

# Strategic advantage with contact centres

By Giles Potter

Most businesses compete in markets where several similar competitors exist.

Given this, it's more essential than ever to deliver high quality customer service to achieve sales and market



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share targets.

As regular customers become product-wise, they can easily compare your product offers against competitors, and so your means of differentiation has to centre on service delivery, or you risk losing business.

Companies service customers mainly through a few channels.

They are face-to-face interactions, phone, contact centres, email, fax and hard copy mail, and quite common now is mobile-text and web-based sales and service.

Contact centres have become a core channel among these options. Their operation is highly accessible for customers and delivers standardised process, is highly measurable, consolidates to one location, and has lower overall costs relative to retail or field-sales environments.

Companies recognising the value the channel can create have found a strategic asset.

For example, when you consider pizza, there is one pizza delivery company phone number you probably recall, like it or not. Phone number recall is a good start.

Back this up with phone technology which makes ordering simple, install reliable processes to cook and deliver

consistent meals on time, more often than others, and you have a strategic revenue generating asset.

While many companies can make and deliver pizzas, few have the phone technology and contact centre systems to create a strategic advantage.

Centre managers are being seriously challenged to deliver competitive advantage, rather than just answer calls.

The highly capable look to gain advantages in all aspects of their operation by introducing technology solutions, integrating channels and processes and increasing staff capability.

Managers achieve wins through developments such as:

■ Self-service technology applica-

tions: Interactive speech recognition systems are being introduced to handle calls without human interaction, eg, for routine calls such as placing a bet, buying event tickets or booking a cab.

■ Multi-media queuing of contacts: Modern technology can handle and prioritise all contact types in a universal queue for consistent service, regardless of how customers want to interact with you. Overlay this with segmentation to sort customers and you can channel your best customers to speak with the most experienced staff.

■ Staff career programmes: Attracting customer service staff is a serious challenge. Managers work hard to differentiate their centres, and varied roles is a good way. A multi-dimensional centre

will offer a range of career opportunities so staff can find several career options, eg, IT management needs of the centre is increasingly winning staff.

■ Overflow management: Relying on voice mail as the only option for the after-hours period is a flawed approach if your organisation has chosen a service-led strategy.

The public expects longer hours of access and won't tolerate long waits. Rather than place increasing demands on staff to work late and/or on weekends, engaging an outsourced bureau to handle after-hours or overflow calls at peak times, is increasingly common.

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