

An Evaluative Report of the Knowledge Worker's Role in the Contact Center, 2008

Unified Communications strategies are largely focused on improving employee productivity. The concept can be extended to encompass contact centers and customer-facing support functions across the enterprise to enhance communications between organizations and their customers.

Methodology

This report is the result of primary research involving a non-disguised judgment sampling of 100 contact center personnel in the financial services, communications, and retail industries. Telephone and online interviews were conducted in December 2007 with 50 customer service contact center supervisors who manage the majority of employees in their centers, and 50 customer service agents/ representatives. All research was conducted by Chicago-based Leo J. Shapiro & Associates LLC (www.ljs.com), an independent market research firm, as commissioned by Aspect Software.

"Unified communications offer the ability to significantly improve how individuals, groups and companies interact and perform."

20 August 2007. Gartner, Inc. Magic Quadrant for Unified Communications, 2007. B. Elliot

Overview

This report assesses the opportunities available for enterprises to improve customer satisfaction through unified communications (UC). Many companies are currently deploying UC applications like presence, voice integration, and collaboration in an effort to increase employee productivity. And, contact centers are already leveraging enterprise workers as knowledge agents. The UC concept can be extended to encompass contact centers and customer-facing support functions across the enterprise to enhance communications between organizations and their customers.

Findings and Observations

According to contact center supervisors and agents, 10.3 percent of all telephone inquiries they handle on a daily basis require assistance from knowledge workers in other departments.

Contact center personnel aren't reaching out to one particular function for support; they are asking for help from a multitude of subject matter experts across the enterprise.

One quarter of the time (25%), supervisors and agents are seeking assistance on technical details. During another 25 percent of these interactions, contact center personnel are getting help from financial, insurance or casualty experts. The remaining calls that require support from upper management, sales and collections, distribution-related functions, legal, retail, and a variety of other departments.

The 10.3 percent is based on two scenarios:

1. Contact center personnel placing the customer on-hold while they glean specific answers from knowledge workers. The information is then relayed from contact center personnel to the customer, secondhand.
2. Contact center personnel attempt to resolve the customer issue, but when they realize they don't have the specific expertise required, they transfer or conference the customer directly to a knowledge worker for problem resolution.

One half of supervisors and one third of agents say each inquiry requires approximately two interactions - whether the problem is handled entirely by contact center personnel or includes support from a knowledge worker - to fully resolve a customer's issue. These same respondents state that calls involving experts in the enterprise take approximately two-and-half minutes longer than those handled exclusively in the contact center.

Business Impact

Contact centers do not operate within a vacuum. They are the customer-facing component of the overall enterprise and, in order to fully resolve 10.3 percent of their customers' issues, they need support from other departments across the enterprise. There are roughly 926,000,000¹ interactions a day between businesses and customers around the globe. To put this in perspective, this means more than 95.4 million contacts a day require assistance from someone outside the contact center, which is approximately 238 million minutes² each day that contact center personnel spend asking for help or transferring calls.

Reaching outside the contact center to knowledge experts certainly equates to a significant amount of money. And, if a contact center can reduce the time per call by even one minute by fine-tuning or changing the process for leveraging a knowledge worker that could mean contact centers could reduce their cost per call by \$2.01³. When multiplying this across all of the calls handled by contact centers on a daily basis, this could add up to a very substantial cost savings.

¹ This number was arrived at by taking the 125,000,000 global interactions conducted using Aspect Software solutions and multiplying that number by the company's 13.5 percent global market share. Aspect Software has 13.5 percent of the global contact center market according to a Datamonitor report - Market Share: Insight into the Contact Center Universe 2007. June 2007.

² This number was arrived at by multiplying 95.4 million contacts by 2.5 minutes. That number was referenced earlier by agents and managers as the additional time per call required for interactions extending into the enterprise.

³ The average inbound call lasts 328 seconds (or 5.5 minutes) and the average cost of an inbound service call is US \$11.09 according to Contact Babel. The US Contact Center Operational Review. 2007

"In a typical day, 10.3 percent of calls require expertise from someone outside of the contact center. On average, these calls last two-and-a-half minutes longer than those handled exclusively in the contact center."

However, organizations must also factor in the potential loss in productivity experienced by knowledge workers who are answering random inquiries from the contact center, as well as the incremental cost of these knowledge workers salaries (typically higher than the wages of the contact center employees). If not managed correctly, the knowledge worker may add value to a single interaction, but hinder overall productivity.

If, as a company develops a Unified Communications strategy, it considers the role of the contact center in that strategy, there emerges a number of opportunities to hone the entire customer experience, as well as continue to improve employee productivity across the entire enterprise.

By extending a unified communications strategy to encompass customer-facing processes, enterprises can leverage the routing, reporting, queuing, workflow, workforce management and scheduling, monitoring, training and coaching processes and applications that have been honed by the contact center. These applications can then be extended across all customer-facing employees – even enterprise-based knowledge workers – to enable them to shorten problem resolution cycles, quickly answer customer inquiries and more effectively up-sell services or products to perspective customers.

And, for agents that are currently following a hit-or-miss approach – attempting to reach knowledge workers in an ad hoc manner – unified communications also offers some real benefits. By interoperating unified communications applications, like presence, collaboration, calendaring and conferencing tools to the contact center, agents will not only be able to easily access regularly scheduled experts across the enterprise, they can use a multitude of channels and tools to improve the process. Agents will be able to reach the right resources, quickly and easily, customers will get their answers in a shorter period of time, and the knowledge worker will have access to the relevant customer history.

This means:

- Reduced call handling time
- Decreased cost per call
- Improved first call resolution
- Happier customers
- Increased employee productivity

Conclusion

With 30 percent of consumers who have a good customer experience planning to do "more" or "much more" business with a company⁴, organizations must focus on meeting customer demands. Managing the 10.3 percent of all contact center interactions that require the assistance of knowledge workers or subject matter experts in a disciplined manner can improve experiences for both the consumer and the business. Ultimately, implementing a unified communications strategy that considers the role of the contact center is vital to the success of any organization.

⁴ The 2007 Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index™ North America. Conducted by Leo J. Shapiro and Associates. March 2007.