

Your Audit Centre Contact

By Giles Potter, Managing Director, Great Outcomes Ltd.

■ Is sugar necessary?

There are plenty of war stories about audits per se, and most often they sound about as promising as announcing the plague. So why have some Contact Centre managers taken to 'the Audit' as if it is the best thing since sliced bread?

There used to be a time when audits only affected the accountants in a company, and now we have Contact Centre audits as well. Were centre managers just too compliant, or was there an element of wisdom in the development of the Contact Centre audit? As the industry matures, those who've been through multiple audits know that they're actually good for a centre, and good for the managers. True.

PRIMING YOUR OWN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

As Contact Centres are a substantial investment for a company (capital, systems, resources, management focus) senior management need to have a strong understanding of how the centre is performing, and how it is adding value i.e. creating a return on investment. Many senior management teams do not have the in-depth knowledge of the functions of a contact centre, its integration with other parts of the organisation, or how the intra-centre functions meld to provide consistent quality customer experiences. There is an opportunity for the astute

Contact Centre manager to present the centre's performance, or development needs, to the management team through an independent review.

To win support for new investment in a contact centre, prioritisation will become an early issue during the competition for resources. The Centre Manager may spot some, or even all, of the changes needed to achieve high productivity in the centre, but this alone will not win support for new expenditure. Determining the 'right' priorities for the changes that have to be made will be challenging, and if approved, managing the implementation often goes beyond the resources or skills that exist in a centre. Outside assistance can complete the gaps in the development needs of the centre, but firstly, the gaps must be identified through a review or audit. Independent data and comparative information needed for a compelling, financially justified case can be provided through an audit. The diagram below shows the stages in the review to refinement process for business development initiatives:





Photograph: Helen Rudolf, DMA

YOUR PLANNING CYCLE

Contact Centre management will get better value out of an audit process that comprises regular, structured programmes rather than ad hoc reviews focussing on specific issues. Constantly changing environments will affect a centre's performance, so a good audit result achieved some time ago does not prove that a centre is high performing now. To achieve the same audit result today may require even better management systems, processes and people results than at the time of an earlier review. Within a regular audit process, the basic measures can be reviewed, and then when necessary, additional criteria can be included into the process e.g. seasonal factors such as assessing absentee rates in post-campaign periods.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

Setting your objectives for the audit process is one of the most important factors for a Centre Manager. Possible objectives could be:

- Identify poor performing areas within Service KPIs, and quantify the expected impact of improving performance.
- Assess processes that exist between the Contact Centre and related internal departments e.g. logistics, accounts receivable, or administration. Highlight processes that are not functioning efficiently.
- Examine the pathways for callers received via multiple layers of the IVR. Establish simpler paths to increase caller satisfaction.

- Determine areas of technology or software under-utilisation.

After the review is complete, the Centre Leaders should spend time with the audit manager brainstorming possible actions. This reflects the greater interaction between audit managers and centre managers that exists today.

An audit manager should be willing to spend time to discuss possible developments and follow-on actions once a review is complete, and not just depart on completion.

GUIDING CHANGE

The audit will identify areas for development, that is a certainty, and also a key objective of the exercise. Managing the actions initiated through the audit process is a different challenge to completing the audit. Your contact centre may not be ready for change, or very well skilled in change management. Consequently, the Centre Manager has to be the guide and leader of the action plan, rather than the action plan being an unbridled catalyst for change, or worse still, a detonator of change.

SUMMARY

For the Centre Manager who wants to add value, 'sugar' should not be necessary to initiate an audit, because reviews shouldn't be viewed primarily as medicine for poor performance. The contemporary audit is a productive and proactive step by the Centre Manager to drive change and improve performance, even if good results are already being achieved. Centre Managers who want to take their Contact Centre to higher levels of performance add regular audit processes into the planning cycle, and know how the results will be used to drive change management, whilst recognising great performance amongst the team.



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Great Outcomes Ltd, a call and contact centre consultancy, assists companies to develop their contact centre by improving management systems and practices through change management projects, leading new developments, and facilitating the strategy for new centres.

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