Reaching top speed in the long-distance contact centre race

By Eugene Schalkwyk

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Running a contact centre is tough. Keeping staff motivated, productive and efficient all the time takes dedication, effort and resources. The goal of any customer service-driven centre is to make sure that no matter what a customer wants or needs, your contact centre can deliver it. First time. Every time.

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Training and motivating your teams is crucial to keeping customers happy - and to keeping agents happy. As Richard Branson says - make your staff happy, and they'll make your customers happy. Unhappy agents are not going to deliver optimal customer service.

There are different contact centre environments - sales, customer service and debt collection, for example - so this a broad guide to two common elements to all three environments rather than a detailed examination of those.

The starting point to keeping agents productive is to ensure they have the right tools at their disposal to do the job. Supporting the relevant communication channels is critical to both your agents and your customers, who expect to be able to call, mail, SMS or tweet you whenever it suits them, and get the desired response - promptly. If your in-house multi-channel solution isn't up to scratch, the chances are your service isn't either.

Manage and measure agent productivity

Technology can also help to manage and measure agent productivity and guide you to those who are not performing and may need training or mentorship. The dashboard of your contact centre should be able to track the efficiency of your agents. Who answers the fewest calls? Who takes the longest calls? These agents are likely the ones who are battling to resolve customer queries efficiently and who, with a bit of assistance, can become more productive and provide a better overall customer experience.

Analysing the types of calls you receive, and automating some of those functions, can help too. If you get thousands of calls for balance queries around the end of every month, you can automate that and let customers use IVR or SMS to serve themselves, freeing up your agents for more complicated queries (and relieving the boredom of answering hundreds of calls about the same, small thing).

Incentivising teams to perform is a tried-and-tested means of keeping everyone's eyes focused on the end game. From individual performance bonuses to team prizes, there are a number of ways to incentivise agents, and here, again, technology can help by providing accurate data with which to evaluate teams and individuals, and ensure that the right behavior is rewarded.

Regular training, and retraining, is a critical part of successful service delivery. Use different training methods to keep your teams interested and engaged. E-learning channels - like five-minute videos or online courses - can be used to refresh product and service knowledge and also offer the benefit of not removing agents out of the contact centre environment for hours or days at a time.

Whether you're just starting out or managing a well-established contact centre, technology and training offer valuable tools to ensure your customer service is first class, for the long run.

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