

# Contact Centre

RECRUITMENT  
& TRAINING

# Call Handling

**- Does an effective call centre take lots of calls?**

**Call Centre managers measure the effectiveness of their operations with a passion. The number of different measures or metrics used to judge performance in call centres surely must exceed the number of call centre operations in the UK: average handling time, time to answer, abandon rates etc - not forgetting the dreaded service level. But what do these tell us about what is really happening within the business?**

Take the call centre manager who reckons they have the capacity to handle 2000 calls in a day but finds that 3000 calls are being presented with a poor service level and high abandon rate. Frequently this scenario arises not from a sudden surge of calls but from a steady increase in call volumes from when the call centre was implemented. "But our business has grown by 50% - give me more resource" is the plea. "No!" is the response from the Director of Customer Service. Functional directors know that applying more resource to a problem is rarely an appropriate solution - more creative tactics are required.

An all too familiar scenario! Let's consider a few areas.

## **Average Handling Time**

Sometimes referred to as call duration. Frequently team leaders compare the average handling times for each member of their team; those with the shortest average handling times (AHTs) are hailed as heroes, and those with long AHTs are cast as villains. The team leader may diagnose the remedy as a heavy dose of coaching.

More detailed information gathering, followed by thorough analysis may tell a different story. What are the agents with the shorter handling times actually contributing to the business? If the agents are engaged in selling, are they producing more sales during their shorter calls? What is their conversion

types on sheets for the agents to complete using the five bar gate recording method. Leave space for agents to record alternative call types just in case you and your trusted agent get it wrong!

Ask a group of agents to record their calls for a day. Then collect the forms and analyse the data. Were you and your trusted agent correct? If you were, well done! If not, never mind; amend the form. In either case, collect more data for a week or more to give a more accurate picture of the ratio of call types.

So having gathered the data why are the customers calling? Try to group the calls into different types; for example:

- Bespoke information gathering - exchanging information unique to the caller - for example, obtaining an account balance
- General information gathering - giving general information such as product information
- Complaint or fault reporting

Determine the percentage of calls by type. Consider what this reveals about the calls received.

Also estimate the average call duration for each call type listed. For each call type, multiply percentage of calls by the average call duration. Then list the

call types by the total time taken. This will show where staff time is being allocated. Look at the largest numbers, this is where your agents are spending most of their time. Is it where you expected it was?

## How many of the calls are as a direct result of something being done in the call centre, or elsewhere in the business, inaccurately or ineffectively?

How many of the calls are as a direct result of something being done in the call centre, or elsewhere in the business, inaccurately or ineffectively? For example, was incorrect information given during a previous call? Is there an inherent fault in the product, is the accompanying literature inaccurate or is there a problem with the way the product is sold to the customer? How many calls are as the result of a failure to deliver on time?

Effective analysis of the data and appropriate corrective action will result in fewer unnecessary calls, and greater productivity and customer satisfaction. It may be worth cultivating a few contacts in other areas of the business in order to provide constructive criticism in a positive way! ■

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