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- ❖ Integrate predictive dialling technology with workflow automation to cut costs
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# Predictive Dialler

**Management objective: Replicate front end call centre efficiencies and cost reduction mechanisms to back office operations by integrating predictive dialling technology with workflow automation**

**Author:** David Fricker, Managing Director, **TouchStar Call Centre Software**

For many years, predictive diallers have been recognised for their ability to reduce call centre costs and increase productivity, efficiency and accountability. Recent developments however, have seen the need for integrated business systems that includes a feature rich predictive dialler combined with a fully automated workflow management system – such as TouchStar Workflow.

## What are the benefits of predictive diallers?

On average, call centres making outbound calls increase agent productivity by up to 300% with a predictive dialler. This is achieved by using complex dialling algorithms to calculate and initiate more calls than there are agents available; the system will filter out dead numbers, busy tones and answering machines - connecting only 'live' contacts through to the agents. A competent dialler has a range of flavours available including power, preview, predictive and unmanned dialling available to the company across multiple campaigns. In addition to reducing potential agent costs, a predictive dialler will also make better use of data by recycling. It is absolutely imperative that any predictive dialling solution is compliant with Ofcom regulations with regard to 'dropped' or 'silent' calls and FSA regulations with regard to TCF (Treating Customers Fairly).

Sophisticated dialling systems now allow for inbound and blended campaigns with IVR and skills based routing, provide searchable call recording facilities, bespoke real time and historical reporting, text to speech and the ability to monitor agents from remote locations and adapt 'whisper coaching' in which allows call centre managers to train staff without the contact being able to hear.

The integration of workflow management – and the creation of greater efficiencies and cost reduction in both the front and back office operations

The integration of a predictive dialler combined with automated workflow management allows call centres to cut costs, provide greater synergies and if correctly implemented will ensure that every area of the business is working at maximum efficiency. The beauty of integrating the call making process and task management, two roles that are often carried out by different departments, is that both the front and back office process costs are kept to an absolute minimum and the technology provides the means to increase both agent and administration performance. In prosperous times this is very desirable, in the current economic climate, it becomes essential to survive.

So how could an integrated workflow management combined with a predictive dialling system help a call centre through the difficult times? On its own, a predictive dialling system allows agents to speak to three times as many prospects or customers but it is often the case for many call centres that fulfilment is not fully optimised. Agents' time is very productive but the back office function can be inefficient and the cost savings created by the dialler are reduced by not having the appropriate management information on the full business process – this is where workflow management comes to the fore. The front end agent script can be totally integrated into the workflow so that should a positive outcome emerge from a call, such as a sale or renewal, the information provided by the contact can be immediately built into the workflow and a task created, e.g. send product or contract. And all this is created seamlessly in one single system avoiding any time and resource consuming duplication.

## Automation of back office tasks

Workflow management provides a number of benefits which affect the core tasks of any business. Firstly it minimises manual intervention, e.g. standard letters, forms, emails and texts are all produced automatically and at the right stage of the life cycle rather than by hand and adhoc. This naturally creates huge time and cost savings as administrative staff no longer have to re-enter client specific detail – exactly the same information that has been either entered by the agent at the front end of the operation or within the data set.

Secondly, there is increased throughput as any chase-up tasks are scheduled automatically. These could be set by a manager or by a front end agent with the system reminding staff should a particular task not be completed. Many companies ask the question, what would happen if the letter, invoice or winning tickets didn't go out in the post that night? And what if there was a marketing drive at the front end of the operation yet the stock had not been ordered? By having an automated workflow management system, these worries are consigned to history. Managers can view exactly what each member of staff is working on in real time – by monitoring the operational aspects, campaigns can be prioritised by the front end call centre staff.

As a result of these elements, customer service levels are naturally improved as the workflow system assigns and schedules all tasks in line with a company's specified service levels. It allows a company to apply the skills and expertise of the best qualified professionals across all skill levels within the business – which has become critical if organisations are to survive during lean times.

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## Adaptability

Outbound call centres often have the requirement to deliver multiple campaigns to different client groups at any given time. For example, a telemarketing operation may be the outsourced operation of a number of large bluechip companies and will be working on a number of parallel campaigns. Other companies that once sold mortgages or other financial service products may now have completely changed their business models and be operating within the personal injury sector. As companies like this must be responsive to market or client changes, the solution must be equally adaptable.

These are the types of organisation that have traditionally used predictive dialling technology but have up until recently missed out on the benefits provided by a fully integrated system with workflow management. Therefore, it is vital for a call centre to source a product that can be easily configurable to these changes as in many cases the system could be rendered unfit for the new purpose.

## Tough times, hard decisions, available solutions

In the current climate, hard decisions may need to be made for companies to survive and these will usually involve reducing staff overheads. The combined predictive dialling and workflow management solution can provide multiple benefits for an outbound call centre. An operation dialling manually could be spending three times as much on staff than necessary. Many centres have recognised this yet have not seen that productivity can be given a further boost along with customer service levels and reputation.

There are many types of outbound call centre that benefit from an integrated dialling and workflow system. Examples in which such a system has been successfully employed include telemarketing, claims management, collections agencies and personal injury specialists. Call centres that are continuing to thrive in this age of economic difficulty are those are ensuring the same philosophy that creates value at the front end is subsequently replicated. A software vendor must also provide a highly consultative approach to allow call centres to reap the full benefits of this new integrated system.

## Next Step

TouchStar Call Centre Software has over ten years experience of delivering bespoke contact centre solutions for a wide range of businesses in terms of size and vertical sector. Our latest product, TouchStar Workflow has taken this acquired knowledge of the factors that make an outbound call centre reach huge front end productivity gains and applies this to the rest of the organisation.

TouchStar's scalable and cost effective solutions can grow with your business, providing you with the communications infrastructure and support network to allow your company to succeed. We provide call centre consultancy services, network services and free of charge training to our customers.

We invest a lot of time getting to know and understand our customers and their businesses – all our staff have contact centre experience so understand the daily issues within a centre. To provide our customer with the ultimate reassurance, we provide support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Contact the author

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### White Paper

Creating a Call Centre Efficiency Zone

<http://www.touchstarccs.co.uk/TouchStar/whitepaper.php>

### Case studies

Axis Telecom

<http://www.touchstarccs.co.uk/testimonials/axis.php>

Ocean Business Solutions

<http://www.touchstarccs.co.uk/testimonials/ocean.php>

Regal Fish Supplies

<http://www.touchstarccs.co.uk/testimonials/regal.php>

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<http://www.touchstarccs.co.uk>

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<http://touchstarccs.blogspot.com>

# Self-service

## Management objective: Harnessing phone self-service to drive customer service *up*, not down

**Author:** Oliver Lennon, CEO, **SpeechStorm**

Self-service solutions have done much to transform the cost-efficiency of customer service initiatives. Yet, in many cases, they have failed to delight the customer. Compounded by current market conditions, this could have dangerous implications for a business.

### Rising customer expectations

Customer expectations are higher today than ever, with intensified market competition and the impact of the Internet in offering up greater choice.

With the economy in turmoil, customers need additional information and help – creating an opportunity for organisations to differentiate themselves on the quality of their customer service.

Yet many call centres are now under unprecedented pressure, as customers face a greater need to check account balances, query bills, amend standing orders, cancel subscriptions or request lenience over outstanding debts. One utility company recently reported a 50% increase in call volumes as customers reacted to price increases. Handling these increased workloads with efficiency to maintain customer satisfaction while keeping a lid on costs presents a substantial challenge.

So how can you strike the right balance between maintaining high customer service levels and keeping costs down?

### Assisted service: the best of both worlds

A popular option is to blend phone self-service technology with live call centre agents to create a seamless service that uses the most appropriate resource for the situation. This gives customers and the companies serving them the best of both worlds – rapid access to customer service, without draining agents' time needlessly. For example, automating the identification and verification aspect of a call and then passing the call to the right agent with a notification of the callers details can save over 40 seconds on many calls.

This blended approach can be used as a stepping stone to the introduction of future self-service options.

### Beyond touchtone

Touchtone technology remains the obvious first port of call for phone self-service applications, allowing customer service operations to filter out high volumes of routine calls, shortening call queues and providing a fast service to large numbers of customers.

Its application is limited, however. Consider a retail environment, for example – where an electronic retailer may have hundreds of products, forcing a customer to listen to endless options before getting the information they really need, will drive customers away by the thousands.

### Speech recognition

Speech recognition is the logical next step, making the experience more natural for callers.

Some 7 million calls worldwide are now handled by speech-based self-service, routing and portal applications every day. The technology, now very mature, has allowed organisations to introduce more complicated applications, without the need for long-winded explanations to the caller e.g. how to enter date information on a touchtone application versus simply speaking tomorrow or next Tuesday.

It allows customers to cut to the chase too. Following the retail theme above, electrical retailer Dixons uses a speech self-service application to simplify the customer's selection of which brand of goods they are calling about. As Dixons stocks over 30 manufacturers' goods, and in excess of 300 product lines, spelling out all of the options would make for a very lengthy touchtone experience, requiring a pen and paper. Being able to say the desired brand name at the outset eliminates all of that time-wasting.

### Mobile Internet

The web has been a major focus of customer self-service initiatives in recent years, thanks to its ability to reach large volumes of consumers, and because the sheer scope of having a visual medium with click-through menus. As a logical extension, mobile Internet has been heavily promoted as representing the next wave of self-service.

Yet, from a customer experience perspective (think of banking), the mobile Internet has many limitations and constraints. These include the requirement to download software onto the handset (think of the number of operating systems across different handset manufactures) before being able to interact with the data, and the very real concern about security when a data 'footprint' is left on the device (think cookies, browser cache etc). Never mind the fact that navigating a website on a mobile phone is at best cumbersome and at worst simply not practical.

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## **SMS**

Text-messaging (SMS), particularly popular with younger customers, also has limitations from a customer self-service perspective. It is one thing being able to request a brochure by text message, but SMS can be a cumbersome medium for anything more complex, and has very low levels of security, limiting the enterprise opportunity. As a result, its usefulness in customer self-service is primarily as a push technology – for example, letting a customer know that a product delivery is imminent, or that an order or appointment has been confirmed.

## **A new option: Visual IVR**

Thanks to the growth in 3G phone adoption, 'visual IVR' applications are growing in appeal. These combine the best of traditional Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and mobile phones, adding a visual element into the IVR equation so that, instead of a caller waiting to hear options, they can see them immediately on their mobile handset.

Visual IVR is an exciting area for customer service operations, allowing organisations to do so much more with their phone self-service applications - innovations that really put the customer first.

And, since the channel uses a similar infrastructure and application development to standard IVR, it is relatively easy for companies to extend into this domain.

## **Speedier interactions**

There are many advantages to harnessing visual IVR, the main one being speed. For example, no more having to listen to time-consuming welcome messages or explanations of the services which can be accessed. It also eliminates the risk of being lost in "menu" mazes.

The medium is also ideal for interactions requiring the entry or confirmation of more complex information, such as long account numbers. In a visual IVR scenario, the caller can see the information on screen, and confirm or correct it as necessary.

Visual IVR is very secure too – in contrast to mobile Internet or text-based scenarios which leave a footprint on the receiver device. With a securely encrypted video call, once the transaction has come to an end, all of the data terminates automatically.

## **Proactive outbound calls**

Phone self-service is not limited to inbound calls. Proactive Outbound can provide organisations with a cost effective mechanism for keeping their customers abreast of service changes. For example, interactive appointment reminders can help hospitals, GP and dental surgeries reduce or reallocate missed appointments, or help delivery companies/estate agents/travelling sales people reschedule their visits.

## **Open standards: flexible integration**

As older IVR platforms reach end of life, you may begin to look at integrated solutions which incorporate the full range of phone self-service options.

By investing in an open platform that supports touchtone, SMS, speech and visual IVR, all from a single central system, you can be assured of maximum flexibility, as well as the ability to migrate gradually from one primary medium to another.

## **The hosted option**

Where budgets are an issue, letting an external specialist host and manage the self-service technology can help ease the transition to new self-service functionality, offering you both speed to market and a way of avoiding any up-front capital investment.

A recent phone self-service initiative by electrical retailer Comet went live in just six weeks, thanks to the use of a hosted speech solution, which delivered rapid payback.

## **Customer-centricity**

By delivering the level of service the customer expects, companies can positively reinforce their brand, and differentiate themselves in a highly competitive and unforgiving marketplace.

When Irish telecommunications provider, eircom, strategically adopted a phone self-service solution, it saw customer satisfaction ratings soar by 11% for its 24/7 customer service line.

The better the service, the better differentiated the customer brand will be. Which, in the current market climate, is priceless.

The key is to keep the customer central to all of your plans, and to embrace a range of complementary solutions to suit different situations - and to offer the customer as much choice as possible. By investing wisely, you'll be able to do this gradually and affordably, from a single infrastructure investment.

## **Next step**

For more information on SpeechStorm's solutions and services, and to read customer case studies, visit <http://www.speechstorm.com>

For sales enquiries, call 0870 876 0870 and ask for Sales

Download our latest e-book, *How to harness self-service technology for maximum advantage in your contact centre*, at <http://www.speechstorm.com/eBook.aspx?title=EvolutionOfSpeechSelfService>

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*Company profile*

SpeechStorm specialises in 'customer-centric' self-service solutions to more effectively manage customer interactions on the phone. We provide open standards based, 'best-fit' customer-service solutions based on the optimal combination of touchtone, SMS, speech or visual IVR.

Our solutions enable contact centres to personalise their customer relationships, reduce costs and improve service levels. Our applications integrate easily with market-leading voice platforms and speech recognition software, and are supported with in-house application development and consultancy services. Designed under the mantra of 'video and voice made easy', our products hand over operational control to contact centres in the form of a configurable web-based Control Centre.

Backed by a professional services capability of more than 250 consultants, SpeechStorm is a subsidiary of Kainos Software Ltd, a leading IT consultancy and systems integrator with offices in the UK, Ireland and Poland.

# Recruitment

## Management objective: Optimising the recruitment budget

**Author:** Hilary Roberts, Managing Director, **HR Consultancy**

Back in July 2008, KPMG's quarterly National Business Confidence Survey reported that more than half of UK businesses were planning a hiring freeze. Their September "Report on Jobs", produced in association with the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, showed that overall demand for staff had fallen more sharply than at any time in the survey's 11-year history.

It's an understandable reaction; times are hard, costs need to be controlled and expenditure curtailed but do you actually know how much your company spends on recruitment and, consequently, how much you'll save by cutting back? It's surprising how few businesses take the time to look closely at recruitment costs and analyse which aspects of their strategy deliver the most successful recruits, but if you are to optimise your recruitment budget, this information is essential.

When budgets are tight, it's all the more important to ensure that what you do spend produces results. Advertising, recruitment agency fees, referral payments to employees, travel costs paid to recruiters and candidates, relocation costs and management time is estimated to account for 90% of hiring costs. Other costs such as testing, admin and reference checks make up the remaining 10%.

Having worked out your level of expenditure, the next step is to work out if you're getting value for money. Compare the retention rate from different recruitment sources; how effective is online advertising compared to traditional newspaper ads; are employees who are referred by friends a better "fit"; where do you tend to get your best performers?

Perhaps more difficult to gauge are the intangible costs that result from selecting the wrong candidate. How much revenue will you lose by hiring an average rather than a great performer? How will your valued agents and managers be affected by working alongside ineffectual colleagues or experiencing high levels of staff turnover? How much time will you spend dealing with an employee who doesn't understand, demonstrate or care about your culture and values?

Making a bad recruitment choice is exasperating at any time. When the economy is depressed and company finances are under tougher scrutiny, it's all the more important to get it right. The cost of recruiting the wrong person can be high and this unnecessary expense, combined with the impact on performance and staff morale, should be reason enough to convince employers that making the right hiring decisions is important and that properly designed and applied selection tools are invaluable.

Recruitment specialists will be familiar with the range of recruitment and selection tools available to them while in the "real world" the entire hiring process can often consist of an informal chat with the recruiting manager. This is a risky strategy. Research has shown that interviewers form an opinion about a candidate within eight seconds of meeting them and the rest of the interview is spent confirming this initial opinion or turning it around. There is a strong tendency amongst untrained interviewers to empathise and bond with people who resemble them, who their share interests, who know the same people and places and even those who dress or look like them! We all have our biases, values and preferences which makes interviewing candidates a subjective affair. By adopting a more structured, formal recruitment process, we can inject more objectivity into the process and avoid the tendency to go with the candidate we like rather than the candidate who is best suited to the job.

A thorough selection process can consist of any combination of the following:

- ❖ Telephone Screening
- ❖ Competency-based interviewing
- ❖ Numerical and verbal reasoning tests
- ❖ Personality profiling
- ❖ Assessment Centres which can include group tasks, individual exercises, in-tray exercises, role plays, written exercises and presentations
- ❖ Technical tests
- ❖ Language proficiency assessment
- ❖ Alphanumeric keyboarding tests
- ❖ Copy and audio typing tests

A full assessment centre gives employers the best insight into the candidate's strengths and weaknesses as well as providing information on their personality, behaviour and interaction with others. In studies, it has been shown that, as a predictor of candidate success in a given role, assessment centres with a combination of exercises and competency-based interviews score significantly higher than biographical interviews alone – not to mention the informal chat!

If you work with an external recruitment consultancy, make sure you choose one who will take the time to learn about your company culture, your values and the type of person you need and then design a bespoke selection process around your needs. Getting the right cultural "fit" can be just as important as skills and experience.

But whether you choose to work with a professional recruiter or with your own in-house team, a close review of your recruitment strategy combined with a rigorous selection process should go a long way to keeping costs under control and ensuring you get the best value from your recruitment budget.

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HR Consultancy has been providing a service to the Call & Contact Centre industry for over 10 years. We gained our first major Call Centre client, ScottishPower plc, back in 1998 and are proud to have successfully managed and retained the account since then. We like our consultants to have practical experience of the market they service so our Call Centre Services consultants have worked in call centres and appreciate the demands that are made on agents and managers. We always aim to work in close partnership with our clients. We believe that our recruitment service is more effective if we truly understand our clients, their company culture and the type of individual they require to meet the needs of their business. Two-way communication is key to this process so not only do we take the time to get to know your business, your people and how you operate but we would invite you to get to know us, to visit our offices and meet the team who would be managing your account.

In addition to our core recruitment offer, we offer the following services:

- ❖ Up-to-date salary surveys and market information
- ❖ Outsourcing/management of your recruitment projects
- ❖ Advertising and response handling
- ❖ Executive Search & Selection
- ❖ Ability testing
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- ❖ Assessment Centre design and management
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For further details, contact Bill Guthrie, Commercial Director, 0141 564 1565 or [bguthrie@hrconsultancy.co.uk](mailto:bguthrie@hrconsultancy.co.uk) or visit [www.hrconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.hrconsultancy.co.uk)

# Management

## Management objective: Bridge the 'mis-connect' between the CEO and the contact centre

**Author:** Keith Pearce, EMEA Marketing Director, **Genesys**

*Recent research has shown a significant gap in perceptions of customer service delivery between C-level executives and front-line customer service professionals. Keith Pearce, EMEA Marketing Director, Genesys, outlines a new approach for C-level executives to evaluate the contact centre which can generate long term revenue for the enterprise and deliver profitable and loyal customers.*

If you were to ask any CEO in the world today whether they want their business to be a customer service leader, they would undoubtedly answer 'yes'. Customer service leadership can catapult a company from laggard to leader in any given industry. Today's contact centre is becoming more and more central to a company's customer service claims and ability to accommodate a myriad of customer contact choices be it via phone, email, chat, or even text messages. In many industries, the parallel between the contact centre and customer service leadership is claimed in advertising slogans and marketing campaigns. In fact, many of today's banks explicitly promote the ability to speak with a live person instead of a machine as not only a benefit of membership, but also an underlying priority of its customer service leadership.

However, beyond the advertising slogans and boardroom promises, are companies 'walking the customer service walk' or simply 'talking the talk'? That question was the fundamental issue that Genesys Telecommunications, an Alcatel Lucent company, sought to answer in its newly published global research, *'The Executive Disconnect: The Strategic Alignment of Customer Service'*.

The research, which covered 47 countries and just under 1,000 participating companies in a very wide range of markets and sizes of organisations<sup>1</sup>, was designed to compare the responses of C-level executives with their customer care professionals who are much closer to the front lines – contact centre managers, directors of customer care, sales managers and directors, and marketing directors.

The most glaring and inconvenient truth that the research revealed was that neither C-level executives nor customer care professionals believe the contact centre is a strategic element of the business (only 20 per cent on both counts). Yet, both groups overwhelmingly agree that customer service is key to brand loyalty – at 92 per cent for C-level executives and 85 per cent of customer-centric executives. This presents a few interesting questions worth examining. Why don't these two groups associate the contact centre with customer service? Is the contact centre viewed as a poor vehicle through which to deliver customer service? Or simply, does today's typical CEO really understand the role of the contact centre? The goal of this article is to examine these questions in detail – and to offer solutions that need to be considered in order to truly deliver, and not simply advertise, customer service leadership in the contact centre.

### A closer look at the facts

The research revealed noticeable differences between perceptions in three key areas, which form the basis of the 'disconnect' between parties. These include: whether the contact centre re-enforces the company brand, how the company measures the lifetime value of the customer and whether the self-service experience of a contact centre is quality scored. In all three areas, most CEOs believe these activities to be an important part of contact centre operations, while many contact centre managers would disagree. There is almost a 20 per cent difference between executives and customer service employees on whether customer feedback is fed through to sales. Most 'C' executives believe that the sales process is driven by customer feedback, while only just over half of the customer service professionals on the ground agree.

Customer satisfaction is the metric most measured by contact centres, with 70 per cent of businesses evaluating it in some way. Yet our research showed that the majority of contact centres still measure and manage performance with operational metrics instead of strategic ones. These include: call duration, 68 per cent of contact centres, average speed to answer, 67 per cent and first call resolution, 56 per cent. However, these metrics won't and don't get the attention of most C-level executives.

To elevate the strategic nature of the contact centre, meaningful measures like customer conversion rates, profitability and customer expectations need to be measured, reported, and tied directly to both the top and bottom line. Only in Germany do the majority of contact centres report revenue per call (at 73 per cent). This approach will yield more meaningful metrics that will impact how well-aligned the contact centre is with the rest of the business.

### Understanding the disconnect – re-enforcing the brand

One of the primary goals of any CEO is to establish the right brand identity for the business. Millions of pounds will go into researching target markets, assessing consumer needs and developing demand in order to build a brand that encapsulates all of the right perceptions of the company and to make it a success in those target markets. In fact, 92 per cent of CEOs believe that customer service is key to brand loyalty.

It would shock most CEOs to learn, then, that we found that only 65 per cent of contact centres align live service – i.e. agents – with a company's brand identity. This inconsistency can be explained by the lack of a clear association between

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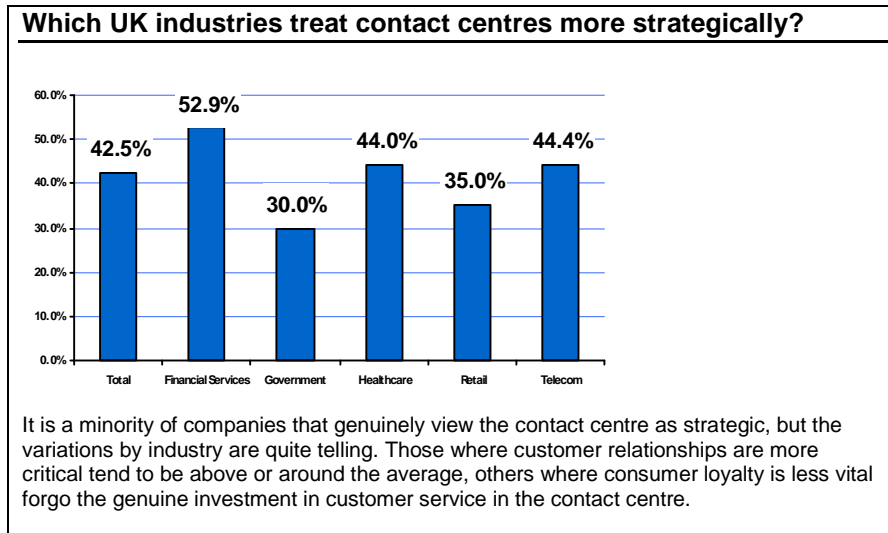
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<sup>1</sup> Markets include financial services, telecoms, healthcare, government, retail, manufacturing, technology and education  
One Third of companies have less than 500 agents. One Third have more than 2500  
Company size ranged from under 100 agents to over 10,000  
Respondents included more than 1,500,000 agents, back-office, branch and field support professionals

the contact centre agent, as a 'brand custodian', and the 'brand strategy' pitched by marketing. Few customers churn because of a poor advertising campaign. However, many are lost due to poorly performing agents, long hold times, and inconsistent service experiences across channels. The key to reconciling this issue is to start measuring customer loyalty through the contact centre.



### Understanding the disconnect – winning loyalty

Loyalty is an incredibly important asset. The Bain and Co Net Promoter Scoring (NPS) system – based on the quantification of how likely it would be for a customer to recommend the company to a colleague or friend – shows how companies with high NPS rankings for customer loyalty are the highest performing in their market sectors. Customers develop loyalty to a brand. Yet, if customer service does not reflect those expectations, customers cannot be loyal to it, and it ends up costing the company on the bottom line.

Contact centres are uniquely positioned to improve an organisation's NPS because many customers judge a company's performance according to their interaction with that company's contact centres. Studies have shown 80-90 per cent of merely 'satisfied' customers can easily leave you if the circumstances are right. Therefore, as customer service quality becomes an increasingly important competitive differentiator, contact centres need to re-evaluate how meaningful 'customer satisfaction' metrics are and graduate to measuring loyalty instead.

Taking this approach, the contact centre has the opportunity to create more brand champions, i.e. customers emotionally attached to the company, who are proven to have a more dramatic impact on future customer behaviour (repurchase rates, retention, and promotion) than the number of simply 'satisfied' contact centre impressions. Treating the contact centre experience as the single most important vehicle the company has to create a brand champion out of a merely satisfied customer will yield better returns than an advertising campaign. Today however, only 65 per cent of organisations we looked at try to establish the brand in the contact centre – and less than half will track whether this wins consumer loyalty.

### Understanding the disconnect – serving customers through multiple channels

The contact centre can be a critical revenue-generating arm of the enterprise, and is often naturally positioned to fulfil a customer's purchase intention, or reinforce the company's competitive differentiation. However, our research finds that often the agent is underequipped for the job, which is resulting in countless moments of revenue capture lost. Most sales opportunities are over the phone – 73 per cent – and yet only 65 per cent of agents can effectively position the brand to the customer. Only 23 per cent of web-based customers are pro-actively contacted through webchat – which explains why businesses cannot achieve consistent customer service through multiple channels.

The contact centre clearly has a key role to play in lead generation, and yet it is not fully linked into the sales process. Customer feedback and sales are not as linked as CEOs think they are – 73 per cent. If agents are expected to become revenue-generating and fulfil the strategic, brand re-enforcing goals expected of them, there needs to be a cultural shift.

We found that less than half of businesses actually measure whether the contact centre experience matches customer expectations – and even fewer use customer information to influence the sales process – a major area of disconnect between CEOs and the customer service department!

If organisations gather more complete and relevant customer data, they put themselves in a stronger position when it comes to selling something to the customer, because they better understand that customer's particular needs and wants. The fact that almost three-quarters of businesses do not measure prospective conversion rates, customer profitability or average lifetime value explains why contact centres cannot reach the expectations of the CEO: they just don't have the right information. The contact centre should be part of the sales process – it has its finger on the pulse and its customer intelligence should determine business strategy.

### Bridging the disconnect – building up contact centre talent

The most telling figure to explain the disconnect is that only 20 per cent of customer service professionals see the contact centre as strategic. If the employees within the contact centre fail to see the strategic value of their position, there is little

incentive for them to execute their roles in line with business objectives. CEOs may not see the contact centre as a strategic tool, but they clearly demonstrate expectations that the contact centre fall in line with their enterprise-wide strategic goals.

The most effective way to eradicate mediocrity in the contact centre however, is through the recruiting process. Businesses who promote the contact centre as a place for talented managers to go to make an immediate impact on the business will yield better talent – and better results – than those that reward middle managers who are driven to simply reduce costs. In fact, the contact centre is an ideal recruiting ground for ambitious, energetic new hires looking to get management experience and handle new high-tech projects that can yield quick results. Some of the leading customer service leaders staff their contact centres with young and energetic college hires as a requisite for entry into other positions within the company. Many report that the experience helps them keep the 'customer first' in their future careers within the organisation, and helps the contact centre adapt to the new communication preferences of younger customer segments.

### **Bridging the disconnect – from agent to sales force**

Thinking, acting, and treating agents like a sales force can yield innumerable benefits. Today, since most CEO's don't see the contact centre as strategic, there is little, if any, pressure to focus on high performers. Thinking of agents as a sales force, whose compensation and behaviour is appropriately aligned, has however, the potential to change the perception entirely and make both agents and management feel more grounded in common objectives.

In order to do this, a radical shift from the current operational metrics in place to more performance-based metrics with a clear compensation plan, quota and merit system is required. This enables a company to measure revenue and identify Net Promoters – which are far more valuable than basic customer satisfaction metrics. This will provide a more realistic overview of contact centre performance and greater control of agent planning.

In order to achieve this, you need to introduce a reporting structure that works for you – but one that's based on more strategic measures, such as 'customer problem solved', instead of operational metrics, such as 'total call time'. This will encourage your staff to have better quality conversations with customers. For example, it would be better for an agent to be on the phone for 20 minutes and resolve a caller's query – eliminating the need for them to call back again – rather than have them rush the call and leave the customer frustrated without a solution to their problem.

Traditional operational metrics penalise such behaviour, but if measured on loyalty and viewed as a sales force, agents are more inclined to see every customer interaction as a potential sales opportunity – and become a powerful customer advocate instead of someone burdened with just another phone call.

### **Maximising opportunities**

In today's economic climate, consistent levels of excellent customer service are mandatory not just to retain existing customers but to help win new ones. Our research has tried to bring businesses face-to-face with the disconnect between the reality versus the perception of the contact centre – that team of agents with direct contact with your customers and prospects. The tools are there to unite the contact centre with back office operations to bring in significant new revenue streams to make it a strategic function within a business.

As customers embrace new technologies and establish new communication preferences, the contact centre's impact on customer service has never been greater. Companies that take a strategic approach to 'tomorrow's customer' by incorporating new channels of customer communication into the 'sales' paradigm model of the contact centre, will foster more loyal customers and reap returns on both the top and bottom line in years to come.

Like any transformation, the contact centre requires an investment in time, budget and people to graduate from an operational entity to a strategic business element in both C-level executive and customer care professionals' minds. The companies that believe in the potential the contact centre has – and embark on making that transformation – will be the real customer service leaders of tomorrow.

### **Next Step**

A complete copy of the research is available upon request by visiting <http://genesyslabs-registration.com/?p=TGRL000007>

To understand more about the *Executive 'Mis-Connect'* you can contact the author or a member of the Genesys Strategic Solution Team – a dedicated group made up of industry-leading business consultants, solutions specialists and systems architects that bring innovative business solutions and strategies to organisations in a range of markets.

#### *About the author*

An eleven year veteran of the high tech industry, Keith Pearce has worked extensively in new and emerging technology markets for contact centre technologies. At Siemens, he helped orchestrate the migration strategy from legacy to new telephony products, in both the Sales and Marketing divisions. At Nuance, he helped build the market for speech recognition software. As Director of EMEA Marketing at Genesys, Keith leads all marketing activities in the region.

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