



Contact Center Turnaround Time and Quality



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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

A contact center can be defined as a coordinated system of people, processes, technologies and strategies that provides access to information, resources, and expertise, through appropriate channels of communication, enabling interactions that create value for the customer and organization. Contact centers, along with call centers and communication centers all fall under a larger umbrella labeled as the contact center management industry.

This is becoming a rapidly growing recruitment sector in itself, as the capabilities of contact centers expand and thus require ever more complex systems and highly skilled operational and management staff.

The majority of large companies use contact centers as a means of managing their customer interaction. These centers can be operated by either an in house department responsible or outsourcing customer interaction to a third party agency (known as Outsourcing Call Centers).

It is expected that in 2016 contact centers will vastly improve processes and call center departments can be placed in a position to contribute manifold to revenues of an enterprise. This white paper aims to define the need for contact centers; and explores why there is an urgent requirement for enterprises to invest in leveraging best practices in this domain to increase their business benefits.

INTRODUCTION: NEED FOR CONTACT CENTERS

A contact center is a unified communications system that easily connects customers with the right agent at the right time. What does that mean? Really, what it means is that a company can leverage and manage a wide variety of customer relations across multiple channels including phone, business website, live chat, email, instant messaging and even video all with one “dashboard” application.

Why is this important to a business? This type of management improves the customer experience by providing answers to questions when they need them, which in-turn improves sale conversions. A contact center is proven to help a business become lean in operating processes resulting in lower costs and higher revenue.

Most people are familiar with traditional call centers which route inbound and outbound calls for multiple companies, typically handled at a separate location from the company. A contact center is connect both internal and external customers to the right agent at the right time. Essentially, it's a more robust form of call center that allows businesses to manage large volumes of different types of inquiries ranging from customer service calls, sales calls to website inquiries and integrate those inquires with a CRM or customer relationship management service.

There may not seem like much of a difference between a contact center and a call center, especially today, since most call centers are adopting contact center capabilities, but a contact center truly does provide a higher level of service.

The best contact center solutions help reduce operating costs by streamlining business processes. First, companies are able to eliminate costly third party conferencing services. Secondly, businesses are able to put critical information within reach of those who need it and that applies to both employees and customers.

Lastly, businesses are able to eliminate missed phone calls and delayed responses, which is a serious problem for companies that handle large volumes of calls.

When you're not able to be at your business in person and you can't field calls, help customers and land importune leads then a contact center just might be the solution your business needs.

CHALLENGES FOR CONTACT CENTERS

The size of your company is not related to whether or not you need a contact center; it is related to the services you want to provide to your customers and how you handle satisfying those inquiries.

These inquiries can be

- ▶ Sales
- ▶ Technical Support
- ▶ Customer Service
- ▶ Returns
- ▶ Billing
- ▶ Collections
- ▶ Customer Feedback
- ▶ Others

General Quality Issues

- ▶ Difficulty in designing evaluation criteria
- ▶ Lack of buy-in or credibility
- ▶ Insufficient resources or time

- ▶ Inadequate training for coaches and supervisors
- ▶ Inconsistent evaluation results
- ▶ Lack of support from management
- ▶ Lack of automation or poor system reliability or support

Is your call center inflexible and incomplete?

Migrate to a Cloud Solution

Technology has evolved and you can easily migrate to a complete solution with innovative integrations and powerful reporting capabilities.

Is your business growing but you still use a phone system?

Optimize Your Productivity

It's time to upgrade to an efficient solution that allows you to integrate with various external systems and view your customer's information during calls.

Do you think call centers are only for big corporations?

Improve Customer Experience

Allow your team to be more professional, strengthen personal connections, and build an excellent reputation for your company.

QUALITY THAT MATTERS

Call quality monitoring is one of the most effective methods for improving the level of service you provide to your customers. Call quality monitoring refers to the process of listening to or observing an agent's phone conversations or other multi-media contacts with customers.

While companies can measure customer satisfaction through customer focus groups, customer contact follow-up telephone surveys, and written satisfaction surveys, the results are often not timely enough or detailed enough to help individual agents understand their impact or contribution. A call monitoring session on the other hand, if done correctly, can instantly deliver a wealth of customer information, gauge individual agent performance and reveal a lot about your business processes and policies.

Not only can it improve the customer experience, it can also improve overall call center performance, reduce callbacks, focus training efforts, identify process improvement opportunities, and facilitate employee development.

The industry has witnessed a proliferation of call-monitoring technology, as companies search for ways to make the call monitoring process more efficient. Industry consolidation has reconfigured vendor offerings and combined technologies to provide more robust solutions.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is also opening new doors. Recent incarnations include technologies that mine call data for keywords and others that interpret speech patterns and evaluate calls without human intervention.

More features are being incorporated into technology solutions for call monitoring, making these systems more attractive to call center management and more challenging to implement.

Many companies have created specialized Quality Assurance groups to monitoring agent performance, in an effort to supplement supervisory effort or offload some of the burden.

Quality and Performance Management

- ▶ 31% organizations closely monitor the quality of interactions with target customers.
- ▶ 60% all repeat calls are process or training driven.
- ▶ 31% organizations recognize and reward employees for improving customer experience.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IS KEY

Call quality monitoring must be reflective of customer value and expectations—it must truly measure the customer experience. Measuring the customer experience is the primary purpose of a call quality monitoring process. Do you know what your customers' expect?

Calibrating your call quality program with customer expectations is an ongoing effort. Call quality monitoring is a performance measurement tool.

Like any measurement tool, you have to be careful about what you are measuring. While the measurement process in and of itself produces change, you'll also want to make sure you're measuring the right behaviors.

The top three drivers for investing in customer experience management are

- ▶ Improve customer retention – 42 %
- ▶ Improve customer satisfaction – 33 %
- ▶ Increase cross-selling and up-selling – 32 %

MEETING QA REQUIREMENTS

Quality assurance (QA) should be the cornerstone of your call center management efforts. This is because optimizing QA practices will help to enhance the quality of the service your team provides to their customers, increase their efficiency and reduce wasteful spending. Taken together, the benefits of optimizing your QA practices might just help your team get a leg up on your competition. This blog post will help you do just that. Below are tips, tools and techniques to help optimize your approach to quality assurance in the call center.

- ▶ Appoint a QA specialist to create a comprehensive QA program and oversee this process.
- ▶ Evaluate potential call center agent candidates for essential customer service skills to ensure that they have what it takes to hit the ground running.
- ▶ Include an overview of quality assurance best practices, as well as how an agent's performance will be measured and how they will be provided feedback based on their performance in your call center agent onboarding and training.
- ▶ Engage in silent monitoring of live calls, in vivo observation of call center agents and listen to recorded calls systematically.
- ▶ Focus your resources on high-value calls as well as routine calls.

- ▶ Rate these calls using a call scoring and evaluation form and calibrate your ratings with a rating team.
- ▶ Rate any customer interactions on additional channels (i.e., chat, email, in person, etc.) with similar scoring and evaluation forms and methods.
- ▶ Incorporate customer feedback obtained from post-call IVR surveys into your QA process.
- ▶ Assess the performance of each individual agent, team, department and the call center as a whole and provide relevant metrics to all parties with a vested interest.
- ▶ Create a culture of continuous improvement by requiring peer-to-peer evaluations and self-evaluations of calls.
- ▶ Include your QA specialist in agent coaching sessions to provide both qualitative (i.e., examples from call recordings, customer feedback, etc.) and quantitative (i.e., scores from evaluation forms) feedback based on the agent's performance.
- ▶ Provide concrete examples of how you would like the agent to improve their approach to interacting with callers if needed.
- ▶ Role play your example with the agent so that they can develop a more comprehensive understanding of this new approach.

- ▶ Engage in whisper coaching to help guide the agent to success when learning to implement a new technique or approach to interacting with callers.
- ▶ Create a remediation plan (i.e., shadow a more experienced agent, have a call center manager whisper coach them, engage in self-evaluation, etc.) for agents who consistently fail to make improvements based on your feedback.
- ▶ Ensure that your QA specialist, customer satisfaction specialist and call center manager meet at least weekly to enhance collaboration.
- ▶ Supplement your onboarding and coaching sessions with systematic training sessions including the QA specialist, call center manager and customer satisfaction specialist .
- ▶ Recruit a firm to periodically evaluate your QA process objectively and provide your team with an unbiased feedback and suggestions for improvement.
- ▶ Leverage call center software with a reporting dashboard that provides the metrics that are of most interest to your team as well as call monitoring and call recording capabilities.

ROLE OF A VIRTUAL QUEUE

Virtual queuing is a concept used in inbound call centers. Call centers use an Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) to distribute incoming calls to specific resources (agents) in the center. ACDs hold queued calls in First In, First Out order until agents become available. From the caller's perspective, without virtual queuing they have only two choices: wait until an agent resource becomes available, or abandon (hang up) and try again later. From the call center's perspective, a long queue results in many abandoned calls, repeat attempts, and customer dissatisfaction.

Virtual queuing systems allow customers to receive callbacks instead of waiting in an ACD queue. This solution is analogous to the "fast lane" option (e.g. FASTPASS) used at amusement parks, which often have long queues to ride the various coasters and attractions. A computerized system allows park visitors to secure their place in a "virtual queue" rather than waiting in a physical queue.

In the brick-and-mortar retail and business world, virtual queuing for large organizations similar to the FASTPASS and Six Flags' Flash Pass, have been in use successfully since 1999 and 2001 respectively. For small businesses, the virtual queue management solutions come in two types: (a) based on SMS text notification and (b) apps on smartphones and tablet devices, with in-app notification and remote queue status views.

IMPACT OF ASA

Virtual queuing impacts the call center metrics in many ways. Queue time is normally measured as Average Speed -to- Answer (ASA). When callers are offered the option to receive a First In, First Out callback, the callers' acceptance rates are typically 45% to 55%. Therefore, about half of the calls that would normally queue for 5 to 10 minutes will now only accrue a speed-to-answer (ASA) of approximately 10 seconds.

Likewise, these callbacks with a shorter ASA will score within the Service Level objective. Since callers cannot abandon while in a virtual queue, the overall number of abandoned calls will decrease.

The impact on customer satisfaction is positive, but tends to be more difficult to measure objectively. Virtual queuing can result in better customer experiences and improved contact center operations. But there are several types of virtual queuing systems.

In order to have a better understanding of the impact ASA on customer satisfaction, call center managers should also

Conduct an outlier analysis

It is important to note that because ASA is calculated as a mean, it may or may not be easily skewed by outliers depending on the sample size. Thus, managers must augment their analysis of ASA by analyzing data from outliers in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of wait time and how it impacts customer satisfaction.

For example, when the sample size is large (i.e., when measuring ASA over a long time span) a few outliers may not skew ASA very much. In these instances, call center managers can very easily be falsely reassured that everything is fine as long as the ASA falls within their target range.

However, the ASA can still be within the target range and include callers that waited an unacceptable amount of time in the waiting queue. Conversely, outlier callers who wait a very long time before being connected to an agent will skew ASA when measuring it over a short time span.

Thus, when calculating ASA, it is important to conduct an outlier analysis as well. Knowing that a few callers waited 30 minutes before their call was answered may be more meaningful than knowing the ASA was or was not within an acceptable range.

Analyze abandonment rates

When analyzing ASA it is also important to note that ASA only takes into consideration calls that were answered. Thus, managers should also assess caller abandonment rates for the same time frame in order to better understand how ASA impacts customer satisfaction in the call center.

For example, if callers wait for 30 minutes in a queue and then give up, this is meaningful information as it will have a negative impact on customer satisfaction, however will not negatively impact the ASA.

In sum, when analyzing ASA, managers must be sure to also conduct an outlier analysis and measure abandonment rates for that time frame as that will provide a more holistic picture of how ASA impacts customer satisfaction in the call center.

VITAL CONTACT CENTER METRICS

Quality Scores

Quality Scores were by far the most important metric used. They provide the ability to look at the overall caller experience and also look at the conversations that agents are using on their phone calls.

Scores can be provided at a high level to track how well the center is doing and they can also be taken down to agent level. Scores are typically measured over between 5 and 10 calls per agent per month, although when things get busy, the number of calls sampled starts to drop off.

First Call Resolution (FCR)

Also known as 'Best Contact Resolution'. This was a very common metric and looks at how many times a customer needs to call a company to get a problem resolved. This is a very good way of measuring a problem from the customer's perspective.

The problem is that it is quite difficult to accurately measure and tends to be rather subjective. For example, a repeat call could be about a different problem.

Here are five common ways in which contact centers measure this

- 1 Can the agent give a satisfactory answer so that the caller does not have to call back (calls are monitored).
- 2 Looking at the number of callers that call back within 7 days.
- 3 Looking at the calling party number within a set period.
- 4 Using a post-call IVR survey.
- 5 Looking at the quality of answer and positivity, measured by a third party.

Customer Satisfaction

An old favorite that looks at the percentage of customers that are happy. This is simple and easy to operate. It can be carried out through a wide range of methods, the most common being a post-call IVR survey, or a follow-up email survey.

Service Level

This was one of the very first metrics to be produced by the ACD systems. It looks at the percentage of calls that are answered within a given time. The average figure seems to be between 80% of calls answered in 20 seconds and 95% of calls answered within 15 seconds.

Average Handling Time

This was for many years the most widespread contact center metric. It looks at the total amount of time that it takes to handle a call. This is a simple measure of efficiency. This measurement includes talk time, on-hold time as well as wrap-up time.

It has had a bad press in recent years because it looks only at efficiency but not at the outcome of the call. Critics say that it tends to encourage the agent to rush the caller off the phone rather than solve their problem.

FUTURE TRENDS IN CONTACT CENTERS

Multi-channel, the way to go

Gartner, Inc has predicted that over the coming years customers will manage as much as 85% of their business relationships without human interaction. This will force businesses to divert a considerable portion of their revenue stream into multi-channel call center solutions to meet this need.

This will help your call center agents connect with customers via their preferred method and will result in higher customer satisfaction marks. It will serve well for companies that are reluctant to spend monies towards this end to realize that customers who prefer automated self-services have doubled to 55% in the last five years.

Already we have witnessed a significant reduction in call waiting time across different centers as larger numbers of customers are connected and served through automated channels such as phone, live chat, social media and email.

Therefore, call agents will find themselves donning a new role as they will be called upon to focus on callers with complex inquiries or challenges that cannot be serviced through more automated systems.

- ▶ 30% of customer service engagements are via email, web self-service, chat, and other online techniques.
- ▶ 57% best in class companies measure support center success across email, chat, web, and voice.
- ▶ 62% use integrated voice response (IVR).

Need to look Cloud-wards

Reduction in overall cost is one of the main objectives of almost every enterprise—but it is no longer the dominant driver. Ever since many contact centers turned to the cloud, they have been in thrall about the innumerable benefits it offers, such as

- ▶ Faster deployment.
- ▶ Flexibility and scalability.
- ▶ Ease of managing remote agents.

According to recent surveys, 18% of call centers will be cloud-based by the end of this year. Gartner further suggests that in 2016, more than half of the Global 1000 companies will store sensitive customer information within the cloud. Therefore, companies will increasingly adopt virtual call centers due to improved security and efficiency.

Importance of Workforce Optimization

The more efficient a workforce is, the more improved their customer relationship management. Translated, it means higher revenue for the company. Businesses are currently in the process of attempting to optimize their workforces by adopting the latest technologies. In the months ahead, enterprises are expected to leverage metrics to improve their call centers activities.

Last year, a small chunk of businesses amounting to barely 31% took an active interest in monitoring customer interactions to assess quality, a report by Forrester Research stated. However, this number is skyrocketing this year, thanks to state-of-the-art virtual call center software features that allow companies to target, monitor and improve key performance indicators (KPIs); view standard metrics in real time and ensure industry regulation compliance.

The data generated will help boost quality management by enabling companies to pay attention to issues such as skill deficiencies in their systems or respective agents. This year is therefore touted as the one in which new parameters will be set for the cream among call centers to race ahead by utilizing effectual strategies and technologies.

The Rule of Big Data

Today, service leaders have more customer data than ever before. Among other tools, surveys, social media, and speech analytics have aided in the collection of enormous amounts of information, resulting in less clarity in what the data actually says. Increasingly, companies are trying to understand a 360-degree view of the customer by combining together customer feedback data with their existing CRM systems.

The key to revealing new insights that would have otherwise been hidden is by truly understanding what you're looking to achieve first, without being overwhelmed with the analysis.

The American market research, analysis and advisory firm, International Data Corporation (IDC) predicts that the market for Big Data will reach \$16.1 billion in 2014, growing 6 times faster than the overall IT market. With that in mind, Data Scientists have become more desirable since it's the management and use of all this data that will be the key differentiator. Ultimately, businesses need to find more ways to connect the mix of structured and unstructured data, helping them to better address the needs of their customers.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Contact centers have undergone phenomenal changes over the past couple of years. Without a shadow of doubt, they are catalysts for corporate and overall business transformation. This is a definitive era in many ways, because customers now manage huge chunks of their business relationships without human interaction.

Additionally, customer service engagements are conducted via email, web self-service, chat and other online techniques. Add to this mix the fact that companies are moving quickly to adopt virtual call centers, owing to key factors such as enhanced security and efficiency.

Given this rich milieu, the best contact center solutions help reduce operating costs by streamlining business processes. That is the reason for their existence and the basis for their success.

ENDNOTES

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