

The Call Center You Don't Even Know You Have

Does your business have a call center? Yes. We can say that without ever having stepped foot in your organization, or even knowing what industry you're in. That's because any company that has ever had an employee talk to a customer over the phone has a call center. The truth is that any time your business handles a customer call, it is an opportunity for revenue. And with the latest technology available, even the smallest company can handle customer calls the same as a large call center.

The latest PBX platforms give your business the ability to increase revenue by taking more calls and spreading the work out among your staff. Basically any employee, regardless of their job title, can take and field customer calls at least part of the time, greatly reducing call wait time and boosting responsiveness to customers. In fact, it is common for many companies to have a 3-1 ratio of lines to available staff when setting up their call center. To support this when selecting your own phone system, you should be answering five basic questions:

- Will this system increase call efficiency for my organization?
- Will it build revenue?
- Will we be able to reduce our phone infrastructure costs?
- Does the system provide for growth and flexibility?
- What level of service and support can we expect from the phone system vendor?

Within those broad goals, you should be looking for specific capabilities on the system you're considering. The phone platform should include a robust Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system to provide for intelligent call routing and queuing. There should be an intuitive interface to improve call agent productivity, and features such as Auto Answer, Hold, Transfer, Conference and Supervisor Escalation. Advance applications can integrate with your CRM platform so that call agents will have an automatic screen pop-up with information on the caller. And agents can even dial customers right from their Outlook® directory.

With the latest VoIP advancements, you can even deploy a remote workforce to handle calls. Customer calls can be fielded by employees working from home or any other location. The advantages of this approach includes reductions in facilities cost and maintenance, while improving employee morale. You also gain the ability to support a part-time/contract work force that can be scaled to meet seasonal call demands.

Reporting

Any phone platform should include an enhanced call center client supervisor application to enable management to monitor an agent's performance and improve training opportunities. And a quality system will offer very sophisticated call analytics to improve organizational performance.

According to Call Center Magazine¹, there are five critical metrics that an organization should monitor to improve their call center. These include:



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- Cost per Call
- Customer Satisfaction
- First Contact Resolution Rate
- Agent Utilization
- Aggregate Call Center Performance

A question was once put to WikiAnswers²: "How do you reduce abandonment rate in a call center?" The quip that came back was simple: "Answer the phone sooner." But perhaps, it's not quite that simple.

Interestingly, common Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as the call abandonment rate did not make the list above. That's because empirical evidence supports that the five metrics listed are the ones that deliver 80% of the value received from performance measurement and management in a call center.

Regardless of the KPIs you chose to monitor, the phone system you select should always be capable of delivering the information you want. You need to improve call performance across the board, including how calls are processed in your system and how the call is handled when an employee picks up the phone, in order to make the right impression on your customers. And robust call analytics are the first step to determining where more work is needed.

¹ Eric Zbikowski, "The Essential Call Center KPIs," Call Center Magazine, (04-17-2007), <http://www.callcentermagazine.com/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=199100188>

² WikiAnswers, http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_do_you_reduce_abandonment_rate_in_a_call_center



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