your IT department can make changes on its own, without the need for costly and time-consuming vendor certifications or calling in outside experts.

Greene, an RMG Direct company, is a professional teleservices firm headquartered in Lincolnshire, Illinois, near Chicago. Founded in 1988, the company operates three blended call centers in Iowa, with an average of 80 agents each. For 2007 Greene was once again ranked one of the top 50 teleservices firms in the country. Greene chose ENSERCLE because it is built on an open standards platform. Mark Deutschmann, Director of Technology, found that he and his team could make adaptations without calling in costly third party specialists. According to Mark, "The biggest advantage is the open architecture. We can tie the product to our existing business processes." Mark came up with several ideas that helped Greene stay a step or two ahead of their competition. "For example, when one of our agent's makes a sale we can use the client's existing web technology and post the sale data real-time to a secure client site."

VoIP enabled

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a protocol optimized for the transmission of voice through the Internet or other packet switched networks. Voice over IP protocols carry telephony signals as digital audio, typically reduced in data rate using speech data compression techniques, encapsulated in a data packet stream over IP. For contact centers there are cost advantages, in that the cost of transmitting voice is included in the fee they pay for data services. However, the main advantage is that voice and data are pushed to the agent over the same network. Agents working from home see the same screens as in-house agents and call center hubs. VoIP-enabled applications can distribute the software (like CRM and quality monitoring) to distant locations while administering the applications centrally.

Dashboards

Dashboard is a generic term that describes real-time or near real-time data appearing on agent desktops. The dashboards can be pre-configured or defined by the contact center. The screens typically include ribbons of contact center metrics but may also include messages, alerts, news feeds, and other data that the contact center deems useful to the agent.



Campaign management

Campaign management applications are used for outbound promotional efforts. The software controls a predictive dialer that is programmed to call only targeted accounts and prospects. Campaign management software directs the agent to use specialized scripts when connecting to a live contact and tracks the progress and results of the campaign

A Suite Solution

Smaller contact centers looking to enhance their operations have more acquisition options today than ever before. The choices are to start with a few essential applications then add more as needs and budgets grow, to acquire all they need at one time with an integrated solution suite, or use various hosted services on a pay as you go model. The traditional approach is to start with the basics. You must have an intelligent call distributor – without one you do not have a formal contact center – then add quality monitoring. Following these two “must haves” contact centers add the functionality most useful for their unique requirements. These would typically include interactive voice response, some type of CRM application, forecasting/scheduling software, and; for outbound and blended environments, predictive dialers. This one-at-a-time approach, commonly called “point” solutions has the advantage of migrating more slowly and choosing the solution that managers believe is best suited for their contact centers. Hosting has some attractive advantages, principally the avoidance of large front-end and ongoing support costs. However, with the exception of CRM there are very few providers at this time.

The suite approach is rapidly becoming the preferred option – particularly for brand new contact centers and those that wish to displace all their legacy systems with a more modern, tightly integrated solution suite built on the latest technology. The suite model has several very important benefits.

Tight integration

Contact center applications are most effective when they work in unison. Purchasing a unified suite means you not only gain all the benefits at once without having to wait years as you source and justify individual pieces of the puzzle. You also have the advantage of knowing that everything is tightly integrated. All of the applications have been designed and tested to function harmoniously. Each application is administered from a common interface. User training is easier because all screens have the same look and feel.

Centralized Administration

A major advantage of the unified suite approach is centralized administration. There is no need to separately enter databases, a slow and error-prone activity. Database updates are entered only once and all the applications are automatically populated with the new information. The reporting function is centralized. There is less need to piece together reports from disparate systems and databases to achieve comprehensive reporting.

Single point of contact accountability

By purchasing all the applications from one vendor, you have one organization to hold accountable for needs assessment, configuration, installation, testing, and user



training. There is one service level agreement to administer and one company to call if things aren't working the way you want.

Coordinated system upgrades

A major problem with individual applications is that they all have their own architecture and software release schedules. Tracking and maintaining separate systems can be a real strain on small IT departments.

Cost savings

While the initial cost will be higher for a suite than a single application, the total cost of ownership will be lower. It is not unusual for the initial cost of any advanced contact center system or software to consist of at least 50 percent services. The largest piece of the initial service fee will be the cost of systems integration. Vendors may or may not have pre-built connectors for your legacy ACD or PBX. If they don't, then the connectivity must be created from scratch, using costly CTI. And when that job is completed you still have only one point of integration. If you need each application to play as a symphony and not a rock band, you need integration with each of the other applications. Additionally, ongoing support costs are much lower for integrated suites. Upgrades and fixes are announced in advance and coordinated. Generally, the IT department does not even need to be involved. Since the system is based on open standards including popular scripting languages, you do not need costly specialists to make programming changes or add new custom features.

Summary

Smaller businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy. Small business succeeds because of its vitality, innovation, and the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes our economy. However, smaller businesses face significant challenges. Lacking the economies of scale of larger competitors, it is difficult to match prices. Nor can they match the marketing muscle and product development budgets of their larger competitors.

What they can do and must do is excel at customer care. Every customer is important and a few are vitally important. The old adage about you never get a second chance to make a good first impression has special meaning for mid-size enterprises. The contact center is the front door to the business.

Small to mid-size contact centers have the same missions as giant centers with thousands of agents. They do not have the same resources. Smaller centers have many inherent advantages that they can leverage but too often lag far behind on technology implementation. This is largely because of the paucity of solutions designed and priced to their special needs. Basic applications like intelligent call routing, screen pops, and interaction recording systems are not just nice-to-haves but absolutely essential for professionally run contact centers. Over the past three years, we have seen a dramatic change, as vendors are recognizing that the market size and growth warrants their attention. There are more options available today than ever before. Integrated application suites layered over a common platform are a "sweet" solution that warrants exploration.



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CROSS-SELL AND UPSELL: TRANSFORM YOUR CALL CENTER TO A WIN-WIN-WIN CULTURE

By Joel Linchitz, President, Phone for Success

It's easy to understand why upselling and cross-selling have a bad reputation. From a customer's viewpoint, it's annoying to have someone push a product or service at you that you don't want. Knowing that, many reps avoid cross-selling or upselling because they don't want to alienate their customers. But ironically, by not upselling or cross-selling, reps lose out on achieving dramatic results from one of the most powerful tools for generating sales, retaining customers and creating employee satisfaction. In short, they're preventing themselves, their company and their customers from participating in a Win-Win-Win environment that lifts morale, promotes motivation, and increases sales.

Upselling and cross-selling are usually focused on the idea of selling something, not on what the customer wants or needs. This is why it is often perceived as someone trying to sell us something we don't want. In many cases that's exactly what it is! To be effective, cross and up-selling must be directed to customers' needs. For instance, if a customer calls your service center to complain about having to pay an overdraft charge, selling them an overdraft-protection account is doing them a favor. In fact, not doing this is a disservice to the customer. But trying to sell them a new mortgage, say, while a rep has them on the phone is almost ridiculous.

Focusing on customer needs is actually a process, not a frame of mind. It means building a relationship with the customer, creating rapport, and asking the

kind of probing questions that uncover how customers are thinking, what they might be overlooking, and how your products/services might make their lives easier or better.

It means upselling and cross-selling as a natural outgrowth of a consulting process. It means uncovering needs and then offering solutions, not throwing options at customers in hopes they will want them.

Training Adjustments

CSRs can be taught to pursue this process proactively. Instead of just reacting to what customers request, CSRs can learn to participate in the process of responding to and helping their customers beyond the predictable. Three elements should be folded into traditional training to shift to a Win-Win-Win paradigm.

- how to develop rapport
- how to ask questions
- how to use active listening skills

Establishing Rapport

Include developing rapport as a separate topic in your CSR training. Rapport is not just a matter of personality, which can't be taught, but a matter of focus, which can be taught. Focus on the customer by using a pleasant and clear voice, by being interested and enthusiastic in what the customer says, by reassuring customers that you're there to answer their questions, find the right solution, and send them away happy. Getting into rapport is being sensitive to another person's viewpoint and allowing them to express it.

Asking Questions

Learning how to ask questions is part of understanding your company's products and services and how they're used. Naturally, CSRs should have genuine respect for and thorough knowledge of the products/services customers are buying. Once that knowledge is there, time in training can be beneficially spent teaching CSRs to practice coming up with typical questions customers might ask, depending on how the products/services might be used. A little practice goes a long way in reassuring CSRs that asking questions is not prying, but actually providing customers with valuable service.

For example, a customer may ask for the cheapest checking account. That's what he or she says, but the underlying meaning may be more involved. After a little probing, the CSR learns that s/he typically uses an ATM that's close to the office, thereby adding a service charge three or four times a week to the cost of the "cheapest" account. The answer to "What's the cheapest checking account you have?" becomes:

"I'd be happy to give you that information. But I wonder if you'd just give me a little background first so we can give you the best service. Could you tell me more about how you like to do your banking? How often do you plan to write checks? What are the three features you would consider most important for your checking account to have? About how many checks will you be writing each month? Do you think you'll be keeping a relatively high balance? Will you be linking your account to a savings account? Or a credit card? Do you use ATMs?"

Active Listening

Listening is definitely a teachable skill. There are traditionally three

key steps to listening actively. First, whatever the customer says should be acknowledged, "I see, or I'm glad you've called because I can help you with that." Second, CSRs should ask customers to elaborate on what they've just said, as in "would you tell me more about what you're looking for, or could you give me a little more information?" Third, after customers reveal what's on their mind, train CSRs to paraphrase. "Just to be sure I understand what you're saying, let me repeat back to you what I heard you say." The paraphrase is not meant to just parrot back to customers the same thing they just said to you. Its simple brilliance is that when it's done properly, it tends to uncover those slight 'mishearings' or misunderstandings that can cause missed opportunities to provide superior service to customers. There's a fourth active listening skill. It's called Reflect, and it's a bit more complicated because it involves CSRs having the confidence to interpret what customers may not be expressing with words, but are definitely expressing with attitude (tone of voice, volume of speech, and inflection). It requires CSRs to say something like, "You sound very upset, and I would really like to help figure this out (whatever the issue is)." Saying that can be a little scary, but is definitely teachable given that the CSR understands clearly how to not take an upset customer's tone personally. One way to help CSRs learn to defuse irate customers is to work with their manager/supervisor coaches.

Coaching and On-going Training

Coaching should be added to your call center's Win-Win-Win paradigm. Managers/supervisors should be trained to give continuous feedback to CSRs



about the way they're executing their skills. The feedback can be in immediate, as coaches walk around and overhear CSRs as they're speaking with customers. Or it can be given to CSRs as a result of monitoring their calls. Or it can be given during a face-to-face, informal meeting during which coaches and CSRs actually discuss expectations and performance, and how to get to the change required, if any.

About the Author

Joel Linchitz is President of Phone for Success, a training and consulting firm that offers 'the best training on the planet for sales and service reps.' He teaches reps to use tools and techniques that will dramatically increase their sales/service results. He can be reached at 212-431-6700 or by email at, info@phoneforsuccess.com

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Conclusion

With CSRs perfecting the tools above, customer-focused upselling and cross-selling can create a Win-Win-Win environment in your call center. The customer gets more than he or she asked for and feels satisfied, not irritated. The CSR experiences new job satisfaction and motivation from contributing instead of just passively responding. And the company benefits from dramatically increased sales and happier customers (who also stick around).

FROM CALL CENTER TO IP CONTACT CENTER: THE FIRST STEPS

By Rod Hodgman

Call centers have come a long way from the days of POTS, or Plain Old Telephone Service, but most companies face a major problem in moving to a true IP contact center that is capable of optimizing the customer experience, reducing operating costs and enabling rapid and continuous innovation.

Continuous innovation and reduced costs are the hallmark of IP networks and applications, and organizations that do not quickly make the transition to integrated IP communications will be at a competitive disadvantage to those that do. Supporting customers and providing an integrated experience across voice calls, video sessions, e-mail, chat/instant messaging and shared desktops, will become a necessity to enhance customer service and improve the bottom line.

The problem most companies face in moving to a true IP contact center is that they manage their voice traffic differently than all their other applications. Even with VoIP being widely used, IP –PBX (private branch exchange) traffic is managed separately than all other IP traffic including email, instant messaging or applications.

Compared to other applications that run seamlessly over the organizations wide area network (WAN), PBXs are islands of real-time communications because they route voice traffic via voice service providers rather than through their existing IP network. This approach creates significant additional capital expense within the call center, costs tens-of-millions of dollars annually in public switched telephone network (PSTN) expenses and blocks the integration of voice into other

WHAT'S KEEPING YOU UP AT NIGHT?

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- Unhappy Clients
- Too Few Applicants
- Ineffective Agent Performance
- Legal Compliance
- Inadequate Supervisory Talent
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customer service communication channels.

Take, for instance, a large Internet retailer that had its call centers based on a collection of products including traditional time-division multiplexing (TDM) PBXs and Automatic Call Distributors (ACDs) with many support applications layered on top. As new call centers were brought on-line they were populated with the TDM and IP networking infrastructure, PBXs, ACDs and applications such as contact center software, reporting, workforce management and others.

If you think this configuration sounds confusing, try managing it! Over time, the company became acutely aware of two critical issues. The first was its inability to innovate new services because of the rigid, proprietary nature of its call center architecture. The second was the significant operating expenses, driven by redundancy and complexity, required to operate voice in the centers on an on-going basis.

To create a true IP contact center in which both voice and data communications can be joined and efficiently routed to an IP-connected agent, companies must first learn how to “Voice-enable” their IP network. Voice-enabled Intranets open up the ability to embed real-time communications into the very fabric of the customer support processes. They also make it possible to quickly and easily link enterprise resources into the customer service process, and for sophisticated contact center functionality to be leveraged throughout the enterprise.

Embracing Technical Standards

The first step in attaining an IP contact center is moving to a standards-based infrastructure

with protocols such as SIP, SIMPLE and SOAP. These standards enable companies to collapse all communications onto a single IP network and simultaneously increase the ability to add new services, including IM, presence and click-to-talk, which reduces costs and increase customer satisfaction.

For the Internet retailer previously mentioned, the new IP-centric design allowed it to move its PBXs out of the call centers and consolidate them into a central data center (with fail-over to back-up data –centers). The central data center serves as the heart of the operation by providing shared voice, video, IM, email and other services as well as intelligent call routing to agents in geographically distributed contact centers. The centralized data center approach is commonly seen in IP environments because it’s the scenario IP was specifically designed for, it has been proven to work consistently, and it drastically reduces IT complexity and costs.

Once the consolidation and convergence is in place, embedding real-time communications into customer service business process becomes straight forward. Rapid integration is driven by a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA). SOA is an architectural style for rapidly creating and modifying applications. SOA components are loosely-coupled, independent services that support the rapid connection of applications and the sharing of data between services. SOA makes it possible to quickly “communication-enable” applications with voice communications, video, instant messaging, presence and other real-time capabilities to allow agents to communicate with supervisors, peers and experts to

seamlessly support customers.

After the transformation from call center to IP contact center has taken place, the ROI is evident almost immediately. Contact center agents empowered with IM and presence applications are better equipped to serve customers needs than their unenhanced counterparts. By taking these steps, companies gain flexibility and can deploy VoIP, IM, and presence, throughout their call centers, with the same – or better – performance, quality, reliability and security as any other IP application.

Rod Hodgman is co-founder and VP of marketing at Covergence, where he is responsible for positioning the company’s session management solutions for maximum value and growth. Rod brings over 25 years of related business experience in technology start-ups and large companies. For more information, visit: www.covergence.com/ipcontactcenter.

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Employees: Your Most Important Connection by Paul Spiegelman, founder and CEO of The Beryl Companies

Here’s a riddle for you: When is an operator *not* an operator? Answer: When he fails to connect with the caller.

It may seem obvious, but call centers are essentially in the *people* business. Most companies of size that view consumers as

their primary market, regardless of the industry, need a call center to field inquires, fulfill requests for information or product, and troubleshoot things in the sales cycle that go awry. After 20 years as the proprietor of a successful, niche-industry call center company, I have become more convinced than ever that the human factor is what makes or breaks our business. I’ve learned that investing in people, before technology or other infrastructure enhancements, pays the biggest dividends in terms of superior customer service and overall success. And that, in turn, brings added value to the clients who depend on you to be their agents in interactions with their customers.

Fostering Loyalty

Fostering brand loyalty on behalf of your clients begins from within, by cultivating your own employees. Why? Because you cannot deliver on the promise of exceptional service unless your own people have developed the passion to help you keep that commitment. Companies often forget that their most valuable asset is their employees. Building brand loyalty from the inside out means instilling passion and commitment in your employees before they ever connect with a caller. If they feel valued, informed and involved, callers on the other end of the line will too. Investing in people leads to happy employees who feel good about what they are doing and pass it on during every interaction. That spawns customer loyalty, which in turn drives profits back into the client’s business.

So how do you create a culture that cultivates loyalty all along the spectrum? I’ve learned over the years that little things mean a lot.



The golden rule really does apply: treat others as you would have others treat you. Here are five simple strategies that have helped my company achieve one of the lowest turnover rates in the business while building a reputation as one of the most service-oriented call center operators in the industry:

1. Encourage Employee Involvement

The concept of “buy-in” really does work. Employees (or co-workers as we like to call them) respond best when they are involved in the development and execution of ideas. Where to start? Frontline co-workers are at the first point of service delivery—where the rubber hits the road with your client’s customers. These employees can often brainstorm ways to deliver services more efficiently or effectively, in ways management may never have considered. I have found that the simplest way to engage employees is by using four simple words: “What do **you** think?”

Getting employees involved outside the walls of the organization is also a powerful way to help them feel they are contributing. For instance, have employees select a charity from within the community, and then determine ways your company can support it and really make a difference. Not only does this provide a tangible benefit for those in need, it helps employees feel good about themselves and their employer.

2. Maintain Open Communication

Employees who are truly involved want to know how well their company is doing. But too often, upper management plays it “close to the vest” when it comes to revealing details about the

business. I believe open communication includes sharing company financials, strategic goals and progress toward those goals, for better or worse. When employees see the good and the bad, they are more likely to understand decisions that are made and support the company in sunshine or rain.

I like to use a variety of tactics for sharing the news. Town hall meetings, informal lunches with the CEO, and regular newsletters mailed to employees’ homes can all help keep employees informed. I especially like an open-door policy for senior management because it lets employees know that they can have a conversation with company leaders whenever they feel the need. Not only does this convey that employee opinions are valued, it provides upper management with valuable intelligence from those who are on the “front lines.”

Floor tours are a vital part of what I do every month. By simply walking around the call center floor and greeting each employee, I foster a connection that can’t be achieved through newsletters or e-mails. Call advisors appreciate my availability and approachable style. Floor tours literally take down the barriers.

3. Promote Career Development

If employees are your most important asset, then investing in them is the best way to reap big dividends down the line. That means helping them develop professionally and branch out to discover new talents they may never have known they had. Tuition reimbursement programs can enable staff members to accomplish their goals, grow professionally and help build the

company. In-house training can help employees develop new skill sets. I believe that one of the best ways to foster loyalty is to promote from within whenever possible. It shows you value your employees and the expertise they have developed with **your** assistance and support.

4. Keep it Personal

In today’s hectic work environment, we rely on technology to make things happen faster and more efficiently. It’s too easy to lose sight of the value of building relationships through personal connections. But my experience has been that reaching out to employees shows we value them as individuals. A handwritten note to an employee establishes that personal connection. Encouraging employees to acknowledge each other for a job well done also fosters camaraderie. We celebrate birthdays, weddings, births and all the other joyous occasions that make life worth living. And we help employees through a personal hardship—such as an illness, loss of a loved one or financial setback. Employees feel like they matter, and that helps them convey that same feeling to callers on the other end of the line.

5. Make it Fun

It’s a simple truth: We spend more waking hours at work than we do with our loved ones. But “quality time” can take place anywhere. Who doesn’t like to have a little fun? A bit of levity can relieve stress, build relationships and spark creativity. Organized events such as potlucks, barbecues and ice cream socials allow employees to escape the mundane work day existence and encourage socializing. At my company, we host an annual “Gong Show” where employees can really flaunt their silly side. I personally have

dressed up as a roller-skating matador as well as in a lime green leisure suit and red wig. We regularly treat employees to movie night at the local cinema and to sporting events where they can cheer on the local franchise. By showing a sense of humor and making it fun, company leaders make themselves more “human” to employees while conveying that they see staff as people, too.

It is particularly important a call center environment to help employees feel a part of something a team (or, in our case, a family). The “front-line” staff spends their days interacting with people on the other end of the phone or through the computer. A sense of community provides an important interpersonal connection.

Putting employees first is not a panacea for all your management challenges, but it certainly helps you create a culture where interpersonal connections are prized above all else. For those of us in the *people* business, there’s no better way for us to connect with callers.

Paul Spiegelman, founder and CEO of The Beryl Companies, is author of Why Is Everyone Smiling? The Secret Behind Passion, Productivity and Profit. Beryl was named the #2 best company to work for in America for the Society for Human Resource Management and has been recognized repeatedly as a top employer in Dallas and throughout Texas. For more information, visit www.beryl.net.

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Workforce Optimization Across Channels

Michael J. Brachelli Customer Interactive Solutions Engineer Dimension Data Americas

Today in most contact centers, workforce optimization (WFO) is still the buzz word. With this technology, contact centers can record calls, forecast schedules, evaluate agents, assign agents e-learning based on their individual needs, and in some cases, measure and evaluate customer experience. If a contact center utilizes multiple channels to interact with customers or prospects then those interactions need to be measured as well. In order for an enterprise to ensure that it adjusts with shifts that occur in everyday business, it must have its hand on the pulse of its contact center and customers. The enterprise must identify what needs to be measured, define how to measure it and determinate what to do with the intelligence gained. In order for contact centers to optimize cost savings, an enterprise needs to implement all components

of WFO across all channels. By only measuring a segment of its interactions with customers (voice interactions only, for example) a contact center is not fully achieving WFO.

More enterprises than ever are starting to realize the importance of WFO, according to Dimension Data's 2008 Global Contact Center Benchmarking Report, which revealed that companies surveyed consider WFO solutions a key strategy and initiative. As the multi-channel contact center initiative continues to become more prevalent in customer interaction, optimizing how these new interactions are dealt with has become critical. At the same time, voice is decreasing in importance as a communications channel. New channels – including Web collaboration, Web chat, e-mail and interactive voice response (IVR) – are being added to the mixture and require unique approaches, measurements, skills and technology to be successful.

So how do contact centers adjust their practices, technology and people to adopt these new channels, while continuing on the path to optimization? To begin with, WFO technology and principles must be applied

to all interaction channels in the contact center, not just some of them. Challenges quickly emerge as an enterprise realizes that its top reps in the voice arena are not always going to be effective working with Web chat or other emerging channels. Since each channel requires its own unique skill set, enterprises need to look for a variety of skills in order to adequately cover the skill sets needed to be effective across various channels.

Enterprises with contact center employees always need to be mindful of scheduling agent time appropriately so they can predict how many agents a center will need at different times through the day and the year and monitor agent adherence to the schedules the center sets up for them.

Forecasting methods are different too when trying to schedule agents and traffic forecasts become more complex as contact centers blend the multi-channel interaction. Blending contact center channels across the agent population has become extremely important as it helps minimize performance degradation during shift changes that can wreck havoc on staffing and service levels. In the multi-channel contact center, quality of service cannot be allowed to slip on any

channel. To avoid shift problems, WFO can be used to take data feeds from a number of systems that essentially generate workload. The number of calls taken can be reviewed with the average handle time and be projected out over a long period of time, and the number of agents needed can be forecasted. Overtime volume on holidays or days after holidays can be built into the forecast and then projected out a year in advance. Then a forecast for workload can be determined along with agent strength to handle that projected workload.

Helping enterprises along in their quest to better handle communications with customers is a host of new technology that is creating opportunities for how contact centers forecast, capture, report and measure interactions. For example, with advanced screen recording using data analysis, contact centers can mine recordings with greater efficiency and accuracy. They can also mine Web-based chat and collaboration session logs with data analysis software. The key to measuring interactions is being able to categorize each call based on many events or variables. Data analysis software can automatically group multi-channel



interactions with the same keywords, phrases and events. The end goal is to measure the customer experience, time, agent performance and any opportunities that may arise.

Finally, there are new software suites available that can automate operations and the implementation of new ideas, measurements and procedures in an environment where the impact can be evaluated, measured and learned

from. This software can free up a supervisor's schedules by eliminating daily manual tasks, allowing them to spend more time working with agents. It can also capture customer feedback in each channel, which is valuable information when trying to evaluate the success of customers' needs. Ultimately, what a contact center can learn and gain by adding multi-channel interaction to their WFO model is only limited by what they can measure, how they measure it and what they do with the

intelligence gained.

###

CASE STUDY

As a world leader in customer service, the Hyatt group has come to know exactly what it takes to ensure their guests understand what "quality" means in every sense of the word. When it was time to identify a company to return those services with that same attention to detail, they chose the Labor Analytics Group (LAG).

The Problem:

Hyatt's business was growing, but the inefficiency of having their back office operations spread across the country was proving to be a hindrance. Compounding this was the fact that quality labor inside those markets was not only hard to find but expensive.

What Hyatt needed was a location that could provide sustainable superior labor; while also being in a cost effective market thus allowing Hyatt to focus on reallocating their resources where it could



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best expand their business.

The Labor Analytics Group was selected because they are a “one stop shop,” as quoted by Hyatt executive, Jim Melvin. With expertise beyond just real estate brokerage, it was their in-depth labor market due diligence and incentive negotiations that outshined any competition. With all of these services in house, the Labor Analytics Group combined to create a team dedicated to seeing that every request and expectation made by Hyatt was not only met but exceeded.

The Solution:

A four phase approach was adopted to best serve Hyatt and their needs. This multi-phase study allowed for quantitative data to be supplemented with qualitative information obtained on a multitude of different levels. While LAG consulting conducted their research, the real estate team ran a parallel search for “plug & play” facilities that could allow Hyatt to be up and operational quickly.

Moore, OK, located near Oklahoma City, rose to the top as the optimal location for providing a sustainable high quality workforce at a lower cost while also having a 42,688 sq. ft. “plug & play” facility that Hyatt was able to lease right away and begin

their back office re-organization.

The Benefit:

Hyatt alone has brought 300 jobs to Moore, and has the comfort of knowing they can expand that location as their needs dictate. Our Incentives Practice Group worked closely with both the state and city officials. The result of their negotiations was a \$6.2 million incentives package on top of which the state of Oklahoma awarded a 10-year payroll rebate through the Quality Jobs Program as well as a customized job training grant through the Training for Industry Program.

The people of Moore were excited to attract such a great corporate citizen to the area and worked hard to ensure Hyatt felt welcomed in their new home. Mr. Melvin went on to say, “It’s all right here, it’s very attractive ... we’ve done very well.”

Moore, OK provided a cost effective, sustainable, high quality workforce \$6.2 million incentives package negotiated 300 local jobs created 42,688 sq. ft. “plug & play” facility obtained

For more information contact:
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A Heads-Up on Selecting the Right Headset Solution

How to Choose Between Direct Connect and Amplified Headset Solutions

By Joe McGrogan, Director, Contact Center Solutions, Plantronics

It’s hard to imagine walking into a contact center and not seeing employees wearing headsets. But while most headsets look pretty much the same on the ear, there’s a big difference at the end of the cord. When it comes to connecting to a phone or ACD terminal, users have two fundamental choices: a direct connect headset or a headset with the addition of an amplifier. For contact center operators, the choice between the two can make a big difference in productivity and return on investment, and making the right decision requires balancing cost and capabilities.

Direct connect headsets plug directly into the headset port of the phone equipment. Users adjust the headset volume using the volume control on the telephone equipment itself. Alternatively, you can attach a headset to an amplifier, which in turn connects to the telephone equipment and ensures compatibility. While some phones — especially newer IP phones — provide a headset port that allows users

to directly plug in a headset, many telephones do not, and consequently require an amplifier.

Direct Connect, Amplifiers or Audio Processors?

Buyers are often confused by the term “amplifier” because much like in the consumer audio arena where today’s so-called amplifiers pack the power of entire home theater systems, Plantronics amplifiers offer many capabilities beyond simply providing volume control and a means to physically attach a headset to a telephone.

In fact, since that is the case, Plantronics now call these devices

“Audio Processors”

Plantronics audio processors, like the Plantronics Vista M22, improve agent productivity and customer satisfaction by incorporating a number of features that enhance sound quality. For example, advanced audio control helps to minimize operator fatigue, which can improve



critical to customer satisfaction by allowing agents to respond to customers more efficiently without annoying repetitions and with fewer errors when inputting data. Automatic volume control allows users to select their preferred listening level. A call volume equalizer then adjusts the level of the incoming signal so that no matter the volume of the incoming call (cell phone, poor line, great line); the received audio is always at the same preferred level. Advanced echo

management also delivers quality audio on all calls — even when delays in the line would otherwise result in echo on the call, which is especially true on IP connections. This is important since phones are designed to provide echo management with a handset, and not necessarily with a headset. As more and more phone makers incorporate headset ports into their equipment, buyers often incorrectly assume that many important headset features

are also built in. But, for example, these simple direct connect ports typically provide only rudimentary volume control. Another common misconception is that because many new IP phones have direct connect headset ports, audio processors are not needed. In fact, audio processors are recommended even more for IP because of latency and echo issues associated with IP voice communication. IP desk phones are not immune from

echo even if they have echo mitigation, since any mitigation they provide is for the handset and not to the headset.

Direct Connect

Compared with a headset and audio processor used in combination, direct connect headsets are less expensive and have a smaller footprint. Plantronics direct connect headsets offer extremely clear sound quality and superior reliability that comes from our long heritage of working with leading telecom providers to



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create breakthroughs in everything from wireless and IP technologies to our own patented sound innovations. In fact, Plantronics is the only headset provider offering Avaya-branded direct connect solutions, and when Cisco wanted to provide a direct connect headset port, Cisco contacted Plantronics to collaborate on the design. While direct connect headsets don't offer the sophisticated volume control of audio processor-based systems, Plantronics direct connect headsets have the highest level of acoustic protection built in to assure optimal safety and comfort. Both Plantronics direct connect headsets and Plantronics amplified solutions are excellent choices. However, in contact centers where improving productivity, reducing operator fatigue, and improving customer satisfaction are top concerns, the benefits of an audio processor-based solution far outweigh the slight incremental difference in costs.

For more information, visit www.plantronics.com/contact enter

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WEBINARS/ SEMINARS

May 28th –CRMxchange - Roundtable Debate: Extending the Benefits of Quality Management Solutions

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Best Practices in Call Monitoring Seminar series with Dr. Jon Anton

We wanted you to be among the first to learn of a new seminar series "Best Practices in Quality Monitoring" starting in March 2008 featuring Dr. Jon Anton as the keynote speaker. As a member of the Call Center Times Newsletter, I would like to offer you or others from your organization a free ticket to attend. The regular price is \$199, but I can waive this fee.

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Pipkins Simplifies Multi-Site Agent Adherence Monitoring with New Graphic-Based 'RTA Global' Tracking System **Cuts Costs by Enabling One-Stop, At-a-Glance Status Checks for All Contact Centers**

ST. LOUIS, MO — Pipkins Inc., released Vantage Point Real-

Time Agent Adherence Global, a graphical adherence monitoring system that reduces the time and expense required to track schedule compliance for multi-site contact centers. RTA Global centralizes the monitoring process by displaying adherence levels for each center on a single color-coded map and allowing point-and-click drilldown to individual sites, enabling systemwide oversight by a single analyst.

This new add-on to Pipkins' Vantage Point workforce management software can be used to track multiple in-house contact centers as well as monitor the performance of outsourced

call centers. It builds on RTA Plus, the industry-first graphical adherence control panel that Pipkins introduced for single-site contact centers last year.

RTA Global allows adherence violations at any contact center in the network to be instantly spotted and investigated with a click from a map that portrays each center's location and its compliance levels graphically instead of through text-heavy reports.

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be customized with user-defined data such as percentage of agents conforming to schedule to provide a quick overview of adherence levels. All data and color indicators are dynamically updated with real-time information.

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Free ContactCenter Networking Event

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