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BEYOND CALL TRACKING

The Importance of Taking the Critical Next Steps

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Many enterprises capture intricate details of their customer contacts through call tracking, yet – often – too little time is spent analyzing calls and deriving optimum performance methodology from this powerful data. The irony for many large companies is that, even though they fervently track calls, they still fail to take the critical next steps to actually improve operations.

Why is it important to effectively analyze customer calls?

The information you collect will pay big dividends when it's included in the development of a call-handling strategy. Implementing such a strategy can lead to dramatic improvement in agent professionalism, call-handling performance, average handle time, revenue and overall customer satisfaction.

ISG suggests using this five-step process as a way to ensure success:

1. **Update your list of most-frequent call types.** Most contact center managers instinctively know which type of call is handled most frequently by their agents, but other call types near the top of the list may come as a surprise. If you already track calls and have developed a list of the most-frequent call types but haven't sampled the call types in awhile, your list may not be up to date. We recommend that you conduct another sample. Over time, changes can occur in the types of calls you receive – sometimes dramatically – depending upon seasonality, new product launches, advertising and many other factors. If you've never tracked calls before, the best way to determine the most-frequent call type is through a preformatted call-tracking template. Such templates can help streamline the manual nature of the call-tracking process by allowing agents to simply mark the appropriate category. If you do not have access to such a system, you can still determine the call category list by conducting manual contact samples. Choose a small, select group of agents to conduct the required call research. Although the process may be time consuming, it should yield enough information to determine the right categories and to calculate an estimated percentage of each from a random sample of calls.

2. **Structure your plan around the top 10 call types.** The list of most-frequent call types is likely to vary widely by industry, call function and the nature of the business. Breaking down a frequency percentage for each call type is a critical step in determining the course of action that will provide the most "punch" in the future. Each call sample must be analyzed carefully to determine the best course of action. Listen to calls of the best agents, and determine if there is a common best answer to the customer's question or statement that you want to be sure to convey.

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3. **Don't simply focus on the categories at the top of the list** (most-frequent call type). Often, the most-frequent calls are short and may not provide the opportunity for improvement that a call type with less frequency may provide. In the airline industry, for example, flight Information calls can make up 30 percent or more of all inbound calls but are generally of short duration and may not provide any opportunities for streamlining. A better approach is to focus on calls with a longer duration and relatively high frequency. Start there.

4. **Analyze business process design.** Conducting an analysis of business process design may require a number of resources and be the most time-consuming step, but a good call-flow design is critical to success, and an improved business process for even a single call type may be worth millions of dollars annually to the enterprise. Here is a recommended method:

   - **Gather a team for analysis.** Make sure your analysis team includes members from outside the call center management team, including participants from marketing, consumer affairs and sales. If possible, add a real customer to the team.

   - **Conduct a step-by-step review of the call flow.** As you review the call flow, make sure the team analyzes every step in detail. Some legacy processes may have made perfect sense years ago but no longer make sense in today's world. Be sure to question the value of each step of the call-flow process. If it no longer provides value, eliminate it.

   - **Ensure "first-call resolution" is a top priority.** If first-call resolution is not an obsession in your contact center world, it should be, so it might be best to rethink your priorities. Few practices cost more or cause more customer frustration than the call transfer system of bouncing from department to department to complete the customer's transaction. Surely you've experienced this yourself: "I can sell you the product but I need to transfer you to the delivery department to schedule the delivery." The delivery department goes about its business of collecting your name, address and credit card information all over again. If a particular call type shows up frequently, then be sure to empower front-line agents to close the deal wherever possible. You will see noticeable improvement – and happier agents, too!

   - **Concentrate on technology.** Relatively complex inquiries for information often can be handled through an automated interactive voice response (IVR) system. Be sure to consider call types that can be directed to the IVR or information that can be better accessed through a Web site. Customers call because they need help. A well-designed system can satisfy the customer while also helping to eliminate a number of calls and reduce cost.

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Good call scripts can be designed as the optimum response to overcoming customer objections and provide a better chance of closing a sale.

5. **Develop call scripts wherever possible.** The best agents most often provide compelling answers to customer inquiries, but does it make sense to leave important responses to chance? We've all listened to calls that should have been handled more effectively and result in a frustrated customer or lost sale. Properly designed call scripts provide the best possible response to a customer's question or concern. Additionally, good call scripts can be designed as the optimum response to overcoming customer objections and provide a better chance of closing a sale. When a response is captured as a script, it becomes repeatable and gives agents the assurance that they are providing accurate information to your customers.

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