How to Improve Service Delivery

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Call centers have evolved from low-cost channels to handle customer problems and routine transactions to become an integral part of the sales and delivery process. However, just as call centers have evolved, so have customers – and they now demand the highest levels of service delivery. How has technology evolved to meet this demand, and how are companies benefiting?

The fight for customer wallet share – the proportion of an organization’s services a customer uses in relation to his total needs – is on. In today’s competitive business climate, companies face the need to provide best-in-class customer service while reducing overall costs and expanding contact center revenue. Organizations that can effectively manage and service customer interaction through its contact centers and turn them into relationships create an advantage to win greater wallet share and therefore are more competitive.

Unfortunately, contact centers, more often than not, struggle with complex sets of applications and systems, increasingly more difficult tasks to solve their customer’s issues, high training costs, and less time to do more work. These and other problems are exacerbated by rapid and continued growth through mergers, acquisitions and market-driven reorganizations, forcing the integration of people, new and legacy systems, applications, and business processes along the way.

As the contact centers change, the agents’ working environment also becomes more complex as new tools are added, changed, or removed from the desktop. These environments negatively impact the agents’ ability to provide quality service and result is contact centers that are constrained in their ability to adapt quickly to changing business requirements and market factors.

The ability to select, implement, and use technology successfully is critical in today’s contact center not only to provide ongoing service but also to add to revenue. Successful organizations deploy increasingly sophisticated and personalized strategies to up-sell and cross-sell products and services to win wallet share. As these organizations transform call centers into the next generation contact centers that provide world-class customer service, they demand software solutions that are highly scalable yet cost effective. In addition, enterprises must find ways of using existing technology more effectively and replace only those applications where they improve contact center effectiveness at an acceptable cost. In many instances organizations add new systems such as CRM, portals, web pages, etc. to the existing agent desktop providing new sources of information, screens to navigate, and processes to follow. These new applications are typically not integrated or only partially integrate with other systems that the agent uses increasing the complexity of the agent working environment.

To be successful and address these ongoing challenges, enterprises must overcome one of the most challenging tasks in their contact centers – how to integrate dissimilar applications, processes, and data. Integration allows contact centers to bring together disparate systems in an effort to make agents more efficient and thereby improving service delivery. The traditional approaches to integrating in contact centers have been to create server-based systems that attempt to reshape the working agent working environment through the creation of composite applications, portals, and other customized solutions. Although these approaches may temporarily eliminate some inefficiencies, they oftentimes are costly, take months or even years to implement, and cannot be modified easily to meet changing business requirements. In addition, most extensive integration efforts require significant application coding changes and in many instances, the replacement of legacy applications in order to provide an integrated environment.
A better solution is to integrate applications where they are used – at the agent desktop. Desktop integration is a more effective approach to organizing the agent work environment, streamlining processes, and reducing the amount of time the agent spends to complete tasks. In addition, desktop integration is non-invasive and does not require any server-side integration thereby reducing integration costs and lowering implementation time from months to weeks.

Desktop integration improves service delivery by eliminating redundant data entry, streamlining processes, and organizing application screens logically. Fortune 500 companies that use desktop integration have also addressed major organizational and training issues related to mergers, acquisitions, and other changing business needs. This type of integration has proven invaluable in reducing agent call times, allowing them to focus on cross-sell and up-sell opportunities with customers. Desktop integration also provides a method for enforcing rules related to compliance and business requirements. Finally, desktop integration allows companies to be more agile in regards to how technology is implemented and used. New applications can easily be integrated with legacy systems while only exposing certain screens, data, and processes of those applications for the agent. Consequently, the agent desktop is organized in a task-oriented environment focused on providing a higher level of service.

Desktop integration has a proven track record in contact centers in improving the use of technology, improving customer service, reducing costs, and improving revenue opportunities. In one contact center where desktop integration was implemented, a unified integrated desktop was implemented in just six weeks to three hundred agents. The average call times were reduced on average over three minutes allowing agents to spend more time with customers and take more calls. At the same time the call center rolled out a new application, integrating it with other applications minimizing training and impacts to contact center operations. The savings due to improved agent productivity and shorter call times in a single contact center are approximately $1.5 million in a single year.

Selecting the appropriate contact center technology can be daunting in today’s enterprise. Instead of adding new applications or replacing existing systems, organizations should examine the tools that their agents are currently using and how productivity can be increased through integration. The most effective approach to integration will continue to be integration at the point of contact – at the desktop. It is here where disparate applications, processes, and data can be integrated quickly and effectively to improve the delivery of service and to win greater wallet share.

John Broderick is the CEO for Cicero, Inc., which provides software solutions to enterprises that integrate applications, streamline business processes, extend the functionality of existing technology, and support Service-Oriented Architectures. The Cicero Platform is the original, patented desktop integration solution that increases end user productivity, improves customer satisfaction and reduces costs in the contact center and across the enterprise. Cicero’s customers such as Merrill Lynch and Nationwide Financial create and deploy fully integrated solutions within weeks and typically achieve a Return on their Investment within months. John can be contacted at jbroderick@ciceroinc.com. Learn more about Cicero at www.ciceroinc.com.