

AGENT  
EFFECTIVENESS TO  
ENTERPRISE  
PERFORMANCE:  
Evolution of the  
Customer Service  
Optimization Cycle



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Customers evaluate the quality of service given by an enterprise based on their experiences with its front-line staff. A wide variety of enterprise-wide job functions and processes impact and influence the customer in different ways. For most organizations the contact center represents the primary customer interface. Capturing and analyzing the 'Voice of the Customer' via agent-customer interactions in the contact center offers invaluable insight into stated and unstated customer needs. Customer interaction via the contact center is a significant service channel, and contact center agents continue to play a key role in delivering a high-quality service experience that meets the needs of sophisticated customers. Agent effectiveness within the contact center in delivering quality customer care has been proven to be an important influencer of customer loyalty. A number of training and coaching solutions are available today that help identify, coach and train agents to reduce skill gaps and enhance performance rapidly.

While improving agent effectiveness is an important goal for contact center managers, optimizing the entire customer service process, via its touch points within the enterprise, is also becoming important. Very often problems in the underlying process or in back-office operations can impact service delivery, regardless of an organization's efforts to train and coach their agents. The changing role of the contact center from a cost center to a profit center, has led to a requirement for performance parameters that support this change. The right investments in technology and associated processes hold the key to achieving greater contact center operational efficiency.

Customer-agent interaction recordings contain a wealth of valuable information on customer likes and dislikes. This information can be used to understand customer experiences, and take action to improve performance not only at agent and contact center levels but also at enterprise levels. Enterprises have successfully applied analytical solutions to extract customer intelligence to understand customer experiences and take action to improve performance beyond the contact center. 'Voice of the Customer Analysis' can be an extremely powerful tool for vice-presidents of sales or marketing interested in learning more about why customers are buying, why customers are canceling service or why specific marketing campaigns are more effective than others.

This paper looks at the evolution of the Customer Service Optimization Cycle and the associated alignment of people, process and technology that ultimately helps drive efficiency and productivity gains at agent, contact center and enterprise level.

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE OPTIMIZATION CYCLE**

Contact center optimization technology and delivery methodology has evolved from an emphasis on pure agent optimization techniques, to one with a much broader scope and impact. Recent developments in both the technology as well as the associated methodologies have helped end-users realize performance and quality gains at enterprise

and contact center levels. While quality monitoring and eLearning software helps drive efficiencies in agent performance, contact centers can achieve greater operational effectiveness by complementing these software solutions with other technologies such as workforce management, performance management and business intelligence.

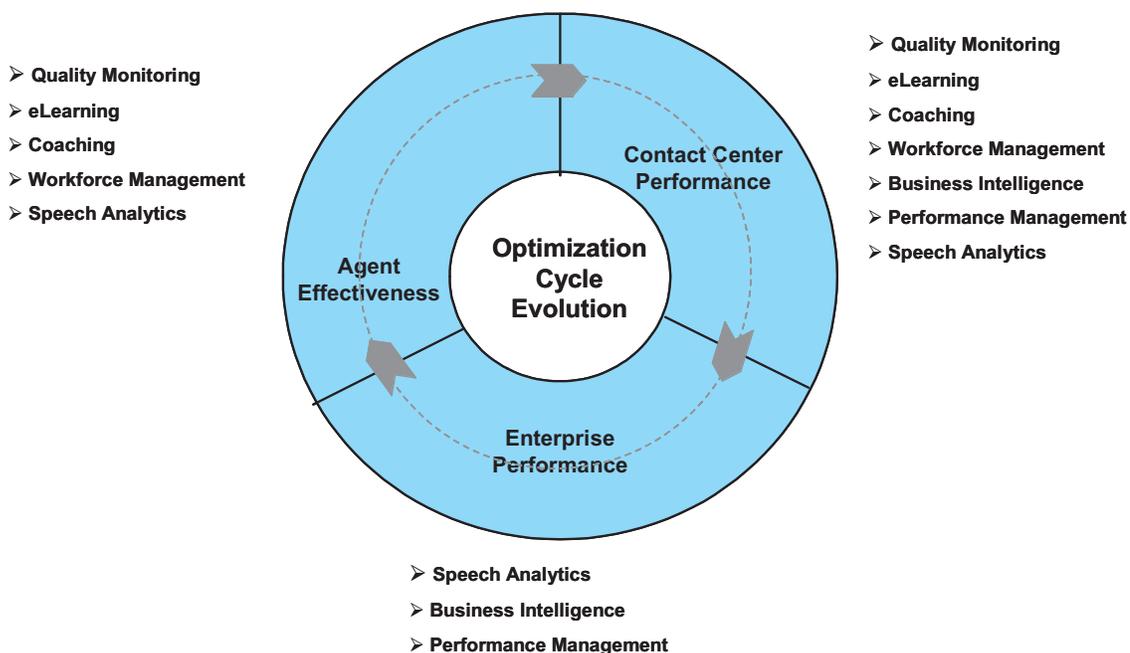
Analytical solutions with word/phrase spotting, data mining, trend analysis, call categorization and emotion detection capabilities help contact centers extract greater insight from agent-customer interaction recordings. This insight based on 'Voice of the Customer' analysis provides managers and business executives with the information they need to make decisions that improve their performance and customer experiences. Better communication improves the quality of decision-making across the enterprise increasing revenue and profitability while reducing costs.

The Customer Service Optimization Cycle has evolved to include the following dimensions:

- Agent Effectiveness
- Contact Center Performance
- Enterprise Performance

A number of contact center technologies including Quality Monitoring, Workforce Management, eLearning, Business Intelligence, Speech Analytics and Performance Management help drive improvements across these multiple dimensions.

**Fig 1: Customer Service Optimization Cycle Evolution**



Agent performance optimization technology has traditionally included the core areas of quality monitoring and workforce management. Business intelligence, speech analytics, performance management and eLearning are associated high growth areas that have resulted in a much broader scope and impact for the core application areas. This expanded agent performance optimization solution scope, enables enterprises to gain intelligence and manage performance based on a 'Voice of the Customer' analysis. Based on the insight and intelligence revealed by agent performance optimization technologies, decision makers can make the necessary changes to enhance the customer service process.

As each of these sectors evolves to focus on improving the customer service process, both within and outside of the contact center, there is a potential of realizing even greater benefits by offering tighter integration between these different applications. Contact centers can extract much greater value from these solutions by exchanging information between the core sectors of Quality Monitoring and Workforce Management and associated areas such as Business Intelligence, speech analytics, performance management and eLearning. For example, an integrated approach to agent performance optimization can help contact centers to:

- 1) Track and evaluate agent quality and performance using schedule adherence data,
- 2) Use schedule information to initiate quality recordings,
- 3) Increase workforce schedule effectiveness by taking into account agent training schedules

The benefits of a suite-based solution include a lower total cost of ownership (TCO), lower integration costs and simpler upgrades. Suite-based solution vendors need to demonstrate the value and ROI of their integrated solutions, over and above what can be achieved by a simple integration between the core applications.

A holistic approach to customer service optimization, with a focus on agent effectiveness, operational efficiency and enterprise performance is essential in optimizing the customer service operation and enhancing the customer experience. Suite-based solutions offer a holistic approach to customer service optimization and broader support for contact centers trying to optimize performance from agent interactions throughout the enterprise.

## **AGENT EFFECTIVENESS**

Contact center agents are significant influencers of customer satisfaction and retention rates. The ability of agents in delivering effective and differentiated customer service has been found to be the single greatest contributor to a positive customer experience. Increasing agent effectiveness in ensuring legendary customer experiences is a key contact center objective enabled by a wide variety of solutions available in the marketplace.

Examples of technology available to enhance agent effectiveness include:

- Quality Monitoring
- eLearning
- Coaching
- Business Intelligence
- Performance Management
- Speech Analytics

Quality Monitoring software records an agent's voice and desktop activity. Agent-customer interactions can then be evaluated and analyzed to identify specific performance gaps. These gaps are further addressed through eLearning software, in the form of training modules that are pushed to the agents' desktop and reviewed at their own convenience.

An increasing number of calls for standard service requests are now being handled via self-service channels such as IVR and Web. The balance of calls transferred to the agent require superior handling skills, and present significant revenue opportunities which have better chances of realization if handled effectively by professionally trained agents. This trend is one of the most significant drivers for eLearning software applications within contact centers.

Coaching is becoming a more relevant term for the training function within the contact center, due to the fact that vendors are able to offer more customized training options to end-users. Recent releases of eLearning software have included the targeted delivery of content to individual agents based on their specific training needs. Agent coaching can now be a bidirectional process, giving the agent the ability to provide feedback and comments to their supervisors. Training packages delivered to the agent desktop now include the recorded interactions, supervisor feedback as well as customer feedback, often received as a result of customer satisfaction surveys.

Business Intelligence and Speech Analytics software helps enhance agent performance via an automated monitoring of calls to identify issues and unearth problems. Analytics products help categorize calls as per user defined business functions. Classification of large volumes of calls according to business categories helps enhance the relevance of intelligence revealed. Assessment of agent quality and peer comparisons based on call classifications provides a granular and more precise identification of skill gaps. While multiple tools do exist today to deliver effective training and coaching – analyzing process workflows for root cause analysis of performance gaps is a key consideration.

### **Why Promote Agent Effectiveness?**

- Adequately trained agents deliver a superior and more consistent quality of customer service
- Adequately trained agents enable quicker problem resolution
- Effective agents achieving service differentiation provide a competitive edge

- Satisfied agents that have been trained effectively take pride in their work and lead to greater agent retention rates
- Revenue generation due to cross-sell and up-sell techniques is more likely if agents have been equipped with tools and methodologies to enable this process.

## **ROI Metrics**

Vendor case studies have revealed attractive ROI metrics for agent effectiveness solutions. Examples include

- A leading financial services company reduced customer complaints by 30% and increased promise-to-pay rates by 15%
- An online book retailer decreased cost per call by 22%.
- A service management company decreased mishandled calls by 93% weekly.
- A leading regional bank increased cross-sells by 97%
- A national bank increased customer satisfaction by 7% in only 90 days.

## **CONTACT CENTER PERFORMANCE**

Contact centers today are incredibly complex utilizing a multitude of technologies, processes and methodologies to deliver effective customer service. Contact center parameters that influence the quality of the customer agent interaction include

- Role of the agent
- Technology to support multiple functions
- Processes and methodologies to support optimal service delivery.

Examples of technology used in the contact center to enhance performance includes -

- Workforce Management Systems
- Quality Monitoring Systems
- Performance Management
- Speech Analytics
- Business Intelligence
- Coaching and eLearning

These solutions listed above integrate with contact center infrastructure elements such as ACD systems, CTI systems, IVR systems and predictive dialers that support the outbound dialing function.

Though all of these technologies have evolved with a view of enabling different contact center functions, they all have a common goal of delivering legendary customer experiences from agent desktops to the enterprise. Technology and software in the contact center environment support distinct functional areas in the contact center. While the technologies

and software play their own role, they are also dependent on each other to drive efficiency and effectiveness of the center. Quite often elements of a particular solution may impact the working of an associated solution. For example schedules developed using workforce management software can optimize agent training, and intelligence gained by speech analytics can help enhance agent quality assessments. Recent releases of core technologies such as quality monitoring and performance management have widened their scope and impact driving efficiencies within the entire customer service process across all customer touch points in both the contact center and the enterprise.

Contact center performance effectiveness technologies help align and optimize existing investments and realize greater operational efficiency. Aligning people, process and technology in the contact center helps reduce costs and promote effectiveness of customer service delivery. A process-centric view of performance allows for better utilization of technology and is a critical component of performance effectiveness methodology.

### **Why Promote Contact Center Performance?**

- Reduce operating costs and deliver superior customer service
- Ensure that the right people are at the right place and at the right time
- Manage and train agents
- Facilitate easy exchange of information between technologies and systems.
- Process centric view of performance allows for optimal utilization of technology

### **ROI Metrics**

Vendor case studies have revealed attractive ROI metrics for contact center performance solutions. Examples include

- A leading packaged goods manufacturer reduced training costs by 25%
- A successful healthcare provider received the following benefits with more accurate forecasting and scheduling:
  - A 50% reduction in average speed of answer
  - Immediate costs savings with optimal staffing
  - An hour per day per agent to improve agent effectiveness through quality monitoring and eLearning applications.

### **ENTERPRISE PERFORMANCE**

Enterprises are increasingly realizing that contact centers are often the only source of valuable customer information. Customer experience management is a key enterprise objective, and Business Intelligence and Speech Analytics products provide invaluable insight in enhancing this customer experience. The change in the profile of the contact center to a more strategic asset within the enterprise has given way to a more holistic measurement of contact center performance: one that includes both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Examples of technology used in the contact center to enhance performance at enterprise levels includes -

- Workforce Management Systems
- Quality Monitoring Systems
- Performance Management
- Speech Analytics
- Business Intelligence
- Coaching and eLearning

Business Intelligence solutions help enterprises understand issues that affect the customer experience, and identify areas for improvement at both contact center and enterprise levels. Business intelligence software can examine successful calls based on criteria such as campaign, value of the purchase, duration of the call, the agent who made the sale and what the customer bought and why. Unsuccessful calls are analyzed to determine why the customer did not buy, including issues related to agent and sales processes. The results of those examinations are then used to recommend or make changes in enterprise policy (for example product or marketing) or process.

Contact center recordings contain a wealth of valuable information about customer needs, information that is hard to access and distribute due to its unstructured nature. The ability to convert unstructured data in the form of agent-customer interaction recordings, into structured information that can easily be shared and analyzed, forms the core of speech analytics offerings within the marketplace today.

Vendor accounts of business intelligence and speech analytics deployments have yielded data and information that is very relevant to users both within and outside of the contact center. Speech Analytics products help categorize and classify calls as per user defined business functions thereby enhancing the relevance of intelligence revealed. Business Intelligence products or software built upon this classification base contain workflow routing mechanisms to ensure that agent-customer recordings, associated information and intelligence is delivered to decision-makers who are best equipped to deal with them. Automating and managing the workflow associated with sharing this information further ensures timely access to the information and the 'voice of the customer'. This access to the 'voice of the customer' and seamless flow of information across the enterprise is an important functionality of business intelligence offerings.

An effective root cause analysis often presents the means of addressing performance issues at their origin. Quite often calls coming to the contact center are driven by events outside of the center (e.g. marketing campaigns, special promotions, etc). From a contact center performance perspective it is very important to understand the significance of these events, and address the root causes if any, for the increase or decrease in call volume. For example, delays associated with accessing back-office systems can affect agent performance and this is something that no amount of training can fix. Business Intelligence and speech analytics products help in an effective content analysis that offers excellent insight into root causes impacting contact center and enterprise performance.

A key feature within Speech Analytics offerings is the ability to predict events such as customer churn via call mining or emotion detection techniques. This capability offers customers to be pro-active in addressing customer pain points and reducing propensity to switch to competitors. Speech Analytics tools also help customers identify patterns within customer complaints that could signal product defects. Enterprises now have the intelligence to help them be proactive and contain complexities associated with events such as product recalls etc.

Sophisticated analytical tools deployed within the contact center environment use the customer-agent interaction to yield valuable information such as customer satisfaction, predict customer churn, competitive intelligence, new revenue opportunities and more importantly have the ability to share this information with concerned departments and decision makers throughout the enterprise in a timely fashion.

### **Why Promote Enterprise Performance?**

- Quickly identify trends and patterns in customer interactions and make incremental changes to improve quality of service
- Perform root cause analysis and correct problems that affect customer service levels
- Gain better insight about customer-segmentation, customer attrition etc.
- Share the 'voice of the customer' with key enterprise stakeholders
- Proactively identify issues prior to escalation.
- Quickly response to marketing campaigns, promotions etc.

### **ROI Metrics**

Vendor case studies have revealed attractive ROI metrics for contact center performance solutions. Examples include

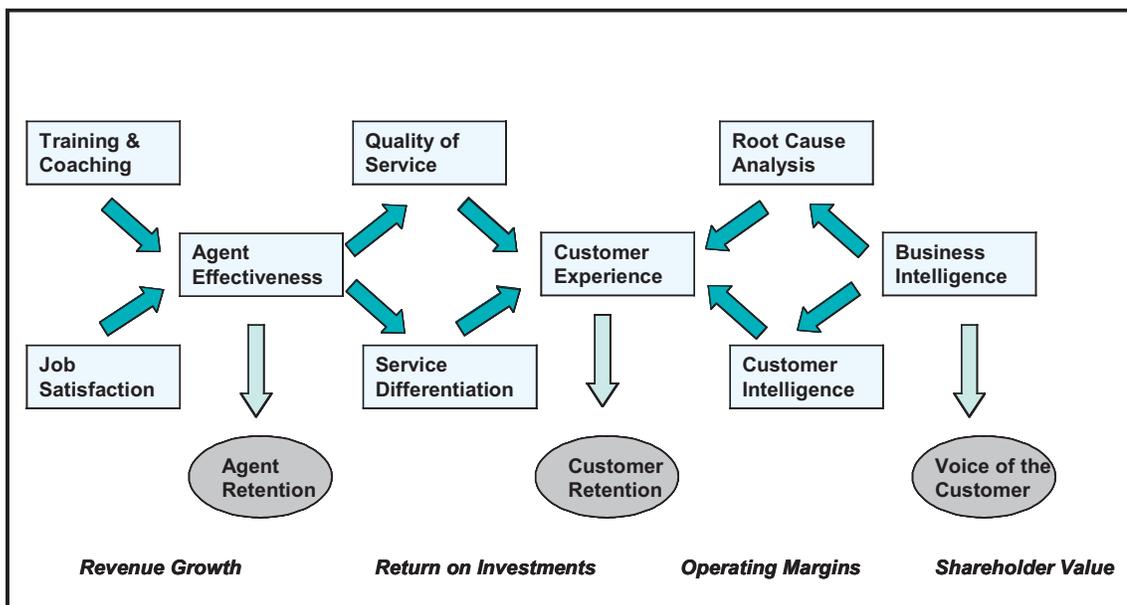
- A major airline increased sales by \$23M in one year.
- A national office supply company increased sales by 6% representing millions of dollars in the first six months.

## **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT**

Enhancing the customer experience is a key corporate goal and one that directly impacts customer retention and loyalty. There are multiple factors that impact this customer experience ranging from the quality of products that an enterprise markets, the quality of service delivered by its front-line staff and the effectiveness of contact center agents in resolving customer problems. Capturing and analyzing the 'Voice of the Customer' via agent-customer interactions in the contact center offers invaluable insight into stated and unstated customer needs. Business Intelligence products help connect the contact center with the enterprise and deliver the 'Voice of the Customer' across the enterprise.

Business intelligence and Speech Analytics products utilize root cause analytics to unearth underlying problems that could be affecting agent performance. A much more granular view of its customers and their needs and wants, helps enterprises customize and personalize offerings to meet customer requirements and improve satisfaction levels. From an enterprise perspective enhancing the customer experience holds the key towards achieving corporate objectives such as increase in revenue growth and shareholder value.

**Fig 2: Factors Impacting the Customer Experience**



**CONCLUSION**

The effectiveness of customer service delivery has its roots in agent performance, contact center operational efficiency and enterprise agility in responding to the voice of its customers and changing business requirements. Increasing agent effectiveness in delivering legendary customer service is a key contact center objective enabled by a wide variety of solutions available in the marketplace. Adequately trained agents deliver a more superior and consistent quality of service and enable quicker problem resolution. Contact center performance technologies help align and optimize existing investments to deliver exceptional customer service efficiently and effectively. A process-centric view of performance allows for optimal utilization of technology and is a critical component of performance effectiveness methodology.

Analytical software uses agent-customer interaction recordings to yield valuable information on customer needs and wants, customer attrition intelligence, new revenue opportunities etc. The ability to share this information with relevant departments and decision-makers throughout the enterprise, in a timely fashion is a critical success factor for improving customer experience. Multiple instances of analytics deployments have

yielded customer data and information that is very relevant to users outside of the contact center and within the enterprise.

The Customer Service Optimization Cycle has thus evolved and broadened to drive improvements across multiple dimensions including

- Agent Effectiveness
- Contact Center Performance
- Enterprise Performance

A holistic approach to customer service optimization, with a focus on agent effectiveness, operational efficiency, and enterprise performance is essential to optimize the customer service operation and enhance customer experience. Suite based solutions hold much promise in ensuring a holistic approach to customer service optimization and ensuring a broader scope of impact for its core application areas.

Customer experience management has been proven to have a direct impact on customer loyalty and brand differentiation. Multiple factors impact the customer experience ranging from the quality of products that an enterprise markets, the quality of service delivered by its front-line staff and the effectiveness of contact center agents in resolving customer problems.

A balanced scorecard approach to service delivery optimization seeks to enhance all its elements, from agent effectiveness to contact center to enterprise effectiveness. The scorecard based on a 'Voice of the Customer' analysis provides clear insight and recognition of what factors are impacting customer experience across the enterprise. Best practice methodologies supported by integrated workforce optimization solutions hold the key to incremental improvement of those customer experiences and ultimately achieving corporate objectives such as increases in revenue growth and shareholder value.

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