HOW TO MEASURE AND MANAGE QUALITY!

By Jane Finn and Deborah Morden

Productivity and quality are the cornerstones of our success. In today's Contact Centre environment, it is simply not enough to handle a large volume of calls. As the type of transactions we handle become more complex and as customers become more reliant on us as the primary link to our organizations, equal consideration must be paid to quality to address customer needs and achieve our business objectives.

Historically, Contact Centres have excelled at measuring performance in terms of productivity. Advances in technology have made it easy for us to track, report, analyze and manage the numbers, especially TSL (Telephone Service Level), ASA (Average Speed of Answer), number of calls, talk time, hold time, wrap time, occupancy, abandoned and blocked calls.

As a result, it is a common error for contact handling and customer service centres to stress productivity over quality – calls must be answered, and if productivity is not high enough service levels will not be met.

But consider, by not stressing quality performance in concert with productivity, how it can have a direct impact on call and e-mail volumes, not to mention longer handling time. Failure to assess, quantify, reinforce, recognize and reward quality can result in:

Escalated calls
Repeat calls
Call backs due to incomplete or missing information
Unnecessary service calls
Calls to Customer Relations
Rework
Incremental talk time
Higher employee turnover and low morale

Quality Monitoring is essential to being able to fairly measure, manage and improve our centre's overall performance. It is the primary source of qualitative data and it provides a framework that enables us to:

Measure and quantify the skills, knowledge, characteristics and behaviours that are required of an information expert
Measure and recognize superior performance
Deliver continuous training and improvement in the areas of:
Products and services
Company processes and procedures
Call flow and transactional management
Call Control
Telephone Etiquette
Communication Skills
Interpersonal Skills
System utilization
Conduct performance appraisals and evaluations based on specific activities and observations that is relevant to the work performed
Compare representatives performing like transactions
Differentiate between employees with tenure and new hires

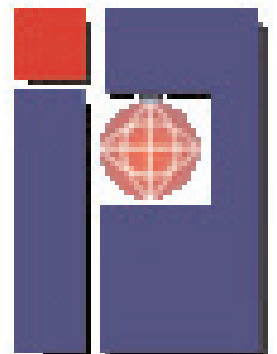Yet despite these very real and tangible benefits

establishing and managing a quality program remains an elusive goal for many call centres.

Why?

Typically the response is "We don't know how to objectively measure quality!" or "We don't have the time!"

Let's start with the how. Following is a seven-step process for developing a successful Quality Monitoring Program.

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Quality cont'

Create a mandatory set of service quality standards for all representatives. These should be developed based on observable behaviours under the categories shown above. Input from front-line staff, supervisors, managers, other business units and customers are required to determine what constitutes quality in your organization and your marketplace.

Create a monitoring form and a thorough set of quality definitions as it relates to how behaviours will be assessed and evaluated. Test the format in your environment before officially launching a new quality program. Allow sufficient time for staff and supervisors to work with indicators to verify that these are reflective of their efforts and abilities and these traits can be easily observed and measured. It is absolutely critical that you obtain employee feedback to ensure buy-in, understanding and accountability for the quality expectations you intend to incorporate into your performance measurement process.

Determine available resources and their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for implementing and maintaining your quality program. Too often quality programs fail because insufficient consideration is given to who will administer the process. In addition to determining how much time should be devoted to this activity, it is also imperative that you assess the skill sets and competencies of your quality evaluators. Like your front-line staff, they will also require training and coaching to ensure that your quality standards are met and the program is fairly administered.

Formalize the review and coaching process. It is not enough to simply collect quality data. It's what we do with that data that affects our performance. Standards must be established for the number of calls to be reviewed either through remote monitoring, side-by-side monitoring or taping. The success of any quality program is contingent on obtaining a statistically valid sampling of calls on a regular and routine basis. In addition, parameters must be set for establishing the number of calls that will be formally evaluated, reporting periods and the number of coaching sessions to be conducted. Additionally, feedback mechanisms must be developed to ensure that information gleaned through your monitoring program is utilized to improve not only performance but also business processes.

Determine how you will make your quality results visible. Daily we bombard our staff with productivity reports. To ensure that there is an equal awareness of quality, information regarding quality results must be provided with the same energy and enthusiasm.

Reward and recognize both quality improvements and superior performance. Too often monitoring programs fail because the only feedback our people receive is negative feedback. The purpose of a quality program is to "catch people doing things right" so we can build on our successes and improve our service delivery. Use your quality program to reinforce appropriate behaviours and eliminate performance anxiety and stress. Make it your mission to find creative ways to celebrate achievement of your quality objectives.

Continuously review and revise your quality formats, goals and objectives. The only constant in our world is change. As the types of programs we manage evolve, as we enhance our ability to define quality and as our people's skills and competencies improve we need to constantly assess the tools we use to benchmark our progress and direct our efforts.

At this point, you are probably thinking – it sounds good but where will we ever find the time to do all these things! Without a doubt, instituting and managing an effective quality program requires a substantial investment in time – a scarce commodity in today's contact centres but technology does exist to help you balance both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of your call centre.

Service-observing systems help ease the burdens associated with implementing and managing a quality call-monitoring program. These systems can help you automate the process of collecting, storing, retrieving, evaluating and consolidating quality data so that you can focus your energies and activities on what is most important – coaching your people to peak performance.

Technology can now provide a contact centre with the functionality required to:

Automate the scheduling and recording of calls for assessment and review at a time that is convenient for both

staff and management. By eliminating the time-consuming process of manually taping calls, these systems can provide real-time savings. Furthermore, they ensure that you obtain a random and consistent sampling of calls. This allows you to statistically validate your quality results and reassure your agents that their performance is being assessed in a fair and objective manner. Share qualitative data with agents, quality monitors, coaches, supervisors, management and other business units. Recorded calls can be archived to share best practices and augment training programs. At the same time, confidentiality of information is always protected as voice clips can only be accessed through a series of security procedures and passwords. Maintaining privacy is another fundamental key to ensuring the success of your monitoring program.

Customize your observation format and document your findings on-line. Current systems even allow voice annotation by the coach and the representative to facilitate timely feedback. By standardizing reporting and scoring of quality results, you can eliminate one of the major reasons quality programs fail – the inability to provide timely, consistent and relevant feedback.

"Observe" not only what is said but also what is being done at the agent's workstation, during the course of a transaction. The latest enhancements, on the market, permit data capture of on-line computer use that can be synchronized with the voice clip to recreate the entire customer experience.

Combine productivity and quality scores to calibrate results, rank performance and record progress for representatives, teams, supervisors and the contact center as a whole. Identify training opportunities and even deliver e-learning solutions.

Capture timely customer feedback that can be shared with the representative and other organizational stakeholders.

While designing, developing, implementing and managing a quality assurance and coaching program may seem to be a formidable task - the rewards are worth it.

Human beings do not function well in isolation. All of us need guidance, direction and support to be successful in our professions. Done well, a quality assurance program not only leads to higher customer satisfaction but improved employee satisfaction.

If you do not have a Quality Monitoring and Coaching process in place - make a commitment to start now! If you already have a quality initiative in place, remember to periodically review the objectives and results to ensure that you are achieving the desired results, efficiently and economically.

People remain your Contact Centre's greatest asset. The time you spend in training, mentoring, coaching and monitoring is the best investment you can make for yourself, your people, your company and your customers!

Jane Finn and Deborah Morden are Managing Partners with Contact Strategies, an independent management-consulting firm. They have worked with contact centres throughout North America, India, Mexico and the Far East to plan, launch and manage new centres, initiate successful quality monitoring programs, design and deliver training programs and conduct operational assessments. They can be reached at 905-459-9434 or visit our website at *www.contractstrategies.com*. ■

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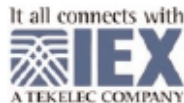
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Best Practices

Reach for a High-Performance Company Culture

By Connie Smith

I would like to share with you the importance of company culture to the success of your organization. Culture is the #1 reason company initiatives fail. If your culture is not in alignment with your initiatives, culture will win every time.

What is Company Culture?
Quite simply company culture is described as "The way we do things around here." It's what happens when no one is watching. It's the shared beliefs, values, attitudes and behavior patterns that characterize the members of a community or organization. Shared beliefs are what you know to be true. Values are defined as the beliefs or principles that guide your decisions. Attitudes are the way you approach a situation. And behavior patterns are the manner in which you conduct your activities. When these four characteristics are aligned with your initiatives, you can reach a high performance culture — the desired goal.

Achieving a High-Performance Culture
A high performance culture doesn't happen by accident. It is based on guiding principles or values, which have become ingrained throughout the organization. Senior executives, managers, front-line supervisors and support employees live these values every day. High performance company cultures are ones where everyone recognizes the importance of achieving employee satisfaction because there is a direct relationship to higher quality performance and customer satisfaction. There is a commitment to hiring right, performance training and development, empowering employees and providing the workforce with the tools, procedures and resources needed to ensure they are able to provide superior service. Here are some attributes one might find in a high performance culture:

Highly respected employees
Customer-driven philosophy
Goal of exceeding customer expectations
Everyone in company lives by the same guiding principles
Communication of values
Can do attitudes!
Embraces change
Institutes two-way communication
Accessible and approachable management
Learning through self discovery
Life-long learners
Commitment to continuous improvement
Imposes single accountability
Communicates strategic plans
Agents want to be coached and supervisor's want to be coaches

What Can You Do to Shift Your Culture to a High Performance Culture?
Understanding what makes up culture and what your current culture looks like are the beginning steps to change. Be patient! A shift in culture does not happen overnight — but over time. Here are some things you can do to introduce and reinforce a high performance culture.

Use legends. Legends are stories that capture the culture and the acts of certain people that demonstrate commitment to the company's cultural values. These may be formal or informal stories passed around the company. Whichever they are, they help people understand what the company is about and what they are supposed to do.

Show commitment! The goal is to continuously demonstrate the company's commitment to its cultural values in a way that makes them come alive for everyone. The single most powerful thing you can do is to show a consistent and unwavering commitment to the values you come up with…in your words and your actions…even when you don't feel like doing so.

Be a role model. Walk the talk long enough and pretty soon your values and your ways of operating and viewing the world just become standard procedure – no longer dependent on you or any single person.

Writer Biography

Connie Smith has been involved in the contact center industry in various roles for more than 20 years. She has built operations and fulfillment contact centers from the ground up including multi-site, retail and wholesale, reengineered multiple site centers and built one of the first true multi-channel contact centers in 1998 including integrated telephone, e-mail, Web chat and callback technologies.

She leveraged her cumulative experience with all aspects of managing contact centers and became a consultant, helping more than 30 world-class contact centers with building, relocation, mergers, assessments, vendor selection, workforce management, metrics, telephone systems, CRM and CTI applications, customer service skill development, training initiatives and quality programs.

During the course of her career, Smith has spoken at many contact center conferences such as Call Center Demo and Conference, Call Center Campus, BAI, CCSF and NCOF offering her practical experience as a contact center manager and consultant. Smith's experience has been pivotal in her success at leading the development and implementation of contact center tools and processes as well as helping to achieve overall business goals by enhancing employee performance. Today, she is the Chief Evangelist for Envision (formally Click2Coach), and her passion is to educate the industry on the importance of workforce management, quality monitoring and coaching.

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Product Announcement

SER Highlights Newest Capabilities of its Award-Winning Automated Quality Assurance Solution

Latest SERTAINTY™ Release Provides Contact Center Operators with Greater Flexibility, Ease of Use, and Enhanced Reporting and Analysis Tools

Dulles, Virginia – SER Solutions, Inc., a provider of innovative software solutions that help contact center operators achieve unprecedented efficiencies, maximize workplace productivity, and enhance customer service, has announced the newest capabilities of its award-winning automated quality assurance solution, SERTAINTY. The newest release of SERTAINTY provides a powerful set of tools that help users quickly measure agent performance and manage their contact center's quality assurance program.

Released in August 2003 and recipient of numerous industry awards, SERTAINTY goes beyond call recording and simple call mining technologies to analyze 100% of all recorded calls for script adherence, achievement of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and overall call quality.

SERTAINTY uses business rules combined with unrestricted, natural speech recognition to monitor conversations in a customer interaction environment, literally transforming the spoken word into retrievable data. SERTAINTY's underlying audio processing and search technology does not rely upon a predetermined word recognition dictionary. Unlike other solutions that are limited to simple keyword and phrase searches, SERTAINTY's powerful business rules engine and Search Grammar Notation (SGN) support the creation of complex rules for analysis of phrases within the context of a conversation.

The newest release of SERTAINTY offers Quality Monitoring Supervisors a redesigned user interface for enhanced usability, enabling more efficient management and review of calls. Within the new interface, Supervisors can capture and save specific calls for later use in agent coaching and training. In addition, a Rules Wizard facilitates easy creation of KPIs.

SERTAINTY 2.2 also offers new reporting and statistical analysis capabilities. A variety of out-of-the-box reports give contact centers valuable insight into agent performance and statistical analysis features enable Supervisors to spot trends in calls and agents' responses. "By automating the time-consuming aspect of monitoring calls, SERTAINTY empowers contact center management to address quality issues, improve contact center performance, and enhance the customer experience," said Larry Mark, Chief Technology Officer, SER Solutions, Inc. "Beyond automating quality assurance processes, SERTAINTY provides value-added services. Users can gather meaningful business intelligence from recorded customer interactions, such as pinpointing customer issues and identifying additional revenue opportunities."

The solution was recently deployed at Calibrus, Inc., a leading business process outsourcing services company that specializes in Third Party Verification and Hosted Recording Services for Telecommunications, Utilities, and Financial markets.

For further information, contact SER at 1-800-274-5676 or visit the web site at www.ser.com/qualityassurance. ■

Inova Solutions Announces Version 5.0 of Performance Optimization Suite
Extends the Boundaries of Real-Time Data Integration and Dynamic Information Delivery for the Contact Center

Charlottesville, VA – Inova Solutions, a global leader of real-time business intelligence solutions for the contact center has announced the general availability of the Version 5.0 Suite of Inova performance optimization products.

The new release further enhances the openness and scalability of Inova LightLink, the industry's leading real-time middleware platform, and extends the suite's proven information display capabilities with the addition of Inova Corporate Broadcaster and Inova Performance Tracker.

"The Version 5.0 release is an exciting example of Inova's innovation and responsiveness to the changing contact center landscape, and the needs of our global Fortune/Blue Chip customers," stated Frank Ortiz, President of Inova Solutions. "The power, flexibility and ease-of-use in the latest generation of our products set a new standard for performance optimization solutions."

Serving as the core of the product suite, Inova LightLink middleware establishes a real-time infrastructure that seamlessly layers over a company's existing IT environment. This enables rapid integration of any contact center related application, system or platform, and highly efficient data communication across the enterprise. The remainder of the suite provides a wide range of presentation and data visualization options designed

products cont'

to meet the information needs of everyone from agents to executives. Together, Version 5.0 of Inova's performance optimization suite provide organizations with instant visibility to unified operational information, enabling them to respond more quickly to changing conditions and make better business decisions. ■

New innovations in delivering media rich content

One of the most visible advances in Version 5.0 is the addition of Inova Corporate Broadcaster. Through an easy-to-use graphical layout tool, Inova Corporate Broadcaster allows customers to quickly create, schedule and deploy media rich views to high-impact displays such as large-format LCD monitors. These dynamic views can contain

any combination of real-time data (complete access to all data integrated by Inova LightLink), messaging, custom graphics, video, and other corporate content.

Advanced scheduling tools provide customers with complete control over when and where views are displayed. Scheduling can occur based on timers or triggered by data thresholds to harmonize views with workflow. Destinations can be single displays, display groups, or all displays in an organization. Utilizing the underlying architecture of Inova LightLink middleware, Inova Corporate Broadcaster drives hundreds of displays spread across multiple geographic locations as easily as a single display.

"The initial response to Inova

Corporate Broadcaster has been overwhelming," said Mr. Ortiz. "Organizations have been craving a creative and cost effective way to engage, inform and motivate their employees, and present the real-time metrics that are crucial to contact center performance. Inova Corporate Broadcaster delivers on all counts." ■

Greater executive visibility into contact center operations

Inova Performance Tracker compliments Inova's Version 5.0 performance optimization suite. Inova Performance Tracker is a toolkit for building and deploying interactive business intelligence dashboards. Targeted at managers and executives, the browser-based dashboards provide a graphical view of

real-time and historical key performance indicators, along with drill-down capabilities, enabling better, faster decisions for improved business performance.

Inova Performance Tracker leverages the .NET framework and Windows SharePoint Services – industry standard technologies that allow rapid implementation and provide compatibility between the contact center and the larger enterprise. ■

Tid-Bit

AFSMI in conjunction with Service Strategies Corporation has launched a new initiative to create a Field Service Certification program designed specifically for services delivered onsite to customers. The initiative will bring together leaders in the technology services marketplace to define industry standard practices, methods and measures. The program will provide a means

to measure the performance and effectiveness of field service operations and enable benchmarking of operations across the industry. The initiative supports the principle of improving the effectiveness of S-Business functions championed by AFSMI.

Field service operations are critical due to their impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. At the same time, the

delivery of on-site services can be very complex and costly. Currently there are no common standards or industry benchmarks for field service quality. The Field Service Certification initiative will establish a foundation to build on existing quality processes and provide a clear focus on measurable results. The program will enable companies to enhance the quality of service delivered to customers by extending certification through the service chain.

The scope of the initiative will be to build a certification program similar in structure to the industry leading Support Center Practices (SCP) Certification program. A performance index model similar to that used in the SCP program, which is targeted at technology support centers, will be used as the framework for the field services program. The intent is to create a complementary certification program that fits into an overall S-Business quality framework

so that the entire end-to-end service chain can be improved, certified and benchmarked against the best in the industry.

The development effort will include definition of key processes, metrics and standards to cover all services that are delivered on the customer's site. Many of the companies that have already joined the initiative have similar challenges in terms of systems implementation, upgrades, repair, maintenance, performance tuning and on-going delivery of value-added services. Some of the specific areas that the program will address include:

Acceptance criteria for a successful installation, implementation, repair visit etc.

Utilization rates for services staff (Consultants, Trainers, Technical Analysts etc.)

Service measurements to track performance and customer satisfaction

Financial service measurements, costs, revenue and profitability

Interfaces to other departments such R&D, Marketing, Sales and Support Center

Personnel management, development and certification of professional skills

Working with AFSMI, Service Strategies has formed a core sponsorship committee to develop the program. The committee consists of representatives from sponsor organizations, AFSMI and Service Strategies. The committee will discuss the key success factors for effectively managing field service operations and will work to create the initial certification standard. On an ongoing basis, the committee will provide regular feedback on standards as part of an annual revision process. Companies represented at the first meeting include industry leaders such as FileNet Corporation, Lawson Software, McKesson Corporation, Rockwell Automation, NCR Corporation, Novell, Roche, Siemens and Quantum Corporation among others. Opportunities still exist to participate as a program sponsor.

A series of steering committee meetings will be held to formulate the program standard, culminating in a final summit event. The first such meeting was held July 14 and 15, 2004 in San Diego, CA,

The purpose of the meetings is to gather input and ideas from sponsors relevant to their respective market segments, leading to detailed certification criteria and ultimately, the development of industry standards for field service excellence. Program completion and launch is anticipated in early 2005.

The kickoff meeting in San Diego included a review of the Service Strategies certification model and discussion of the quality framework that unifies the certification of both support center and field services operations. The group also reviewed the performance index methodology employed in the program. The most significant outcome of the San Diego meeting was the development of a preliminary list of business practices that should be included in the field service program. The participants conducted interactive focus group sessions to create a preliminary list of field service business elements. As the development process continues, these preliminary lists will evolve into a full featured set of requirements that define the key factors for operating a world-class field service organization. .

If you are interested in participating in the Field Service Certification sponsorship program please contact Service Strategies at info@servicestrategies.com *or give us a call at 858.674.4864, toll free 800.552.3058.*

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AMTELCO Announces an Infinity Intelligent Series Seminar

McFarland, WI— AMTELCO is pleased to announce a seminar demonstrating the new Infinity Intelligent Series. This seminar is designed to provide an in-depth look at this revolutionary new approach to message handling. Live demonstrations of the software and an opportunity to ask questions about its applications will be available.

Representatives of call centers who are currently using the Infinity Intelligent Series will be talking about how it has dramatically changed their business and improved their bottom line. The modules of the Infinity Intelligent Series that have been released after two year of development are:
• Intelligent Messaging
• Intelligent Dispatching
• Intelligent On-Call Scheduling
• Intelligent Directory

When: Reception – Monday, Sept. 13, 2004, 6:00 p.m. Seminar – Tuesday, Sept. 14, 2004, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Central Time.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner will be provided compliments of AMTELCO.

Where: Embassy Suites Hotel, Milwaukee-West, 1200 South Moorland Road, Brookfield, WI 53005,
www.milwaukeewest.embassysuites.com

Who: some of the speakers include Kevin Beale, AMTELCO Director Research and Development Software; Mike Leibowitz, owner Professional Answering Service; and Susan Kirkpatrick, AMTELCO Training Coordinator.

For seminar reservations call JaNelle Stransky or Jasmine Waldner at (800)356-9148. For more information on the Infinity Intelligent Series, contact AMTELCO at (800)356-9148, visit
http://callcenter.amtelco.com,
or send an e-mail to
info@amtelco.com.

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VISIT — Richardson at **Booth #205** at the **2004 Annual Call Center Exhibition (ACCE)** in Seattle, WA from September 13-15, 2004.

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An Offer from Incoming Calls Management Institute

Incoming Calls Management Institute (ICMI) offers the very best in leading edge, high-quality public and Web training seminars for call center management professionals (contact center, interaction center, help desk). We help individuals and organizations understand the dynamics of today's customer contact environment to improve

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Envision is a leading provider of performance optimization solutions for contact centers empowering businesses to maximize every contact with their customers. Since its founding in 1994, Envision has focused on improving the effectiveness and performance of contact center agents to create measurable value for the enterprise.

Check out what is happening: http://www.envisiontelephony.com/news_and_events/press_releases.asp

TREND

Landmark eService Study of Major North American Companies Finds that a Stunning 41% Did Not Respond to Emails with High-Value Purchase Intent

Ground-breaking study by BenchmarkPortal also reveals that only 29% of those that responded, gave an accurate and complete answer in their email response

Mountain View, California — In the first of its State-of-eService Benchmarking Series (tm), BenchmarkPortal, a leading source of CRM best practices for contact centers, found that the majority of even the largest companies in the US and Canada are failing to respond to emails with high-value purchase intent, and are missing out on revenue opportunities. Conducted in July 2004, this research is the first of a series of eService benchmarking studies, sponsored by eGain Communications Corporation (OTCBB: EGAN), a leading provider of customer service and contact center software available for in-house or on-demand hosted deployment.

BenchmarkPortal included 300 U.S. and Canadian companies with over $250M in annual revenue in the evaluation. Among the companies assessed were leading corporations across retail, travel and hospitality, financial services, e-business, telecom, and hi-tech/consumer electronics manufacturing

sectors. Posing as customers, survey researchers made targeted email inquiries that demonstrated a clear intent to buy a high-value product or service. Both the timeliness and the quality of the responses were measured.

Among key cross-industry findings:

· A shocking 41% of the companies did not respond
· Only 39% of the overall sample sent an answer within 24 hours
· Only 15% of companies sent any form of acknowledgement, a very simple tool used to set customer expectations and maintain interest

· Only 17% of the companies in the overall sample responded with an accurate and complete answer
· 6% did not offer any form of email contact

Among sector-specific findings:

Responsiveness:

· Retail sector performed the best in responsiveness with 53% responding within 24 hours

· Surprisingly, the financial services and telecom companies were the least responsive, with 59% and 40% of the companies not sending any response at all.

Quality of response:

· Here again, retail sector performed the best with 35% of the companies providing an

accurate and complete answer

· Telecom and hi-technology manufacturing performed the worst with only 9% and 10% of the companies in the respective samples, providing an accurate and complete answer

"The fact that 41% of large North American companies are simply ignoring emails from high-value buyers is shocking," said Dr. Jon Anton, reputed contact center thought leader and director of research for BenchmarkPortal. ""Our study serves as a wakeup call to a majority of US businesses, some of the most respected brands in their categories, who are losing business due to poor online service."

"As customers increasingly turn to the web to conduct business, companies cannot afford to drop the ball on eService," said Ashu Roy, CEO of eGain. "eGain's email management solution is used by market-leading companies and it's no surprise that they did well in this study."

To request a briefing on the findings of the study or to have your own customer service operation benchmarked, send an email to info@egain.com <mailto:info@egain.com> or information@benchmarkportal.com <mailto:information@benchmarkportal.com> with information about your firm. The findings will also be presented at a webinar by Dr. Jon Anton of BenchmarkPortal, to be held on October 19, 2004.

■

Case Study

PIPKINS' AGENT WEB ACCESS MODULE MOST POPULAR AMONG FREDERICK'S OF HOLLYWOOD CALL CENTER AGENTS

Administrative tasks for call center supervisors just became easier with the offering of Pipkins' new online agent schedule viewing and modification system called WebAccess. The system eliminates the need for supervisors to print and distribute agent work schedules and drastically reduces time spent managing agent scheduling. It also allows agents to have more control over their own schedules via the corporate network or the Internet through a Web browser. It enables them to view and make modifications to existing schedules, request overtime, exchange schedules with other agents and report absences. By using the module's vacation planner, agents can check accrued and used time-off, view available vacation slots, submit vacation requests, and add their names to wait lists. There is also a built-in electronic bulletin board and messaging system which allows for agent-to-agent and agent-to-supervisor communication.

Supervisors can manage the entire vacation planning process online, including establishing and managing vacation limits, wait lists, and blackout and non-operational days. Vacation limits and accrual hours information can be imported from Excel files. The vacation planner interfaces with the contact center's payroll system, eliminating the need to re-enter the agent's vacation accrual information and ensuring that accurate time-off information is used in calculating paychecks.

WebAccess is an optional module for Pipkins' Vantage Point workforce management software and the company's WorkforceScheduling.com subscription service for smaller call centers. "Our WebAccess agent self-help system provides a completely paperless environment for disseminating agent schedules as well as an automated method for both submitting and managing schedule changes," said Jim Hogan, Manager of Customer Care for Pipkins.

Catalog and Internet retailer Frederick's of Hollywood has been a customer of Pipkins for two years using Vantage Point software through the online subscription service. According to Frederick's Contact Center Manager, Clay Myers, Web Agent Access is extremely favorable with agents because of the communication capabilities. It allows them to access schedules online while away from the office and receive rapid response time to schedule change requests. They heavily utilize the bulletin board feature that goes out to all agents for communicating and sharing helpful hints. Supervisors also discuss and respond to procedural issues through the bulletin board. Myers says "this feature is so popular that Web Agent Access is always up on agent's computers."

Shanna Dodge, Frederick's Contact Center Supervisor, states that the bulletin board feature is important to the operation of the contact center because changes occur daily regarding everything from corrected catalog item numbers, changes to daily featured items, and making agents aware of weather issues in various parts of the country which can create delivery delays. Dodge says "for example, we posted details to our bulletin board about the recent Florida hurricane that was creating delays in certain parts of the state. Our agents were able to reassure customers that their orders would be received." The bulletin board is the most effective method to communicate this type of information between agents and supervisors.

■

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