

Resolution at first contact — Leveraging Technology

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Contact centres have always played a significant role in business with their ability to influence the relationship between an enterprise and its customers. Today, the ability to deliver a resolution at the cus-

tomers first contact is essential in maintaining service excellence. Industry benchmark research studies have found that 92 percent of consumers form an opinion about a company's image through their interaction with the contact centre, and 62 percent would stop using a company's goods or services if they had a bad experience.

Contact centres have continuously evolved and adapted to

meet the changing needs of the customer. Today they are no longer just driven by efficiency - they are more about delivering effective customer service - and there is a significant difference between the two. While efficiency focuses on metrics such as length of time on calls, abandon rates and agent rest breaks, effectiveness measures key business metrics such as customer loyalty, retention, service

levels and even staff retention rates. Industry research has found that 77 percent of businesses believe their contact centre is critical to the overall success of their business, and that there is a very high correlation between customer satisfaction levels and first contact resolution. This in turn translates into benefits in the form of cost savings to the enterprise as less time is spent on customer sup-

port.

Resolution at first contact is essential for contact centres to not only maintain, but increase customer loyalty, especially as the customer base becomes more tech-savvy, knowledgeable, and with growing expectations for speedy yet well-informed service, anytime, from anywhere. As communication

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technologies such as the telephone, web, email, IM and SMS become more prevalent, contact centres need to be able to leverage these technologies to best serve their customers. Indeed the changing face of customer behaviour in the new hyperconnected world will greatly impact on the way organisations connected with their customers. Organisations will need to respond to this change in a pre-emptive manner in order to differentiate their service offerings and stay ahead of the competition.

With unified communications, agents will be able to receive queries from these usually separate media contact points and have them presented in an integrated format on their computer screen. This way, all enquiries of a specific nature can be routed to specialised agents with the appropriate multimedia tools and knowledge, reducing response times, increasing resolution at first contact and increasing agent productivity as well.

Instant messaging is a popular form of communication that analyst house Gartner has predicted will be in use by most companies by the end of the decade as a common business to business tool. It is undoubtedly already a popular social tool for the younger generation. Although instant messaging is not yet a common

feature deployed by contact centres, it is another example of a contact media that all contact centres should look to using as a customer access point in the near future.

In addition to multimedia communication, contact centres are also turning their focus towards outbound calls. With a trend for inbound based contact centres to embrace cross-sell and up-sell activities, and many service agents now carrying sales quotas, outbound calls made by traditionally customer service orientated contact centres are steadily approaching that of inbound calls.

Virtualisation of contact centres is yet another evolutionary trend that is shaping the development and operations of customer service operations. As long as staff have access to an Internet connection, they can work whenever and where ever they wish. The flexibility this brings to contact centre staff and their work-life balance is unprecedented. Contact centre managers are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain good staff, particularly in cities where competition for skilled staff is high. The ability to offer flexible options to mature workers returning to the labour market can be a competitive differentiator for the contact centre - parents and carers with family and other commitments being typical examples. A customer

service agent with a good work-life balance and flexible employment options would be more satisfied with their job - and this in turn motivates them to deliver better customer service.

Another option that customers are increasingly demanding is self service. Whether ordering on the web or buying shares using an interactive voice response (IVR) system, customers demand service at any time of the day that is quick, reliable and consistent. In a contact centre we need to balance the value of a call with the cost of servicing it. Routine calls cost agent time and are often repetitive in nature. This can decrease overall agent satisfaction and lead to unnecessarily high levels of agent attrition. The first step when considering self service options in a contact centre is to take low value routine calls away from the agents and direct them to a self service (IVR) solution. In many cases the customer would actually prefer quick, reliable and predictable automated services rather than waiting in a queue to speak to an unmotivated customer service representative.

As business becomes more complicated and people become more mobile, self service incorporating advanced speech recognition eliminates the need for complex layered menu options and

opens up new service possibilities. Speech is a natural way for humans to communicate. It is rapidly improving and is being accepted by the customer as a convenient and always available service. While there will always be a case for real humans in contact centres, with speech enabled self service solutions we can deliver complex service options in a practical and compelling way. Not only can we service complex customer enquiries with advance speech that would not be practically possible with touch-tone alone, we also deliver on Resolution at First Contact. Our agents are also happier as they are now transacting more value-add enquiries and providing a high-level service.

Changes in technology have brought around changes in customer behaviours and expectations, as well as how contact centres operate. As more new devices and multimedia channels are being used, customers' expectations around access, connectivity and customer service will continue to increase. In the near future, we will see more contact centres being upgraded with new technology solutions aimed at delivering effective customer service and driving loyalty. In addition, the role of the traditional contact centre will evolve to incorporate more sales opportunities while pursuing resolution at first contact as a key priority.