

amdocs

IMPROVING AGENT EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Leveraging today's technology to bring out the highest levels of agent productivity

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

INTRODUCTION: WHAT’S WRONG WITH TODAY’S CONTACT CENTER? 3

GET PRODUCTIVE QUICKER 4

- IT ALL STARTS WITH THE DESKTOP 4
- ELIMINATE CONFUSION WITH AGENT GUIDANCE 5
- CALL OUT WHAT’S REALLY IMPORTANT 5
- TRAINING, TAILORED TO FIT 5

TIMELY SERVICE ON THE FIRST TRY 6

- HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH? 6
- ENTER THE DATA – ONCE 6
- QUICKER SERVICE THROUGH AUTOMATION 7

CONCLUSION 7

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nowhere is customer frustration more apparent than in the contact center. For many customers, the contact center represents their primary point of contact with the company as well as their main source of pain. Inefficient operations and poorly trained customer service representatives (CSRs), although frustrating, seem to be a fact of life. But this doesn't need to be the case.

Tools exist today that help alleviate these issues and enable the contact center to become a service star. These tools can enable even the most junior CSR to provide superior service by reducing the complexity of handling customer interactions through desktop unification and by providing agents with the guidance they need to succeed in any scenario.

More importantly, these tools can also be leveraged to improve the speed at which CSRs can handle the interactions and ensure that customer issues are resolved the first time, reducing the need for multiple interactions. Automating routine processes, propagating information across multiple systems and providing just the information needed, exactly when it's needed, can make a real difference in reducing the handle time for interactions and improving first call resolution rates.

Improving the efficiency and productivity of contact center agents can not only help the bottom line, it can also reduce customer frustration by providing customers with the service levels they expect and improving their overall experience.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S WRONG WITH TODAY'S CONTACT CENTER?

We've all experienced it – the frustration of contacting the contact center. Interactions take too long, and often customer service representatives seem unable to resolve the issues at all because they don't have access to the right information or are not trained to use a certain system. At best, customers are forced to call back again for the same issue, but in most cases they will simply look to another company and product to fulfill their needs. According to a study by Purdue University, 63 percent of customers have stopped using a company's product due to a negative contact center experience.

So why is it so difficult to provide the service customers expect and deserve? One of the key contributing factors to a poor customer experience is the inexperienced or poorly trained agent. The contact center is a challenging environment and, as a result, the attrition rate among CSRs is understandably high. For many companies, as soon as agents are trained, comfortable on the system and becoming productive members of the contact center, they move along to the next opportunity. One executive phrased the problem as the 20/20/20 rule: The CSRs in their contact centers were on average 20 years old, made \$20,000 per year and lasted a mere 20 weeks in the job. With agents churning so quickly, the question is what is the best way to get agents up to speed quickly so that they can provide superior service without the need of extensive off-line training?

Another key area of frustration for customers is the fact that it often takes too long to get an answer or resolve a problem in a single call. Training (or lack thereof) definitely comes into play here; however, there are also other factors at work. As new products and services are introduced, the systems that agents must master and utilize grow at a rapid pace. In many contact centers, it's not uncommon for CSRs to be required to access 15 or more applications during the course of the day, each one with different log-in and usage parameters. As CSRs struggle to navigate the maze of applications and screens, the impact to customers translates into longer interaction times, repeatedly being asked to provide the same information, and the risk of not having their issues resolved on the first attempt. These are among the leading factors in customer frustration with the contact center.

It's no wonder that contact centers face a constant uphill battle in changing the customer experience from one of frustration to one of delight. But all is not lost. There are ways to better equip agents for success whether they are new on the job or seasoned veterans. These tools can finally help the contact center strike a balance between business needs of improving efficiency and reducing costs and consumers' needs for a positive customer experience.

GET PRODUCTIVE QUICKER

What if new CSRs could be on-boarded and productive in mere days as opposed to weeks? The fact is that in most contact centers, new agents are put through anywhere between four to ten weeks of training before they are allowed to start taking real customer calls. When considering the churn rate for agents, businesses don't really want CSRs to spend what on average amounts to 10 percent or more of their tenure in the company in off-line training.

To address these challenges, companies must look to new and innovative technologies that can help reduce the training burden and make agents productive quicker.

It all starts with the desktop

Creating a successful environment for CSRs starts with the agent desktop itself. A smart agent desktop is optimized to handle CSRs' needs with an intuitive user interface and controls that provide easy access to customer information. This desktop seamlessly integrates all the disparate applications that CSRs might need, eliminating the need to toggle across multiple screens or systems. Process-based support is also a key feature of the desktop, to help CSRs with the most common tasks they must perform during a service interaction.

This smart agent desktop brings together a host of capabilities designed to help even novice agents handle the most complex issues in the contact center in an efficient and effective manner without the need for complex, lengthy, off-line training. The flexibility of the desktop allows agents to "jump right in" and quickly become productive through the use of guidance features that can be configured to the individual agent's particular needs.

IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE CONSOLIDATED ENTERPRISE

Consolidation is a way of life in the communication, media and entertainment industry and with consolidation comes challenges around training the extended customer care organization on new products, services and procedures. For one North American service provider, the challenge came down to how best to improve the efficiency of the CSRs during the process of consolidating to a single desktop post merger.

The answer for this service provider came in the form of a joint solution from Amdocs, the market leader in customer experience systems innovation, and its partner eglue, a global provider of targeted business solutions to agents and customers. This solution leveraged agent guidance with process-driven, context-sensitive callouts tied together through a unified desktop. The service provider reduced desktop training for CSRs by 25 percent and reduced average handle time by eight percent.

Eliminate confusion with agent guidance

While much has been said about the need to off-load routine requests from agents to self-service options, there will always be certain interactions that require human intervention. These are often complicated issues that involve multiple steps and require CSRs to access several applications to complete. These are the instances that require the most training for CSRs, as they need to know which applications to access and in the proper order. And it doesn't stop there. Agents must also understand "how" to handle the interaction. Even here *training time can be reduced* and in some cases eliminated *with process guidance technology*.

Process guidance provides CSRs with a step-by-step workflow to walk them through the steps required. Such guidance can extend across multiple processes and even across multiple applications, reducing the need for intensive training on how to process an interaction. This guidance is provided in real-time, during the course of the interaction, so CSRs learn on the job.

Call out what's really important

Automated agent guidance through the interaction process is a major step forward in reducing the time it takes to on-board CSRs. It is not enough just to train the agent on how to use the application, or even the general steps to follow; they also need to understand how to deliver a consistent and differentiated customer experience. This can be accomplished through the use of on-screen callouts and tips. These contextually relevant tips are presented as call-out boxes on the smart agent desktop and provide CSRs with key pieces of information and even one click access to key knowledge items and pages.

The goal is to provide the CSRs with a much quicker way to learn or gather information so they can provide a superior customer experience. This can actually benefit both new agents who are just coming on-board as well as existing agents who are constantly asked to learn new products and procedures. The callouts not only enable all agents to come across as professional and helpful to the customer, but also shortens overall call length.

Training, tailored to fit

It is important to understand that different CSRs have different needs. One size fits all solutions for training CSRs may work for some, but not everyone. Experienced agents learning a new product or service will have different needs compared to a brand new agent. That is why this functionality can be configured at an individual CSR level. New CSRs can be provided with richer guidance from the system than more experienced agents. The experienced CSRs may find guidance too constrictive on routine interactions whereas new agents may welcome the automated assistance. At the same time, guidance may initially be provided for all agents when a new process or service is introduced.

This ability to tailor the automated guidance can help close the gap between the top performing CSRs and the "newcomers," while reducing the costs associated with training and on-boarding.

TIMELY SERVICE ON THE FIRST TRY

Customers have a reason to be frustrated with the contact center. They are often forced to wait on hold while CSRs search for information, only to come back on the line and ask them to repeat information they have already given. In some cases it's even worse. Customers find they must contact the business multiple times to attempt to get the same issue resolved. It's no wonder contact centers typically receive low marks for customer satisfaction.

With all the advances in contact center technology and processes over the past 10 years, why is this still happening? The ever increasing complexity in the contact center is clearly part of the problem. Agents must deal with a dozen or more systems on the desktop that present a dizzying array of information. The belief that a 360 degree view of the customer is essential can overload CSRs. When they do find the screen or application they need, the lack of integration between the systems often means they must re-key in data to complete the interaction. To top it off, many of the processes themselves are repetitive, such as address entry or account data confirmation. This adds unnecessary time to the overall transaction.

There is an answer – in solutions that help agents better manage interactions, not only reducing the length of the interactions but also enabling them to provide a superior experience as well.

How much is too much?

Much has been said over the past several years about the need for a 360 degree view of the customer. It is true that a business must have a good understanding of their customers. However, the desire to provide a complete view has often added undue complexity to the agent desktop. In a typical contact center, CSRs must wade through a dozen or more screens and applications to get to the information they need, prolonging the interaction, adding additional cost and contributing to customer frustration. The answer lies not in overloading CSRs with customer data but in providing the *right customer data at the right time*.

The more efficient approach is to filter the data that is presented to CSRs based on the current context of the interaction. This way CSRs aren't overloaded with multiple screens of information they must sift through, but rather the context-relevant information about the customer is presented in a single pop-up screen on the smart agent desktop. CSRs can then be guided in "what they need to do" rather than focusing too much time on "what they need to know." In other words, focus on the actionable intelligence and not the ocean of information. Providing the right information, at the right time, can go a long way in *improving first call resolution* rates.

Enter the data – once

Customers hate having to repeat themselves and this can't be fun for agents, either. In some cases, such as with financial services, it can be a requirement for regulatory purposes, but more often than not, customers are forced to repeat information because the CSRs must access multiple systems during the course of an interaction. One reason for this is that these systems often are not integrated so vital customer data must be keyed in to each system. Not only does this frustrate customers as they are forced to repeat themselves, but it leads to data entry errors.

FROM CUSTOMER SERVICE ZERO TO CUSTOMER SERVICE HERO

Providing quality service more quickly is the goal of every contact center. For one large service provider, management had challenged the contact center to reduce the average handle time for customer interactions without sacrificing the high level of quality that customers had come to expect.

To address this challenge, the service provider turned to Amdocs and partner eglue. Their joint solution focused around the ability to auto-populate information across the various systems used by the CSRs, reducing the need to ask customers to repeat account information multiple times. This resulted in a 20 percent reduction in average handle time without any sacrifice to the quality level in handling customer queries.

A smart agent desktop can eliminate the problems of entering customer data into multiple applications. By its very definition, the unified desktop captures contextual data from any desktop system and automatically, or upon request, populates it into different applications. This can be done for a single data item as well as multiple data items at once. As a result, the interaction ***handle time can be significantly reduced*** by eliminating the manual data entry or copy and paste actions. As a side benefit, automating the data entry process can also improve the integrity of the data itself, across all of the organization's systems.

Quicker service through automation

Nobody likes long interactions. Customers don't want to spend their valuable time waiting for CSRs to look up information or complete routine tasks, and the CSRs, who are normally incented on the average handle time, want to get through the interaction as quickly as possible. The challenge, of course, is that most of the tasks the CSRs perform are still manual processes. Automating those tasks, however, can benefit both the customer and the CSR through shorter handle times.

The ideal solution captures contextual data and simulates CSRs' actions on the required applications based on the contact center's business rules and decision points. This allows the company to fully automate certain business processes, reducing CSRs' spend on manual tasks and improving the customer experience with quicker, more efficient interactions.

CONCLUSION

The need to provide a superior customer experience has never been more critical than it is today. While this is a continual challenge for contact centers, there are ways to provide a differentiated experience while at the same time maximizing the use of the CSRs. Focusing on tools to improve the efficiency of contact center agents, and the means to make them productive quicker are the keys to success. The contact center will always be a complex environment with a steady stream of new faces, but by embracing some of the improvements mentioned here, customer frustration can be converted into customer delight.

Find out how Amdocs and its partner eglue can help improve contact center efficiency through the effective delivery of smart agent desktop solutions that can turn frustrated buyers of products and services into loyal customers.

ABOUT AMDOCS

Amdocs is the market leader in customer experience systems innovation, enabling world-leading service providers to deliver an integrated, innovative and *intentional customer experience*™ at every point of service. Amdocs provides solutions that deliver customer experience excellence, combining the software, services and expertise to help its customers execute their strategies and achieve service, operational and financial excellence. A global company with revenue of \$3.16 billion in fiscal 2008, Amdocs has more than 17,000 employees and serves customers in more than 50 countries around the world.

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