

## Quality Monitoring Enhancements In Call Centers

### The Challenge

Customers today are becoming more and more demanding ¾ they expect superior service, competitive prices and deferential treatment. To satisfy these self-confident individuals, call centers must constantly monitor, improve and enhance service levels and agent competence. Especially in times of economic downsizing, potential buyers may be well informed and very picky.

Thus, quality monitoring (QM) and training / coaching tools have grown in value. Even call centers already implementing QM solutions, about 50 percent in the United States, seek new ways to benefit from their applications, or to leverage and upgrade the existing software. Their key goal, to differentiate themselves from the competition, must focus on customer service!

But to enhance agent performance, call centers must use sophisticated tools to control, monitor and measure the change management process. Otherwise, competitive adjustments and fine-tuning will not be possible.

Measuring soft skills for call centers offering customer services (consultancy, advise and support, hotline) may become even more important than evaluating typical parameters such as order volume and talk time.

### The Implementation Process

First, a company considering a quality monitoring project must set up working standards, such as a benchmarking matrix, and develop an objective measurement system. These No. 1 tasks often prove difficult because they demand revisiting and sometimes re-engineering well-established processes and leaving well-trodden paths.

“Simple” questions must be answered such as, "What call is a 'good' one?"

- When is the customer happy?
- When is the agent happy?
- When is the company happy?

Conflicts may arise because the responses to these questions may overlap or even diverge. In addition, how do you measure “happiness” and “satisfaction” precisely in the first place? What do you look for in recorded calls?

Call center management must pose questions such as:

- What represents “quality” in this specific account? (and the answer may differ by account or even by order!)
- How can it be objectively measured?
- How may problems be ameliorated? (service flaws require an immediate remedy, often additional agent training)

The implementation process may be facilitated by consultants who specialize in quality management and quality measurement. Call centers should thoroughly explore this resource and contact QM vendors as well. These vendors have a vested interest because without call center clients knowing how to use their tools efficiently, they will never have satisfied customers themselves!

Quality monitoring and management firms must demonstrate expertise over an entire “communications thread” (including the telephone call between customer and agent, and any initiated actions) and also align their solution with the entire company's quality approach. For example, the integration of a call center into the company's marketing or PR efforts must be carefully coordinated. The call center agent represents the first

public contact for new offers, terminologies or even press releases. Therefore, the call center agents must be aware of the corporate identity and culture, an important issue beyond simply monitoring calls for quality or process analysis. QM may contribute immensely to check and fine-tune the company's appearance and internal processes, but other experts must contribute as well!

But let's step back and re-examine the communication itself. Within a call  $\frac{3}{4}$  usually less than a minute long  $\frac{3}{4}$  all kinds of aspects must be efficiently addressed: content, expertise, kindness, corporate identity and decisiveness, for example. How do you measure them? How do you monitor them? And how do you train agents to comply? These issues represent the initial and crucial starting points.

The best solution, by taking little steps first, begins with new departments, new services and new products, where adjustments are easily established; training is required anyway; and fresh ideas are readily available. A campaign may be evaluated by clearly defined expectations such as:

- Is that new offer / product / marketing effort understood by all responsible agents?
- Do they all follow the new de-escalation process?
- Is the new company mission incorporated?

### **Are We Doing Ok?**

The preceding questions lead to the next one: How can the results of investment in new technology be measured?

First of all, technology represents only one part of the process. Project management and content, supervisors, trainers, service managers, the sales and marketing departments, and, of course, human resources must be coordinated as well. Usually, the time involved in all these areas inhibits a precise "quality measurement" approach.

For the same reasons, measurement of ROI (Return on Investment) must consider factors beyond technology and implementation costs. The cost of the software must be combined with the time needed to learn how to use it, a process largely dependent on interactions with live customers! Vendor influence here is negligible, and honest ones will tell you so upfront.

Providing a realistic ROI also depends on other factors such as the effect of the quality monitoring approach on agent hiring and firing, training costs, management personnel such as trainers and supervisors, maintenance of infrastructure, service provisions, etc. Without considering these, the ROI will be inaccurate.

However, other measurements after implementation may be clearly quantified such as shorter average call time, higher closing rate (ordering), shorter time span for solving problems (hotline), and accurate customer advice (consultancy). But again, even the ROI will differ by call center and business idea. And in the end, the evaluation must include customer satisfaction, a soft fact, hard to assess.

Therefore, one of the most important and difficult tasks of the project group implementing QM within a call center involves answering the question, "How can we measure the positive result of our project?"

Despite this difficulty, call centers installing a QM solution must be willing to spend even more. Quality monitoring applications must be supplemented by an investment in training. Only when the results may be improved, altered or maintained, does QM become justified as an efficient management tool.

### **Future Trends**

Today's QM technology is delivering an increasing amount of value to the call center. Integrating all communications media requires the measurement of quality for e-mail interactions and web channels as well. Unfortunately, these areas still lack attention.

In addition, the recorded call will become even more crucial when it may be used for business intelligence. Call centers will learn more easily about their customer needs, expectations, complaints and trends. The call itself will provide valuable information and will be integrated into a beneficial customer data repository. Capabilities like keyword spotting, speech recognition and content analysis will offer intriguing possibilities  $\frac{3}{4}$  but need even more care and attention to be effectively integrated into a call center's strategy. The technology may be exciting, but, above all, it has to serve the customer!

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