

Optimizing Your Workforce To Advance the Customer Experience

Forward-thinking companies are rolling out new performance improvement cycles that utilize recorded agent-customer interactions to promote self-awareness.

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To meet the ongoing challenge of delivering superior customer service and sales results, more and more companies have invested heavily in CRM applications. After all, in good or tough economic times, one sure way to damage your bottom line is to fail to invest in customer satisfaction. Facing hefty CRM software expenditures and intricate implementation timetables, forward-thinking companies are looking for ways to protect and optimize their CRM investment. The quicker any business can realize a return on a significant technology investment, the better the overall value of the investment.

CRM solutions are often associated with enhancing the relationship with the customer. An equally significant gain, however, is that the relationships among departments, workflow, and processes may emerge as significant improvement opportunities.

The flow of information between customer and company too often follows an unpredictable or wrong path. It should be a straight shot to direct the agent to relevant information, and the customer to the best solution, creating complete relationship satisfaction in every engagement. This flow of information ultimately impacts the customers' experience with your enterprise and their experience with your brand and is often a key factor in customer loyalty.

The contact center is a vital source of customer intelligence. Through the contact center, an enterprise can capture new and fresh information about its customers while talking with them.

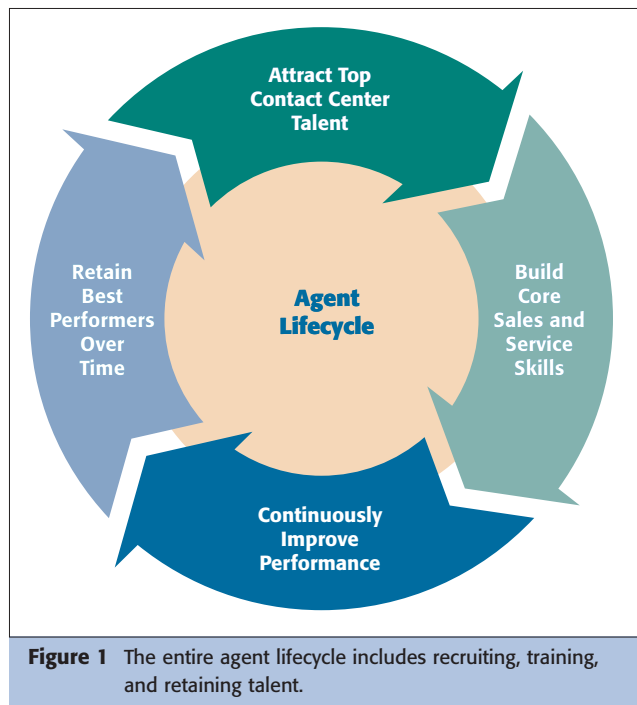
One of the foundations for a solid customer relationship is a group of agents who know their business. With the customer relationship environment being far more sophisticated than ever, supporting agents with learning and coaching opportunities is vital. When you invest in improving your employee capabilities and satisfaction, you'll experience a corresponding upsurge in customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In this highly competitive business environment, customer satisfaction and loyalty are key determining factors in corporate success. Studies indicate that most companies cite lack of trained employees as their No. 1 barrier to sustaining growth. Nowhere is this challenge more evident than in the contact center, where CSRs are the frontline and are interacting with customers on a daily basis. That's why performance improvement is so vital. The actual ROI of any

CRM system is its return on information. When this can be quantified, then we can move to the ultimate measurement – return on relationships, which is ultimately what CRM is all about.

Enhancing Self-Awareness: A Fresh Approach To Enriching Customer Experiences

Imagine receiving feedback from well-intentioned coaches telling you how you could improve, and then not having the time to reflect on the feedback and examine your own performance for yourself. While some improvement can occur this way, CSRs are much more likely to “own” opportunities for improvement if they can see or hear them for themselves. The typical service profit



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chain begins with customer service agents. Their actions start the chain reaction of events that will either be positive or negative. Therefore, it is important that all of the proper processes, policies, and training be in place to support their efforts.

New performance improvement models offer a fresh approach to enhancing self-awareness, allowing CSRs to learn and improve by observing and analyzing the customer experience as it unfolds for the customer. These self-awareness techniques are most effective in a dynamic learning environment, in which companies focus on the entire agent lifecycle – from recruiting to training all the way to retaining talent (see Figure 1).

New models help agents at all performance levels identify areas of excellence and target areas for improvement. They also enable your contact centers to improve systems applications and screen pathing, to identify gaps in training and development, and to identify process improvement opportunities.

For example, customer-interaction-recording software can capture and store what is taking place, allowing you to replay a true picture of how service or sales representatives interact with their customers and their CRM application. The captured samples provide a clear indicator of how easy the CRM software is to use, which tools agents prefer, and how well they have been trained to use different features.

Forward-thinking companies are rolling out new performance-improvement cycles that utilize recorded agent-customer interactions to promote self-awareness. Often this process will begin with individual or coach-assisted call review, a discussion of strengths and opportunities for development based on what the CSR observed, and the identification of key action items for improvement. A successful performance improvement program requires:

- Customer interaction recording/quality assurance software;
- Recording principles;
- Development time;
- Observation tool and guidelines;
- Coaching principles;
- Security provisions; and
- Program champion and internal sponsor.



Figure 2 Opportunities for Self-Awareness in the Agent Lifecycle

To achieve maximum return on your investment, consider implementing the following practices (see Figure 2):

1. With your new tool in place along with your recording principles, observation guidelines, and coaching principles, you are ready to begin by using the monitoring tool for coaching and self-development purposes.
2. Over time, as CSRs become comfortable with the process, invite CSRs to nominate calls for a best-practice library. These calls can be used in many facets of the agent lifecycle.
3. As the library is being built, remember to take the time to thank and reward those who contribute. Consider setting up a point system to become an expert representative as measured by contributions to the library. Contributions will help others learn and will help your company to deliver an enhanced customer experience.
4. Work with your recruiting team to analyze top performers' calls from the library and develop enhanced recruiting profiles and competency models.

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5. During initial training, your finest examples of calls should serve as role models for newer agents to learn rapidly, so they can emulate rather than figure out on their own how to serve the customer. Your not-so-best-practice calls are valuable learning opportunities as well; let new learners critique them and explain how they would handle the situation differently.
6. Upon completion of new-hire training, record calls on a daily basis for new hires and provide daily coaching. This will help new hires achieve proficiency much more rapidly.

In addition, elevate the importance of the supervisor/coach, because they will be conducting the majority of the agent development through coaching; it's important to arm them with coaching skills through supervisor training.

ments in better technology, but because of the actions people are taking as a result of that technology. Performance improvement initiatives will bring a clearer focus and emphasis on coaching, which translates into highly trained agents and more long-term value to customers. Your CSRs will be well-rounded professionals who want to remain and grow with your organization, while your sales improve measurably.

Results Speak Clearly

What kind of reception can you expect from performance improvement initiatives? Associates we've worked with have voiced high acceptance and, at times, passionate commitment to performance improvement. They expressed strong endorsement for the self-awareness aspect of the program, and measurable impacts on performance are a testament to its success.

By using intelligent monitoring, you will reap the benefits of more productive agents who are confident they are being monitored randomly and based on business criteria that is important to your company.

Frequent Feedback Boosts Agent Performance

Fair play for agents is crucial to the success of any performance improvement program. Your CSRs need ongoing input that is impartial and helps them to improve their job performance. By using intelligent monitoring, you will reap the benefits of more productive agents who are confident they are being monitored randomly and based on business criteria that is important to your company.

By simplifying the monitoring process for coaches and team leaders, they too can become more efficient by focusing on more strategic tasks. Your performance improvement program can help them become mentors to your CSRs, too. In fact, the most important byproduct of intelligent monitoring is quality coaching. With more informed agents and more effective coaches – who are all driving toward a common goal of improving the satisfaction level and loyalty of customers – your contact center can have a more significant impact on your company's bottom line.

The contact centers of today must be much more relationship-oriented and focused on delivering superior service. Customer service representatives will be more productive, not just due to invest-

Program participants have demonstrated a 7 percent improvement in handle time compared to control group members.

Key results have revealed a 4 percent improvement in customer satisfaction and a 9 percent spike in employee satisfaction. These are powerful results for any company.

Measuring success is a critical first step toward optimizing performance. In these highly competitive and fast-paced environments, a formal performance-improvement program is critical to any effective CRM strategy. Continuous learning boosts staff productivity, performance, and retention. Performance improvement initiatives present a unique opportunity to evaluate the very reason you created your contact center in the first place – to provide superior customer sales and service. ■



WEB LINK

Learn more about recorded agent-customer interactions in "Let the Voice of the Customer Engineer Your CRM Implementation" in this book and at www.crmproject.com.