THE ANATOMY OF A GOOD CALL

A guide to what makes your agents tick, what a good call looks like, what you should be measuring and how you should be measuring it.

From the much loved Anatomy of a good call blog series.
CHAPTERS

YOUR AGENTS BRAIN ................................................................. 1
BEST PRACTICE ................................................................. 2
MEASUREMENT ................................................................. 10
WHAT A GOOD CALL WILL LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE .......... 14

WE HAD SOME HELP
We enlisted the expertise of Carolyn Blunt to contribute to the best practice chapter in this article. Carolyn is an industry expert and consultant trainer for contact centres. You can find her at this address emberrealresults.com

ABOUT SCOREBUDDY
Scorebuddy is an award winning, purpose built software solution for the contact centre industry.
The tool enables the quality manager to assess and manage staff performance across multiple channels, identifying trends, pinpointing issues... improving customer sentiment.
CHAPTER 1. YOUR AGENTS BRAIN

YOUR AGENTS ARE AMAZING! As you can see from the above illustration, every time they are on a call they are using their Frontal, Parietal & Temporal Lobes! Who'd have thunk it?

You have probably read a number of articles online about the different elements that each “good call” will have in common. We will talk about that in the next post, but for now let’s take a step back and look at the raw materials… the parts of the brain that your agents will need to be using during a call.

THE FRONTAL LOBE
The Frontal Lobe takes up 41% of the brain and is the seat of much of our thinking, judgement and creativity. Your Agents will need to think on their feet (or in their seat) when a question from a customer is off-script. Do they treat all calls the same or quickly learn the nature of the call and caller. Their tone of voice could be a make-or-break element to the call. When a customer asks a tricky question, maybe there’s a clever work-around that the Agent could suggest, maybe even think of something while on the call/chat? Your agents will have to use their judgment on certain calls where the conversation takes a more antagonistic turn.

THE PARIETAL LOBE
The Parietal lobe is key to our communications skills. Your Agent’s choice of language and tone makes a difference to the outcome. You can script a conversation can and you can train your Agents to respond to many different types of call but their choice of language and tone will impact on how the caller perceives that interaction. This might sound a little obvious, but let’s not underestimate the importance of being able to read while under pressure on a call. We forget how difficult citing information from very detailed terms and conditions while under pressure.

THE TEMPORAL LOBE
This is where our feelings live and where we store short term memories. Showing empathy could be the difference between a successful or a negative call. Empathy comes more naturally to some of your agents. Identify those agents that aren’t as strong in this area and work with them to help them understand the impact. Learning of course is important (might we even say it’s a no brainer?). There is the initial getting-up-to-speed training that they will need to go through and then there is the information specific to the interaction that must be learned on the fly.

Even after all of the onboarding is done and your agents are up to speed with your processes; your agents will remain as individuals. And as individuals they will possess skillsets that differ from your other agents. Some might be good on the phone, some might be better suited to the written word.

This is important to remember when choosing which agents work with the different channels.
CHAPTER 2: BEST PRACTICE

During their job interview your agents will have said that they are great communicators. You will have assessed their language skills, their ability to do the job technically, their levels of empathy and their general demeanour. You thought they were of a high standard (you did hire them after all!) so now could be a good time to perform an audit?

We have outlined some of the most important elements of the call below and industry expert Carolyn Blunt (Real Results Training) has agreed to add some coaching tips for us.

TONE OF VOICE

Most of us will adjust our tone of voice during every day personal conversations. When we talk to our managers, colleagues, grannies, children or even our pets, we will use a slightly different tone to match that of the other person.

What tone should your agents be looking for? Your customers are important and so your agents should be trying to match their tone of voice. This will create some level of empathy and will help the conversation/interaction.

At a base level your agents should be reasonably confident & upbeat.

Our tone of voice and how we articulate ourselves is so important. It represents your brand. But, how we think we perform on a call can be very different to how we actually come across.

Have you ever listened to a recording of your own voice? Most of us have at some point and more often than not we are surprised at how we sound. This is the most powerful way to learn how you really sound to others! - Carolyn Blunt

COACHING TIP: A scorecard will give a measured/consistent account of the agents performance, what it won't do is give the real ‘feel’ of the call. Sitting side by side to listen and evaluate a few calls together every month is invaluable. It is important that they don't feel bad or embarrassed so try to make them as comfortable as possible. Treat it as an opportunity to learn, remember you don't have to be ill to get better! Having your agents so confident that they choose the calls they struggled with and want to review together is a sure sign that you've cracked it! Ensure you document the outcomes of coaching sessions and continue to encourage and support them daily when you hear them trying out what you discussed.
LISTEN CAREFULLY
This will sound obvious, but listening is still the most important skill of all. There is nothing worse than knowing that you aren’t really being listened to at the other end of call, chat or email. Your agents will have answered the same questions over and over, but they can’t afford to be complacent.

Agents are generally under pressure to deal with customers and close the call as quickly as possible so as to open the next call ASAP. When the call centre is extra busy, agents will sometimes not pause for breath. This might look and sound like they are performing at an optimum level, but how is this speedy performance being perceived by the customer at the other end of the call? It also quickly fatigues your agents. The risk is that when an agent rushes a call, the customer will feel that they are not being listened to. - Carolyn Blunt

COACHING TIP: A rushed call will mean that the agent will not be able to listen carefully to the customer and as a result they will miss clues and signals and won’t be able to personalise the call. This is important for a good customer experience.

Work with your resource planners and the agent to ensure that they take a brief pause between calls. This brief pause can be used to process any data from the previous call, or even just to take a breath! It pays off in the long run not to rush through calls as this can cause errors, escalations and/or repeat call volume.

SPEAK AT A NORMAL SPEED
This is customer service... not sales. We are not trying to convince the caller to buy something, we are trying to help them with a problem. Their issue is important to them, they have taken the time to call... your agents should take the time to have the conversation with them. Speaking too fast can cause a sense of duress, and that could turn what would be a run-of-the-mill call into a complaint call.

Let’s not forget that when your agents are on a call they are relying on their listening and speaking voice alone. Speed is the obvious area to look at first, but don’t forget about accents and dialects.

An experienced agent will adapt the speed at which they speak on a call to suit the customer. For example a busy professional won’t want to hang around, but an elderly caller or someone who doesn’t have English as a first language may require a slower pace. However even the most experienced agents can be prone to speed issues at the end of their shift, or at the end of their working week. This speed can occur as a result of the desire to finish a call when their shift is over or it can come from the excitement of an approaching weekend. - Carolyn Blunt
COACHING TIP: This tip is really directed towards the management team. Put simply it’s about paying your agents back when they continue calls past the end of their shift. Most call centres use a system that measures the time that an agent is engaged on a call. This system is often seen in a negative light by agents and is essentially seen as ‘big brother’. Controlling and monitoring toilet breaks and talk time negatively is what gives call centres a bad name. Think about the culture you want to create. Are you supporting your agents to be happy and positive about their role?

If your agents work overtime ensure that the time is returned to them. This will change the perception of the IT system, the management team and will of course improve the culture in the call centre.

USE OF LANGUAGE
Did you know that “55% of the meaning in our words is derived from facial expressions, whereas only 7% is in the actual words spoken”? (Albert Mehrabian). This helps to remind us of the importance of language when your agents aren’t face-to-face with your customers. A couple of tweaks to how your agents engage with your customers can make a big difference to the overall call/result.

For most call centres, the pursuit to maintain a consistently high quality of call (with a high turnover of staff, often from different nationalities) means that certain call types, or at least parts of them are given guidance with scripts. A loosely scripted call does have its merits, for example, it keeps things on track and negative language can be taken out of the call completely. However, in modern times we don’t want to feel like ‘just another caller’. We want the agent to personalise the experience to suit us; and that rapport is vital in order to reach that top level of customer service. - Carolyn Blunt

COACHING TIP: You’ve trained your agents well... give them the freedom to be themselves. They should be encouraged to use appropriate humour, especially in live chat and social media interactions. Explaining to agents why you want them to feel like they can express themselves will promote a sense of trust between the management and the rest of the team. Help them understand what is appropriate and what isn’t by sharing examples and practicing answers together.

EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING
There are a few types of questions that are often used during your average call/email or chat. Open questions get the conversation started, probing questions enable the agent to get into the nitty-gritty of the issue. Closed questions have their place too... as long as that place is at the end. Always start with open questions about the subject at hand, this will give you all the information you require to take the conversation further.
STOP USING SPREADSHEETS

We know that that sounds harsh, but we have seen this over and over again.

A large percentage of our customers were using spreadsheets and came to us looking for help with their quality assessment. Spreadsheets are great for lots of things, just not quality assessment. For quality assessment you need to have a platform that will record and store data, identify trends, highlight problem areas and report on your teams performance. Spreadsheets aren't so great at this.

MEETING REMINDER: 5 MINUTES OVERDUE

Quality meeting with the Customer Services Director.
- Report
- Update
- Issues

Dismiss

STOP USING SPREADSHEETS

Scorecards are created, scored and stored online. Create a scorecard for every occasion and modify your scorecards at any time without breaking reports!

EASY TO USE
A logical set of menus with everything at your fingertips, flexible ‘User Categories’ control access and the activity log tracks user input for auditing.

ENGAGE AGENTS
Agents trust scorebuddy for accurate, consistent evaluations, viewing scores and comments from their desktop, listening to calls and even self-scoring!

EMPOWER TEAM LEADERS
Team Leaders rapidly identify behaviours for intervention. Attach calls, email or screen grabs for easy access during reviews.

IMPROVED CUSTOMER SATISFACTION
Using scorebuddy improves the performance of customer service staff which significantly boosts customer satisfaction.

ACTIONABLE DATA
Analytics visualises variations and exceptions, drill through to identify root causes, highlight best practice and top and bottom performers.

NO IT REQUIRED
Your FREE TRIAL provides templates and a user guide to get you started, import staff details from a CSV file and get scoring!

visit: www.scorebuddyqa.com
Open questions: Using closed questions at the start of a conversation will set the call off to a bad start and make getting the information a lot more painful. An open question will identify the issues quickly, while developing empathy. An open question begins with a Who/What/When/Where/Why or a How; and can’t be answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’. I’d re-write that question to ‘When did the problem first start?’

Probing questions: This is the stage of the questioning which will allow you to delve deeper into the customer's answers, finding out the reasons and emotions behind those answers.

Closed questions: Asking closed questions (i.e. questions which only allow a yes or no answer) allows you to confirm both your and the customer’s understanding of what has been discussed in that specific line of questioning. It will also show the customer that you have been listening!

Questioning is one of the most important skills in the agents arsenal. The agent would start off with a few detailed questions such as membership numbers, name, address etc.

‘Floodlight questions’ will then enable the agent to develop a real understanding of the customers’ needs and how best to serve them. ‘Spotlight’ questions will allow the agent to focus in on the more specific details.

Different questioning types will serve different goals. For example: If I wanted to know what your favourite colour was I would just ask you... ‘What’s your favourite colour?’ A ‘floodlight’ question like this will get your agent the information they need, as efficiently as possible. If I used ‘Spotlight’ questions ‘Is it red?’ ‘Is it blue?’ we could be there for half an hour until I guess correctly! - Carolyn Blunt

COACHING TIP: Floodlight questions work well at the start of the call and then focus can be narrowed down with spotlight questions. Lead by example. Supervisors should demonstrate the mastery of questioning during training sessions (of course) as well as during agent coaching reviews. An agent will stay motivated and learn far better if you stimulate their thinking and ask them ‘What do you think could be even better in this call?’ rather than simply telling them your opinion!

BUILDING RAPPORT
Building rapport with customers is a lot like building rapport with people that we might meet socially. Respect and understanding are non-negotiable and some ice-breaking should be thrown into the mix.

Breaking the ice. As with most interactions, those first few seconds are all important because they can set the tone for the rest of the call. An already happy customer just checking a balance for example can have another great experience and a good start to a call can disarm even the most annoyed of customers.
**Listening carefully.** This will sound obvious but listening is so important that it requires a mention... Now that you have broken the ice with the customer, really listening to the customer is vital. Nothing will annoy a customer more than if they think that they aren’t being listened to.

**Mirror the customer.** When we are face-to-face we often mirror the people we are speaking to. This is proven to be a subconscious act in order to build rapport or empathise with people. This could be anything from the way we are sitting to folding our arms, or even flicking our hair. Your agents need to be behaving similarly, their challenge here is to be able to get this mirroring across via the phone or chat.

> People like people who are similar to themselves. Building rapport with customers is, of course, really important to the success of the call (and the organisation as a whole!). There are some easy comments that an agent can make that will immediately warm the customer to the agent. For example: if the customer has lost their eye glasses and cannot read their membership number, the agent could respond with an “Oh yes, I lose my glasses all of the time!” Phrases in their kitbag like ‘I do that too!’ ‘Oh I know, I’m exactly the same’ when said with sincerity can reassure and build rapport.
> - Carolyn Blunt

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**CLOSING THE CALL/CHAT**

Agents (especially new starters) can sometimes be guilty of getting off a call or chat too quickly. A lot of contact centres have tried to address this by scripting the end of call message, but depending on the execution, this could come across as just that... scripted.

- Confirm what is going to happen after the call ends. What will I do, What will you do, etc
- Be proactive: Is there something you need to tell them to prevent future problems or unnecessary calls?
- Ask if there are ‘any other questions’. Many customers think of something else just as the call ends but it’s lost when you rush them off the phone.
- Genuinely thank them. For their time, their business, for being a long-time customer, for being understanding – whichever response is appropriate.
- Introduce some personality into the interaction. Instead offer some appreciation based on the nature of the call.
- Use their name. Build this into the ending. Using their name during your appreciation statement is a great way to personalize it.
'Signposting' is the term I use to describe how the customer service advisor can steer the caller through a call, especially at the closing. Examples might include: ‘So to confirm, the application of that credit will allow you to pay our most recent invoice: is that how you'd like to use it?’

Where a caller is going off on a tangent: ‘Coming back to the original query about the returned garments, can I take it you are happy with what we have agreed?’

‘Just to confirm Mrs Smith, our engineer will call to your home tomorrow around 11am and you will be available then?’

One thing to watch out for is the use of the contact centre cliché ‘is there anything else I can help you with?’ at the end of the call. It's like a red rag to a bull if you haven’t actually been able to help the customer in the first place. So I strongly suggest that you don’t make it mandatory signpost phrase on your scorecard! - Carolyn Blunt
ANALYTICS

With Scorebuddy, agents get their own dashboards showing their quality scores and giving them the facility to self-score. Watch as they up their game before you've even had a performance review, empowered by the metrics and the trust you've placed in them.

Learn more
CHAPTER 3: MEASUREMENT

We read a great article recently by Forbes on measurement where they were debunking the dogma that ‘If you can't measure it you can't manage it!’ They argue that the important stuff can’t be measured.

We sit somewhere in between with the thinking that you should of course continue to measure those traditional metrics (eg. average handling time etc.) but customer expectations around service have escalated dramatically over recent years and so you really need to investigate those softer metrics (eg. Did the agent attempt to build rapport with the customer?).

THE USUAL PRODUCTIVITY METRICS

Typically Call Centers measure calls handled, average handle time or first contact resolution. In the case of a sales team the number of sales closed is often tied to performance. These are all justified and important to track, however, how do you REALLY know that you are providing a quality service?

You need to be able to dig deeper into your quality assessment to understand how your team are performing. You also need to talk to the wider business about how each call should be measured. Operations will have a view on what’s important, the Marketing department will have another view and so on.

The usual productivity metrics ARE important, we recommend that you localize your quality assessment. Take a step back and identify those metrics that will tell you about how your agents are performing for your organization.

WHAT SHOULD YOU BE MEASURING?

We learned from chapter 2 that a good call should cover the following areas:

- The tone of voice used
- The importance of listening carefully
- The Language that your agents use is very important
- Did the agent use effective questioning?
- Was the problem solved?
- Did the agent build rapport?
- Did the agent close the call/chat well?
When compared to traditional metrics, these areas are more difficult to measure as they require a much closer look at each agent, but this is a really worthwhile process and will tell you a lot more about both your customers and your agents.

If your team has a sales element to their calls (if the response from the customer dictates whether the call is deemed to be a good one or a bad one) it is important to remember that a poor performance from an agent can still result in a sale whereas a great performance may not. You need to understand ‘why’ you did or did not make that sale. Traditional metrics will not reflect this, you need to look closer at the call.

We cannot control the result of each call, we can however control the standard of the service that we are proving each day. What you should be looking for is a consistently great performance from your team. Control the controllables.

Obviously we aren't suggesting that you do away with the traditional metrics, keep them! We do suggest however that you also measure the soft skills in the areas that we have outlined above.

WHAT ABOUT COMPLIANCE?
Compliance and regulation are necessary evils, resulting in repetitive scripts and some restrictions on agent behaviour. Your QA tool should take account of compliance, tracking pass/fail rates, identifying consistent offenders and breach behaviours. More importantly breaches should be alerted to supervisors immediately to be addressed. Providing the regulator with a robust audit will reduce your risk profile.

REPORTING
So this month was a good month. What if I asked you about last month? Or how does this month compare to the same time last year? If you are using spreadsheets to monitor the quality of your customer service, these questions are probably making you feel pretty uncomfortable right about now J.

KEEP ALL OF THE DATA IN ONE PLACE
If you are using spreadsheets to manage this process then you will probably be used to losing data-sets. End of quarter or end of year meetings are often proceeded by the stress of amalgamating the weekly/monthly reports. It is really important that you keep all of your data in one place. You can successfully report on all of the data with ease. You will also be able to dig down into specific incidents with a couple of clicks. Try doing this with a spreadsheet!
REPORTING TO MANAGEMENT
Dashboard reporting is the answer. You can see how this month compares to any other time period at the click of a button. One of our customers (that was using spreadsheets) has written a review of Scorebuddy where they claim that ‘Scorebuddy has given them their Mondays back’. Your reporting needs to have this capability.

REPORTING TO THE AGENT
Rarely do we see any mention of the agent as being a part of the reporting loop. This is crazy! The agents are key stakeholders in the reporting. Feedback about the performance of the team is really important not just so that the agent will have an understanding of how their team is doing and how they can improve, but it’s critical for morale. Human Resources IQ have a great article on the importance of morale to staff.

We really understand the importance of engagement with agents, so much so that we have developed a module within Scorebuddy that enables supervisors and managers to engage with the agents, providing the agent with a report on their individual performance as well as a being a platform for 1 to 1 communications between supervisor and agent. The feedback from customers is that the agents really respond to this. It’s called Agent Insight, check it out!
With Scorebuddy, agents get their own dashboards showing their quality scores and giving them the facility to self-score. Watch as they up their game before you've even had a performance review, empowered by the metrics and the trust you've placed in them.

Learn more
How you will interact with your customers will of course change significantly in the coming years.

We believe that video will be the norm in just a few years. Why? Look at how young people are talking to each other today. They will expect to be able to interact with you via this medium in the near future.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT WILL A GOOD CALL LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

Do you remember the discos that you used to go to when you were 16? If you met somebody nice you would have asked for/given them your phone number right? Well that’s not happening anymore (I asked my nephew). Now people are ‘adding’ each other on Facebook (or whatever the app of the day is).

How we connect socially has changed and will continue to change. How we shop, how we complain, how we expect to be served by brands has changed.

Look at how your niece/nephew/son/daughter talk to their friends, this will give a strong indication as to which channels you will need to serve in the future. This will also give you an idea of the expectations that your customers will have during these interactions.

YOUR CUSTOMERS’ EXPECTATIONS

Your customers’ expectations have changed a lot in the last 10 years. Online shopping has dramatically increased the standard of service that we expect from brands. Amazon.com has raised the stakes in customer service for everyone, never before has it been so easy to research and buy products online. Amazon.com is famed for its checkout process, where it is held up as an example of ‘best-in-class’ for speed and usability.

Now consider this scenario... your customer has just ordered something from Amazon in record time, the whole process was intuitive and everything went well. Now that person is starting a ‘chat’ with one of your customer service team looking for help with their account... the pressure is on!

Not only is your customer service team being compared with the competition, your customer service team is being compared with every website out there (regardless of sector). This might seem unfair, but this is what’s happening.

A recent article by ICMI looked at the top 10 trends that are changing customer expectations. The main findings were as follows:

- Social media is changing the definition of what’s “fast”
- The online world is changing how efficient we expect a business to be
- The rise of self-service has led to a generation happy to help themselves
- The “always on” culture means customers expect 24/7 service (or as close as possible)
- E-commerce has become commonplace – and shoppers no longer expect to pay for the convenience of it
- Channel or device-hopping habits mean customers expect OmniChannel service
- Social media has made customers feel more empowered
- The data-driven online world means consumers expect a personalized service
- Our mobile-focused culture means customers expect your site and customer service to be “mobile-friendly”
- Social media means customers expect you to be “listening”
- The importance of meeting your customers’ expectations

Do not meet their expectations and they will be disappointed (you don’t want this). Meet your customers’ expectations and they will be happy. Exceed their expectations and they will be delighted.

This all seems pretty straightforward but it is important to recognise this before you start putting a quality framework in place. This understanding will let you know what service levels are expected to keep customers happy. A considered framework that is well implemented will enable your agents to provide the opportunity to exceed these expectations; creating advocates – and this is the Holy Grail.

These changes described above help us understand what the new ‘call’ will look like (albeit in many guises) but the real challenge we face is how we handle these interactions while at the same time maintaining customer satisfaction. Here are our ideas on how best to achieve that.

MANAGERS NEED TO REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEIR CUSTOMERS

Contact centres in general will record the standard metrics like; calls waiting, first call resolution, time to answer etc. These are important and of course you should continue to measure them.

However, we have learned from our customers that these metrics are not necessarily a hard-and-fast way of measuring a good call; understanding what a good call looks like can be more complicated than that.

For instance, if you look at the average-handling-time metric, the desired result might be a speedy call. However, getting through a call with a customer as quickly as possible can be a good or a bad thing.

A good example of this would be to look at two calls taken by a reservations agent at a hotel. Their first call might be a customer looking for the most affordable room in the hotel, the second might be somebody looking to rent out the entire second floor for a conference.
The second call will take longer because there will be a huge amount of detail to get through, there will probably be a negotiation on price and the conversation in general will be very different to that of the conversation with the first caller.

If we apply the average-handling-time metric to these calls, the performance of the agent on the second call will be considered to be not as 'good' as their performance on the first call. So does that make the second call a poor performance? Of course not.

What we are saying here is that while the old metrics are still important, different calls can have different requirements, leading to different outcomes. These calls cannot be assessed using the same yardsticks. Contact centre managers need to be more fluid when assessing the quality of these interactions.

Whatever the brand, whatever the product, understanding what is really important to your customers is paramount. You may have already established what is really important to your customers, but how long ago did you do that?

Peoples’ expectations have changed a lot in recent years, what you perceive as important to them might be worth another look.

**AVERAGE HANDLING TIME**

Average Handling Time is one of those metrics that has been around since, well... since forever.

The customer experience is now at the centre of how call centres are handling calls around the world. The idea that a customer might be rushed off a call in order to meet performance metrics sounds crazy in todays' call centres but it does happen. As a result, a growing number of call centres have stopped using the AHT metric.

Carolyn Blunt from Real Results Training is an expert on this topic having been working in the industry as a training consultant for the last 13 years. Her own take is that we should take a balanced view towards AHT, to not throw the baby out with the bathwater so to speak.

“My own personal opinion is very much that AHT is not the bad guy and that its' bad reputation has come from scenarios where it has been used incorrectly. If we rush customers off the call all we will do is increase the volume of repeat calls. That said, if we take the focus off AHT altogether then we will end up with planning going out the window, we will end up with long wait times for customers in queues, and that will of course will negatively impact the customer experience. So it's very important that we do keep a focus on AHT and that we don't follow this this recent trend of removing the targets and all the visibility that comes from that”.

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**Be careful how you use the AHT metric.**

**You should look for a balance somewhere between spending too much time with a customer and rushing through the interaction.**

**You should continue to use AHT, but we suggest that you use it as a guide rather than a rule.**
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“With that said, there is a further distinction to make, which is that targeting AHT (talk time) at advisor level can be very dangerous. That has caused a lot of the bad rep that AHT has garnered. Instead, using average talk time peer group comparisons as a coaching tool and as a way of identifying training needs, is key. Notice where there are significant delays (due to lack of advisor knowledge/confidence), loss of control, too much unnecessary information ‘pushed’ on the customer, excessive use of hold etc. This is where good efficiencies can be gained that also improve CSAT”. - Carolyn Blunt

As we have mentioned in previous posts/articles, the traditional metrics are sound and should definitely continue to be used, but into the future, if we are to get the customer experience right, we need to be looking closer at the actual content of the call. We need to be looking at sentiment, building rapport etc. not just measuring how long that call took to close.

EVERY CUSTOMER MUST BE TREATED WITH THE SAME LEVEL OF SERVICE
This might sound like an oldie, but treating every customer with the same level of respect and patience has never been as important. Why is that?

If a famous person for example contacted your customer service team there is a good chance that the agent that took the call would do their very best to make sure that the call was a success. Famous people have lots of friends and would be considered to be an influencer among them.

Today, with social media, influencers come in all shapes and sizes, and often come without a recognisable face or name. A bad experience for one of these influencers could damage your brand reputation very quickly.

HOW DO YOUR AGENTS COME ACROSS VIA EMAIL OR CHAT?
Most contact centre managers will have started their careers during a time when customers would contact the customer service team by phone exclusively.
Email, social media and live chat are the channel of choice amongst young people, and those young people will grow up to be regular adults, and when that happens, email, social media and live chat will become the norm.

As a result, the agents of the future will need to be able to communicate clearly and on brand via the written word. That is a skill that might not necessarily be present in your team.

REVISE WHAT YOU HAVE DECIDED ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS’ EXPECTATIONS AND ADJUST HOW YOU SCORE YOUR AGENTS ACCORDINGLY
This might sound strange... but are you over delivering? Would your customers have been happy to wait a bit longer for a response?

The customer channel will often dictate the expectations. Your customer will want a phone call to be answered as quickly as possible. A live chat should
be answered in less than 30 seconds, and the expected response time to an email could be closer to 24 hours.

We had a conversation recently with a customer about expectations and customer satisfaction. This customer used our voice survey product to survey their customers post call with regards to response time.

This customer wanted to investigate how a reduction in response time would affect customer satisfaction. They boldly reduced their response time by 20% and this had... wait for it... zero effect on satisfaction levels.

This freed a number of staff up and they were able to work in other areas of the business. With a large number of staff, even a half % reduction in resources can have a significant impact. Once you have decided on what are realistic expectations for customers contacting you, publish them. Transparency of service performance will become the norm for customers.

When did you decide on the level of your current customers’ expectations?

CROSS POLLINATE YOUR AGENTS

We attended a presentation recently given by another customer where they spoke about staffing and attrition rates. They learned that their staff fell into 2 categories, those that were looking for a career in the call centre space and those that were just looking for a job.

When looking at those that were considering a career in the call centre space, they realised that getting staff trained up on different channels/desks helped to develop the agents understanding of the business and its products.

As the agent moves between the different channels (calls, chat, email etc) they will bring with them some best practices that might be lacking in other channels and may be able to highlight these to the channel manager. For example, the usual warm greeting on a call might not be part of the live chat template. The brevity of a twitter post might highlight the fact that an email is too wordy.

We call this cross pollination.

CHANGE HOW YOU LISTEN TO YOUR AGENTS

Staff surveys are another way of checking on what is working and not, and whether the key brand thrusts are understood and being delivered.

Regular, short surveys to your agents will help to keep a healthy dialogue between agents and team leaders/ supervisors/managers. This will also help to make your agents feel more valued and engaged.
Multichannel? Try Anychannel!

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