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Help Yourself: Contact Centers and Self-Service Technology

By Grant Sainsbury, *Practice Director of Customer Interactive Solutions, Dimension Data North America*

Contact centers are fast discovering the value of self-service interactions. The Web, speech recognition, touch-tone systems and kiosks all offer unique advantages both to consumers and corporations. As these technologies continue to improve, self-service systems correspondingly will become further honed. It will ultimately be up to the contact center to balance these channels while working to accommodate evolving customer expectations.

Today's customers are seeing the benefits of helping themselves. In fact, self-service is becoming increasingly familiar to consumers, who don't think twice when using everyday services such as ATMs and the Internet. Thanks to these mainstream innovations and many others, processes that once needed to be completed in-person at a specific location can now be addressed anytime, anywhere.

Consequently, consumers are more results-oriented than ever, and their increasing desire for immediacy has had a direct impact on the contact center. By studying and anticipating customer needs, contact centers are developing an increasing number of self-service applications to handle common processes, freeing agents to concentrate on more profitable interactions. According to Dimension Data's 2006 *Global Contact Center Benchmarking Report*, 53.4 percent of contact centers currently offer online self-service systems, and 12.5 percent are planning to install them.

Pitfalls to Avoid

The benefits of speaking with a live agent are clear – customers' responses are not limited to menu options, and they can speak freely, facilitating an ad hoc flow of information. But there are downsides as well – including long waits, redundant requests, multiple transfers and, at times, incomprehensible accents.

With the rise of the results-oriented, pressed-for-time consumer, contact centers have taken advantage of technological advances to automate as many services as possible, thereby reducing response times and shortening queues. However, inadequate technology and a lack of self-service integration can cause problems to arise. The result, if contact centers are not careful, can be a jumble of seemingly arbitrary touch-tone numbers and complicated menu structures.

Complex menus frustrate callers, proving that technology such as touch-tone self-service, in and of itself, is not sufficient. Quality is of the utmost importance, and contact centers far too often overlook the user experience when designing new systems. Instead, centers should analyze new technologies and align them with business goals prior to implementation. This way, both the caller

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and the contact center stand to benefit from an increasingly efficient experience.

The Role of Speech Self-Service

Speech self-service technology will play a crucial role in enhancing the caller experience, allowing consumers direct access to the services they need and establishing improved security measures through speaker verification with voice biometrics technology. Thus, it's no surprise that findings from Dimension Data's Benchmarking Report show that voice-driven self-service technologies are receiving particular focus this year, with 27 percent of contact centers looking to upgrade their Interactive Voice Response (IVR) platforms and 25 percent planning to install speech recognition systems.

Speech technology, as a self-service channel, has been widely available to contact centers for some time. Organizations that have successfully implemented speech self-service understand that the critical success factor is not merely the technology configuration, but also the users' experience with the interactions supported by the application.

According to Tim Pearce, global solutions manager for self-service at Dimension Data: "Speech technology in a contact center environment is judged by the user's ability to interact with the Voice User Interface (VUI). Contact centers can deploy the best speech technologies available on the market today, but if the applications are not usable and not designed with user-centric principles in mind, they won't be successful."

What customers most desire is that their requests are both quickly addressed and quickly resolved. In turn, organizations need to ensure that their automated service is easy to use and that customers can use, want to use and enjoy using the VUI provided.

In many cases, customers can pinpoint the type of information they desire – for example, information on a new phone or more details about a new service. These customer predispositions and common requests drive the need to design speech self-service from a user perspective.

The Optimal VUI

According to Pearce, there are a number of steps involved in designing an effective VUI:

1. Understand the target audience

The first step in the design of a VUI is to research an organization's target audience. Contact centers must ensure that the interface provided by the speech application suits the demographics of its target audience.

2. Design the application to suit user needs

Contact centers need to design a speech application to anticipate and suit users' wants and needs. Rather than dwell on the technology driving an application, consumers instead focus on whether their inquiries will be handled quickly or not.

When examining user needs, contact center managers need to ask two key questions:

A) What do the end-users want and/or need the application to do?

B) How should the system be designed to accommodate these requirements?

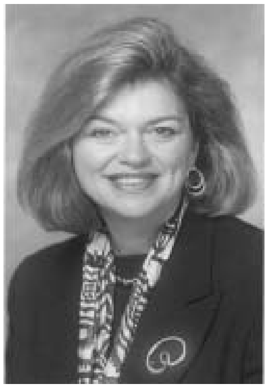
3. Involve objective human language and behavior experts

Speech is all about human communication, interaction and behavior. It is therefore essential to involve people who approach the VUI design from an objective and informed perspective. A contact center needs specialists who are objective about human language and behavior to ensure this requirement is met.

4. Use representative-spoken language

Organizations must ensure that their recorded prompts have an appropriate and representative spoken-language style, as well as realistic human prosody in terms of speed, pitch, tone, rhythm and intonation patterns.

In many cases, older touch-tone IVRs and earlier speech recognition systems fail to meet



RANTS & RAVES!

Randomly Timed Musings

Arson Investigation in the Contact Center

By Kathleen M. Peterson
Chief Vision Officer, PowerHouse Consulting, Inc.

Contact Centers have long been plagued by the practice of *fire fighting*. This is the reason given for not attending to planning, analysis, or other quality initiatives. “We don’t have time for that - we are too busy putting out fires.” If you are fighting fires all day, everyday, they will never go out. Embers of the flames remain only to reignite. If this is what your Contact Center is doing, you don’t need to fight fires any longer. *You need an arson investigation!* Arson investigations search for two things: origin and cause. When origin and cause are identified, the investigation proceeds to find the culprit and eliminate the threat.

It is time that Contact Center fire fighters become arson investigators. Management must commit to discovering what is causing conditions to be out of control, whether it be service level, abandons, productivity, quality, handle time, or something else. Take some fire fighting time and convert it to investigation time. Close yourself off and evaluate the situation. Create a list of *fires* and identify the situations, similarities, and drivers. Ask for input, and then just *think*. Focus on origin and cause - this is the hardest part - and not on trying to solve the problem. Before you can really solve a problem, you must first define it.

Will this take time? Yes, but guess what? It is unlikely that the entire operation will *go up in smoke* while you step back and evaluate. You may also be quite surprised at how much clarity emerges in just a couple of focused hours.

Categorize your findings around the fundamentals: hiring, training, resource management, and leadership. (You may even find that you have a couple of *arsonists* in your midst.) THEN search for solutions. Too often we attempt to first identify the solution (fire fighting) before we have clearly identified the problem (arson investigation). Take the time to organize your approach to solutions and embers will die out, yielding fertile ground for genuine long-term improvement.

Give it a try. And be sure to let us know when you hang up your fire fighting gear.

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customer needs because they seem robotic and do not mimic natural, intuitive human conversation.

"Spoken language is far less formal than written language, and when human conversation is based on the VUI, customers stay in their comfort zone and respond naturally," says Pearce. "Even if contact centers are using a limited technology such as touch-tone interaction, they can markedly increase its performance if they use a user-centric designed approach.

In conclusion…
Although speech self-service can reduce the cost of interactions, the real benefit for organizations lies in their ability to extend their core technology platform and enhance the experience of customers. The value of this can be considerable – generating repeat business, word-of-mouth business and improved efficiency. In fact, rather than buying more equipment and hiring more agents, the effective use of speech recognition systems allows contact centers to leverage their existing technology investments to provide improved services.

Smart speech recognition and self-service technologies offer a win-win situation – consumers can save time and avoid hassles, while contact centers optimize resources and satisfy their customer base. And for contact centers deciding whether to implement these technologies, the decision is – quite literally – an easy call.

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2007 Call Center Salary Report – (US)

Overview:

M.E.R. Inc. is a specialized executive search firm dedicated to the Managed Services, Transactional Outsourcing and Direct Marketing Industry. Growth rates in professional services for both managed services and transactional outsourcing continues to set record pace and our firm is well positioned to continue to meet the growing demand for executive talent in this arena.

Managed Services includes a wide range of professional services in outsourcing, CRM, BPO, direct marketing, customer care, help desk, call center, etc. We placed globally for our clients in sales, marketing, operations, and HR disciplines.

If your company has any form of customer interaction center, (inside sales, inbound care, outbound sales and service, help desk, technical support, anything evolving around a customer interaction process, our firm has placed in this area. We represent over 15,000 industry experts that have proven how to implement a customer strategy, maintain and grow profitable relationships with your customers.

Background:

In January 2006, M.E.R. published the "2006 Call Center Employment Outlook Report and Staying Competitive with you Management

Compensation report in 2004. Both of these reports and all other of our white papers can be found on our web site at www.justcareers.com

Our last call center compensation report was produced in 2004 and we felt it required updating with current trends. Response to salary data and information, draws a significant amount of interest and our goal is to continue to provide industry related information that is both useful and provides value add.

The growth of call centers as a channel to answer and response to customers continues to increase and “worth what paid for” in a call center seems to be a common question. Our firm has benchmarked a number of call center related positions and the comparable salaries in each. These confirmations have been gathered from hundreds of candidate interviews used in our daily operations.

If you have a question on a position that we have not listed, please respond with your questions and I would be happy to provide what our view has been.

I also would welcome your kind response to this report of what your observations have been in the salary data contained. This continues to help us validate our findings and information provided to our readership.

Chad McDaniel
President
M.E.R. Inc
mcdaniel@justcareers.com
866-991-3555 (Toll-Free)

*Report attached

Call Center Operations:

Position:	Compensation – Low	Compensation - High
Call Center Supervisor In-House	$38,600	$49,200
Call Center Supervisor Outsourced	$26,400	$39,600
Call Center Manager In-House	$52.500	$69,800
Call Center Manager Outsourced	$41,200	$58,700
Call Center Director In-House	$82,500	$99,100
Call Center Director Outsourced	$72,300	$92,700
VP Call Center Operations	$90,400	$135,000

Call Center Support Positions:

Position:	Compensation – Low	Compensation - High
Workforce Manager	$50,000	$75,000
Account Manager – Client Services	$60,000	$85,000
Quality Manager – Call Center	$45,000	$65,000
HR Manager – Call Center	$50,000	$75,000
Telecom Manager – Call Center	$75,000	$105,000
Reports Manager – Call Center	$35,000	$55,000

Call Center Sales:

Position:	Compensation – Low	Compensation - High
Inside Sales Manager	$80,000	$105,000
Telemarketing Manager	$65,000	$89,000
Telemarketing Director	$77,000	$100,000
VP Sales – Call Center	$80,000	$130,000

Note:

- **All positions listed are "base" salaries listed in US dollars for US positions only**
- **Data includes averages of all regions (NE, SW, SE, Midwest, etc).**
- **Data has been collected from recent candidate/market interviews**

What our Recruiters have observed in the marketplace:

Barb Tyrchniewicz:

I have noticed there are a lot of individuals displaced because of acquisitions and mergers and they may be driving the market price down. Some candidates are taking on roles that they may be overqualified for. This experience level then could become an expectation to hiring authorities. The requirement to offshore in remaining competitive has caused some call center outsourcers to be creative with their salaries in North America. One last area that I have noticed is that consultants who are in the role for 4 or 5 years entertaining a six figure salary will consider a lower salary in the $90 - 95K range for Site Manager roles for some stability in their income.

Carolyn Welsh:

Employers are expecting more for the money (i.e. post secondary education = diverse experience (multiple hats) – limited relocation packages etc). Their profit margins continue to be tight in a number of industries, driving the continued more for the hire paid salary.

Nancie DeVita:

I would say base salaries have really been flat for the past 2 years. I would say average Site Directors of site with more than 300 seats are in the $80K to $100 range, Operations Managers are in the $45-$65K range.

Andy Young:

I would say the tier A sales hunters (5,000,000 Quota annually) are getting base packages in the $120 to $150 K range with aggressive 3 year commission components.

The tier B sales roles (2,000,000 to 4,000,000 million players) are more in the $80 to $120 K range with similar commission structure.

The offshore market continues to grow and competition for this talent has increased salaries for strategic offshore expertise.

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Ken Blanchard, co-author of *The One Minute Manager®* and *Customer Mania*

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provide businesses with a competitive advantage in customer service. MAGIC *smashes* superficial, ineffective approaches to solve complex customer service issues yet through a simple and fun approach."
Barry L. Ogle, Vice President, Wyndham Vacation Ownership

"*How to Talk to Customers* illustrates the keys to making MAGIC every day with every contact. If service is a differentiator for your organization, this book should be on everyone's desk, from the day they start!"
William M. Lyons, **President and CEO, American Century Companies, Inc.**

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C. Paul Turner, Managing Director, Citifinancial Mortgage, Inc.

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###

Be a Double Bagger

by Linda Richardson
info@richardson.com

Are you a no bag, one bag, or two bagger?

The "bags" are a metaphor for the level of customer care and how proactively you treat your customers — to help and keep them.

To define the categories, consider this situation in which a customer is making a purchase at a cash register. The "no bag" customer service person generally rings the sale up slowly, talks with a colleague, and asks if the customer want a bag — which the customer may be expected to fill him/herself.

The "one bag" customer service person rings the customer up, goes through the motions, and places light or heavy items in one bag, even if the bag may not be strong enough or may be too heavy for the customer to comfortably carry.

The "two bag" customer service person greets and welcomes the customer with a smile, efficiently and accurately processes the order, and without the customer asking, suggests a double bag for the customer's convenience.

The "bag" mindset among customer service professionals is contagious. If you are a "double bagger," you usually aren't alone. And sadly, if you are a "no bagger" or a "one bagger," you also aren't alone.

In our experience, only 3 in 10 customer service professionals are double baggers. Double baggers stand out and help make the customer experience and after the customer's day a little better. They are exceptional and usually grow and advance in their jobs.

If you work for a company that is passionate about "double bagging" to create an exceptional customer experience, you are very lucky. If you don't, *you* can be the one to start the double bag care. Regardless of what you do, the "bags" are in your hands. It is up to you:

Greet each customer to let him/her know you appreciate his/her being there.

Smile and use words such as "Good morning" "Hello." If face-to-face, please make eye contact.

Give your full attention to the customer, (i.e. do not talk to colleagues, drink or snack ...).

Take ownership for helping — "Let me help you with that."

Be accurate and efficient.

Ask if there is anything else you can do.

Think ahead to find a way to add value (offer the second bag or whatever the equivalent is in your company if possible).

Thank every customer for his/her business every time — be the last one to say thank you, even after the customer thanks you.

###

Is your business a talent magnet?

IN THE GLOBAL HUNT FOR TALENT, SOME STARS SHINE BRIGHTER

WHEN AUTHOR AND COLUMNIST Thomas L. Friedman in 2005 declared the world to be flat, he meant that revolutionary changes in technology, communication and information-sharing had leveled the global playing field – permitting almost anyone to do almost anything almost anywhere.

In the calm epicenter of the tumultuous Middle East, the Arab Emirate of Dubai is creating a super-city of luxury hotels, office buildings, homes and entertainment complexes that stands as one of the most eye-popping wonders of the modern world. Imported labor from India and the Philippines helps build the new city 24/7.

In the ancient Chinese port of Macao, near Hong Kong, American-owned companies such as Wynn Resorts and MGM-Mirage are constructing gambling resorts that make their Las Vegas properties look tiny. The reason? If 100 million tourists can reach Las Vegas in five hours or less, over four billion live within the same distance from Macao.

In Bangalore, India firms with names like Office Tiger provide an ever-increasing array of information technology, accounting, payroll, call center and other back-office services to clients in America, Western Europe and elsewhere. In other offices, Indian-born but U.S.-trained accountants process tax returns for American accounting firms – overnight and at a fraction of the cost. And while Western doctors sleep, Indian radiologists interpret medical images sent to them online. But perhaps most important, some 100 IT companies from around the world have built R&D centers in a suburb called Electronics City – home to a stunning 140,000 software engineers.
Meanwhile, in the North Central United States, manufacturers who used to move jobs to non-union southern states now are sending them directly to China, where new plants are starting production every day of the year.

All that – and more – has created a worldwide market for talent. While Asian construction workers may be the most visible labor pool in Dubai, hotels and regional corporate headquarters are recruiting highly skilled managers on a global basis – and paying them premiums to work there. Ditto the dazzling gambling resorts in Macao. Even India, with its seemingly endless supply of talent, is beginning to face a talent shortage. Though it and China, for example, now graduate more engineers than the United States, not all come from prestigious universities, understand Western business culture or live close to major population centers.

The Best and Brightest Have Many Job Choices

THE NEW, WORLDWIDE COMPETITION for talent is happening at an inauspicious time for the typical, often struggling employer.

For one thing, the population is aging not just in the U.S., but in Europe and Japan as well, which means shortages ahead in the managerial ranks. For another, demographics are shifting, with the best and brightest workers preferring to work in population centers full of people just like them, which means that jobs may not be where people want to work. Moreover, today's younger workers increasingly place personal fulfillment ahead of job security, which means they increasingly will direct their own careers and move from employer to employer. If the right job is not available in Austin, or some other currently desirable place to live, the geographically adventurous may well sign up for a tour of duty in Dubai or Macao.

Thanks to the Internet, a virtually unlimited amount of information is available to help guide everyone's career choices. Do you want to know what your job – or anyone else's job – is worth on the open market? Visit salary.com. Do you want to know what employees think of your company (or any other)? Google will help you find the appro-priate website, message board or blog. As just one example, career information site vault.com contains the following employee comment about one well-known consumer products company: "It is hard for minorities to strive and grow at *[name deleted]* due to the lack of any support." While a minority job-seeker might regard that as an isolated complaint, what if the message string showed 20 similar comments?

Last, it is difficult to hoard talent – keeping it safely stowed away for future use (when the market turns, or a new product reaches commercializa-tion). That old maxim "use it or lose it" certainly applies to talent management. It is truly amazing how often employers are surprised when a top per-former leaves for greener pastures: "I never real-ized that Leslie was unhappy." Forget that she car-ried more than her fair share of the weight, yet re-ceived only cost-of-living raises and had not been promoted in over three years.

How to Make Your Business A Talent Magnet

YOUR ORGANIZATION may be spending hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars on marketing its products or services – while ignoring the need to market itself to both prospective and current employees.

More often than not, marketing creates demand by expressing or dramatizing a unique value proposi-tion – *i.e.,* the benefit that a consumer will receive by trying and using the product or service at hand. That benefit or value may be cleaner laundry, en-hanced financial security, a more pleasing appear-ance, greater safety and performance on the road, reduced chance of a dreaded disease, etc. The question that too many employers ignore is what unique value does their organization bring to its employees, without whom the wheels of progress would grind to a halt.

In olden days, companies could offer jobs for life and merit increases in the low double-digits for all. Those days have long passed, so there had better be other benefits that your place of employment offers. In other words, what makes your organiza-tion a magnet for top talent?

Here it may prove instructive to look at *Fortune's* annual "100 Best Employers to Work For." Virtu-ally all have one or more distinctive benefits they provide employees. For example, first-place em-ployer Google Inc. offers free gourmet food in 11 employee cafeterias scattered through its Mountain View, CA, headquarters. If the food is not enough, employees also can do their laundry, drop off dry cleaning, get a haircut, have their car washed and lubed, work out in the company gym or have the concierge make a dinner reservation. A marketer might say that Google has taken the bother out of working. Intangible benefits of whatever dimen-sion and cost can help bond existing employees to any organization, while attracting prospective employees to apply.

Of course, it's not all about intangibles. In a survey last year of 1,100 employees, HR consulting firm Watson Wyatt Worldwide found that compensa-tion remains the number-one reason why workers change jobs. (In the words of *The Wall Street Journal,* "Opportunity Knocks, and It Pays a Lot Better.") Companies today that are strapped for cash often make the mistake of lumping all compensation dollars into a single pot and doling out the same minuscule raises to top and poor performers alike. As in the sports and entertainment industries, more ordinary businesses need to cultivate and coddle superstars, offering them the kind of compensation packages they can't refuse.

Hiring people costs a lot of money, so it makes little sense to have your organization become a happy hunting ground for recruiters around the globe. One alternative is to hire mediocre people. The other is to become a talent magnet.

Sanford Rose Associates - Cleveland East is a specialized Executive Search and Human Capital firm that helps clients fill critical openings for Call Center and Business Process Outsourcing organizations around the world. For more information, contact:
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Ray Hansell has been involved in the Teleservices and Direct Marketing Industry for over 25 years. He was the CEO of RMH Teleservices, an international call center operation that he co-founded with his partner MarySue Lucci in the mid 1980's and took public in 1996. During this same period, he also performed consulting services for dozens of Fortune 500 companies regarding their in house call center operations.

Currently, he is the co-founder of [MaraStar Communications], a direct marketing software company founded in 2000. MaraStar produces animated training and communications products that are used in training and motivating employees, particularly in the call center industry.

Do You Remind 'em Before You Remove 'em?

Taking the Brighter Path by Creating a Positive Environment of Trust Over an Environment of Negativity

What *is* an environment of negativity? Perhaps the best way to describe this type of work place environment is to share my own personal experiences with you. In my years as both an employee, and later, a business owner, I've observed actions that have created negativity among employees, and as a result, I have learned the keys to building an environment of trust.

As an employee, one of my first jobs in sales involved an incident where a fellow employee was not only swiftly, but rudely dismissed. Management proceeded to deny the very existence of this associate in a threatening manner. They suggested that any inquiries into the whereabouts or circumstances of the terminated employee would result in further terminations without due process. These actions frustrated the employees, leading to concern for their own futures with the company. The secrecy with which management approached this situation drove some team members to leave the company.

An environment of negativity may result in team members getting the wrong impression of your management practices. The risk in creating an environment of negativity is that the resulting work environment will become non-productive. This happens when team members get the impression that employees are summarily dismissed or are not given the opportunity to improve or remediate their actions.

I've witnessed public perception of an entire department turn negative when employees were unaware of the positive steps taken by management to help team members with performance issues. This spiraling of negative reactions commenced after the actions taken by management to remove the problem employee were handled in a negative manner. Because department managers did not clearly communicate the opportunities for improvement that every employee was offered, existing employees began to react defensively to any interaction with their managers.

The lesson I've derived from these experiences is the importance of conducting employee interventions and communications in a manner that is consistent and fair. This communication fosters an environment of *Trust*. When employees know where they stand regarding company policy and performance, there are no surprises when corrective actions are taken.

The Consequences of an Environment of Negativity

The most serious consequence in the environment of negativity is employee turnover. Employees may believe that their position within the company is insecure, that their job is subject to random standards that they can't control and/or are unaware of; in many cases, this fear causes an employee to quit. In effect, why not take control of their destiny by leaving before being asked to leave? People don't stick around long in the environment of negativity.

Many managers may not realize the cost of turnover both in the short run as well as over the long term. The immediate cost of employee turnover includes replacement cost of the new hire i.e. advertising, training, testing, etc. But there is also a cost that is not so obvious – the costs of lower departmental performance as a result of poor team morale. This cost affects not only your employees, but also your costumers, who are negatively impacted by poor service levels.

Creating a Brighter Path with an Environment of Trust

Consequently, what I generally recommend in dealing with performance-related employee problems is an approach I call the "Brighter Path." This path is so named because it uses a brighter, lighter, more positive tone to open up the employee to better, more productive behaviors, rather than a darker path that shuts down the employee publicly. It is based on **clear communication** of performance expectations, company policy and discipline practices. When expectations are clearly and directly communicated to the employee from the outset, and any performance-related concerns that arise along the way are tackled with the clear goal of helping the employee improve, the possibility of further performance problems usually dissolves.

Here are my steps to creating an environment of trust:

Consistently and

positively communicate performance standards to all employees.

Give gentle yet effective reminders to employees with performance-related problems. *I've found employees are receptive to positive reminders, usually yielding an immediate turnaround in behavior.*

Follow up by observing behavior after the reminder has been issued.

Attempt several more reminders to employees, with a more serious tone, should the first efforts not produce the desired results.

Take company appropriate steps to reprimand/remove should a reasonable amount of follow up steps fail to produce the appropriate behavior.

Making these extra efforts does not take a lot of time or energy, yet it often produces some surprising turnarounds that reduce unwanted turnover and cultivates a positive work culture with superior productivity. The reason is that employees appreciate an open positive environment of trust, and demonstrate their approval with behaviors that are consistent with acceptable management practices.

Communication Tools to Cultivate an Environment of Trust

After many years of dealing with hundreds of employees in a variety of challenging circumstances like these, my business partner and I launched MaraStar Communications to help companies create environments of trust. MaraStar Communications produces patented training and communication animations that can be used, among other things, to help managers, trainers, and quality coaches to communicate to employees in a positive manner, and reinforce appropriate workplace behaviors. These animations, called ToonUps, are designed to be used as positive reinforcement, as well as in reaction to performance-related issues, sent directly to the desktop of individuals or posted to the company intranet and even included in PowerPoints for an entire group to view. To view these animations, visit our website at http://www.marastar.com/.

Many companies use these positive and humorous animations to not only communicate performance-related issues, but also educate employees on company policies. These communications set the stage for appropriate behaviors by introducing them into the initial corporate training program and then followed up regularly to remind and reinforce positive behaviors in a variety of ways.

Whether, as a manager, you use these kinds of animated interventions or simply provide verbal reminders in earshot of the other employees, you are taking a positive step to improve performance that will be noticed and acknowledged by other employees.

In the court of public opinion, if the employee turns their performance around, then management will be credited for the positive approach it took to facilitate the change

As a result, an environment of trust is created with clear, consistent and considerate communication. Follow the Brighter Path with positive reminders to turn around employee performance and maintain a positive employee perception. If you want to create this kind of positive work experience for your employees and your company —-

Always Remember…Remind 'em before you Remove 'em!

BEST PRACTICES IN VERIFICATION

—By Jim Beuoy, Director of Quality Assurance and Corporate Compliance

Bad leads are costly…. Have you ever calculated the costs of sending a sales rep out on a bad telemarketing lead? Add up the marketing dollars that you spent on lead generation such as campaign planning, target market selection, list rental(s), creative script writing, training the agents who cold call and qualify, role-playing, coaching, and so on. Then try to put a figure on the all of the costs associated with the sales rep following up. Don't forget to include full (hourly) overhead burden, including benefits, office space, and so on of both the sales rep and the lead generation group. Was travel involved? Even if the sales rep only contacts the "qualified" prospect by phone, you'll find that the total cost of following up on a lead is not insignificant. Not to mention opportunity costs. Whatever number you arrive at, it won't take more than a couple of seconds to recognize that you simply cannot afford to allow bad leads to slip through your lead generation process.

Bad sales are even MORE costly…. Now, if you think that you can't afford to have bad leads slip through, your system you REALLY can't afford to have bad telemarketing sales slip through! With all the renewed, state and federal focus on consumer fraud, chances are that too many complaints of unauthorized billing will land you directly in the cross-hairs of consumer protection enforcement. Assuming that you prove that "slammed" sales / leads were due to one bad apple on our team or that unauthorized charges were the result of error and that you came out unscathed from an investigation, consider the damage to the brand. That kind of publicity can have a lasting impact. Regardless of the outcome, defending yourself against such claims can be enormously expensive.

Negative Option Sales demand verification…. One-time sales are risk enough but if your product or service involves a negative option (whereby product is automatically shipped and billed until the consumer takes some steps to cancel the "subscription") then your exposure to risk is heightened significantly. Throw in a free introductory offer to your product / service and you have a classic scenario that causes concern on the part of legislators and enforcement authorities alike. Every Compliance Officer will tell you that free-to-pay-conversion, negative option sales MUST be verified.

Regardless of whether or not your offer involves a negative option, it should be obvious by now that you need to verify leads and/or sales. Some may think that the cost of quality is too high, but that thought is often arrived at by not including all of those hidden costs. If we add up all of the previously mentioned costs, we should have a good starting point for a budget. Since there is more risk involved with a bad sale than there is with a bad lead, this article will discuss verification options in terms of sales. It will be a little easier to discuss virtues of alternative approaches without the baggage of waffling back and forth between sales and leads. We'll also talk about why it's important that the verifier be a third party verification.

What verification methodology should you use…. Obviously, we'll need to find a verification methodology that both is appropriate for the size of the program and one that ensures that the cost of prevention isn't more expensive than the cure. The most commonly deployed approaches are: 1) Immediate Verification, 2) Call-back Verification, and 3) Recorded Verification. Let's weigh the pro-s and con's of each.

Immediate Verification…. Immediate verification typically involves the telemarketing agent raising his or her hand for a Supervisor or Verifier to run over, take over the conversation, to verify the decision. Just to keep things honest, the verifier adds some security or confirmation code to the record. With more recent technology, the Supervisor / Verifier can barge in (remotely) to verify the sale / lead instead of running over and taking over the agent's handset. In other environments, the agent transfers the call to the verifier. Regardless of how the verifier joins in on the call, the agent is still required to signal or find someone to talk with the prospect - in real time. If you've ever witnessed this approach, you can attest that it results in the appearance of pandemonium. People are standing up, frantically waiving and verifiers are running about the call center floor, trying to verify and answer questions at the same time.

Think too about how the consumer feels while this is happening. The consumer is sitting there waiting to tell someone else: "yes, I REALLY do want to give you my money." Probably less than the ideal consumer experience.

On the positive side, you get 100% verification. Other approaches may dictate that you settle for a statistically valid sample, but immediate verification all but insures contact with each customer. Plus, it saves the expense of sending through a "bad" sale only to spend more time and money on stopping the order from being fulfilled. Think through the logistics of stopping an order after the sale has been submitted. Adjusting reports. Adjusting commissions. Speaking of which, agents know whether or not they earned a commission (and you don't have the baggage of dealing with charge-backs) when you verify immediately.

Immediate verification allows you to fulfill orders as just as fast as your back-office procedures can process them. Faster shipping culminates in improved cash flow. It may also be an appropriate choice when there are very few sales per hour. You probably won't want to invest in outsourcing verification to a third party if you only get a sale every other hour. Several sales per hour, translating into hundreds of sales per day is a different matter.

Call-back verification…. Compared to immediate verification, call-back verification typically results in a lower percentage of confirmed sales. As the name implies, this process involves a follow-up phone call to the buyer. With today's hectic lifestyles, a second contact (hopefully in a fairly short period of time) is another challenge to the sales process. Even when you try to establish a specific time for the verification or you try to call back around the same time of day as the original contact, you'll find that this approach typically takes several attempts to make a contact. Even with a reasonable number of attempts, residential verification contact rates often fall below 85%. As if an additional contact isn't challenge enough, right-party contacts can cause additional drops. Spouses, other family members, or co-habitants occasionally want to know the purpose of the call, raise additional questions or objections, and in some cases make a request for no further contact.

One the plus side, this approach offers another touch point. Consequently, it can be the preferred methodology in situations where you want to cultivate a personal relationship. Recruiting volunteers for a charity may be a good example. That extra touch point helps emphasis the importance of the mission and stimulates the volunteers to fulfil their pledge / assignment.

It may also be appropriate in scenarios where there can be a high level of buyer's remorse. Verifiers can be trained to re-emphasis benefits, offer reassurances of a good decision, or at least save against sending out undesired shipments. If you really prefer this approach, just be sure to include a contingency plan for repeat buyers who tell your agent: "please don't have them call me to confirm!" It happens more often than you think.

Methodology recommendation…. Of the three approaches**,** **recorded verification** is the least intrusive for the consumer. The other two approaches may be viewed as making your customer prove that they want to buy from you. Plus, situations like the ones discussed above can go wrong during verification. Additionally, verifiers may need as much, if not more, training than the sales agent. They may be called upon to save cancels. They may not be able to lean the scope of the project from the sales rep training kit. You may need to make the investment in an additional training kit specific to their challenges and objectives.

Assuming that you have

volume and continuity, there really is a better way. Most companies already have recording capabilities in place for quality assurance purposes. Most companies also send the data records somewhere for fulfillment purposes. A simplistic model for recorded verification is to export / post the data and the recordings to a secure FTP site, allow the verifiers to listen to the recordings overnight, and have verified sales / verified leads back the next morning! A version of this process has been in use for at least since the late 70's. It's just that digital recording has speeded up the process and has replaced cassette tapes along with all of the label and library baggage associated with handling physical media.

Recorded verification is less intrusive and less burdensome for the consumer. Furthermore, it can be more objective than the other two approaches. Verifiers can't help but have some pressure and emotional stake in direct conversation with the buyer. Recorded verification can be set up much like quality assurance scores; where the absence or presence of the criteria – rather than the verifier determines the validity of the sale!

Leverage the experience of an outsourcer…. Obviously, no export is involved when the verification function takes place in-house. However, grading your own papers (so to speak) is rarely advisable. .
Outsourcing to a Third Party Verification (often referred to as 3PV or TPV) will not only add legitimacy, avoiding any appearance of bias, but it should give you healthy savings. An experienced outsourcer should be able to provide this service at a cost less than what you can attain in-house, plus you'll benefit from their experience - avoid learning the mistakes that they've already overcome.

For further information, please contact Dan Werner at 866-671-0778 or dwerner@oksameridial.com

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Get Rid of "Customer Service Training" and Focus on "Results Training"

By Kimberly King

So you think that your organization needs Customer Service Training? For those of you that have money to burn and don't really care whether you get any results, then a "Customer Service Training" purchase may be in order. For those of you that would like to invest your training dollars wisely and are very concerned about getting a return on your investment from the time and money you devote to improving your performance, consider the 10 steps highlighted below as an alternative to "Customer Service Training" and strive to make a difference in your organization and get results.

Beware of anything labeled "Customer Service Training". Here's the number one reason why... **your Employees have a lot to focus on**. They must understand the computer system, know your products, communicate effectively, achieve sales, reduce their escalated situations, find the answers they need and satisfy the Customer all at the same time. They are being asked to accomplish a lot of tasks. From your business perspective, you also have a lot of goals for them to achieve. You have sales goals, Customer satisfaction ratings, productivity measurements and probably a few other categories relative to your business.

When you deliver information that is telling them to deliver great "customer service", you are leaving out the message for them to achieve all of your other goals too. Through Customer Service Training they will be taught how to "smile while they're on the phone", (my LEAST favorite directive), use the Customer's name, say please and thank you, and ask permission to put the Customer on hold or how to politely transfer a call. But how do these behaviors help them achieve their sales or their productivity?

Customer Service Training is too narrow of a focus and leaves your Employees confused about what they are expected to achieve.

From your perspective, you want them to achieve ALL the goals: sales, service, productivity, safety, etc. So what is the answer?

DON'T deliver Customer Service Training. DON'T deliver sales training either. You will be sending the message that one day they should focus on sales and the next day they should focus on service. What should be done is to focus on WOWing the Customer.
Here is the 10-step process to GET RESULTS, not just deliver training.

1. Determine the exact flow of a customer interaction and map out that interaction so that you have a documented procedure of what a WOW Customer interaction looks like. A WOW Customer interaction will leave the Customer feeling delighted and respected, it will leave your business knowing that you have maximized all of your sales and efficiency opportunities and your Employees will feel motivated and positive about the interaction.

2. Watch and listen to what is going on in your organization and compare it to your process map. Are your Employees ignoring your Customers when they walk in the door and staying too focused on the task they were doing? Are they telling your Customers, *"We can't do that for you"* which leaves your Customers wondering why they are giving you their business? Are they missing opportunities to offer your alternative solutions to your Customers which would help your business grow its sales? These are all very distinct behaviors that you might observe when you listen and watch closely to your Employees interacting with your Customers. These are all very distinct behaviors that will lower your sales, lower your Customer satisfaction ratings and lower your retention rate of Customers.

3. Now that you have defined your standards and have observed how your Employees are meeting or not meeting these standards, you have a good idea of what to emphasize when you communicate your new behaviors. Bring everyone into a room and ask for a volunteer to be your mock Customer.

Demonstrate what a WOW Customer interaction looks like and sounds like with your volunteer being the Customer and you taking on the role of the Employee. Ask everyone how they felt from the Customer's perspective. Ask them the specific behaviors that you demonstrated that made them feel respected, guided, appreciated and wanting to buy more from you.

4. Now it's time to introduce the process flow of all the behaviors that you demonstrated that created that WOW experience. Face to face interactions are going to be different that transactions that take place over the phone.

Here is the flow of a standard telephone interaction:

1. Greet the Customer
2. Acknowledge the Customer's response
3. Verify the Customer's information
4. Ask questions to continue understanding the need
5. Continue acknowledging the Customer to let him/her know you are listening
6. Ask more questions
7. Continue to provide accurate and complete information
8. Transition from the service need to any alternative solutions
9. Use powerful and passionate words to describe your products and services
10. Ask for additional business
11. Summarize the call
12. Offer additional assistance
13. Conclude the call with an expression of appreciation

When these behaviors are accomplished using all the correct word choices, an inflected tone that conveys interest and enthusiasm, a pace that demonstrates patience and a volume that shows confidence, you will create a respective, efficient, caring relationship with your Customers which will WOW them.

5. Now pair your Employees up in groups and two and provide them with a Customer scenario. One person will be the Customer and the other will be the Employee. As they are role playing, you are walking around the room to ensure that they are following the process that you have just outlined. Make note of who is not acknowledging, or probing or using passionate word choice.

6. After the role play, share your observations without using specific names of the people in the room. *"When I heard, 'Thank you so much for coming to see us today' I was excited because it was a great example of an appropriate expression of appreciation." "When I heard, 'We don't have that product in stock', that is an example of not offering our Customers alternative solutions.*

When we don't offer alternative solutions we lose potential revenue and our Customers go somewhere else to a business that does try to assist them."

7. Make sure that your facilitators know how to model the desired behaviors and are holding your Employees accountable for demonstrating those behaviors. If your facilitators are simply delivering material without the goal of driving change, you will be wasting time and money. Your facilitators must be able to create a safe learning environment while simultaneously holding people accountable for changing their behaviors to meet your expectations. Be sure that your facilitators are also providing the strong rationale for the importance of each behavior. If your Employees understand **WHY** each of these behaviors is important, they will become intrinsically motivated to perform those behaviors. If they don't understand the importance, they are less likely to change their ways to meet your expectations.

8. Continue role playing and providing feedback. Continue modeling the desired behaviors so that your Employees have a solid example for which to emulate.

Wrap up the class by emphasizing that these are the new standards that everyone will be held accountable to achieving. Do not let the class leave without setting the expectations of what will be happening once they get back to work.

9. The most important role in your organization is that of your front-line Supervisors. Now that you have taken all of your Employees off the job for a half day to a full day to reemphasize the standards and provide them with practice time, it is critical that your Supervisors are holding them accountable for what they learned in class. Without this accountability, your Employees will think that you just took them off the job to do training. But your goal was to take them off the job to give them an opportunity to learn new behaviors. Now that they have a new understanding of the behaviors that will drive business success, you expect them to implement those behaviors. Teach your

Supervisors how to praise the right behaviors and change the ones that are not helping you achieve your sales, service and productivity goals.

10. Communicate your results to let everyone know how you are progressing. You pulled everyone into a training room for a reason — to get results. Now it is critical to communicate your progress so that everyone feels like they are contributing to success. They want to know that their time in training was well-spent also. Celebrate your successes and continually provide feedback of what is going right and what still needs improvement.

By following this process you will be assured to get results from the money you invest in customer interaction training that produces results. Remember – it's not Customer service training, it is Customer interaction process training that will create WOW Customer experiences!

InterWeave's **Journey to WOW** *process and supplementary products and services will enable your organization to consistently achieve your WOW standards. With over 23 years of call center experience, InterWeave president, Kimberly King, models being a WOW mentor and provides you with the tools you need to drive change. Visit <u>www.interweavecorp.com</u> or call 877-969-3283 to find out how you can embark on the* ***Journey to WOW****!*

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