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Today's Issue

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Welcome to this week's issue of Call Centre 101

To navigate between the topic-streams, click on the coloured tabs above or the titles below:

- ❖ Develop winning strategies for email management
- ❖ Driving down absence rates and boosting contact centre performance
- ❖ Winners of the England Call Centre Hero Awards 2009 are announced
- ❖ Date and venue announced for the Directors' Masterclass Conference 2009

Latest News...

BT transfers call centre 2,000 jobs from India to UK

BT is to switch at least 2,000 call centre jobs from India to the UK. The move is part of a long-term strategy to cut costs by £1bn and reduce dependency on third parties globally, a BT spokesman said. Although the initial figure has been put at 2,000, around 2,750 jobs could come back to the UK as the company looks to half its call centre operation on the sub-continent...

Full story > [City Talk](#) or [Times](#) or [Economic Times](#)

Kwik Fit Insurance reveals £1m expansion plans

Kwik Fit Insurance (KFI) has revealed ambitious plans for expansion over the next five years. The Lanarkshire-based intermediary, which is backed by French venture capitalist group PAI Partners, told Scotland on Sunday that it is looking to double in size through acquisitions that could top £1 million...

Full story > [Insurance Daily](#)

Rise in swine flu cases brings forward creation of emergency hotline

The national swine flu phone line, a central call centre that allows thousands of people to receive infection diagnoses simultaneously, is to be set up by the Government within days. The flu line, the backbone of the National Pandemic Flu Service (NPFs), is to be activated after a further dramatic rise in infection cases, to be announced by the Department of Health today...

Full story > [Times](#)

Eclipse Internet bigs up its Customer Hero

Ever been disappointed by the lack of customer service you receive whilst on the phone to your internet service provider? It doesn't look as if Eclipse Internet have been getting too many complaints as a member of its call centre staff was recently honoured with the title of Customer Hero at the UK Call Centre Hero Awards 2009...

Full story > [Broadband Genie](#)

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Email

Management objective: Develop winning strategies for email management

Author: Matthew Haines, European managing director, nGenera CIM

Email is an established, and often preferred, communication channel among consumers that, when managed effectively by a contact centre, can lead to increased customer satisfaction, improved agent efficiency and reduced operational costs. Matthew Haines, European managing director, nGenera CIM, highlights the winning strategies for providing an exceptional email customer service experience.

Over the last decade, email has not only evolved into an entrenched medium for personal and business communications, it has also been widely adopted as a channel for customer service and support.

By the end of 2005 over 92 per cent of websites offered email as a customer support channel and having the option to email a company has become firmly embedded in customer expectations. The cost-effectiveness of email offers an attractive option for contact centres looking to manage an increasingly demanding customer base, but it does put the onus firmly on the organisation to deliver an exceptional service via this channel.

There is a vast array of best practices, strategies and techniques that contact centre managers need to take into account when looking to optimise their email management. However, these can in essence be distilled into a number of basic but key principles, which when put into practice and used with an appropriate email management system can ensure any contact centre can effectively handle and respond to every incoming email.

Always respond!

One of the often unspoken, but critical rules to email management is that every customer email that requires a response must receive one. Sound obvious? In fact, it was one of the single biggest failings in an independent audit conducted among UK retailers in 2007, with 45 per cent not responding to an email enquiry at all!

Speed of response also has a direct impact on customer satisfaction and although practices vary by industry, a simple email enquiry should take no longer than 24 hours to answer. Some emails may require a single automatic acknowledgement and some may not need one at all, but it's important that each type is accurately identified and handled appropriately.

An auto-acknowledgement can be an effective way to inform customers that their email has been received, and also prevent you from receiving repeat email from the same customer on the same issue.

It's also important that customer service agents recognise that email must be viewed very differently from the phone. Responding to emails requires a different set of both skills and system features compared to answering phone calls.

According to JupiterResearch's report on 'Email Automation Best Practices', offering auto response can cut the amount of emails handled by agents by up to 15 per cent. Answering emails promptly is the most basic element of customer care, but one that is often overlooked and a potential purchaser who is kept waiting is not going to be an enthusiastic return visitor.

Effective routing practices

Managing the path of an incoming email can be the fundamental element to managing emails effectively – or a significant point of failure. Routing emails based on departments and queues rather than individuals is critical. In the absence of a particular agent, routing logic based on individual agents will result in emails that either remain unanswered or have to be manually moved from one agent's inbox to another.

Instead, appropriate queues or mailboxes should be created, as well as roles and departments, and rules configured based on these parameters so routing is always based on the "best available agent", opposed to a predetermined named agent. Intelligent routing can also be carried out by using information gathered via the email Web form, the incoming email address, or via intelligent email content scanning to identify the email sender.

Companies with a wide range of products and services, and appropriately skilled teams in various areas, would also be wise to configure skill-based routing too, to ensure incoming email is delivered to the right, specialist team, and then to the best available agent.

Personalise all communication

Unlike a branch visit or a counter at a high street store, email doesn't offer the live, real-time interaction of a face to face encounter. As a result, companies must work hard to engage with customers in order to initiate and develop a lasting relationship. Starting with the acknowledgement, personalise every email by including the customer name in the greeting, the agent's signature, and other pertinent customer information. Making use of Web forms that ask for first and last names will help to automate this process.

Apart from the first acknowledgement, it is also a good idea to keep the customer informed of progress, particularly delays. Depending on email volume, why not employ automated rules or have agents respond with a personalised note? In either case, mention the nature of the delay and the expected resolution time, if only to avoid them emailing you at regular intervals for another update.

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Unified Desktop

Workforce Optimisation

Empower your email agents

So far I've discussed the importance of email communication from the customer's perspective, but it's worth us spending some time looking at how you can help your email agents manage the incoming emails and streamline the response process.

Email management systems offer an array of features including agent productivity tools to help provide value to the process, such as automatic spell-checking in multiple languages, the ability to personalise messages using templates for parts of the email (like header, greeting, body, footer, etc.), and the ability to preview emails, use pre-configured responses or insert knowledgebase articles.

Providing your contact centre agents with access to an integrated knowledgebase can also be extremely powerful in ensuring the delivery of consistent, relevant and quick email responses. At the same time, it can also be used for other customer service channels such as self-service, online chat and phone.

Improving and evolving your email communication

As with any other ongoing process, it's critical to gather metrics, measure performance and make continuous improvements to your overall email management initiative. Real-time statistics present a live snapshot of the system and agents, for example the number of emails in a queue, number currently within service levels, agent workload and response times.

Metrics should be gathered on an ongoing basis and analysed to determine trends, identify issues, evaluate agents, and escalate product or service problems to other departments in the organisation.

Metrics gathered should help not only track past performance, but also predict future performance. For example, monitor trends associated with specific events, such as new product releases, product recalls, marketing promotions, and holiday seasons and use these to estimate potential pressure points and staffing levels.

Conclusion

Email is generally accepted as one of the most efficient communication tools, but overlooking its vital role in any multi-channel customer service strategy can be extremely detrimental to any organisation. Providing an email contact address to customers is pointless if your contact centre staff don't respond to them or provide them with incorrect or incomplete information. Adopting effective email management practices can unlock the door to reduced email processing time, improved agent effectiveness and productivity, and ultimately deliver an interactive experience that always exceeds customer expectations.

Next Step

Attend Call Centre Clinic's webinar on Online Customer Service, being held on Thursday July 23rd at 12.30pm.

Reserve your place now, click below:

<https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/431672130>

Download a free 'must read' whitepaper on Email Management, click the secure link below:

[Winning Strategies for Email Management - White Paper](#) *new*

Contact nGenera CIM

<http://www.ngenera.com/cim>

Absenteeism

Management Objective: Driving down absence rates and boosting contact centre performance

Author: Liz Sumpton, Head of HR Business Partnerships, **Ventura**

Introduction

Historically, high turnover amongst call centre staff has been accepted as a universal reality for the industry. Whatever the level of staff attrition, the cost of lost profitability, sales, recruitment and wasted training is estimated by Blue Sky Consulting to equate to losing £1.1bn a year UK-wide.

The latest Employee Absence Survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) states that the average cost of sickness absence alone is £567 per employee per year. This figure probably massively underestimates true costs - imagine what the total costs of all absence, replacement labour, overtime or reduced performance actually amounts to.

In a tightly run operation like a contact centre where costs and performance are closely managed, significant levels of staff absence can cause major problems with productivity, motivation, culture and customer experience. Employees can end up over worked and stressed and more likely to take time off as a result. Morale suffers, which increases staff attrition, overwork and absence.

Many companies have impressive tools and infrastructures around managing sickness and absence but still the absence figure remains high. Applying these tools to achieve both cultural and attitudinal change is the tricky bit. This means taking the information and practices and applying them to achieve a tangible difference at an individual, team and department level.

Absence includes a whole range of issues aside from sickness. Medical appointments, bereavement, time off for dependants or unknown whereabouts all need to be managed effectively.

Context

In 2008 ContactBabel reported that the services sector saw a market average of 5.4% staff absence rate. Medium sized call centres saw the highest rates of absence at 6.4% as did outbound activity at 7.5%. This may be due to the high pressure nature of outbound roles.

Factors can be complex when it comes to reasons for absence. Although absence tends to decrease during periods of economic recession, it's still important to have the correct measures in place to drive down absence rates.

The CCA market guidelines recommend that overall sick leave should be under 7.5% which takes into account both short term and long term sick leave, and short term sickness should be reduced to below 5%.

Best practice guidelines as set out by the CCA define 4 strands to focus on.

Firstly setting goals and agreeing approaches will bring clarity and direction to managing attendance.

Secondly it's important that staff are clear on the requirements and expectations of their employers. This can be achieved at the recruitment phase, at induction and through the availability of guidelines for all staff to reference.

Thirdly managing attendance is a top down approach. An environment should be created where the importance of attendance is implicitly understood and in which absence is managed correctly.

Finally processes such as daily management meetings, back to work interviews, recording past attendance and keeping full records achieve the more technical points of absence management.

Ventura recommendations

Over the past 12 months Ventura has achieved a significant reduction in sickness and absence through implementation of new controls and measures.

Ventura's top 4 recommendations are:

1. Motivation and responsibility

A framework should be provided within which Team Leaders have the right attitude, knowledge and skills to recognise, support, and manage attendance issues within their team. Engagement, relationship skills and attitude are just as important as knowledge of policies and procedures such as disciplinary action and holidays. Creating emotional engagement and commitment to the business by treating employees appropriately and with discretion will positively impact absence rates. Having an aspiration target for absence which all the leadership teams are required to achieve as part of their performance measures will impact bonus opportunities

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Workforce Optimisation

Improving planning and scheduling off the phone activities is one way to help boost staff moral leading to better performance and more cover for peak times. Taking call after call can sometimes become monotonous for the agent. Scheduling off the phone activities makes the working day more enjoyable improving job quality.

Delivering an online knowledge base for policies and procedures achieves clear visibility of the framework. Providing face to face manager training and coaching also helps to provide consistency across the business.

Introducing an online attendance calendar provides transparency and visibility. Individual to each user, the agent and line manager are able to view personal attendance information, providing a view of all past and future holiday bookings, sickness taken and general attendance.

The calendar enables better management of attendance, allowing you to deliver against objectives of significantly reducing sickness across your business. It also ensures all employees are aligned with company policies regarding attendance and makes sure contractual obligations are met.

2. Flexibility

Creating shift swaps or working time back means that hours can be recovered when it's best for the business. Making a provision for emergency holidays means you are prepared for possible absence which will reduce the impact on performance.

A 'time bank' provides an option to work time back when it's best for the business. An hour's bank system can record absence required for dependants as well as overall absence hours. The system can then schedule time worked back within requirements and verifies when hours have been repaid. Where hours are not credited back within the set period, deductions from salaries will occur.

Benefits of such a system include cost savings as well as the ability to see patterns of excessive use of the facility. Working time back when it's best for the business will have a positive impact on productivity. With the consequence of absence being to work the hours back a reduction in frequent absence will be achieved.

3. Attendance recognition

It's important to establish a clear link between attendance and performance. Creating a scorecard in order to provide greater recognition through reward of excellent levels of attendance will boost morale. Low levels should also impact the overall assessment. Such recognition has already shown to impact 1 day absence events significantly.

Providing a scheme that recognises and publicises employees who have zero absence will act as a motivational tool. Incentives such as monthly and annual draws for zero absence employees can be used as a recognition device.

4. The provision of non-attendance details in employment references

Future employers are interested in attendance information. Supplying details of non attendance for the last 12 month period in line with company policy can encourage a reduction in absence levels as it can have a knock on effect for future employment. Details relating to non attendance reasons, hours or instances should not be disclosed however. Such provision may reduce absence rates due to the consequences it can have long term.

Smart recruitment also falls into this category as employing the correct people for the job in the first place will increase job satisfaction and therefore reduces possibility of absence.

Next Step

Results orientated

Ventura has in the last 12 months seen a reduction in absence by 3.33% and is currently well below the industry standard at 4.05%.

We are confident that our sickness and absence proposals achieve results and as an outsourcer we aim to perform above industry standards to add value to our client's business. We need to be experts. If sickness and absence is an issue for your company then we can improve it. The cost savings to your business through reduced absence and improved productivity are extensive. With over 40 years experience we know how to drive down sickness and absence through tried and tested methods.

If you would like to talk to us about how we can help reduce levels of sickness and absence please contact us.

Ventura can help

Ventura is one of the UK's leading outsourcers specialising in customer management. A partner to our clients, we deliver outsourced operations that make a real difference.

We challenge the way our clients operate; striving for continual improvement; delivering efficiencies through business excellence.

Onshore, offshore or multi-shore, customer facing or back office processing, our solutions are built to meet your needs and deliver your objectives.

Our expertise in outsourcing can give you the edge.

About the author

Liz Sumpton is Head of HR Business Partnerships at Ventura. She leads the HR Business partner team whose primary aim is to develop strategic and operational HR solutions which enable the business to achieve its business plan. Liz has 5 years HR experience predominantly in the financial services sector, coupled with several years contact centre management experience of a large operation unit operating 24/7. Liz has a wealth of experience, in particular in attendance and performance management, effective retention strategies and colleague engagement and satisfaction programmes.

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Hero Awards

Winners of the UK Call Centre Hero Awards 2009 are announced

The results of the inaugural Call Centre Hero Awards 2009 have been announced by the organisers.

Congratulations to the UK Call Centre Hero Award winners for 2009:

Customer Hero 2009: UK

Ashley Black, Information Advisor, Journeycall Ltd, Brechin

Team Hero 2009: UK

Sam Jones, Collections Advisor, Barclaycard Commercial, Stockton-on-Tees

Support Hero 2009: UK

Trevor Flack, Performance Development Manager, Spark Response, Gateshead

Unsung Hero 2009: UK

Anne Winn, Customer Services Officer, Telford and Wrekin Council, Telford

After announcing the results, Jon Snow, the founder of the Call Centre Hero Awards and chair of the judging panel, stated:

“Congratulations to all the winners of the inaugural Call Centre Hero Awards. Each award was hotly contested and we received many excellent nominations. The judging panel had some very tough decisions to make and each shortlisted nominee should be congratulated on their achievement. But the winner of each award was outstanding and a role model for their peers in the industry.

“I would like to thank the line managers and centre managers who took the time to make their nominations and submit such detailed appraisals. Without you the Call Centre Hero Awards could not happen.

“For those who did not win this year, I encourage you enter next year’s competition.”

In total, 48 organisations from across the UK made 136 nominations in 4 award categories.

The Call Centre Hero Awards were established to recognise the commitment, endeavours, achievements and professionalism of frontline call centre agents and their critical support staff.

Jon Snow comments further, “Call centre agents have tough jobs and often work in high pressure roles dealing with frustrated customers. Their professionalism and day-in day-out service delivery is mostly unrecognised. These awards seek to change that. With a million people now involved in call centre work, the sector has become an important employer and an economic asset. Positive recognition for very much deserved.”

The 2010 awards are in the planning stage and the organisers promise more categories, with aim of attracting 100+ UK organisations to enter. Entries will be remain free!

If you would like more information on the Call Centre Hero Awards 2010, please email:

Jon.Snow@OneWeekMedia.co.uk

Or call 0845 053 1187.

About

The Call Centre Hero Awards (CCHA) are organised by the Call Centre Clinic (the main trading brand of OneWeek Media Limited). The CCHA are the only national awards initiative for the UK call centre industry. The founding aim of the CCHA is to recognise and celebrate the careers and achievements of the frontline staff in call centre organisations. Entry to the CCHA will always be free and is open to all centres over 20 seats. All centres are treated equally, regardless of size or brand prominence.

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Conference

Date and venue set for the Directors' Masterclass Conference 2009

When: October 15th and 16th 2009

Where: Millennium Gloucester Hotel, Kensington, London

How to register interest (without obligation)

If you are interested in attending, please join the following LinkedIn subgroup (below) and updates will be forwarded as they become available:

Directors' Masterclass Conference 2009 > <http://www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?gid=2084223>

Please note that to join the above subgroup you must be member of the **Who's Who of UK Call Centres** on LinkedIn.com. If you are not yet a member, please click below to join:

<http://www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?gid=1803753>

Overview

Building on the success of the Directors' Dining Club, the Jon Snow is proud to announce the launch the Directors' Masterclass Conference 2009.

This unique conference will be held over two-days and feature 21 masterclasses featuring leaders of the contact centre and customer service worlds.

Each masterclass will be one-hour long and feature a mix of presentation, panel discussion and Q&A.

Our unique tri-colour system will indicate the level each class is aimed at:

- Blue Classes are for those new to a subject
- Green Classes are for those with some knowledge of the fundamentals but not an expert
- Red Classes are for those with a high level of knowledge of the subject. They may be practitioners in the field

After each masterclass there will be a networking break, allowing attendees to carry on conversations started in class.

All networking breaks and lunch will be held in the **Who's Who Networking Lounge**, which will also feature an expo of suppliers and consultants.

On the evening of the first day the **Directors' Dining Club** will host a **Gala Dinner** and all the conference delegates are welcome to attend. The Gala Dinner will feature two keynote addresses, entertainment and a late bar.

All the presentation materials will be available to delegates post-event on a USB stick.

Sponsor a Masterclass!

If your organisation would like to sponsor a Masterclass then please email Jon.Snow@OneWeekMedia.co.uk.

To find out more about sponsorship opportunities, please attend our next webcast for prospective sponsors on Tuesday July 21st at 10am for thirty minutes. Click the secure link below to reserve your place.

<https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/581015403>

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