How to manage call centre staff effectively

Accurate, efficient and effective workforce management in a contact centre is essential to ensure premium customer service levels and minimise staff churn, but it relies on a lot more information than a simple schedule of planned campaigns.

In fact, as any contact centre manager will tell you, the real crises in contact centre workforce management arise when business processes, operations and marketing initiatives across the organisation are not factored in. hence, input from the whole business - not just the contact centre manager - is vital.

Says Paul Fick, MD of Spescom DataFusion, a provider of integrated communication solutions and platforms for call centres and enterprises: "In today's contact centres, customer call volumes are moving targets. When you factor in multiple sites, expanded media options, agent proficiencies and preferences and customer expectations, the task of forecasting and scheduling becomes difficult to manage without the right tools and sophisticated analysis. However, even the most sophisticated tools are useless if analysis is not based on relevant input - and that includes not just data of historical activities but information relating to current initiatives across the business."

Communication is vital

To gain access to this information, managers within all business divisions need to be made aware of how their activities can impact the contact centre, notes Fick. They also need to communicate their strategies such as targeting new markets to grow revenue and initiatives in a timely fashion to ensure accurate contact centre workforce planning and forecasting. To facilitate this, a suitable workforce management application needs to be introduced.

It's important to select a workforce management solution that will enable maximum flexibility. "Call volumes in a contact centre will vary depending on marketing campaigns, seasons, holidays and other events. A workforce management solution that allows the workforce management team to select, combine and alter current and historical data to predict future call volume and plan accordingly is thus essential. They will also need to be able to set up profiles to model call volume behaviour for different events and circumstances," says Fick, adding...

"Multi-site management will additionally allow for a single point of control over the entire network, and decision-making at individual sites. Information such as key contact centre metrics like contact volume, average speed to answer or service levels, presents a complete picture of your entire contact centre operation."

Tracking performance, activity

Other functionality to look out for in workforce management solutions are advanced adherence capabilities that track schedule adherence, including activities that are not phone-related such as front-end and back-office activities. Says Fick: "This function should comprehensively collect and display data on how employees are spending their time throughout the day, and where there are discrepancies between the schedule and reality. Improving visibility into these agent activities will help the business streamline work processes, increase employee productivity, and control operational costs."

Concludes Fick: "Although there's no exact formula for predicting the workload of calls, emails, and chat sessions, it is possible to model call behaviour for different types of events and circumstances as well as work out complex "what if" scenarios to help ensure that you have the right staff to support customer service operations. With the right information from the business, you can quickly and easily produce schedules that maximise the efficiency of your contact centre, enabling you to deploy the right number of agents, with the right skill sets, at the right time."

About Spescom

Spescom (Pty) Ltd is a JSE listed company operating in the ICT sector. Founded in 1977, this South African company has developed and delivered a number of world-first technologies, as well as innovative products and services to both local and global markets. Its core focus is to deliver integrated business communication solutions that enhance the way businesses communicate with their customers' and leverages voice, video and data technologies through its five divisions: Spescom DataFusion; Spescom DataVoice; Spescom Telecommunications; Spescom Media IT and recently created NewTelco South Africa - a carrier-neutral co-location service provider creating a telecoms interconnection hub for sub-Saharan Africa. The company has a staff complement of 258 with offices located in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and London.

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