

White Paper

February 2014



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Resolving Missed Calls

The Key to Transforming Customer Service

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Overview

The heartbeat of business

Companies invest large sums in Customer Experience Management (CEM) and enabling technologies but in many cases fail to satisfy customers. Despite the sophistication they do not 'know' the customer and any inflated claims about customer care are immediately punctured by the simplest and most ubiquitous business experience – the telephone call.

This white paper will take you through the new landscape of customer behaviour on the telephone and highlight challenges for retailers, supply chain companies and professional services in the age of digital emancipation.

It will touch upon common customer engagement mistakes that cause disproportionate damage to sales and customer loyalty. It will look at lessons learned from internet and mobile telephony and introduce guiding principles for enhancing every telephone touch point. This paper will also discuss simple low cost solutions that reliably enhance customer experience.

The principles apply to any size of business whether small, medium or large, multi-site organisations, public or private sector. If the purpose is to make better use of the telephone, the goal is to secure the friendship of agnostic and first time callers and to improve relationships with existing customers. The right approach to call management can achieve all this at a fraction of the cost of implementing a CEM solution.

Transforming customer communications

Digital customer Digital values

Digital communications including social media put the customer in control of the purchase rather than the company and this makes it difficult to manage business or consumer sales.

According to a recent edition of The Economist¹ advertisers now face an uphill struggle as they contend with growing 'scepticism and sophistication'. The most sceptical customer segment is not the baby boomers, who have been exposed to decades of marketing tactics but millennials who more readily allow social media and mobile devices to influence purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. The article referred to a survey which asked 134,000 respondents in 23 countries what they thought about 700 brands. The response in Europe and America was that the majority would not be worried if 92% of the brands surveyed simply disappeared.

National business statistics show that when calls are left unanswered 56.7% of them never leave a message and never call back. When callers obtain numbers from Google searches they simply move down the ranking to the next ranked competitor. A UK-based FTSE-100 builders merchant with more than 900 national branches, for example, undertook a series of surveys to

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analyse the impact of missed calls. In one year, out of 14.5 million calls more than two million calls went unanswered. Apart from the potential loss of revenue, (which the company equated to £83.9m based on average sales order value), far greater damage was being inflicted on its brand reputation and through poor customer experience. The company estimated that just 5% improvement in call resolution would add £3.3m to its bottom line.

Technology changes but the problem remains the same

A recent Accenture Report² showed how digitally enabled communications empowers customers to switch to competitors more easily than at any other time. One statistic was 66% of customers switched companies at least once due to poor service in the past year.

The authors cited the main reasons for switching as distress at being put on hold for long periods when calling companies, promises that are not fulfilled, being passed around different people to resolve a query or complaint, variable quality in customer

experiences when using different channels, for example mobile phone or internet, as well as undefined difficulties when trying to do business with a company.

If one of the key points of the Accenture Report was that advances in big data and digital technology including social media were in themselves ineffective in delivering customer satisfaction, the reasons for such ineffectiveness may be found in a recent Econsultancy MultiChannel Customer Experience Report³. This showed that the greatest barrier to improving customer experience was cited as the complexity of integrating so many channels through which customers interact.

In most cases the complexities of achieving true control over customer experience makes this a long term goal that requires a large investment, company wide buy-in, and boardroom level commitment to drive the change (another key finding of the Econsultancy report).



Mobile technology has demonstrated the way ahead

Yet one of the most real customer experiences, the phone call, can be managed to provide excellent customer experiences without sophisticated technology and strategies. Lessons can be learned from mobile phone technology which have both raised customer expectations but also shown what can be done with very simple data management. Mobile phones provide rich call logging features enabling users to see who called, when and how often the caller tried to make contact. With much better visibility of the caller, whether known or unknown, business or social, the user is able to make a decision about the nature and urgency of the call and in many cases is able to make an informed call back.

Start with the low hanging fruit

But what if the cost of managing this more fickle world of loyalty was not a major CEM implementation but a simpler telephony solution that answered these key complaints of customers on the phone? If the telephone can be used to improve customer experiences and provide associated metrics for bolstering loyalty, this must be worth considering.

When the telephone system is given the intelligence to display caller information just as a mobile phone does, members of staff have enough information at their fingertips to return informed responses. Even the ability to recognise the number of abortive attempts a caller has made over a given period of time can redress any bad feeling as an informed ring back indicates an effort made by a company. If linked to CRM the returned call can be so much more influential. The cost of a discrete implementation is small compared to more sophisticated CEM and if the data is compatible with open and proprietary software such as SAP, JD Edwards, Oracle and other mainstream sources, the telephony solution can provide a valuable stepping stone to future big data and CEM ambitions.

The cost of a Managed Call Solution can prove insignificant when compared to potential losses incurred by missed calls.



Missed calls are an exploitable opportunity

Business surveys reveal common and easily solved causes.

Customers are queuing to be answered and missed calls go unresolved. The problem is often compounded when management do not have visibility of missed call performance. In the case of the builders merchant, the organisation rectified the problem by implementing a managed service for centralising company wide call data. Information can be viewed at local and corporate level. More importantly the implementation from planning to commissioning was completed within six weeks and this equates to minimum disruption to the business for a solution that goes a long way to improving and managing customer expectations.

Looking at this in a bit more detail, missed calls from existing customers cause frustration when they are seeking a resolution and are required to call repeatedly because calls or messages go unheeded. When the telephone is put in the hands of trained, well equipped and empathetic staff, customer experiences can be significantly improved and maintained. A courteous ring back becomes a higher quality customer experience. When customers know they can rely on quick telephone resolutions, missed call management can counterbalance shortcomings in

other channels. If call data is also linked to a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, members of staff can use that information to make the caller feel 'known'. This is one of the soft benefits experienced in the builders merchant example. Technology that served the needs of corporate management frustrated the work of customer facing staff. They were simply ill equipped to engage effectively with telephone traffic. By introducing call and CRM visibility, staff became more motivated, morale rose and this bodes well for improved sales performance.

... BT research warns that 69% of customers calling a business will hang up instead of leaving a message....

Missed calls from potential new customers are potentially lost sales – the caller may be mildly irritated but can move on to a competitor. BT research warns that 69% of customers calling a business will hang up instead of leaving a message[?]. As the mobile phone example demonstrates the absence of a message does not prevent staff making a reasonably informed response when a simple Call Reporting facility is integrated to the telephone system.

Use the right technology

Simple system solution

A surprisingly limited amount of telephone technology can provide the means to protect business and catch new customers by ensuring every call from an unknown number is answered rapidly. All that is required is to display the call data to enable staff to make informed responses that make first time callers and existing customers feel valued. A successfully operating system in large multi-site organisations and SMEs is iC Suite*.

This type of system enables employees using landline telephony to make better informed ring backs knowing the number of attempts the agnostic or first time caller made trying to contact the company, the period over which these abortive calls were made and whether these calls occurred during or outside normal business hours. Management and customer facing staff know if the issue was resolved.

This is a simple and practical instance of turning a negative customer experience into a positive one. It demonstrates to the caller that the company is making an effort to respond and the good will generated by this effort is carried forward by staff that are able to resolve the issue, whether for product information, corporate business or a complaint.

Improving inbound-call visibility enables a company to optimise staff levels according to the dynamics of call volumes. One option is to use a call centre but this does not necessarily eradicate the causes of frustration such as queuing, call bouncing and unresolved voicemails. Contact centre agents are not usually as informed as dedicated department staff and any resistance by agents to escalate calls can intensify resentment. Call centre data may show the call was answered by an Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) system but not that the issue was resolved for the customer. A BBC News report ⁴ quoting a 2012 National Audit Office survey about delays to answering HMRC hotlines included telling details such as “calls were counted as answered even when transferred to an automated message rather than an adviser”.

Futile attempts to log calls as answered when the issue is unresolved are another common customer-engagement mistake. It degrades customer experience and as statistics show, the company is unlikely to receive further unprompted calls from dissatisfied callers in a high percentage of cases. This type of customer-engagement mistake is easily avoided using a managed ring back system. Extremely high call volumes may mean longer delays to call backs but at least they can be better informed and avoid multiple handoffs that make it difficult to do business with the company.

When customers know that informed ring backs are reliably returned within an acceptable time frame they are generally happy to leave voicemails. Ring backs can be more efficient than queuing, allowing the caller to attend to other business.

Use the right specification

Whether you choose to manage call reporting on site or as an outsourced SaaS the minimum specification should provide the following capabilities:

- Collect call data from multiple telephony sources
- Itemise incoming and outgoing calls
- Monitor missed calls
- Have multi-site reach with branch level call reporting
- Use real-time call reporting at branch level
- Generate reports to all levels of management via dash boards
- Use web-based dashboards with real-time updates to enable informed calls to be returned within agreed timeframes

Summary of management key needs:

- In-depth understanding of call metrics for measuring KPIs
- Visibility of metrics such as who called, was the call answered, returned, the duration before returning the call, whether the call was resolved.
- Centralised CRM using controlled edits to reduce errors and the facility for matching missed call data against customer details.
- Inform decision makers - senior executives involved with strategic direction such as forward capacity planning to deal with seasonal bursts of customer activity.

Guiding principles**Guiding principles for managing good customer experiences**

The objective is to turn visitors into customers before they become lost prospects. This is not done by quantifying missed calls but ensuring the calls become profitable resolutions.

Key steps:

1. Use the telephone statistics to customise and personalise the user experience.

2. Discover how many calls are missed and understand how efficiently they are resolved.
3. Discover how many missed calls are resolved by staff call backs.
4. Define success criteria (a response, call back or final resolution etc).
5. Establish what types of calls should be resolved personally or dealt with via a contact centre, or a hybrid of the two.
6. Develop workflows / business process accordingly.
7. Calculate call response timescales and relate to agreed KPIs or SLAs. These will usually depend on the critical nature of a service and what is an acceptable response to customers.
8. Offer a guaranteed response time for a call back. This will help manage customers' expectations and safeguard experiences if empathetically managed.
9. Track end-to-end visitor experiences from the initial inbound call through to call resolution.
10. Response time is not an unqualified priority. It should be designed to meet the expectations of the customer. A builder with contract staff on site, for example, needs fairly rapid reassurance about delivery times to site or if materials are in stock and need to be collected. By comparison, patients will be satisfied if a routine call from a doctor's surgery is returned after a longer period.

Conclusions

Call management is an efficient means of rescuing potentially lost sales and providing good customer experiences. The data captured provides the information to better understand customer behaviour in a liberated digital economy and supports the marketing objective of befriending the customer. An important element of customer-centric business practice is to provide a transactional environment in which the customer is always happy. This can be difficult to achieve when companies simultaneously need to improve operational efficiencies.

Call Management helps by ensuring missed calls, for example, need never go unresolved. Core employees equipped with real-time computer screens are able to deal with dynamic changes in call volumes by following up calls they were unable to answer previously. With some knowledge of the difficulty callers experienced in trying to contact the company, an informed and courteous telephone response then delivers the good experience.

Customers are satisfied when they know a company can be relied upon to return a call. They need not even leave a message. Call management can make a huge difference to a company's bottom line. This white paper has given one example of a large builders merchant who turned missed calls into a business opportunity in which they could target 46.7% of missed calls that could add almost £84m to the top line. 'Technology changes but problems remain the same' need not be true. Call Management for one builders merchant can make a massive difference.

About iC Suite

*iC suite award winning business analytics solution is proven to drive major improvements in customer service through missed call management and resolution.

About Tollring



Turning communications into business insight, to solve real business challenges at the touch of a button.

For 20 years Tollring has provided feature-rich, technologically advanced and cost effective communications management solutions. Their unique software and technology-enabled services help manage, understand and control a wide array of business related information, resources and assets.

With over 4000 customers globally, Tollring continues to develop innovative solutions that compliment business processes, facilitate regulatory compliance and ultimately save customers time and money, delivering a clear ROI. Tollring solutions meet a broad cross-section of business and operational needs, demonstrated through case studies and referrals.

Tollring's portfolio of cloud based and locally installed applications includes:

- **iC suite** enterprise resource analytics for large multi-site enterprises
- **icall suite** complete call management (call recording, reporting, CTI, automated dialling and contact centre analytics), offering the richest functionality for managing telecoms systems, billing, contact centre and agents.

The award-winning solution iC suite helps large and growing companies to understand the true cost of operations. The solution combines software and services to help IT, Finance and Procurement understand, control and reduce spend in a highly effective way. By gathering data from direct and indirect costs assigned to every location, asset and resource, iC suite transforms data into actionable intelligence, helping companies to visualise, understand and manage resources better.

Fully scalable for any size of business, icall suite provides all the business tools you need for your phone system through an easy to use interface, dashboards, wallboards and customisable widgets.

Tollring solutions have been successfully deployed to large corporate customers across a range of sectors including; local government, blue light, healthcare, higher education as well as to mid – large private companies.

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