



P03: Deborah Meaden
on the secrets of
customer service

P08: Future calling the
latest breakthrough
technology

P28: Opportunity calls
innovative ways to keep
staff happy

behind the voice

A guide to call centres and customer management

First contact:

how customer service
can steer your business
to safety



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PUBLISHER: Bradley Scheffer, brad@lyonsdown.co.uk • **EDITOR:** Anthony Wilks, anthony@lyonsdown.co.uk • **CREATIVE DIRECTOR:** Andy Sweetman, andy@lyonsdown.co.uk • **PROJECT MANAGER:** Jonathon Baer, jonathan@lyonsdown.co.uk • **PRODUCTION MANAGER:** Nikki Dudley, nikki@lyonsdown.co.uk

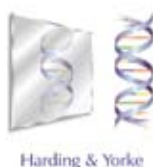
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ARCADIA AVENUE LONDON, N3 2JU

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ANY OF OUR SUPPLEMENTS PLEASE CONTACT US:
T : 020 8349 4363 W: www.lyonsdown.co.uk E: info@lyonsdown.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS: DEBORAH MEADEN is a successful entrepreneur and star of Dragons' Den. After a rapid rise to Managing Director of Weststar Holidays and a management buyout, she sold the company and is now a full time investor. Her portfolio ranges from fashion to software, waste management to market research. **PAUL BRAY** is a freelance journalist who has contributed to The Daily Telegraph, The Sunday Telegraph, The Sunday Times, The Times, The Guardian and many magazines including Computing, Director and Nasdaq International. **ALEX COXON** has worked as the editor of Call Centre Focus and Call Centre Helper. Since going freelance in 2005, she has written and edited for a wide range of publications, from the Guardian to Travel Trade Gazette to Airport World. **JAMES WEST** is a freelance writer and editor, specialising in customer service and IT support. He is editor of servicedesk360.com and a regular contributor to Call Centre Focus and Customer Strategy. **ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS:** cover and pages 8, 12, 13, 22 and 28, **BY REBECCA HENDIN.**

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Deborah Meaden, entrepreneur and TV Dragon, talks about the secret of customer service, and her own experiences running a contact centre.

For something that is *raison d'être* for organisations, customer service is too often misunderstood. Customer service is not a separate topic. It is everything that an organisation does to meet or exceed its customers' expectations. It is not a wonderful, new, fully automated customer contact system which may undoubtedly be an aid but can in no way substitute for knowing what is actually important to me in the transaction. It is, at some point, about people talking to people, finding out what matters to them and what they really want.

I entered the world of call centres through Weststar Holidays Bookings Office. We were

It worked because we kept our eyes on our customers and what would ultimately make their lives better, not just today but into the future.

If technology is over-used, then the people within an organisation can feel they are a process not a person. They lose sight of what they are actually doing, take little or no responsibility and end up caring less. Under-use means that people spend their time on the wrong things, and customer service suffers. Customers become an interruption, a nuisance in people's everyday lives. Getting the balance right not only speaks a lot about the culture of the organisation, it helps create the culture. Employees become

guarantee and they failed. That email should have apologised - a person would have.

The ease with which we can now find competing products on the internet means that service makes the difference. I will buy from the person who offers the product I want at the price I am willing to pay under the terms that fit my circumstances. The more frequently I use that supplier, the more I want to be recognised and through that recognition the more loyal I become. I even become more tolerant of their mistakes, although too many or too big and I am very likely to become more upset as I believe I have gained rights as a loyal regular customer. I am happy, on the whole, to keep my relationship online and impersonal. But at some point I want to feel that I am dealing with a real live person, and I want that person to be listening to me, not reading from a script.

I suffer very little bad service since I have been on Dragons' Den. The very same people who used to provide me with bad service, no longer do. In other words they make a personal choice and we, the general public, let them get away with it. We praise excellence and criticise poor service but we are rarely specific and we rarely bother to tell people what we actually want. We accept mediocre because it is not quite bad enough to make a fuss about. We usually have to bring ourselves to the point of fury before we bother communicating at all at which point all is already lost. We fail to recognise the part we play and through that failure organisations can go blithely on their way thinking everything is OK. And that is pretty much what we get... OK. And that is simply not good enough.

We understood that this was a journey we needed to take with our customers, not do to our customers.

the first Holiday Park Operators to offer a fully integrated online booking system. We understood that our customers would eventually want all the tools available to them to make their choice and so invested in a long term view. We also understood that this was a journey we needed to take *with* our customers, not do *to* our customers. We told them what we were doing, why and how it would benefit them. We even asked them for their help and patience, and we always spoke to them.

We were an odd mix, embracing new technology whilst retaining old-fashioned telephone answering, but this was a clear strategy.

more satisfied and that flows directly through to happier customers.

In a recent internet transaction for a Christmas present which failed to arrive on time, I was greeted on a daily basis with an automated email telling me the status of my transaction, but not explaining the only thing that I actually wanted to know: when would the gift be delivered? After Christmas, having missed the promised deadline, I received an email telling me that they were delighted to say that the gift had been dispatched. Well, they might be but I was not. I could have bought the same product from anywhere. I chose them for their service

Taming the many-headed beast

Paul Bray looks at how the confusing muddle of multi-channel communications can be tackled with a step-by-step business strategy.

When it comes to communicating with their customers, businesses today are not just spoiled for choice but spoiled by choice. The more communication channels that become available – phone, email, voicemail, text message, web site, web chat, social networking, not to mention letter and fax – the more difficult it is to maintain accuracy and consistency, control what’s said and how, and keep accurate records of communications. The business doesn’t put out a consistent brand message, costs grow unchecked, and above all customers don’t get a consistent experience.

“Multi-channel communications have been treated in a very fragmented way,” says Barry Osborne, a consultant for customer communications management (CCM) specialist Pitney Bowes Business Insight. “Often communications are only seen by the business operations that use them at an output level, they’re something that happens as part of a process. Rarely are communications managed in a proactive and joined-up way across the organisation.”

What’s needed, argues Osborne, is a unified, business-wide strategy for managing customer communications. The first stage, he says, is to step back from the delivery mechanism and define the business outcomes desired, such as customer strategy, customer objectives or operational cost efficiencies. You might, for example, want to convey highly personalised messages that vary with the stages of the customer lifecycle, or to be more proactive and increase revenues through cross- or up-selling.

Having defined the business aims, you need to understand how customer

communications are handled currently, which can mean everything from electronic and web based communications to traditional post, billing and contact centre voice calls. “Many communications processes have grown up piecemeal,” says Osborne. “They’re often complex and ill defined and rarely does someone within the business function have ownership over the way in which they’re managed, changed and delivered.”

Once the desired outcomes and communication processes are understood,

the technology needed to enable the way they work in practice. Business process definitions may need greater scrutiny at this stage: just saying “agent completes questionnaire” may not be sufficient if there are many variations and dependencies. The increased level of understanding this brings may enable significant efficiency savings, says Osborne.

The other key ingredient of a successful CCM strategy is measurement, notes Osborne. This could include how long a process takes, how quickly changes can be made, or the specific return on investment.

Accurate measurement is the final link in a continuous loop that ensures that the CCM strategy is constantly updated and kept aligned with business aims.

“Having a CCM strategy can assist in improving customer retention, maximising the lifetime value of customers, personalising marketing communications, and maximising the customer experience across all touch points,” Osborne says. “And it affords a huge opportunity for business improvements and cost savings. The typical return on investment period is pretty impressive: even through small, incremental improvements, CCM can pay for itself in three to six months.”

In summary, says Osborne, “Communications strategy is about aligning the right communications, for delivery to the right people, with the right message at the right time, in a co-ordinated way across the business. This enables communications to deliver the needs of the customer voyage, and optimise the customer experience in a consistent way across any contact channel.”



CCM WILL HELP YOU FIND YOUR WAY

the detail of the customer communications strategy can be designed. It’s only at this stage that you select the actual media. Thus you don’t say, “Web chat is the latest technology, we have to offer it”, but, “We want to reach very keyboard-literate young people, and web chat is more effective than email and cheaper than phone”.

A major part of this design is what Osborne calls the “business architecture”, a combination of the business processes and

“Even through small, incremental improvements, customer communication management can pay for itself in three to six months”

KEEP SMILING

WITH THE RIGHT ORGANISATION AND TRAINING, CUSTOMER SERVICE CAN BE IMPROVED DESPITE BUDGET CUTS.

The recession has wiped the smile off the faces of many previously happy customers. As companies have cut back on budgets (and staff as a result), service levels have been put under increased pressure just when companies need to maintain their competitive advantage. Morale sinks among those who remain and customers don't get the service they deserve.



But it doesn't have to be like that, as Percepta, a customer experience management specialist, has demonstrated at a contact centre it runs for a major motor manufacturer.

When it seemed as if cuts were unavoidable, Percepta re-organised the staff who remained. "We combined teams and responsibilities and focused on motivation and training," recalls Samantha Lee, Percepta's business development and marketing director. "We ran small incentive programmes and reviewed the interactive voice response technology, redirecting customers back into dealerships and the client's website so the remaining staff weren't overwhelmed with calls." As a result, an independent survey shows customer satisfaction in the company being maintained at its previous healthy levels.

Percepta was founded back in 2000 – a partnership between Ford Motor Company and TeleTech Holdings, a customer management solutions provider. Today, Percepta employs 1,700 staff in 10 contact centres in Europe, North America, South Africa and Australia. Key to its growth has been its willingness to partner with clients, Lee explains.

"We value our long-term partnerships and being involved in strategic decisions made about the direction of clients' business projects," she says.

Unlike many customer management companies which have their staff working on a range of jobs for an ever-changing list of clients, Percepta allocates dedicated staff to specific client projects. And those staff are more often than not located at clients' offices rather than in remote call centres.

This approach allows Percepta to form genuine partnerships with clients, says Lee. "Because our people are working cheek-by-jowl with the client's own staff, they understand the client's business better," she says. "Our people can develop the partnership more productively – for example, by making suggestions for improvements to our client's customer experience management."

And some of those improvements come with a handsome pay-off. For example, Percepta recently worked with two global automotive firms to change their mindsets from running conventional call centres – where the main success measure is how quickly calls are answered – to customer experience thinking that focuses on what really boosts satisfaction.

"If you don't answer calls quickly you'll lose customer satisfaction, but if you answer the calls on time you won't necessarily improve it," Lee explains. Instead, Percepta focused on discovering the factors which turn "ambivalent" customers into buyers with a smile on their face. "Solving customers' problems in the

time they expect and keeping them up to date with progress are the two things that really drive satisfaction," says Lee.

The company implemented systems to identify customers in danger of becoming dissatisfied because their problems weren't being solved quickly enough. And it found that making a courtesy call a few days after the problem was resolved also boosted satisfaction.

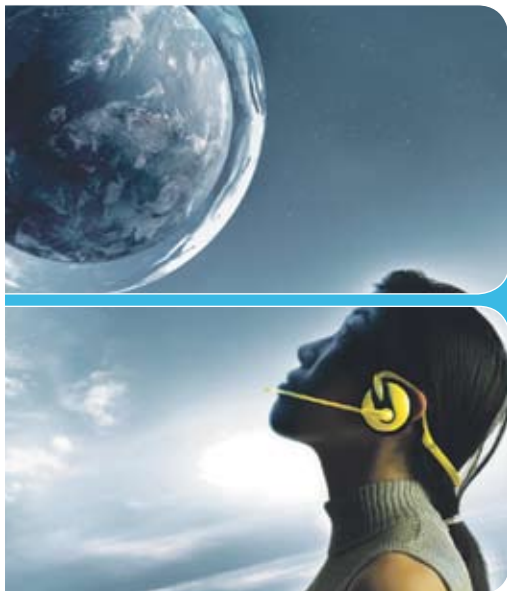
In Europe, this work increased customer "promoters" – those who speak highly of the motor maker – from 12 to 21 per cent and reduced the detractors from 26 to 14 per cent. The bottom line: £14m more in incremental sales.

"Solving customers' problems in the time they expect and keeping them up to date with progress are the two things that really drive satisfaction"

Apart from leading car makers such as Volvo, Ford, Mazda, Jaguar and Land Rover, Percepta works its customer experience magic in industries as varied as agricultural equipment and white goods. Lee makes the point that Percepta's skills are also readily transferable to firms in other sectors.

Whether the recession continues into 2010 or not, the downturn has left plenty of disgruntled consumers in its wake. Finding ways to put the smile back on their face is going to be a business priority in the year ahead.

www.percepta.com/europe



Vocal power

The latest developments in Speech Analytics can provide unprecedented levels of business intelligence.

Turning talk into Strategic Business Data

Every organisation knows that customer interaction is the lifeblood of its business and that capturing data from these exchanges is crucial to customer retention, operational efficiency and identifying new revenue opportunities. But finding the right technology that can capture, search and analyse this information has been an ongoing challenge. A major breakthrough has come with the phonetic indexing technology pioneered by Nexidia, the leading audio and video search company.

How the technology works

Phonetics is the study of the sounds made by human speech. By tracking these phonemes, it is possible to search an audio track for specific data more quickly, accurately and flexibly than with any other speech technology. Phonetic analytics is so effective it is now being used widely to improve customer contact centre service quality and to achieve efficiency savings. How? By identifying the call types, products and processes that are driving call volumes (and hence costs), reducing call handling times and seeing where opportunities such as cross-selling, can be increased.

A leap in analysing speed

A key feature of Nexidia's patented phonetic indexing technology, used in the company's award-winning Enterprise Speech Intelligence (ESI) solution suite, is impressive speed. Compared with its nearest competitor, Speech-to-Text, which analyses at up to 4x normal speaking speed before losing accuracy, Nexidia's software reads speech 207 times faster than normal speech, enabling millions of calls to be analysed a day.

Identifying major savings

Nexidia's accuracy can lead to major savings. A proof of concept trial with customer services outsource provider, Ventura, revealed a potential £600,000 worth of savings after it was discovered agents were finding certain processes, like Explain Bill, hard to explain. "We were able to do targeted listening directly to the point where 'bill' was mentioned in the call, and begin to understand the knowledge and skill gaps," says Michelle Winter, Quality Manager at Ventura. "We rebuilt

the agent framework and developed specific coaching programs to reduce handle times."

Improving agent productivity

This ability to perform root cause analyses on a massive scale lies at the heart of Nexidia's solutions. Barclays recently started a proof of concept trial with Nexidia to improve many parts of their operations, including customer service, compliance and call efficiency. "The customer experience is key," says Graham Whitham, Head of Multi Channel Innovation at Barclays. "We're looking at ways to tailor and improve that experience, to significantly cut down the effort required by a customer to get their call dealt with. Being able to understand the detailed context of what every

Nexidia's software reads speech 207 times faster than normal speech, enabling millions of calls to be analysed a day

customer asks us in every call can help us drive real improvements to our services."

An additional enormous power of Speech Analytics also lies in its ability to home in on the content of individual calls. For example, Whitham says, we might check every call for basic compliance ensuring that all calls concerning sales include the use of appropriate terms and conditions. We're also investigating the possibility of using the system as a safe coaching mechanism for staff development.

Engagement from the top

To ensure continuous improvement Nexidia helps clients achieve self-sufficiency as soon as possible. Says Jonathan Wax, Vice President EMEA at Nexidia: "This includes familiarising analysts with the new system to get them up to speed. One of our major tasks is to demonstrate how the system can have a positive impact on an organisation's business strategy, planning and operational management, and this involves making sure all those at the top are proactively involved."

nexidia 

VENTURA

Customer services outsourcing provider Ventura, carried out a 30 day Proof of Concept with Nexidia. The trial revealed, among other things, that agents didn't fully understand certain processes such as Explain Bill and Direct Debit. While these were ostensibly automated processes, they accounted for 14 per cent and 11 per cent of all calls respectively. In total, £600,000 worth of potential savings was discovered through the trial alone. To date over £1million of productivity savings have been generated. Ventura is now rolling out Nexidia's solution for a number of its clients.

To script or not to script?

Finding a happy combination of knowledgeable and approachable staff can be difficult to achieve so can scripts provide a workable solution? **By Peter Graddon.**

A customer service centre is expected to deal with a wide range of enquiries or problems but in many cases, the staff may not be very familiar with the products or the services that they are dealing with. These centres are also usually very busy and staff turnover only compounds the problems.

Staff in service centres are at the front-end of the business and as far as customers are concerned they are the business; call handlers are the most empowered people in the company because of the way they can influence customer perceptions. That is why every one of those brief encounters between customers and staff need to be handled well.

So managers face a dilemma; they want control so as to maintain standards - but customers want to talk to someone who can respond adaptively to their particular wants and concerns. Managers want to ensure that call handlers are conveying a consistent message - but customers want to be treated as individuals. Managers are seeking to use non-technical customer advisers - but customers want to feel they are speaking to an expert who knows what they are talking about.

Clearly experts make better decisions than novices because of their knowledge, training and experience but it is unrealistic to expect them to be available to deal with every call. So the challenge is to take the knowledge and the skills of experts and make them available to staff who deal with the customer, to allow them to make more effective and faster decisions.

To solve the conundrum, managers have turned to scripts to provide the guidance for staff. Scripts can give the degree of control and consistency managers seek but word-for-word scripting is a real turn-off for customers because of the forced formality and limited opportunity for interaction.

So Omfax Systems has developed Inter•View, a unique system for 'intelligent' scripting with the emphasis on talking to the customer to determine the problem rather than jumping to solutions; on developing staff skills in communication and interviewing rather than as memory banks of answers. Intelligent scripting is about providing staff with quick and easy access to up-to-date guidance and information that is directly relevant to a customer's enquiry and to the right responses and solutions based on expert knowledge.

At the heart of Inter•View, the intelligent scripting tools link the context of the enquiry with customer data and service information to ensure responses reflect the individual customer's circumstances. Using rules based decision processes, Inter•View can ensure responses to customer enquiries, fault diagnoses and service requests are accurate and up-to-date. And a key to its success is the ability to easily amend, refine and add to the scripts.

As a result, staff at customer services centres can perform at a consistently high standard, regardless of the extent of their technical or service knowledge and managers can be assured of the accuracy and consistency of the answers being given to customers.

Peter Graddon is Director at Omfax Systems Ltd
Web: www.omfax.co.uk
Tel: 01869 242867

Intelligent scripting is transforming the way customer contacts are managed:

- building confidence for staff handling all manner of enquiries
- delivering an effective one-stop service
- providing consistent service responses
- providing 'expert' solutions
- focussing on the customer's needs
- enhancing customer service.





Back to the future

James West explains why call centres have such a bad name and how a changing business market could transform them into positive, business-leading operations.

Only traffic wardens and politicians are treated with more disdain than call centre workers, according to the survey conducted by the Co-Operative.

Yet despite negative perceptions, call centres are needed more than ever. Fierce competition means that customer service is perhaps now the main differentiator businesses have, while social networking means that negative word-of-mouth can spread globally within hours, undermining the millions spent constructing brands.

The challenge is to return call centres to their roots: providing customer service. Most call centres were set up to deliver 'service' at the lowest possible cost, not make the lives of customers easier, and negativity this strategy created proves that 'cost-cutting' and 'customer service excellence' are not compatible ideas, but diametrically opposed business goals.

Ian Pearson is a futurist, working previously for BT and now for consultancy Futurizon, and he believes that automation of the dull, repetitive processes which call centres were largely built to address will usher in what he describes as the 'care economy'. "We are emerging from the dark ages when IT was used solely to reduce costs and improve efficiency. The future will see technology increasingly freeing staff to focus on what IT cannot deliver; meaningful human contact."

Therefore, call centres will still exist, but will be far removed from the traditional stereotype of noisy, airless warehouses filled with unhappy workers. Rufus Grig, CTO of Azzurri Communications' contact centre practice, predicts the rise of specialist teams dealing with all customer contacts. "These teams will work across all customer channels, including social

media, appearing when and where customers want help," says Grig.

Ian Pearson gives an example of where call centres are headed, citing a Twitter update he posted complaining about his faulty X-Box. "I quickly received a message from Microsoft offering to help. This service is delivered by the call centre, but instead of waiting for the customer to call in the traditional way, they are monitoring the internet and proactively helping customers."

The call centre agent profile will also change according to Peter Ryan, lead contact centre outsourcing analyst for Ovum. "We are going to see more home workers for whom call centre work can fit around their lifestyles, and an increase in the number of older workers who have the empathy and life experience which make them ideal for customer service work."

Even the term 'call centre' itself needs addressing, as it is hugely reductive and fails to illustrate the breadth of channels supported or acknowledge the powerful role that customer service now has for business success. Rufus Grig

believes the weight of negativity has inspired many businesses to rename the call centre: 'customer helpdesk' or 'customer service centre' are both popular choices.

"Call centres will become smaller, skilled hubs with high calibre staff acting as account managers, responsible for and empowered to deal with all customer issues. Businesses will understand the integral role the call centre plays in driving customer value and treat staff accordingly, meaning that service-based work will no longer be seen as a stop gap career," says Natalie Calvert, managing director of Calcom Group.

Of course, not all businesses will embrace the quality option, and Rufus Grig says this means even greater polarisation between the quality service providers and the businesses who wish to maintain the pile 'em high philosophy. Whether customers, already greatly empowered by the internet and more discerning than ever, will be happy to deal with businesses who continue to offer sub-standard, frustrating call centre services remains to be seen.

"Call centres will become smaller, skilled hubs with high calibre staff acting as account managers, empowered to deal with all customer issues"

Measures that correlate with Profit

Harding & Yorke (H&Y) is the leading Contact Centre measurement business and the custodian of the only academically proven measure to correlate directly with Profit. In 2009, an Academic Journal, authored by Professor Merlin Stone, stated conclusively that Empathy is the key ingredient in turning contact centres from cost to profit centres. The discovery was made from the analysis of H&Y's ERIC (Empathy Rating Index Co.) Benchmarking Programme™ between 2004 and 2008 which measured over 200 companies from 12 different industries semi-annually.

Jamie Lywood, CEO of H&Y, asks 'why would anyone bother with a measurement that didn't have a direct link to their bottom line?' – Why indeed? The ability to empathise with customers and colleagues means that both the physical and emotional needs of customers are accounted for and optimum value is achieved.

The H&Y methodology has been

tested at 98.9 per cent reliable and is fair, consistent and sensitive as well as being equally effective across channels and functions - giving those responsible for brand enhancement and protection a comparable measure across their entire business.

2010: H&Y announce the launch of AS60 – a benchmark of the 60 most aspirational Contact Centres serving the UK. Contact Centres are invited to pit their levels of empathy against these proven centres from the 12 core industries and take their rightful place in the empathy order of merit.

H&Y will also shortly reveal a breakthrough development in the digital capture of empathy and visualisation techniques with integrated early warning signs on unknown risks of profitability, regulation and reputation.

For information on Harding & Yorke call +44 (0) 1235 845 700 or visit: www.empathy.co.uk



CASE STUDY

The AA, the UK's largest motoring organisation, is rolling out a new contact centre system which they describe as 'world-class'. It combines its two business streams, Roadside Assistance and Insurance, into one single integrated and 'virtualised' system.

Phil Buley, Director of IT Operations, the Acromas Group (which owns the AA) explains: "Currently if something causes a call backlog at one of our sites a customer could be waiting longer than one routed to another centre. The new system means that wherever the call enters our network, it will be routed intelligently to the next appropriate agent. This will significantly improve the customer experience that our contact centres can provide, with calls being answered faster."

Azzurri Communications' Contact Centre Practice (www.azzu.co.uk) who are delivering and managing the system, have also developed an intuitive application to automate the identification and validation

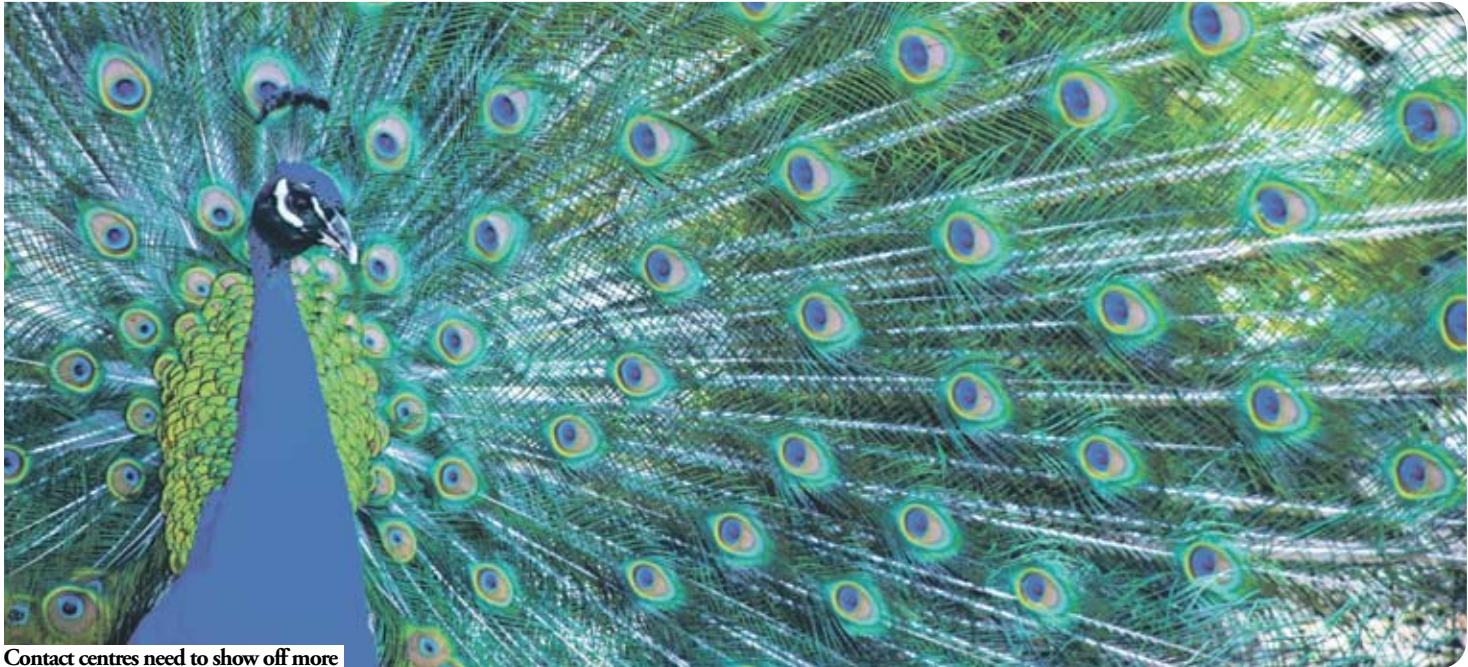
stage of the insurance renewal process. By integrating the self-service application with the new CTI (Computer Telephony Integration) application, AA's customers will no longer need to enter long personal identification numbers. The AA expects this enhancement to lead to a significant increase of customer self-service insurance renewals.

The AA also expects the new solution to reduce its ongoing support costs, whilst maintaining the same levels of management. Buley said: "Being able to deal purely with just one firm for all our support issues going forward will enable our internal team to provide a more effective and responsive service to our customers."



Raising the game

Contact centres need to make sure they are measuring the right things, and market themselves more proudly, argues **Mats Rennstam**.



Contact centres need to show off more

There are a number of things most centres need to change if we are to raise the game across the board. At Bright, we have identified two basic things everyone needs to improve on and four additional improvement areas for more mature centres.

(1) Of the two basic “quick fixes” for the industry, the first one is to measure why customers are calling in a structured way. This may sound obvious but a majority of companies still don’t do this on an ongoing basis. By listing the top 10 reasons every month you will be able to (through root cause analysis, putting FAQs on the web etc) significantly increase your first contact resolution (FCR), customer satisfaction, planning, and feedback to the rest of the organisation etc.

(2) Secondly, stop measuring (and thus managing) what’s easy to measure and what is not relevant to measure. A classic example of this is the 80/20 calls answered service level target that so many organisations still have. Very few centres reach this mark (the average is 55 per cent of calls answered within 20 seconds). Unfortunately most centres

genuinely believe achievement of this target is key to delivering customer satisfaction but when measuring what impact a 30 seconds shorter hold time has, we see that it hardly affects customer satisfaction at all (unless the total hold time exceeds 2 minutes).

Before setting targets for any operational metrics, the strategy needs to be clear; what is our overall purpose and what factors will affect this strategy? It’s the combination of not choosing KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) that drive strategy and a lack of data on how those KPIs affect each other

We need to get better at proudly marketing our industry to the world

that makes many centres work very hard yet only become efficient, not effective.

(3) Measuring and following up the relevant KPIs will tell you how much better or worse you are doing since the last time you measured. However, it won’t tell you whether the resultant figure is good or bad. This can only come from external benchmarking; comparing you to peers and other centres.

Benchmarking against your own sector is of course of biggest initial interest. For qualitative measures though you shouldn’t disregard cross-industry comparisons; not many bank customers call banks other than their own but they will call their teleco, utility and local authority. Each consumer’s view of what constitutes good customer service comes from an amalgam of all their contact centre experiences..

(4) We need to get better at proudly marketing our industry to the outside world. The average centre is actually performing significantly

better now than 2 years ago, however the volume and complexity of calls have increased at an even faster rate. All of us need to have access to better data and communicate this proactively to the media. Within an organisation, managers can use KPIs to market themselves effectively, proving their value to stakeholders in order to get the necessary funds to maintain and invest in a centre. They need to think about what metrics a financial director would

be interested in, and the marketing director, and the CEO.

(5) Apart from the opportunities in home working, voice analytics and other new technology enabled areas, companies need to keep up with a generation that are now used to communicating in other ways. A disappointed generation Y teenager is more likely to post a slating of their interaction with a company on Facebook or Bebo than contact you to let you know. Companies should definitely monitor these sites in order to listen and learn.

(6) It is clear that a contact centre cannot measure performance, employee engagement or customer satisfaction in isolation. They all drive each other and by measuring them in parallel a whole new world will open up. By adopting a more holistic view to performance management, as well as getting the first two basic points right; this industry will definitely be able to raise its game significantly.

Mats Rennstam is MD of Bright UK. Bright produce Europe’s largest bespoke benchmarking for contact centres; the Bright Index



Achieving Actionable Intelligence with Verint

Understanding customers and identifying emerging market trends are key differentiators, particularly in today's challenging market conditions.

As the public face of the organisation, contact centres have a key role to play if businesses are to deliver on their customer service commitments during 2010. At Verint we understand the challenges contact centres face, whether it's achieving the right resourcing balance, meeting compliance requirements, or sharing essential customer and market information across the business.

Verint's enterprise workforce optimisation solutions help by giving organisations insight that might otherwise be difficult - if not impossible - to obtain. The company's solutions help organisations to capture customer intelligence, uncover business trends, discover the root cause

of employee and customer behaviour, and optimise the customer experience across contact centres, branch and back-office operations - all focused at reducing operational costs and increasing revenue creation potential.

Our next generation Impact 360 Speech Analytics solution, for example, allows organisations to analyse contact centre calls to identify customer trends. By applying specialist data mining technology, it uses advanced analytics techniques to help transform raw contact centre data into Actionable Intelligence. For a business this translates directly into clear reports of what customers are saying, details of what terms customers use most, and also alerts when changes are occurring within customer

conversations.

Our Impact 360 solutions go further, allowing businesses to take the customer intelligence currently locked in the contact centre and start applying it to other areas of their operation - helping not only to improve the customer experience, but also enabling better decisions that will lead directly to reduced costs and increased revenues.

For more information about Verint, please visit: www.intelligenceinaction.com

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No wires attached

How best to support customer service best practice in call centres, by Richard Kenny, EMEA Contact Centre Business Marketing Manager, Plantronics

Reliable audio quality and full access to data during a call have traditionally outweighed the need for agent mobility in call centres. These two simple product capabilities have driven call centres to favour corded headsets for the majority of agents as they are key in delivering customer service.

However, new wireless technologies, as well as matching corded headsets on audio quality and giving agents more personal freedom, can now significantly improve customer services too. The latest wireless headset combines the optimal voice quality of traditional telephony for customer conversations and the latest in Unified Communications technology which can locate subject matter experts within the organisation and mix them into the call without putting the customer on hold. This enables experts to listen and respond to customer problems directly, all on the first call which helps contact centres achieve

first call resolution. The UC technology also allows agents to listen to how the problem was solved, better equipping them to deal with similar problems moving forward; increasing their knowledge and improving the attrition rate.

A further benefit of this technologies ability to mix audio streams, is to enable the supervisor to listen to call recordings on their PC and replay them over the phone to remote or home based agents for training purposes.

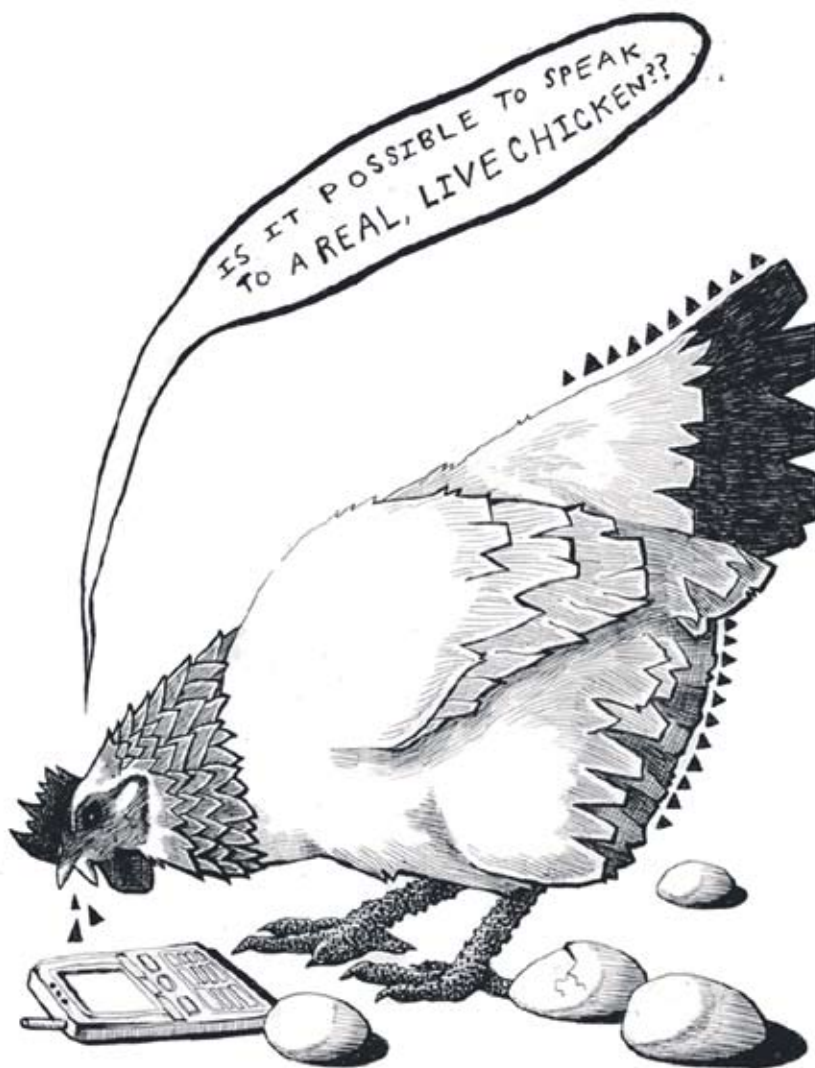
For organisations looking to the latest technology to improve their customer service, wireless headsets with the ability to mix audio streams together, combined with the collaboration enabled by Unified Communications provides tangible and immediate benefits.

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Phone truths

People rarely have a good word to say about call centres. At best they are seen as a modern necessity, at worst as the impenetrable, outer stronghold of a heartless, corporate machine. But is this image really fair? **Paul Bray** investigates



We all have a mental picture of the typical contact centre: a battery hen house with a telephone in every cage, where catatonic operators with thick foreign accents drone through a prepared script, fail to answer our questions, and then try to hard-sell us something we didn't want, before fobbing us off onto someone else to start the whole process again.

There are all kinds of things wrong with this cartoon image, but the most striking is the premise that there is any such thing as a typical contact centre. Almost a million Britons work in contact centres – a number which continues to rise – and they vary hugely in the type, difficulty and variety of work they undertake, from basic sales to complex technical or emotional support. (Incidentally it's a myth that most agents are foreign: only a small percentage of communications are handled offshore, and more companies are actually making a feature of their UK-only contact centres).

Nor is there a typical worker. Staff range from students paying their way through college and mums returning to work, to 'resting' actors and retired solicitors. A quarter are graduates, according to a survey by Hays Contact Centres, and the proportion can be much higher in complex business-to-business areas. Some agents are experts in their own fields, such as the trained counsellors and registered nurses who man some NHS hotlines, or financial experts engaged in complex business-to-business transactions.

Pay isn't always great because of offshore competition, but there are compensations, says Philip Shuldham-Legh, group sales and marketing director of outsourced contact centre operator The Listening Company. "Most people come to work here because it's fast-moving, enjoyable and involves a lot of new technology, and above all because they like people. It's a very social job, off the phone as well as on it."

Some workers just want a job, but others are keen to build careers, either within the contact centre or in other areas of the business (Shuldham-Legh started his career on the phone, like most of The Listening Company's directors). "It's a very good way to get in on the ground floor of an organisation and the best people can get promoted very quickly," says Anne Marie Forsyth, chief executive of the Customer Contact Association.

There are now professional qualifications in contact centre work, and according to the Hays survey, a third of agents see it as a long-term career and more than half would recommend it to friends.

Super agent

Far from 'dumbing down' the contact centre, the increasing availability of information through the internet and other sources has actually increased the complexity of the work, says Marc Michaels, director of direct and relationship marketing at the Central Office of Information. "Self-service takes away a lot of the 'basic' questions so the people who phone up are more likely to have queries that are complex, urgent or emotionally challenging. That means you need a higher calibre of staff." There's more focus on training and developing staff than there used to be, says Birgit Neumann, EMEA vice president of relationship management specialist Convergys. "This is a people business and if you don't train, manage and motivate people properly you can't give good customer service. The perception that contact centres take people straight off the street simply isn't true any more."

There's now an increasing emphasis on multi-

Staff range from students paying their way through college and mums returning to work, to 'resting' actors and retired solicitors

skilled 'super agents' who can handle a variety of tasks. Targets are still important, but they're more likely to be based on output – has the agent solved the customer's problem? – rather than the number of calls taken. Far from wanting to get callers off the phone as quickly as possible, one major bank actually imposed a minimum call length because research suggested that short calls tended to leave customers dissatisfied.

"More and more information is available at the front line and there's more emphasis on trying to sort things out at the first point of contact," says Forsyth – although she adds that it helps if customers also have all the necessary information to hand before they ring up, and know what they want the call to achieve.

The old-fashioned 'zombie' approach, where agents were forbidden to deviate from a rigid script, is on the way out, says Neumann. Agents are more likely to have a 'script flow' that merely guides the direction of the conversation, and there's more emphasis on empowering them to take decisions on the spot, such as issuing refunds up to a certain limit or fast-tracking an order.

Even that common bugbear, cross-selling, is getting a makeover, as companies try to get under the skin of their customers rather up their nose. "The key is finding out what's driving the

customer," says Derek Bishop, managing director of customer service specialist Abeo Consulting. "We talk about helping the customer to make a decision to buy, rather than 'selling'."

Making conversation

So why do so many of us still say we hate contact centres? Perhaps what we really hate is not the contact centre per se, but the times when things don't go right. "When you get a piece of direct mail that you value, you don't call it junk mail," says Michaels. "Similarly when you get the right information from a trained customer service representative who's empowered and supported to deliver what you want, you don't think of it as a contact centre, but as a conversation."

When contact centres fail, the root of the problem usually lies elsewhere, says Bishop. "Rather than trying to fix the contact centre, you may need to talk to the board."

Inadequate training, poor performance management, lack of empowerment, over-emphasis on targets and unpleasant working conditions may all be part of the problem, but it can take top management action to fix them.

Contact centres tend to be a barometer for the quality of the business as a whole. If internal communication is poor, for example, the contact centre won't be made aware of the latest new product or marketing campaign, the necessary resources and skills won't be in place, and the customer experience will suffer, says Bishop. In successful companies, adds Neumann, "There's far more focus on the contact centre as an output of something that happens deeper within the organisation."

"The stature of contact centres within organisations has significantly increased, and almost every one we run has board-level representation," says Shuldham-Legh. "In the past you never had that kind of voice, and greater recognition has meant that people take more pride in the job."

As they become better integrated into the business, the positive value of contact centres is becoming more apparent. "A contact centre is a hard core commercial operation and what we do is quite measurable," says Shuldham-Legh. "You can say, 'If you give me 200 more people, this is what I could deliver for the business.' I've seen a team of eight people drive £40 million a year in new revenue."

The most astute businesses are aware that they can use integrated contact centres as a source of customer intelligence. "The fact that communications come into one place means that lots of information is captured that organisations can use to understand customers' needs, wants and expectations, and tailor their products and improve their services in order to meet them," says Forsyth. This has been a particular focus during the recession, when customer retention has become so important.

So next time you contact a contact centre, spare a thought for the intelligent, trained professional on the other end of the line. And if they're not intelligent, trained or professional, ask yourself whether you're talking to the right company.



Even cross-selling is getting a makeover, as companies try to get under the skin of their customers rather up their nose

USING NET PROMOTER® TO MAKE CALL CENTRES A DRIVER OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND GROWTH



In the journey a customer takes from selecting a supplier to experiencing a service or a product, the call centre often features as one of the main touchpoints. And, research by Satmetrix shows that there is a strong relationship between ‘support’ interactions and loyalty – and thus business growth. In fact, we discovered that:

- satisfaction with the support experience is a leading indicator of loyalty
- changes in support satisfaction scores is reflected in recommendation scores in as little as three months
- support organisations must balance operational and loyalty measures to support customer retention and growth.

As a result ‘service and support’ has a unique opportunity to monitor and influence customers’ ongoing relationship with your company, impacting retention, repurchase and referrals.

Through our work with global organisations we have identified six essential steps for call centres to exceed expectations:

(1) Evaluate how operational metrics impact loyalty. While most call centres focus on cost management, you must evaluate how metrics such as hold time, connect time and language issues impact loyalty. You may find the financial impact of customer churn and word of mouth exceeds the cost savings.

(2) Embrace a common metric like NPS® across the enterprise to break down your silos. The support experience is often dependent on

other functional areas such as sales or products. Creating a common metric that all functional leaders embrace breaks down the silos and ensures a positive customer experience across the journey.

(3) Balance key financial metrics with Net Promoter. Understand the economics of customer loyalty and optimise the customer experience to create loyal customers that purchase more and refer their friends.

(4) Understand the drivers of loyalty. While there may be several areas of the customer experience that need to improve, identify those areas that matter most to customers and focus your efforts on improving those areas first.

(5) Close the loop. Communicate with customers your actions, demonstrate that you have listened to their feedback and are making changes to improve their experience.

(6) Plan to exceed expectations with a clearly defined strategy for capturing the voice of the customer and driving action. Build the right processes to distribute the voice of the customer and hold the organisation accountable to address performance gaps and identify opportunities to delight customers.

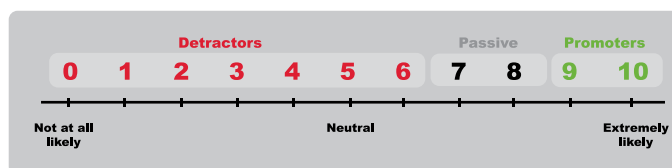
The book – Answering the Ultimate Question - goes into these and other steps in more detail. It is a “how to” guide for successful Net Promoter programmes, based on case studies and findings from over 80 companies.

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$$\text{NPS} = \% \text{ of PROMOTERS (9s and 10s)} - \% \text{ of DETRACTORS (0 through 6)}$$

One question provides the best predictor of customer loyalty for the vast majority of businesses: How likely is it that you would recommend (Company/Product X) to a friend or colleague? Using a 0 to 10 scale, you can calculate your Net Promoter Score® (NPS®) by taking the percentage of Detractors.

The Net Promoter® score allows you to categorise customers into three groups based on their willingness to recommend your company or product to a friend or colleague:

- **Promoters** (score 9–10) are loyal enthusiasts who will keep buying and refer others, fueling growth.
- **Passives** (score 7–8) are satisfied but unenthusiastic customers who are vulnerable to competitive offerings.
- **Detractors** (score 0–6) are unhappy customers who can damage your brand and impede growth through negative word-of-mouth.

When combined with appropriate diagnostics and follow-up actions, the NPS drives improvements in customer loyalty and enables profitable growth.



By Richard Owen,
co-author of Answering the Ultimate
Question and CEO Satmetrix,
the Net Promoter Company

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Successful organisations know that providing excellent service sets them apart from competitors, keeps customers happy, motivates their best staff, builds enviable reputations and increases their prospects for future success.

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- to increase employee engagement
- to make a difference with your customers
- to improve your business performance

People who are well trained, motivated and engaged deliver the best customer service to customers.

We develop and maintain the National Occupational Standards in contact centres; our own professional qualifications are based on these standards and are available to people working in member organisations. We also offer organisations the opportunity to have their own training programmes formally recognised and benchmarked against national customer service standards.

Technology can only take you so far in customer service delivery. Your people need to be highly trained and encouraged to consistently meet and wherever possible exceed customer expectations.



The most successful organisations are those whose people, processes and strategies are focused on delivering the best possible customer experience.

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Jo Causon, chief executive, Institute of Customer Service.

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What could Unified Communications do for you?

Everyone's talking about Unified Communications (UC) – but how can contact centres benefit from these new capabilities? It's really quite simple.

UC technology-enables customer contact business processes, removes the barriers between communications systems (such as voice, e-mail, instant messaging, desktop applications, presence, voice-mail, fax, and video/web conferencing) and integrates them in real time.

With UC, organisations can also extend their contact centre capabilities to external knowledge workers. And with research showing that service agents and supervisors require assistance from experts in other departments on over 10 per cent of calls, that's something everyone can benefit from. Aspect's UC applications for the contact centre, together with its UC Services practice, help companies capitalise on these opportunities.

UC applications from Aspect include:

- Seamless Customer Service™ which delivers the tools needed for comprehensive call response, including co-ordinated self-service/live service and integrated assistance
- Blended Interaction™ which provides inbound, outbound, self-service and workforce

optimisation along with common reporting and administration

- Streamlined Collections™ which automates early stage collections and enables expert agent engagement
- Optimized Collections™ which uses performance, workforce and campaign management techniques to increase right party contacts, low staffing costs and improve collector effectiveness and collections results
- Productive Workforce™ which uses tools and processes to help organisations optimise resource utilisation and adopt a continuous improvement culture
- Productive Workforce™ for Aspect® eWorkforce Management™ which delivers these benefits to Aspect eWorkforce Management users

Using these applications, Aspect believes organisations can improve customer satisfaction by 8 per cent, first call resolution by 5 per cent and productivity by 10 per cent; while reducing overall maintenance costs by 20 per cent.

58 per cent of UK business executives taking part in a March 2009 Aspect survey said that their

organisation had a UC strategy. Executives cited cost savings, improved collaboration, greater efficiency, and increased productivity as the main benefits of UC.

For more information, contact:

Jenny Thornton on: marketing.uk@aspect.com

Or call: 020 8589 1000





The art of listening

Voice recognition systems can bring huge savings, and the best part is that customers actually like it.

It is said that if a caller to the computerised enquiry system of German railways sneezes, the computer says 'Gesundheit'.

True or not, the story represents the ambition of the designers of automated customer contact systems - to be so slick that customers almost but not quite feel they are talking to a human being.

It is important they are never totally fooled, because many people actually prefer to talk to a machine rather than a human being, according to Ian Turner, European general manager of leading voice recognition company Nuance. "According to Ladbrokes, who use our software, people often prefer to place bets with a machine, and Premier Inns report that people prefer to cancel reservations with the computer," he says.

The current generation of voice recognition systems for contact centres aims to eliminate the much-disliked 'if your enquiry is about sales, press 1' system. Instead, a voice asks the caller if they want X or Y, and recognises the caller's response. The accuracy is now very high even faced with challenging accents.

As a mobile phone pioneer, Vodafone has enormous expertise in dealing with customers, now made available to the contact centre industry through its Unified Communications Group. They are offering design, installation and support of a number of self service applications, including interactive voice recognition (IVR) and Voice Portal, which can help contact centres deal with repetitive requests and queries.

Adrian Hipkiss, head of sales at Vodafone Unified Communications Group, says IVR is a financial no-brainer. "IVR is a growth area because of its ability to drive a really strong return on investment, often in months not years" he says. "IVR takes away some tasks that are very

The latest IVR systems can even pick up distressed or angry customers and signal their calls for immediate attention

expensive to do with human operators, such as taking an address, giving out opening hours or issuing a repeated instruction such as directions, all of which are very simple tasks."

IVR can also help cope with spikes in demand without having to hire temporary staff. "A building society during the Northern Rock crisis was being inundated with calls," Hipkiss recalls, "so they added a self-service engine to the call centre PBX that offered the option for an agent to ring back, and either stored the customer's number from the CLI or asked for it if it was withheld." There was a real possibility that, had customers failed to get through on the phone, they would have gone to their local branch and queued, a sight that fuelled the panic that hit Northern Rock.

The latest IVR systems can even pick up distressed or angry customers and signal their calls for immediate attention. "A motoring organisation's system detects stressed female voices late at night and puts them straight through to a skilled operator, and other systems can identify what they call 'colourful metaphors' that show the customer is angry, and put them through to an operator who can sort out their problem," says Hipkiss.



► Vodafone leading the unified communications revolution

Contact centres are in the throes of the unified communications revolution, bringing together the internet, mobile phones, texting and more so customers can talk to businesses in the way that suits them best.

One of the recent arrivals in the sector, Vodafone, brings a quiverful of technologies from network planning through remote working to customer relationship management into the field, and is a top-tier partner with all the major contact centre technology suppliers. Its Unified Communications division, built around the purchase of Central Telecom, is a major force in the contact centres in the UK and Europe.

With its comprehensive breadth of expertise Vodafone now offers all the new services that many customers now expect, such as web chat, video conferencing, texting and email (and not forgetting that most of them still want to talk).

The offering also includes all the technology under the bonnet that connects customers to the right operative by intelligent call routing, and gives the operative the customer data they need from the CRM database. Predictive dialling for outward-bound call centres ensures the agents always have something to do.

Vodafone's expertise also extends to regulatory and legal advice, particularly important when calls are being recorded.

www.vodafone-central.com



vodafone

Bring it home

The technology is now in place to allow a rapid rise of agents working remotely.

Working as a call centre operator at home can be a godsend for single parents, the disabled and their carers, and for people living beyond commuting distance of the cities. But progress has been slow.

Amber Maclennan lives with her young family in Easter Ross, one of the remotest parts of the British Isles, and found it impossible to get work close by. Now she works from home as a call centre operative for outsourcing company Vertex, who recently started a pilot scheme in the area in collaboration with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. "I really wanted to go back to work but once child care and travel were taken into account it made no sense. Now all I have to do is walk to a corner of the bedroom, log in and I can work in the morning while the kids are at school," she says.

The benefits for workers are clear, but timid HR policies and fears over security have held home workers back, despite the huge benefits both financially and in self-esteem that can be gained by joining the world of work.

"Home working is becoming more prevalent but home or remote workers are still a tiny proportion of the contact centre workforce," says Anne Marie Forsyth, chief executive of the Customer Contact Association.

There is great interest in a new model for remote working developed in the US, according to Ms Forsyth. "Home workers are self-employed agents and bid for the hours they want to work," she explains. "The companies find they are not managing staff but trying to make sure they are feeding enough hours to the best people to keep them on your side."

The new model has not been adopted widely on this side of the Atlantic because managements do not want to lose control, Forsyth says, but points out that the self-employed are vetted more thoroughly than most hired hands because they have to register with a bank and the tax man. So far, the most prominent user of self-employed home workers is Shop Direct, the operation behind the Littlewoods, Grattan and Woolworths Online brands.

The technology to equip home workers effectively and securely is now mature and

affordable, according to Dave Hopkins of Vodafone. Not only that, but it is supported by the sophisticated infrastructure developed for by companies for their contact centres. Much of the technology developed by Vodafone for its contact centres is now being integrated into

The technology to equip home workers effectively and securely is now mature and affordable

the homeworking environment, such as disaster recovery and continuity architecture, integrated back office solutions and intelligent call routing.

"The computers used by home based operators have to be very secure, with no USB ports or discs that could be used to copy information and pass it on, or download viruses," he says. "Our computers are completely locked down and because the software actually runs on our computers, connecting with the home agents' computers using Citrix middleware, they don't have any sensitive data. It also minimises the bandwidth required."

Having got the technology sorted, companies need to think carefully about the type of work the remote workers should be given. They are not, in general, best at sales because salesmen like to work in teams, with lots of interaction and a sense of competition that is best fostered by keeping them all together. "General customer service such as dealing with payment queries, product returns and technical support are ideal for home workers," Hopkins says.

Soon, home working may become mandatory as part of Britain's commitment to reduce carbon emissions. "Now there is a big push on the green agenda I believe that in two or three years all call centres will have to have a proportion of their workings home based," Hopkins predicts.



Customer service managers are still focusing on the wrong things, **writes Frank Sherlock.**

What customers want

As expectations of a recovery in 2010 rise, companies that are identifying strategies to gain momentum ahead of their competitors should consider superior customer service as an essential source of strength. However, executives need to understand how the consumer landscape has shifted. The availability of information to the general public, as well as the disintegration of barriers to switching between competitors have generated a more challenging service environment.

Customers are less likely to put up with poor and rigid service. Instead, they are looking for a positive experience that meets their needs. The winners will be those companies that use customer service as a differentiator.

A survey commissioned by Convergys in early 2009 shows that when customers contact companies for service, they have two main priorities: Is the customer service agent knowledgeable? And is the

One way of stopping this effect is by making better use of the data companies already hold. These include customer satisfaction surveys, behavioral data, and recorded conversations. The most successful companies go one step further, giving agents the leeway and authority to meet individual needs and provide positive, personal experiences.

When it comes to evaluating a company's customer service operation, executives need to look at the problems that are not resolved in one call and adjust processes that could result in a repeat occurrence. At all times, organisations should aim for consistent quality interactions between customers and agents. Although this intelligence and level of service could be potentially expensive, knowledge-management systems, speech recognition, and other technologies can help to offset these costs in the long run.

Some executives believe that irritated customers will forgive their errors and come back for

At all times, organisations should aim for consistent quality interactions between customers and agents

problem resolved first time? Yet these factors are often not priorities for customer-service managers, with most organisations continuing to measure time-on-hold and minutes-per-call. These approaches could encourage contact centre staff to rush calls - resulting in an unsatisfying customer experience.

Over half of customers surveyed say they have had a bad service experience and on average, 40 per cent of customers suffering bad service stop doing business with the offending company, often without warning.

more. However, Convergys' research indicates that that opposite is true. As companies rebuild themselves in 2010, this silent attrition represents lost opportunities for positive word of mouth and future sales. Any company looking to be first out of the blocks in an upturn needs to immediately address what matters most to its customers and prevent silent attrition.

Frank Sherlock is Senior Vice President International at Convergys

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Getting better connected



By allowing agents to quickly access customer data for up-sell and cross-sell opportunities, CCM can increase service revenue by up to 35 per cent

Customer communications management, or CCM, is a relatively new technology, but it promises significant improvements in the quality and efficiency of the way many large and medium-sized organisations interact with their customers.

According to Lisa Sutrick, director of product management at CCM specialist Pitney Bowes Business Insight, the CCM process stretches from data acquisition and cleansing, through dynamic document generation and multi-channel output, to providing a permanent archive (or 'vault') and account management for customer self-service.

Many organisations are already using CCM for high-volume 'batch' transactions, although they can extend this by the addition of carefully tailored marketing or informational messages. However, they have not focused as much on their on-demand and interactive initiatives from a holistic CCM perspective.

For example, CCM can make it easier to produce one-off documents on demand. If a customer buys a carpet in a shop and wants a finance contract, this can be generated and printed on the spot. If someone buys a concert ticket on the web and needs a personal identity card to gain admission to the venue, this can be emailed to them for printing on their home printer. The same principles can be applied to all manner of documents, from extended guarantees to insurance quotations.

For interactive communications with the contact centre, the user interface must be easy to use and efficient – perhaps automatically selecting the right template, pre-filling as much as

is available from the back-end system, then only displaying exactly what is needed as the template unfolds before the user's eye. It should be possible for the interface to be designed by, or in consultation with, the actual users, says Sutrick, so that their efficiency is increased, not impaired.

According to a study, Turning Customer Interaction into Profitable Relationships, by independent analyst firm Quocirca, "Equipping call centre agents with accurate information to service calls ensures that call handling is prompt and reliable, while by integrating information captured by call centre agents with business systems such as customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise content management, CCM ensures that customers receive timely and accurate communications based on a complete knowledge of their interactions."

Research by McKinsey & Company suggests that, by reducing the average time it takes agents to retrieve or update information from back-end systems, CCM can cut service costs by up to 25 per cent, while customer self-service (for example via the web) can reduce transaction costs by 99 per cent (eg from £10 to 10 pence). In addition, by allowing agents to quickly access customer data for up-sell and cross-sell opportunities, CCM can increase service revenue by up to 35 per cent.

"With CCM," says Sutrick, "the contact centre agent's life is made easier, the business knows that communications are properly branded and conveying the right message, and the customer gets a better, more consistent, more relevant service. So everybody wins."

► STAGES IN THE CCM PROCESS MAY INCLUDE:

* Verifying that customer contact details are correct and consistent, and adding demographic and personal data to help understand customers' past behaviour and predict their future needs.

* Creating relevant, personalised, content-rich communications that increase the likelihood of the customer making a purchase; improve customer satisfaction, cross- and up-selling opportunities; and enable the business to provide a faster and better response to queries.

* Selecting the customer's preferred delivery channel. For example, older customers might appreciate a phone call while teenagers would prefer a text message – or even, in future, a posting on a social networking site.

* And recording exactly what's been said, by whom, when, and how. "In today's increasingly interactive, multi-channel world, if you don't archive communications across all possible media you don't have a single customer view anymore," says Sutrick.



Outsourced but not forgotten

Call centre outsourcing isn't all about cheap and cheerless phone support. **James West** argues it is a practice that is maturing, with a range of options helping businesses give the best possible customer service.

Call centre outsourcing has become synonymous with poor quality support delivered by workers thousands of miles away, all in the name of saving businesses money. Yet such examples are becoming hard to come by, and many different types of outsourcing are now being used to compliment and improve the service businesses deliver in-house.

Peter Ryan, lead contact centre outsourcing analyst for Ovum, visits outsourced call centres around the world, and reports that many of the staff he meets are 'the cream of the crop'. He insists the market is now mature and that leading outsourcers are able to exceed the quality of service that their clients are able to offer to customers.

If this is the case, why aren't there more positive stories about outsourcing? Rufus Grig, CTO of Azzurri Communications' contact centre practice, says anonymity is the best endorsement for an outsourcer. "If they are doing their job properly, the customer may not notice they are dealing with an outsourcer." And those who have managed this sleight-of-hand are not quick to shout about it for fear of alerting their competitors of its potential.

Peter Ryan says the savings once mooted are rarely realised, especially as the emerging locations for offshoring have matured. India, for example, which Ryan describes as a 'great play' five years ago in terms cost, has become extremely competitive, with workers demanding better benefits and higher wages in exchange for their loyalty.

Instead the reason to outsource has become

more about quality. "For a good outsourcers, quality customer service is their bread and butter, and they can deal with the attrition, staffing and technological issues which are not core to most businesses," explains Ryan.

Although long-distance offshoring destinations such as India, the Philippines and South Africa are still popular options for businesses looking to outsource, the change in emphasis from cost to relationship-building has seen the rise of 'near-shoring', that is the practice of outsourcing to locations closer to home soil. For the UK, this means countries such as Poland

"If they are doing their job properly, the customer may not notice they are dealing with an outsourcer"

and Egypt, while in the States it's Canada and Mexico. Peter Ryan explains the appeal. "If

there is a problem, the call centre is closer - 2-3 hours on a plane instead of long haul. Cultural familiarity is also better."

Another option is home-shoring. This can involve working with an outsourcer based in the client's home territory. Such an arrangement is carried out almost exclusively for quality-driven reasons, as savings will be minimal, but it does mean the customer benefits from the speciality of the outsourcer as discussed earlier.

The other type of home-shoring involves call centre agents working from home. "Not only do you lose the huge overheads associated with running a call centre, but you tend to attract older people who own their homes and have a good level of education and life experience - ideal traits for call centre workers," says Ryan. (For more on home-working, see page 22)

Yet the future of outsourcing is not any one of the methods described above. Instead, call centre outsourcing will increasingly be defined by blending these different ideas to create the right balance.

A simple example would be retaining a home soil call centre, either through an outsourcer in the same country or managed in-house, for the queries that require special care and attention. Some home working will be employed, perhaps allowing agents to work some days in the call centre and some from home, to minimise overheads and transport costs. Near-shore outsourcing might be employed to act as an overflow, or to offer service out of hours. "There is no magic bullet, businesses will need to find what works best for them," says Ryan.

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Customers want to speak to well trained, well mannered and clear spoken, helpful staff but unfortunately, this is frequently not their experience with contact centres.

Centre Managers want to provide the best people for their customer's experience, but it's hard to recruit people in the top quartile of intelligence capability, with sensitive communication skills. Such people want to be doctors, lawyers, consultants, diplomats. They don't go for careers in contact centres.

Durham based Voicentric have a solution. People who aspire to the professions typically go to top Universities where they study maths, the sciences, history, philosophy etc. Students at top Universities, like the University of Durham, are the professionals of tomorrow. But while at University they need money to finance their way through their studies and they are very willing to work in an upmarket call centre based on their doorstep.

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Doing a Masters in Physics at Durham, Mike Higgs, is very much a typical Voicentric team member.



“I work
in a call
centre
and I
like it”

It is hard to believe that anyone would want to work in a call centre, such is the negativity surrounding them. Yet **James West** spoke to three people who not only enjoy their work but also challenge the stereotype of the tedious call centre environment.

Of the three people you will hear from in this article, Gary Stroud works in an environment that is most representative of the average call centre - busy, bustling and high energy. Yet the similarities end there, as working for the Sony PlayStation account for his employer Sitel means that break times often entail intense sessions of gaming action, rather than sitting in a dreary canteen waiting for a shift to end.

Stroud, who has been a customer service advisor for the past four years, was introduced to the business via an agency and ‘liked it straight away’. The stereotypes most people associate with call centres - overcrowding, constant pressure, stress, and high staff turnover - do not apply here. “We have ample room to move about, and we have targets but they are achievable and the pressure is not as high as people might think.”

PHONE GAMES

The reason why these problems are absent is

thanks to the strategic focus of PlayStation. Many call centres are driven to reduce costs, rewarding agents by their efficiency at moving onto the next call, rather than offering a quality experience to customers. This alienates agents, making them feel like robots merely processing calls and creates many of the issues that typify the negative call centre experience.

The PlayStation approach differs, using service quality to maintain brand integrity, and encouraging staff to go the extra mile to ensure customers are happy. This extends to the reward programmes as Stroud details. “We are targeted on quality and excelling in this area means going into prize draws for things like Champions League tickets and PlayStations.”

Work repetition is dealt with by giving staff additional and alternative tasks to carry out; Stroud for example spends some of his time creating schedules and handles web chat and email as well as phone-based interactions. The dreaded lack of career path has also been addressed: ‘the majority of the managers here

started off on the phones’. All team members are approachable, including Andy Barker, the Sony Computer Entertainment (SCE) UK director of consumer services, who is ultimately the boss of the entire operation. “I can talk to Andy, he’s a knowledgeable guy and I can ask him direct questions if I’m having difficulty on a call and he is around.”

As well as getting to play the games which they support, Stroud says the team has some fun with the game playing public, recalling a gamer who had ‘won’ a speedboat when playing the quiz game Buzz on his PlayStation and called up to see when the boat was being delivered.

HOME LIFE

Another person helping reverse stereotypes is Gillian Rose, who is employed by outsourced call centre services provider Maygenta, and works for several of its clients. Suffering from acute Agoraphobia, Rose says that if it wasn’t for Maygenta, she wouldn’t be working at all. The reason why her condition is not a barrier to work

Soulless? It doesn't have to be like this



is that all Maygenta call centre staff are home-based workers.

The interview, training, and the job itself are all handled remotely, meaning that Rose - who is able to leave her home for short periods - hasn't been required to leave the house to fulfil the needs of the role. "The job is very flexible, I work roughly two half days per week, broken up into blocks of four hour shifts. You can 'pause' when you need to, go and put the washing on etc. Everyday brings a different challenge and I enjoy speaking to people and solving problems."

Although working alone can be difficult

for some people, Rose says she is friendly with other members of staff and occasionally calls one of her colleagues for a chat. "Maygenta is adding a message board and chat facility to the

website soon which will allow us to talk more frequently. Online training sessions are also fun and make me feel part of a team."

For Rose, it is fair to say the role has transformed her life. "Before this job, my confidence and self-belief were very low, but Maygenta has been so supportive and the operations manager, Lionel Lincoln-Lewis, is always on the end of the phone if something needs fixing. It's given me a new chapter in my life."

SOCIAL WORKER

The final person helping to bust myths about call centre work is Emma Sykes, who works for healthy children's food specialist Ella's Kitchen. For a start, rather than working on her own in a separate call centre, Sykes works in the central Ella's Kitchen office located just outside of

Henley. "The whole business employs 15 people, so I sit with the rest of the team in our converted barn. It is an open plan environment and I deal with every customer enquiry personally, whether it be phone, email or letter."

Being at the heart of the team, rather than working as a fringe department, is vital because it means that Sykes is not only able to address any problems that customers are experiencing, but also work with the rest of the team to ensure the reasons why a problem occurred in the first place are fixed. "The role means I have got to know everyone on the team, so I can speak directly to the marketing teams, the comms team, or whoever is involved in the service we ultimately deliver to customers."

While the average call centre agent finds themselves classified as being on the bottom rung of the business hierarchy, Sykes describes herself as managerial level. "I've worked in major press offices and I'm a mum myself so I hope I bring some gravitas, and I'm totally empowered to do

whatever is needed. I love helping people and I believe in the mantra of treating people like you want to be treated."

There are two defining shared characteristics of these three individuals. Firstly, they enjoy talking to and helping people. Secondly, the businesses they work for fully support them in fulfilling their roles. By understanding the value of their customers, rather than treating service as a costly burden, SCE, Maygenta and Ella's Kitchen allow service-orientated people to blossom and do what they do best.

The old style, lowest-cost-possible-style call centres will still exist for sometime, and these operations will continue to promote the negative stereotypes which plague the industry. But as businesses get smarter and realise that treating customers badly means they will be lost to competitors, we will see more call centres which

are positive and well-respected operations, and as a consequence, more satisfied call centre workers.

Five ways to keep staff happy

Give staff formal training opportunities. Organisations of all sizes – but particularly small to medium-sized enterprises – can take advantage of the Government's Train to Gain programme, which provides advice and funding to help businesses put staff through recognised qualification programmes such as NVQs.

Create the right environment. Employees often leave call centres because there are better incentives elsewhere. Working with a local gym or crèche to secure discounted membership rates or child care can be a low-cost way of developing an enticing benefits package.

Consider using virtual staff. Call centres like QVC have found that home-workers such as carers or people with disabilities tend to stay with the organisation longer than office-based employees.

Remove the boredom factor. Call centre work is often regarded as monotonous. But by implementing technology such as interactive voice response (IVR) to handle simple customer queries, businesses can ensure staff have a more varied and interesting workload.

Offer career breaks. Staff don't always leave call centres to go to another job. If valued employees want a career break to go travelling or undertake charity work, follow Sage's example and give them the opportunity to return at a later date.

Alex Coxon

Analysis: The UK contact centre industry in 2010 and beyond

2009 saw the first-ever annual reduction in agent position figures, with the industry shedding 11,500 seats (equating to around 18,500 jobs). In large part, this is due to the fallout in the financial services sector, with woes in manufacturing, media advertising and travel playing parts too. On the positive side, the retail and distribution, services and public services sectors all posted significant increases in headcount.

Looking to the future, major surveys carried out by ContactBabel, a contact centre analyst firm, show a strengthening in confidence within the industry, with many respondents planning double-digit percentage increases in headcount in 2010, although the industry is unlikely ever again

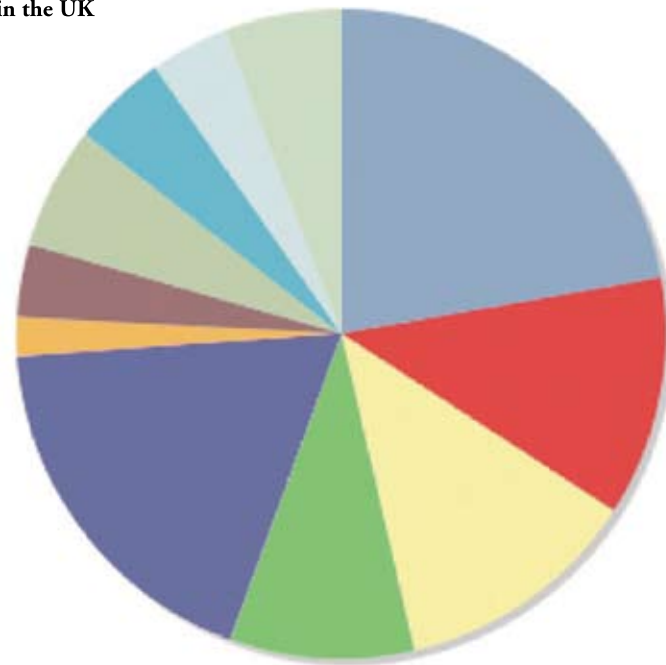
Many contact centres plan a double digit increase in headcount in 2010

to reach the growth rates seen in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Large investments in self-service, automation and web-based customer service is likely to reduce future demand for new staff, who will instead focus on complex, high-value, relationship-building customer interactions, rather than the more mundane tasks that many agents still do today.

Figures taken from ContactBabel, "UK Contact Centres in 2010: The State of the Industry"

UK contact centre agent positions, 2000-2012		
Year	Agent Positions	Net annual change (APs)
2000	340,000	50,000
2001	395,000	55,000
2002	445,000	50,000
2003	494,254	49,254
2004	529,211	34,957
2005	558,423	29,212
2006	591,929	33,505
2007	638,250	46,321
2008	640,000	1,750
2009	628,500	- 11,500
2010	642,500	14,000
2011	665,000	22,500
2012	685,000	20,000

Distribution of contact centre jobs in the UK

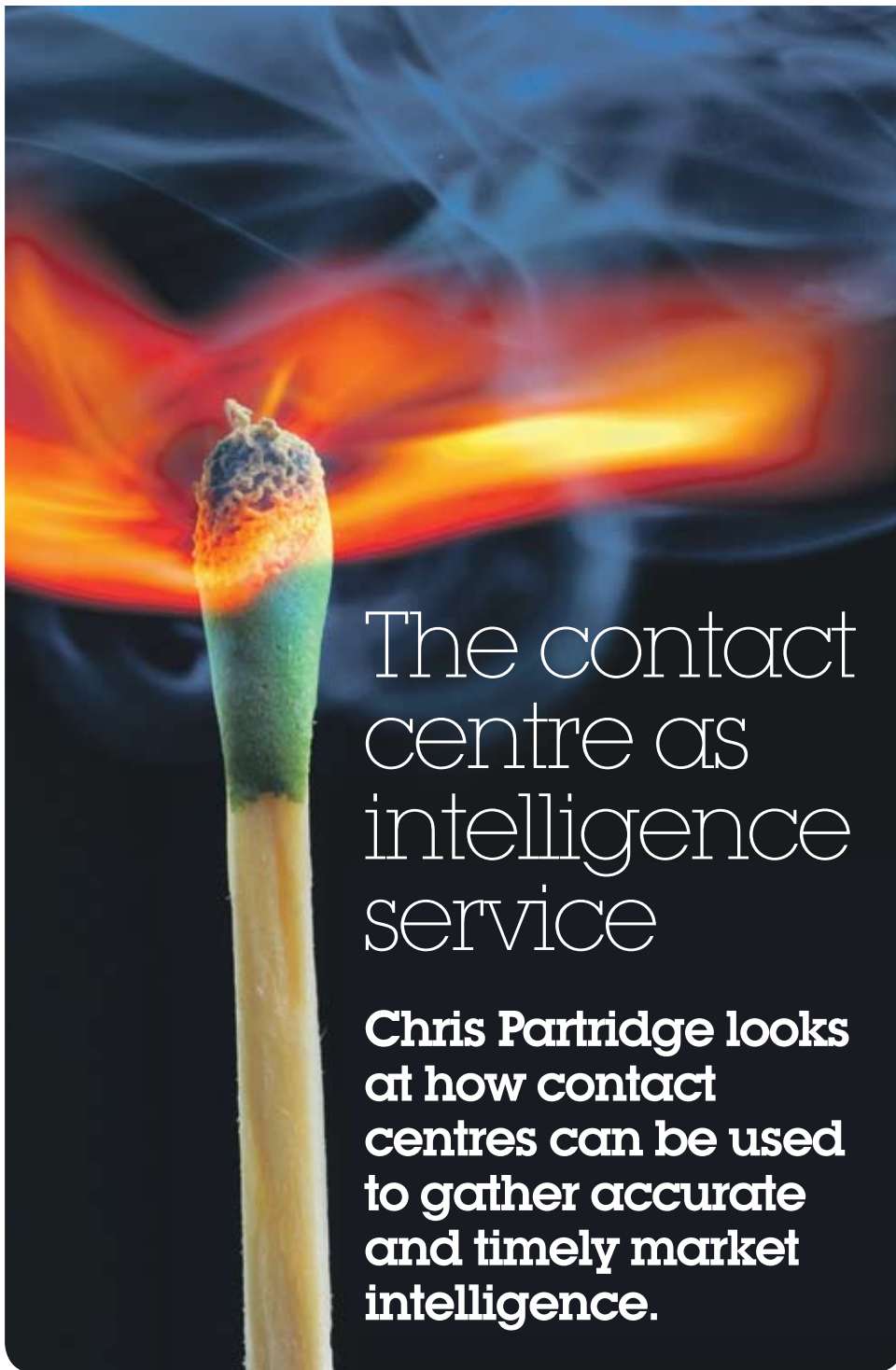


WHERE ARE YOU CALLING FROM?

Although the South-East has the greatest number of contact centres, it is Scotland and the north of England which relies most heavily on the contact centre industry for employment. 5.34 per cent of jobs in the North-West are contact centre-related, whereas only 1.63 per cent of employees in London work in contact centres.

- North (228,525)
- Yorkshire (122,200)
- Scotland (124,775)
- W Midlands (93,975)
- South East (190,785)
- N. Ireland (20,210)
- Wales (35,800)
- E Midlands (62,370)
- SW & Ch. Islands (50,300)
- E. Anglia (37,810)
- London (60,750)

Research from Steve Morrell at ContactBabel



The contact centre as intelligence service

Chris Partridge looks at how contact centres can be used to gather accurate and timely market intelligence.

Contact centres are becoming a valuable source of market information, yielding insights into how customers perceive the company and its products and driving change. As a result, contact centres are becoming more central to corporations' operations instead of being a remote add-on designed simply to take orders or head off complaints.

"There has been a change in contact centres to reporting problems back so they can be sorted out," says Anne Marie Forsyth, chief executive of the Customer Contact Association (CCA). "Organisations are using this to convince other parts of the organisation to be more customer-centric. It is very much about contact centres being catalysts for change."

To be effective as a change agent, however, a contact centre has to be much more sophisticated than the old model of a roomful of telephone-answerers reading from scripts, and the CCA has

been promoting their Global Standard, a set of best practice guidelines that enable contact centre operators to expand their horizons. "We put into place in 2001 a common set of processes around customer contact to reduce the chances of failure, and it has been really successful, with the fifth version due out in April," Forsyth says.

The standards are based on a mind-boggling amount of data. "We set up a Customer Experience Council where companies come together to share data on customer satisfaction, and we have developed benchmarks based on 300 million calls," Forsyth explains. 260 organisations as varied as Tesco, British Gas, the BBC, Manchester Constabulary and NHS Direct have gone through the accreditation process, and customer satisfaction ratings are going up as a result. "Our benchmarking research showed that 84 per cent of customers calling these organisations are completely satisfied with the service received," Forsyth adds.

"It is very much about contact centres being catalysts for change"

Measuring customer satisfaction reliably and credibly is essential for contact centres to progress, and an extensive toolkit is now available to do this, including analytical and statistical software packages, automated monitoring tools such as voice analytics, and customer surveys done either by interactive voice response or online. Agents can also sign off with a short survey, though careful training is needed to ensure the customer is not antagonised by intrusive or time-wasting questions. "We recognise that customer experience management is both an art and a science," Forsyth says. "More measures of customer perceptions are available too – customer satisfaction, Net Promoter Score, consumer trust, customer empathy, customer engagement, intention to purchase, brand bonding and so on."

The feedback from these surveys can be pure gold, providing intelligence on everything from how a brand is perceived to why a particular product is not selling as well as predicted. Another benefit, Forsyth believes, is that feedback can be immediate and personal: "Feedback is sent straight back to the staff, not as a summary at the end of the month."

Feedback also helps highlight potential problem areas that may be rare, and therefore little considered in writing the processes for a contact centre, but can cause huge problems when they occur. Bereavement is one – cold-calling a widow with an offer of life assurance for her late husband can get the company in the local papers, and not in a good way. Version 5 of the CCA Global Standard addresses this issue, as well as the emerging challenge of integrating new technology such as IVR and non-voice channels such as the web in ways that are seamless and easy to use for callers.

"It is fair to say that regardless of the economic environment, the CCA Global Standard will allow an organisation to anchor good self governance controls, and improve on processes which do not match the rigours of the contact centre environment, leading to enhanced operational ability and improved customer experience," Forsyth contends.

For more information, visit:
www.cca-global.com

Call centres find their voice

Excellence in customer service has been touted as the big differentiator in a struggling economy. **By Ian Turner**, General Manager Northern Europe at Nuance Communications



Despite the phone remaining the dominant communication channel when contacting a call centre, many companies fail to grasp, or at least demonstrate an appreciation of the potential to improve the customer service experience through this medium. The call centre remains woefully under-funded, resulting in demotivated, unproductive agents and disgruntled customers. Many customers face long queues, only to be misrouted to the wrong department and eventually reach their final destination in an agitated state. Recent YouGov research commissioned by Nuance revealed that one in five people have been so frustrated by a call centre experience, that they have later admitted shame with the way they have spoken to an agent.

Sales reps often travel the length and breadth of the country, tirelessly knocking on doors for leads. However, a customer or prospect rings a call centre because they actively want to speak to that company. This should not be taken for granted. Every call is an opportunity for that company to sell its products or services.

Admittedly, call centre managers have a lot to contend with. Call volumes continue to grow in a sporadic fashion and call centre staff attrition is extremely high. However, this is not an excuse for poor customer service. Technology has evolved to such an extent that automation can now play a major role in overcoming these challenges. The fact is that automation has already, and will continue to, transform customer service. For instance, queuing in a bank to wait for a cashier to withdraw cash probably feels like a distant, even faintly ridiculous memory now that we self-serve at an ATM.

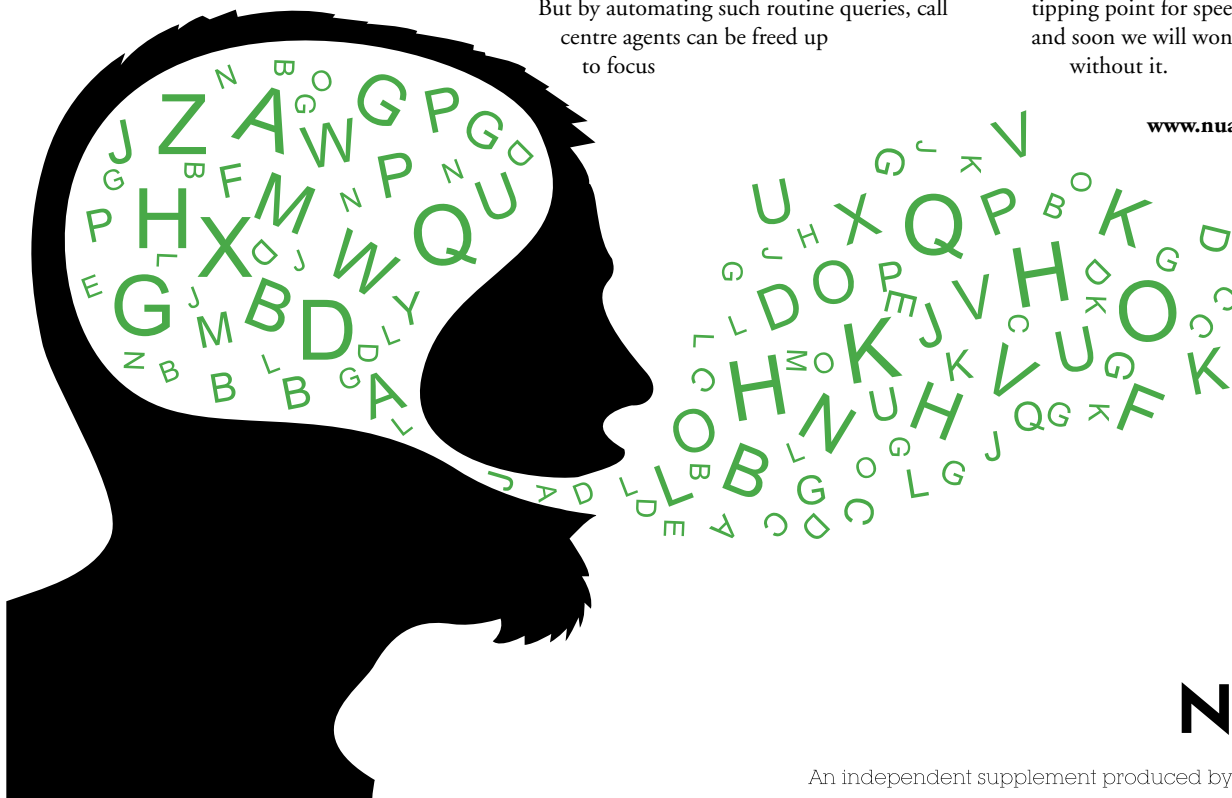
As consumers become more adept at using technology for their personal needs, staff and customers will benefit from increased interaction with call automation, and more specifically speech recognition technologies. From an employee perspective, having to handle an increasing number of repetitive calls can contribute to low morale and high staff turnover. But by automating such routine queries, call centre agents can be freed up to focus

on more complex tasks. This results in a more motivated force of 'knowledge workers', with a better record for attendance and quality performance, with the overall effect of elevating the brand. Likewise, from a customer perspective, if callers have to sit in a queue to speak to an agent, while being subjected to some dreadful music; only to be confronted by an unhelpful or unenthusiastic person at the end of the line, the end result will be discontentment at best. The opportunity to cross-sell disappears and brand reputation and loyalty plummets, with a disastrous effect on the bottom line.

People are by nature task orientated and just want to get a job done as quickly as possible with minimal fuss. Businesses that recognise this and respond by giving their customers the choice and flexibility to serve themselves will ultimately prosper.

Admittedly there will always be people who prefer to speak to an agent and that option will remain available, but more and more people are experiencing the benefits of speech automation. The key is to provide choice and be sensitive to the fact that people will require varying methods of service for different tasks at different times. What is clear is that we are about to reach a tipping point for speech technology adoption and soon we will wonder how we ever survived without it.

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Knowing Without Learning

In his latest novel *The Lost Symbol*, Dan Brown popularises the concept of noetic science, simply defined as the study of things that we know and we don't know why we know them. Noetica have been applying these ideas to contact centre technology since 1997.

By treating customer interactions as dynamic business processes designed by you and ingeniously exchanging information with all your existing systems, Noetica's software provides agents with all the knowledge they need precisely when they need it. This makes customers happy and agents more productive.

Achieving the seemingly impossible and allowing contact centre agents to know things that they never had to learn, saves money by reducing training and shortening calls.

To find out more please call: 020 7326 8500
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Empathy works... Empower your people!

Forward thinking organisations recognise the key to increasing sales and improving customer retention sits mainly with their people. Of course, the mechanics of business play their part, however it is the human factor that differentiates customer interactions. It is no longer about what you do; the secret of success lies in the way that you do it!

Harding & Yorke's correlation between their empathy measures and profitability confirms this assertion. This shouldn't come as a surprise - we are all customers and our instinct and preference is to interact with someone who can demonstrate genuine understanding, care and respect toward us. The bottom line is - if staff don't have the right attitude then we only have ourselves to blame. We not only recruited them, but are also responsible for their on-going development and motivation.

The Empathy Academy builds on H&Y's extensive customer experience measures and helps organisations to optimise relationships with customers. The Academy works in partnership with clients to build strategies, design interventions, transfer skills and create coaching environments where internal and external customers feel genuine empathy towards them.

The first step to improving empathy with external customers is to improve empathy with the people who deal directly with them. If you want your people to demonstrate empathy to customers, at the very least, provide them with quality measures that have clearly defined skills and behaviours and empower and impassion them through regular coaching and empathetic management.

Customers won't always remember what you say, but they'll remember how you make them feel. Empathy works!

For information on The Empathy Academy call +44 (0)1235 845 700 or visit www.empathy.co.uk





Centres of opportunity

Alex Coxon looks at the innovative methods used by some contact centres to tackle staff attrition.

There are few business benefits associated with an economic downturn, but one that prevails is staff retention. During a recession employees are less likely to abandon the security of their current job to seek opportunities elsewhere.

However, there are exceptions to this business rule. According to analyst group ContactBabel, staff turnover in UK call centres is still excessively high, averaging 24 per cent in 2009 despite the financial crisis. This compares with an employee churn rate of 15.7 per cent for British businesses as a whole, as recorded by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Lack of support and poor career prospects are frequently cited as grounds for call centre agents to search elsewhere for work. And they are reasons executives can ill afford to ignore considering ContactBabel estimates 75 per cent of a call centre's operational cost results from its people, with a sizeable proportion ascribed to recruiting and training new staff.

The good news is that there are things call centres can do to prevent attrition. Take the mobile phone company Vodafone, for example, whose Warrington-based call centre has reduced employee turnover from 34 per cent to 10 per cent in two years.

"People need incentives to stay here long-term, so we've created a raft of initiatives aimed at making the centre a better place to work," says Les Blacker, head of high value customer services at the centre. "These include our GROW programme, where we give agents time away from call handling to gain formal call centre qualifications such as NVQs. We also pay for staff to undertake non-call centre related Learn

Direct courses in subjects such as languages or mathematics, the idea being to help people build a career here while also fulfilling their personal learning ambitions for free."

British Gas is another company that has undertaken measures to cut attrition across its energy call centres, from 52 per cent in 2007 to approximately 15 per cent today.

"We stopped measuring inputs – such as how long an agent is on a call – and starting measuring the output of calls in terms of customer satisfaction, which has positively impacted on customers and staff," reveals

Staff turnover
in UK call
centres is still
excessively
high,
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2009

group commercial director, Chris Jansen. "This has been overlaid with environmental improvements... We now give staff fresh fruit, for

instance, and offer greater flexibility by removing the need for agents to clock in or out when they leave their desk."

For some call centres, giving staff more freedom extends beyond reducing physical restrictions. At both Vodafone Warrington and the travel firm Holiday Extras, whose Kent-based call centre enjoys just 3.5 per cent staff attrition, employees are regularly petitioned for ideas on how to improve the centres' environment and management. Holiday Extras also gives staff the chance to sample jobs elsewhere in the business if they want to broaden their career prospects outside of the call centre.

"We actively help people move internally, for example into marketing or IT, because that way we don't lose the knowledge they've built up," explains head of operations, Peter Mooney.

Other call centres such as that of the television shopping channel QVC in Merseyside – where attrition runs at approximately 12 per cent – and the IT firm Sage in Newcastle, which has reduced churn by 18.5 percentage points in 12 months, have started running reward and recognition programmes to show staff they are appreciated.

Whatever initiatives call centres put in place, the key to combating attrition is to engage with staff.

As Vodafone's Les Blacker puts it: "The job market is more contracted than it was before the recession, but this won't last forever. Call centres looking to reduce attrition long-term need to listen to their people and develop them in the ways they want. Without this kind of engagement, attrition will always be an issue."

Giving customers the best customer service experience really can make a difference - a 'Platinum' customer experience

If you think that overall good customer service leads directly to customer satisfaction, think again! These days it is all about "delighting" the customer, **writes Rachel Robinson**, Divisional Managing Director, Teleperformance



According to a recent survey we commissioned with YouGov, 76% of adults said that just one unpleasant contact centre experience was likely to make them take their business elsewhere.

Providing a good contact centre experience really can make all the difference to keeping your customers. As we all know it's less expensive and more profitable to sell to your existing customers than it is to go out and find new ones. If you can keep those customers happy your business will certainly thrive.

Customer satisfaction has always been important, but times have changed. In today's marketplace customer

retention has become more difficult as it has become easier than ever for customers to switch suppliers.

So how can you increase customer satisfaction and loyalty through your contact centre and stay ahead of the competition, and at the same time merge costing cutting and efficiency with quality? One possibility is customer segmentation and total optimisation of premier contacts.

At Teleperformance we have recently launched our "Platinum" contact centre offering. Looking at how you can make the most of your high-value transactions and delighting those customers means you can really take a consumer's contact centre experience from great to fantastic.

Today's contact centre solutions must be aimed at giving customers an outstanding human approach along with applying cutting edge technology, such as voice analytics, speech recognition, web chat and collaborative browsing plus embracing social networking. Of course, technology can only assist if it sits on top of highly trained, extremely motivated and high calibre contact centre staff.

Every customer touch-point offers a company the opportunity to maximise the customer experience and establish a bond that will never be broken.

One of our global clients to adopt this business model is Sky in Brazil, who are now positioning the customer service agent as a consultant who can offer a solution to the customer rather than simply selling a service. This approach was key in securing 20,000 new subscribers per month on the Sky High Definition service.

Integral to this success was not only educating customers about High Definition (HD) TV in the local market and addressing their needs, but also building long term subscriber relationships. Like many of today's services this is not something that can be sold in a single five-minute call.

Today the success of most brands is based on the "go beyond" approach adopted - this is critical to consistently exceed customer expectation, which is essential in the current economic climate. This is a better policy than cost cutting and degrading the customer contact centre experience. Remember cheap is always expensive in the long term!

Your call is important to us...

Does your IVR system reflect the needs of your caller... **or the structure of your organisation?**

From a caller's perspective, satisfaction comes from only one thing – achieving their goal with minimal fuss. Nothing else really matters. No amount of machine spoken apology, music on hold or voice personality can make up...

WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR CONTACT CENTRE STRATEGY, IT PAYS TO ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Do you know why people are contacting you? How do you measure it?
- Do you know who your callers are? Have they called you before?
- Do your callers complain of being passed from 'pillar to post'?
- Can you offer your callers choice – real, informed choice?
- Do your callers have to wait for long periods?
- Are your callers repeatedly asked to provide their details?
- Is your contact centre integrated with your IT systems?
- Do your menus reflect the needs of your callers or your organisational structure?
- Can your contact centre adapt, automatically, to continuously changing demand?

By employing 'Call Triage' techniques you can address all the questions posed above.

HOWEVER, EFFECTIVE CALL TRIAGE REQUIRES SOME ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY SUCH AS:

- Structured information capture – where callers provide answers to initial questions using push buttons or speech recognition,
- Data integration – pull data from your systems and then push data back into those systems,
- Data manipulation – updating and changes to dates, names, postcodes, account numbers,
- Complex decisions – based on environmental conditions such as staffing levels,
- Context – associating captured information with the caller and presenting to your agents.

The goals of effective call triage are to: **improve caller satisfaction** with fast and accurate routing leading to an increased likelihood of the caller accomplishing their goals, **reduce repeat calls** through satisfying requests at first point of contact and **balance the budget** through appropriate **channel shift** including the automation of routine tasks. Additionally, effective call triage will also **reduce staff stress** through managing the call flow peaks.

The debate over calls answered in person or machine will continue. Financial reality means that organisations require that their current infrastructure delivers end-to-end solutions while costs are contained.

Customers demand choice. Choice supplies the caller with patience to queue or alternatively the willingness to use appropriate automation. Armed with a candid review of their environment successful contact centres can marry their callers to the most appropriate agent either in-person or via automation, demonstrating both efficiency and superior customer satisfaction.

For more information on Call Triage and to attend an on-line masterclass, visit:
<http://tiny.cc/calltriagemasterclass>

Call: 01442 242 242 and ask for "Call Triage" or visit: www.telephoneticstv.co.uk



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- Lower total cost of ownership - transactional based pricing offers low cost and risk with little or no investment in infrastructure and skills. The Ultra infrastructure is built around a carrier-grade resilient network for worry-free hosting that provides Business Continuity/ Disaster Recovery as standard.



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Home Shoring

For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the requirement to commit large amounts of capital and resources up-front is often a big barrier to building an in-house contact centre. Most companies, therefore, either outsource their campaigns, or make do with whatever resources they have available.

SBS Call Manager leverages advances in telecommunications and the general availability of broadband to make it entirely possible to build a call centre using home based workers. Capital requirements are minimal and time to deploy remarkably low. A home shored call centre is indistinguishable from a conventional operation as far as callers or sales contacts are concerned.

It is possible for agents to consult supervisors, transfer calls and generally operate as if part of a regular call centre. Live statistics

and peer performance information help keep up tempo. Call centre supervisors are able to monitor staff, listen to calls and instant message agents.

Agents have the flexibility to sign up for work hours that best suit them. It is easier to recruit agents when such flexibility is on offer. Reducing commute and office energy needs help with low carbon goals.

SBS Call Manager provides a comprehensive capability building on office-based, home-based or a mix of resources. It can service inbound, outbound, email or instant messaging customer service and sales needs all with call recording and tagging.

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for better business

Vocal Power

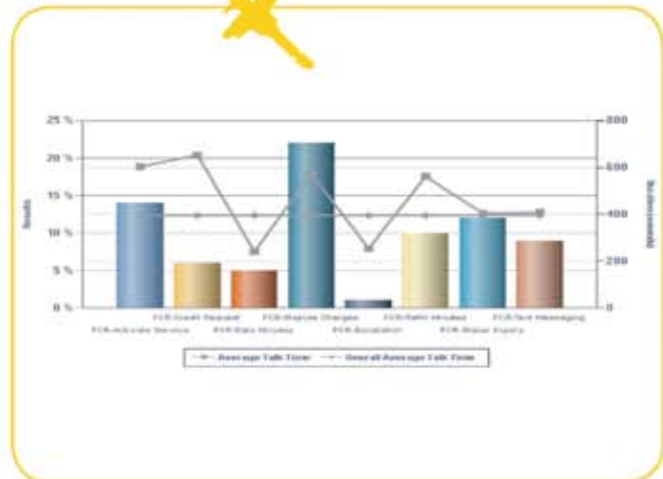
Speech Analytics – providing unprecedented levels of business intelligence



Every organisation knows that customer interaction is the lifeblood of its business and that capturing data from these exchanges is crucial for customer retention, operational efficiencies and generating new revenue opportunities. The issue to date has been the ability to process large volumes of audio at sufficient speed and to perform highly accurate root cause analyses on which to base critical business decisions.



Nexidia's Enterprise Speech Intelligence (ESI) has the proven ability to accurately analyse customer contact effectiveness across the entire company; providing executives with a strategic asset for timely decision making. Organisations already using Nexidia's extensive solution set are achieving substantial financial returns coupled with major business improvements. **Nexidia solutions help you clarify customer problems, elucidate organisational issues allowing you to improve services and increase business effectiveness.**



nexidia

020 8973 2442 jwax@Nexidia.com

Understand what is happening at the point of customer interaction with your contact centre agents.