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Contact Centers

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by Réal Bergevin and Allen Wyatt



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Introduction

Welcome to *Contact Centers For Dummies*, Avaya Limited 2nd Edition. Executives and analysts alike realize more than ever that the contact center can have a tremendous impact on their overall business in the areas of revenue, costs, market intelligence, and customer loyalty.

A contact center is many things — cost center, profit center, key source of revenue, key source of frustration, strategic weapon, strategic disadvantage, source of marketing research, source of marketing paralysis — all depending on the goals and capabilities of the contact center.

With the emergence of worldwide competition in the contact center business, working from a defined methodology is becoming increasingly important. This guide attempts to provide a high-level approach to the different methodologies you can use, with lots of information not only on running contact centers, but also on implementing technology in contact centers in a profitable way.

How This Book Is Organized

Contact Centers For Dummies is organized into six parts, each covering a different aspect of contact centers from resource management to the latest technologies that can help you plan for the future. Any approach you take to tackling *Contact Centers For Dummies* is fine. Most people, however, will get the most out of this book by jumping right into Part I.

In Part I, “Contact Centers: A First Look,” you get a good overview of contact centers. It’s especially useful for those who are just getting started or who want to refresh their understanding of contact center basics or of current trends in contact center management.

Part II, “Business Basics: Models and Drivers and Goals, Oh My!,” is especially for those planning a new contact center. You find a potential business model for building a contact center and relate that model to the larger corporate mission.

Next comes Part III, “The Master Plan for Management.” This part looks at contact center analysis, financial planning, and staffing. Included is a simple overview of how (and what) measures come together to drive contact center operational and financial performance.

Part IV, “Making It Go: An Introduction to Contact Center Technology,” covers the basic contact center technologies. You discover the various ways of getting contacts to the center, information to the agents, and information to customers.

In Part V, “Technological Enhancements: Getting the Newest and Coolest Stuff,” you get into the fun stuff. Here you find the latest and greatest technologies available for updating and improving your contact center, new or existing. (To help you garner support for your toy list, you also find a simple approach to recommending and justifying new technology.)

Part VI, “Ten Ways to Improve Your Contact Center,” provides tips and techniques to boost your company’s revenue and efficiency. All ten suggestions can apply to any contact center, regardless of the types of contacts you handle.

Icons Used in This Book



This is unforgettable stuff — or at least, you don’t want to forget it.



The Tip icon provides you with a general recommendation on how you can make your contact center better, or make running your contact center easier.



This icon designates insider techie information you probably don’t need to know but may find interesting.



This icon flags potential pitfalls you need to be careful of.



These are real-world stories about companies that have found successful technological solutions to a broad range of contact center and network management scenarios from Avaya applications and routing systems.

Part I

Contact Centers: A First Look

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In This Part

- ▶ Defining a contact center
 - ▶ Inbound, outbound, internal, and external designations
 - ▶ Differentiating between good and bad contact centers
 - ▶ A quick glimpse into the future
-

No company operates in a vacuum, devoid of contact with customers or the general public. If you have the need to communicate with others outside of your company (who doesn't?), then you are a prime candidate for developing or using a contact center. Heck, you may already have a contact center and not even know it!

This part introduces you to contact centers — what they are and how they benefit customers and companies. You'll even discover some of the traits that distinguish a good contact center from a bad one. By the end of the part you should have a good grasp of how good management, sound skills, and great technology can help make a good contact center into a great one.

What Is a Contact Center?

We've all seen it — an ad on TV urging you to call right away. It's late at night, and some disgustingly perky announcer is touting the benefit of the latest laser-sharpened steak knives, full-chicken roaster, or Patsy Cline collection. In a moment of weakness, you pick up the phone and feverishly dial the

number on the screen. Within seconds, you are connected to someone willing to send you whatever it is that you can no longer live without. The person on the other end of the phone (who also happens to be way too perky for your 2:00 A.M. call) is undoubtedly part of a contact center, waiting for your call and ready to help.

But wait — there's more! (Sorry; we almost felt perky for a moment.) Contact centers aren't limited to salespeople working late at night. A contact center is the person at the other end of the phone when you call an airline, cable company, technical support, your bank, or favorite retailer.

Sometimes a contact center is just one or two people sitting beside a phone answering or placing customer calls. More often it's a very large room with lots and lots of people neatly organized into rows, sitting beside their phones, managing customer interactions.

But contact centers are more than headset-wearing switchboard operators. The modern contact center handles phone calls, e-mail, online communication, and sometimes even old-fashioned written letters. In short, contact centers deal with any type of contact for a company (other than in-person) — contact with the general public and customers of all types: potential, happy, or even disgruntled. Contact — good, bad, or downright ugly — is the name of the game.



To a customer or client, contact center personnel are the voice and face of the company. If you (as a customer) are angry, you often get mad at the person on the other end of the phone — after all, you're talking to the company, right?

Inbound/outbound

Contact centers communicate with customers in a number of ways, but who initiates the contact defines the type of contact center. If the outside world initiates contact, then the contact center is said to be an inbound contact center. Conversely, if the contact center is responsible for initiating contact, then the contact center is said to be an outbound contact center.

Customers contact inbound centers to buy things, such as airline tickets; to get technical assistance with their personal computer; to get answers to questions about their utility bill;

to get emergency assistance when their car won't start; or for any number of other reasons for which they might need to talk to a company representative.

In outbound centers, representatives from the company initiate the call to customers. Companies might call because the customer hasn't paid a bill, when a product the customer wanted is finally available, to follow up on a problem the customer was having, or to find out what the customer would like to see by way of product or service enhancements.

Outbound contact centers are, most often, very telephone-centric. Whereas inbound centers can handle many different ways of contact, outbound centers most often use telephones because of, well, tradition and perception. It is not unusual for a company's representatives to call a customer on the phone, but it is more unusual for them to send an e-mail that could be negatively perceived as spam.



Some contact centers are called *blended* operations — agents in the center handle both inbound and outbound contact. Blending done well can make contact center operations very cost-effective and can improve service to the customer as well.

Self-service

A new breed of inbound centers is starting to emerge — *self-service* centers. In traditional contact centers, all interaction between the customer and the center is done with human agents. However, in self-service centers a good portion of the load is being shifted toward non-human systems, such as automated response or even speech-enabled.

Automated response systems enable the customer to use the keypad on their phone to answer questions by pushing buttons. Each button push brings them closer to the information they want. Automated response systems have been around for years, giving the customer access to simple (and common) information, such as addresses, balances, and procedural instructions.



Speech-enabled systems are more sophisticated and easier for the customer to use. In such a system the customer actually speaks a response, rather than needing to press keypad buttons. Speech-enabled systems are a great boon for cellphone using customers because they no longer need to perform

gymnastics to keep pressing buttons on their phone. As speech-enabled systems become more sophisticated, customers can ask questions directly to the self-service system and get a wide variety of answers.

Internal/external (or outsourced)

Just as contact centers can be designated as inbound or outbound, they also can be designated as internal or external. (We almost said in-house or out-house, but figured that the unintended allusion might be distracting.) When companies are small, they often develop their own contact center capabilities internally. As companies grow, they often look to outsource their contact center functions, or they spin off those functions to a subsidiary or partner company. This is where the concept of the external contact center comes into play — the center is *external* to the main company.

In fact, companies that provide nothing but contact center functions to other companies have grown into a multi-million-dollar industry. At last count the traditional call center industry employed more than 6 million people in North America alone, and accounted for the sale of more than \$700 billion in goods and services. Through today's contact centers you can purchase, complain, or just talk about almost anything from the comfort of your home, office, car, or wherever you can get to a phone (or log on to the Internet).

Whether your contact center consists of a receptionist and a customer service person or entire departments, the principles by which a contact center are operated are still the same. Thus, the information in this book has applicability regardless of the size of your operation, and regardless of whether your operation is internal or external.

Figuring Out What Makes a Good Contact Center



In general, the things that make a good contact center are also the same things that make a good business. For instance, a good contact center has a strong culture where people work from a common set of values and beliefs and are bound by a

common purpose and a strong focus on the business objectives.

Just as in any business, effective management continually aligns everything the contact center does with its business objectives and desired culture. Generally, as Figure 1-1 illustrates, you can look for your contact center to deliver in three areas:

- ✔ **Revenue generation** includes everything that leads to revenue — sales, upgrades, customer retention, collections, and winning back previously lost customers.
- ✔ **Efficiency** refers to cost-effective operations for the organization — whether this relates to the operation of the contact center or to getting work done for the organization.
- ✔ **Customer satisfaction** is really long-term revenue generation — build customer loyalty and keep them doing business with you. Contact centers should make things easy for the customer. The contact center is available when the customer needs it and has access to all the information necessary to answer customer questions or solve customer problems.

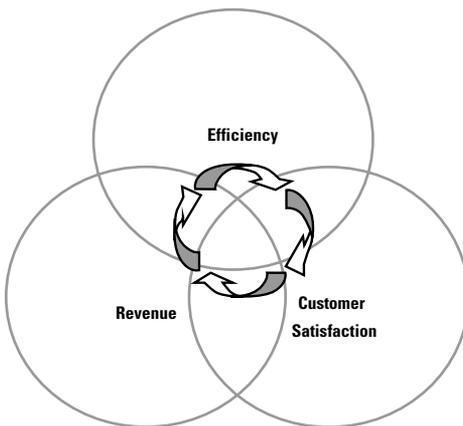


Figure 1-1: Mutually dependent business objectives.

To think that revenue, efficiency, and customer satisfaction are distinct goals is common, but they are, in fact, very much mutually dependent. (Figure 1-1 illustrates this.) Good revenue

generation cannot happen without some level of efficiency, and only satisfied customers will continue to buy a product. And, for customers to remain satisfied, they want the same thing contact centers do when they do business — an efficient transaction. For most customers, talking to your contact center is not the highlight of their day!



When a contact center fails to sell a customer on the first attempt, revenue isn't maximized because customers who really want your service/product must call back. Call-backs of this nature create inefficiency through duplication of effort and also represent poor service. Why make customers do more work to get what they want when they could have been satisfied during the first call?

The good

Not all contact centers are created equal — some are run very well with clearly defined missions, while others are a hodge-podge of people tucked away in a corner trying to poke their fingers in the dike. (Think of the brave work of Hans Brinker in saving his city in Holland.)

When everything is working as it should, a good contact center

- ✔ Focuses on its business goals.
- ✔ Answers customer contacts (phone calls, e-mails, and so on) quickly.
- ✔ Has high employee morale.
- ✔ Resolves a high percentage of customer inquiries on the first contact.
- ✔ Measures customer satisfaction as a service indicator and has high customer satisfaction scores.
- ✔ Provides a significant source of revenue for the organization.
- ✔ Has a good process for collecting and presenting performance data: Everyone knows where they stand monthly, daily, hourly, or in real time.
- ✔ Is efficient — little rework is required: Calls are consistent in length, requiring a minimum of customer time for resolution.

- ✔ Has everyone engaged and busy with a purpose, but with no one overly taxed.
- ✔ Improves processes continually to make constant gains in service, efficiency, and revenue generation.
- ✔ Is seen corporately as a strategic advantage — an ally to the rest of the organization.

Many contact centers are exemplary in their dedication to customers and clients. The real pros in the industry have transformed perceptions so that well-run contact centers are no longer viewed as “money holes” or “necessary evils,” but as profit centers or a real competitive advantage.

In fact, today entire companies are built around contact center capabilities. For example, you may buy a computer from a company that doesn’t have a retail store, or do your banking with a bank that doesn’t have branches — they offer the telephone or Internet as your only contact options.

The bad (and the ugly)

Not all of the changes in contact centers have been viewed as positive. Contact centers and their managers have faced significant challenges. Partially because of the impact that contact centers have had on everyone’s daily lives, and partially because of some bad management and bad business practices, contact centers have raised the ire of consumers and caught the attention of legislators, particularly outbound centers.

Not all contact centers operate in ways beneficial to either themselves or the organization as a whole. These are some things you’d expect to see in a contact center that isn’t working properly:

- ✔ Long delays for customers to get through to “the next available agent,” or long response time to an e-mail
- ✔ Frequent shuffling of customers from agent to agent
- ✔ Customers often left on hold for extended periods of time
- ✔ Customer issues that frequently require multiple contacts before they are resolved
- ✔ Low employee morale and high turnover

Legalities are important

In the United States, overly aggressive telemarketing practices have resulted in laws governing telephone sales, especially who can and cannot be contacted.

These laws affect the way that outbound contact centers can do their work. Inbound centers are similarly touched by the law. Some industries are legislated as to how quickly they must answer incoming calls — a response to poor service and long delays that consumers experienced in the past.

Additionally, privacy legislation adds a level of complexity to how contact centers collect and use identifying and financial information about their customers. Other legislation restricting how and where contact centers can operate is being considered in a number of countries.

Some of the legislative challenges faced by contact centers are the result of poor business practices, some by the success of the industry.

Explosive demand for contact center services, both from business and consumers, taxes the industry's ability to grow in size and capability while maintaining excellence. Still, on balance, contact centers continue to advance in number, capability, sophistication, and excellence for two reasons: They are effective and efficient business tools, and they satisfy the increasing customer demand for convenience.

If your business is running a contact center or thinking of starting a contact center, make sure you fully investigate any of the legalities involved. Legalities are important, and you don't want to land on the wrong side of a legal battle.

- ✔ No way to measure customer satisfaction — or, if there is, scores are low
- ✔ A poor understanding of metrics or performance
- ✔ Harried staff running from crisis to crisis, putting out fires but not getting ahead
- ✔ A lack of improvement in working conditions
- ✔ The wider corporation grumbles about the contact center, complains about costs, and questions the results; some talk about outsourcing

Fortunately, as ugly as the symptoms of a bad contact center are, they can be solved. It takes determination and perhaps a complete “rethinking” of your organization, but solutions do

exist. This book provides a few strategies, tools, and skills to help you control what your contact center produces.

As with any business, a competent and productive contact center is the result of well-planned objectives and conscientious alignment — management needs to align practices so that they are consistent with objectives. When this is done effectively, the contact center will have many characteristics of the good, few if any of the bad, and none of the ugly. A well-run contact center is not an accident. It's a result of good planning and good execution by good people.

What Does the Future Hold?

One of the fascinating things about contact centers is their never-ending pursuit of improvement. Effective managers are constantly looking for better technology, better processes, better people, and better training for those people. It's all part of the original charter for contact centers: to find more effective ways of communicating with customers so the company can serve customers better and cheaper, while generating more revenue.

Accordingly, we look for contact center services to become more customized to the needs of individual customers. There will be technological advancements, perhaps some “ohhs and ahhs” in what contact centers can do with automation. But the end result will be that more contact centers will provide better service. Great one-on-one service will become the minimum expectation for doing business, regardless of the medium.

Fortunately contact centers aren't alone in their quest to better service their customers. Leading vendors, such as Avaya, continue to provide groundbreaking technology specifically tailored to the needs of a modern contact center. Such companies stand ready to partner with organizations interested in meeting the future head-on. As you read through this book, you get a glimpse of the future and how you can plan for it.



As contact centers improve in all aspects of their operation, they look for ways to go beyond customer service — to make the experience of dealing with the company better. Contact centers do all of this because customers expect — and deserve — the best.

Part II

Business Basics: Models and Drivers and Goals, Oh My!

.....

In This Part

- ▶ Developing meaningful business objectives
 - ▶ Supporting business objectives with powerful performance drivers
 - ▶ Establishing balance in your drivers
 - ▶ Creating reports that help you to measure success
-

This part takes you on a whirlwind tour through the wonderful world of business models. In the process you discover the ins and outs of such fundamentals as business objectives and performance drivers. We also touch briefly on reporting.

A business model is a high-level description of how your business is organized and what things you're going to do to produce whatever results you deem appropriate. A business model is really no more complicated than a game plan or playbook. "Our goal is to win the game, so here's what we're going to do. . . ."



Like game plans, business models change and evolve. Over time, your model will become outdated or you'll find better ways to do things, resulting in a need to modify the plan. The important thing is to have a plan.

Determining Your Business Objectives

In the short term, your organization establishes goals and targets it wants the contact center to achieve. These goals, often referred to as *business objectives*, flow from the larger organization all the way to individual contact center agents, as shown in Figure 2-1.

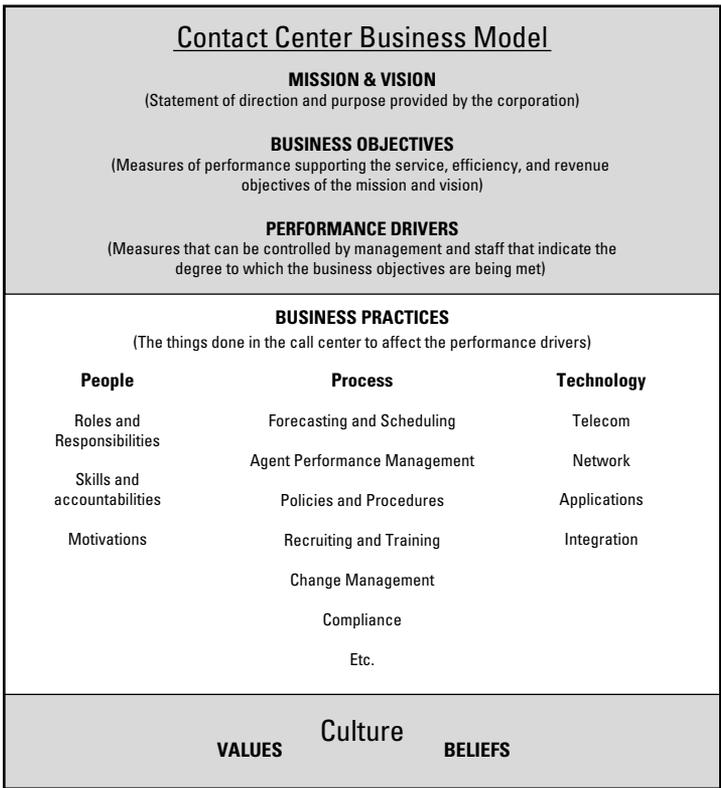


Figure 2-1: Business objectives work their way down through an organization.

Business objectives typically measure contact center effectiveness and the organization’s progress against four broad

areas: cost control, revenue generation, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction.

Remember the old phrase “Garbage in, garbage out”? Well, it rings very true with business objectives — set bad goals, and you’ll get equally bad results. Business objectives need to be well thought out and justified. When well defined, these goals are the gauges that tell you about the performance of your contact center machine — like the gauges in an airplane.

Ideally you have input into specific objectives — if only to make sure that they are realistic. Specific goals and objectives vary by company, but Table 2-1 shows a few common examples.

Table 2-1 Example Contact Center Business Objectives

<i>Goal/Objective</i>	<i>Measure</i>	<i>What It Tells Us</i>
Customer satisfaction	Post-contact satisfaction scores Contact abandonment rate Average speed of answer	Are our agents providing good service? Are we answering contacts quickly enough? (Hanging up is one form of customer feedback!)
Cost control	Cost per contact Cost per customer Cost per case Cost per order	Are we handling contacts in an efficient manner? Do customers have to contact us too often?
Revenue generation	(Net) revenue per customer Revenue per contact	Are we making money? Are we maximizing sales and upselling opportunities? Are we growing the business?
Employee satisfaction	Employee opinion survey Retention rate Employee referrals	Do our employees feel valued and respected? Do they like working here?

Identifying a good objective

Aim for two important characteristics when setting business objectives: Make sure that your objectives are measurable and that they tell a complete story.

Ideally, a measurable objective tells you as much about an area of the business as possible. For example, using total contact center expenses to measure cost control tells you something about what the center costs to run, but it really doesn't tell you whether it's profitable. A contact center that costs \$1 million per year but has only one customer is much more expensive than a contact center that costs \$50 million but has millions of customers.

The following are some good parameters for measuring objectives:

- ✔ **Revenue per customer:** the total revenue generated by the contact center divided by the number of customers
- ✔ **Cost per customer:** the total cost of running the contact center divided by total number of customers
- ✔ **Customer satisfaction:** how satisfied customers are with their contact center experience
- ✔ **Employee job satisfaction:** how satisfied contact center employees are with their jobs

Really, you can find or create all kinds of measures — as long as they tell you what you want to know about your operation.

Avoiding misleading measures

When considering business objectives, you need to avoid relying on some common contact center measures simply because they don't tell the complete story and, as such, can be misleading.

One example of a poor measure is the *operating budget* — how much your company spends to run the contact center. Most companies would like to minimize the total cost of running their center, but if the company is growing at 50 or 100 percent per year, then in all likelihood contact center costs

are going to rise. So looking at the contact center budget can be misleading when considering cost control.

Another example of a common yet misleading measure is *cost per contact* — the cost of running a contact center for a period of time divided by the contacts answered for the same period. Cost per contact can be misleading because it doesn't consider the impact of poor quality and repeat contacts. If agents don't do a good job handling customer contacts, then they are bound to call back. Although your cost per contact may appear low, a large number of repeats increases your cost per customer.

Measuring Progress with Performance Drivers

Business objectives are derived from your mission and are the goals and targets you're trying to achieve. Using them to manage your contact center requires that you understand and use performance drivers.

Performance drivers are processes and behaviors — expressed as measures — that influence achieving your business objectives.

For example, average contact length is a driver of contact center costs and has a direct impact on the business objective of cost per customer. So, average contact length is a driver of cost.

Performance drivers are the building blocks of the operation, and with them you can mathematically model the business objectives, budgets, and other aspects of operations — creating the economic model of your contact center.

Drop by a contact center and you're likely to hear discussions about some of these performance drivers:

- ✔ **Service level:** refers to how fast you answer the phone, e-mail messages, and so on. It is most commonly measured by the percentage of incoming contacts answered in a specified amount of time. For example, if the contact center answers 78 percent of all contacts within 30 seconds, the service level achieved is 78/30.

- ✔ **Average contact length:** refers to how long it takes, on average, to process one customer interaction.
- ✔ **Agent availability:** tells you how many of your agents are actually available to take a call — that is, they're not already busy on a call.
- ✔ **Agent occupancy:** refers to the percentage of time that agents are busy with customers.
- ✔ **Conversion rates:** the percentage of contacts converted to sales (customer saves).
- ✔ **Retention rates:** how many potentially lost customers were saved by agents.
- ✔ **Customer satisfaction:** how satisfied your customers are with the level of service your contact center's providing.
- ✔ **First-contact resolution:** the percentage of customers who do not have to try back within a certain time frame (usually a day) to have their issue resolved.

Categorizing the drivers

Generally, performance drivers can be grouped into four areas. There are drivers that affect

- ✔ cost control
- ✔ revenue generation
- ✔ customer satisfaction
- ✔ employee satisfaction

Each category is discussed in the following sections.

Cost-control drivers

Your contact center is likely to come under the microscope for cost control often, even though contact centers are on average an efficient way to communicate with customers. Still, contact center expenditures are frequently one of the larger budgetary line items for corporations, so it's no wonder their costs are scrutinized.

CASE STUDY



Reducing potential bottlenecks to continued growth

The Homeserve Group is the United Kingdom's leading provider of home emergency solutions, with over three million customers and more than five million active policies throughout the U.K. Homeserve works with a wide range of major business partners in the utilities, appliance manufacturing, retail, and household insurance sectors to offer a total service of warranty marketing, repair, and maintenance solutions across the nation, Europe, and worldwide.

With growth running at 30 percent annually, Homeserve wanted to implement best-of-breed contact center applications before its customer services operations became a potential growth bottleneck. Investing in the latest contact center systems and applications was essential, if the company was to drive change and improvement in how it served its customers.

After analyzing several options, Homeserve implemented an Avaya-based solution, centered on Avaya Communication Manager and Call Center. An Avaya Media Server functions as a hub for their IP-based network of over 1,000 contact center seats in three different call centers. In total, Homeserve has implemented just under 1,000 Avaya IP telephones across its enterprise.

Homeserve is also using Avaya Call Management System for its reporting needs. They worked with Sabio, an Avaya BusinessPartner, to integrate the Avaya Interactive Response (IR) solution into its IP infrastructure. The solution makes all of Homeserve's inquiry types — which number over 200 — easily accessible for the caller, and helps ensure the customer experience is a straightforward and satisfying one.

After implementing their Avaya solution, Homeserve now operates on an "any seat, any function, anywhere" basis. This has improved their level of customer service, with wait times reduced from 150 seconds to only 30 seconds, despite the fact that inbound call capacity has increased by 20 percent.

Homeserve has seen additional efficiency improvements in their call centers. Effective speech recognition and CTI has driven intelligent call routing, thereby improving first-call resolution for a wider range of callers. A side benefit for the bottom line is that intelligent routing now gives agents more time to pursue upselling opportunities with existing customers.

Items that affect the cost control of your contact center include

- ✓ contact length
- ✓ agent occupancy
- ✓ agent skill level
- ✓ average cost of putting an agent online (wages, benefits, overhead, and so on)
- ✓ repeat contacts from customers who don't get an accurate or complete answer on the first try
- ✓ nonproductive agent time (time away from the phone)

Well-run contact centers dig deep into these aspects of operations to better understand why they achieve the levels they do and how to affect them in the future. For example, contact length can be broken down into time spent communicating with the customer and post-contact work (time spent processing customer requests after the customer is gone). Both can be better understood when looking at how long different types of contacts take — an information contact versus a sales contact, for example.

Revenue drivers

It don't mean a thing if you ain't got ka-ching! Improving revenue generation can have a greater impact on margins than improvements in cost-control measures. In larger contact centers, small improvements in the customer retention rate represent hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars in saved revenue. Similarly, small improvements in selling and upselling can have a big bottom-line impact.

In addition to your retention rate, key revenue metrics you need to consider include

- ✓ conversion rate (the number of sales made per contacts handled)
- ✓ revenue generated per sale
- ✓ cancellations per contact (a variation on retention rate)
- ✓ revenue lost per cancellation (a measure of the degree to which individual agents are mitigating revenue loss)

Customer-satisfaction drivers

Your customers want the same thing you do — an efficient and professional resolution to their problem. That's the primary reason that the metrics to measure and drive service include

- ✔ How fast you satisfy the customer's request — including average speed of answer, service level, and hold time.
- ✔ Number of times a customer needs to be transferred to another agent or representative
- ✔ Contact review assessments — are your agents being professional, courteous, and competent?

Employee-satisfaction drivers

Get to know your employees so you can determine what the drivers to their satisfaction are. Some things that almost certainly come up as key drivers to satisfaction include

- ✔ **Supervisor support:** Am I getting the help that I need?
- ✔ **Fairness:** Is the workload distributed equitably so that I am not too busy while other agents are idle?
- ✔ **Feedback:** Do I know where I stand?
- ✔ **Training:** Did I get the training that I need to do the job well?

The importance of balance

You need balance to maximize each component of performance and provide the best solution for achieving your business objectives. When you're attempting to strike this balance, keep in mind that overemphasis on one area can hurt performance in others. For example, too much emphasis on cost control can hurt service and revenue.

Don't go overboard on cost control

You've taken your quest for cost control too far if you

- ✔ Hire low-cost people otherwise unsuited for the job.
- ✔ Skimp on training and feedback.
- ✔ Don't spend adequately on support services.

Avoid a surplus of service

Customer service is crucial, but making the customer like you shouldn't be your only goal. Remember that customers want contact center agents to perform a service, not become their best pals.

Ensuring that ten agents are always available, waiting for the next call, to answer every customer call inside the first ring might be overly expensive. Your average customer is probably okay with waiting an average of three rings before their call is answered.

Resist revenue-generation mania

It can really turn off a long-term customer with a service concern if an agent fails to resolve the issue but makes great attempts to close in for more sales.

Although an overall focus on revenue generation is vital, over-emphasizing short-term revenue gain will probably lead to long-term service pain, as your contact center loses the life-time value of a loyal customer.

Don't focus on entertaining employees

When it comes to making employees happy, some companies live with the motto, "Try not to upset anyone." If you adopt that motto you'll probably end up hurting your contact center's performance.

Over time a fair, honest, and consistent approach wins as much or more in morale as does a soft hand — and it has the added benefit of keeping the organization on track.

For good contact center operation, try to strike a perfect balance between cost control, revenue generation, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction.

Table 2-2 provides a summary of the basic contact center business goals and the corresponding key performance drivers that affect them.

Table 2-2 Contact Center Business Objectives and the Performance Drivers That Affect Them

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Measured By</i>	<i>Driven By (Performance Drivers)</i>
Cost control	Cost per contact	Contact length Cost per hour of providing the service Percentage of time agents spend with customers Percentage of contacts resolved on first attempt
Revenue generation	Revenue per customer	Percentage of contacts resulting in a sale Dollar value of sales made
Customer satisfaction	Post-contact customer satisfaction survey	Accessibility Agent professionalism, courtesy, ability Process — ability to service the customer
Employee satisfaction	Employee opinion score Employee turnover	Management behavior and support — especially direct supervisor Adequate training Consistent feedback

Reporting: Providing Feedback

Contact centers are data factories. Almost every tool that a contact center agent uses collects, stores, and reports on something. Used properly, this information provides contact center managers with tremendous intelligence to analyze performance, develop practices resulting in improvements, and discard practices that don't support objectives.

Increasingly, contact centers are hiring analysts with advanced degrees in statistics and engineering because their findings are so valuable in what they offer via improvements through the business model.

Reporting completes the contact center business model. Information reports give managers feedback they need about whether their practices and performance drivers are properly aligned with the contact center's business objectives.

Part III

The Master Plan for Management

In This Part

- ▶ Managing business objectives
 - ▶ Managing performance drivers
 - ▶ Establishing targets for performance
 - ▶ Focusing on resource management
 - ▶ Setting staff schedules
-

Prudence dictates that contact center managers pay close attention to finance, analysis, and resource management. Contact centers can be complex beasts and they run very much by the numbers, so all three items play a significant role in operating them effectively.

Miniscule changes in procedures can make an enormous difference in results, including — and especially — performance and financial results. Increasingly, contact center managers are turning to analysts to help identify improvement opportunities.

Understanding and improving performance isn't just the concern of analysts. Ideally, everyone in the center is concerned with performance and the numbers. This part includes basic information that should be understood and practiced by as many people in the center as possible.

Business-Objective Measurements

Business objectives are the desired outputs of the contact center — what the corporation needs from the contact center by way of revenue generation, cost management, and customer satisfaction. (See Part II for more about setting business objectives.)

In the following sections you find some common ways to measure whether your contact center business objectives are being met.

Operating budgets

The operating budget is the sum of all the costs associated with running a contact center for a given period, usually a year. The largest cost in the contact center budget is typically labor. In traditional contact centers, it is not unusual to base budgets on common assumptions, such as the number of contacts that the center will receive, how long those contacts will last, and what it takes to achieve resolution on the contacts.

These assumptions are used to determine staffing needs and to anticipate other costs.



By understanding the factors that go into your budget, you can play “what if” with those factors to see the bottom-line effect. Being able to do a quick calculation on the impact of changing the drivers goes a long way to motivating management to find ways to make improvements.

Cost center versus profit center

Many times management views a contact center as a burdensome expense for the corporation. This may not be a fair assessment, however, because many contact centers turn out to be profit centers — they help create customer loyalty and generate sales that may otherwise have been lost.

You can pay attention to a number of measurements on the cost side of any equation, including the following:

- ✔ **Cost per contact.** Calculated by dividing the total costs to run the contact center for a period of time by the total contacts responded to in the same period.
- ✔ **Cost per customer.** Calculated by dividing the total cost of running the contact center for a period of time by the average number of customers for the same time frame.
- ✔ **Cost per resolution.** Divide total costs for the period by the cases resolved, looking for improvement over time.

These are obviously very simplistic measurements, and will suffice for some contact centers. Others use more complex measurements that either build on or entirely replace these simplistic ones. Many of the measurements are provided by the management applications used at your site; make sure you review what is available and determine which measurements fit best with your needs.

On the profit center side of the coin you can utilize entirely different measurements, such as:

- ✔ **Total revenue generation.** Your finance or marketing department will calculate total revenue generated.
- ✔ **Revenue per contact.** Divide total revenue generated during a period of time by the number of contacts for the same period.
- ✔ **Revenue per customer.** Divide the total revenue generated for a period of time by the average number of customers over the same time frame.



If you can constantly reduce cost per customer and increase revenue per customer, then you're looking the good life right in the eye — corner office, parking space, key to the executive lunchroom — it's all yours!



One way that you can help decrease costs — while still handling more volume — is through the implementation of self-service technologies. Part IV introduces some of these technologies, which enable customers to help themselves rather than tying up valuable (and costly) agent time.

Paying for it all

Those charged with overseeing the finances of an operation must always be concerned with one overriding question: How does the company pay for it all? In other words, how do you generate the revenue necessary to cover the expenses inherent in any contact center?

This is a fundamental question, and one that you need to ask often. You can go far toward answering the question by transforming, if at all possible, your contact center into a revenue source. Look for ways that you can upsell, cross-sell, and just plain sell. Chances are good that your contacts have a problem (why else would they be contacting you?) and any salesperson knows that problems are synonymous with opportunities.

REMEMBER

Just because you see a customer problem as an opportunity doesn't mean that the customer has the same vision. Make sure you are sensitive to resolving the customer's needs, and don't be overbearing in trying to sell.

CASE STUDY

A culture of communications excellence

Strategically located in the Asian hub of Singapore, Pan Pacific Hotels and Resorts is engaged in the management and marketing of hotels and resorts in 11 countries throughout the Pacific Rim. Its properties span half the globe, from Jakarta, Indonesia, to Seattle, USA.

Pan Pacific's mission is to ensure that its far-flung properties embrace the differences of each land and culture. The celebration of culture and tradition is infused into almost every facet of the Pan Pacific properties. Each location is a reflection of its environment and conveys a unique personality as well as purpose.

The technological challenge faced by Pan Pacific involved improving and modernizing its corporate office call center infrastructure, replacing the old PABX solution with a newer telecommunications platform. The company recognized the need to take advantage of convergence opportunities to enable creative deployment of the organization's communications system.

The first step for Pan Pacific was re-evaluating its existing telecommunications model and cost-effectively moving toward an enterprise solution. "Our PABX system was relatively old and not easily upgradeable. The

infrastructure wasn't in place to allow our office to build up the telephony network," said Mark Fancourt, Corporate Director of Information Technology.

"We were also unable to integrate our office automation and telephony products. The PABX system also did not provide real facilities for a mobile workforce, which was especially critical for our IT and hotel operations strategy."

After evaluating several options, Pan Pacific selected an Avaya IP Telephony Contact Center Solution. The solution is comprised of an Avaya S8300 Server running Avaya Communication Manager and Call Center software, and mobility solutions like Avaya Modular Messaging and Avaya IP Softphone.

"We were not just looking for a technological solution, but a solid technology partner with an international presence. Avaya was very professional – the team understood what we required and proposed the solution to match our needs today and in the future."

The solutions provided by Avaya allowed Pan Pacific to reap significant benefits. The company has realized improved call management through the Avaya Communication Manager, Call Center, and Modular Messaging solutions. In addition, corporate staff members have been able to enjoy increased mobility with the IP-based infrastructure coupled with Avaya Modular Messaging. The ability for staff to receive calls, download information, and receive messages even when they are out of the office has been a big boon.

Pan Pacific believes that technology is important to ensure smooth business operations. From the ability to call up guest information quickly at reception to reservations and even engineering services, integrated technology is key. Pan Pacific will continue the future development of its assets in terms of technological infrastructure, and Avaya is there to support that effort.

Performance Drivers: Managing the Results

Performance drivers are variables that have an impact on your contact center's business objectives (see Part II for more detail). They're called performance drivers because, like a person who manages the controls of a car, or like the

programs that make computer equipment work, drivers are things that make other things go. In this case, performance drivers make business objectives go.

Examining performance drivers

A key component to controlling and manipulating outcomes is to designate responsibility throughout the organization — most importantly to the contact center agents, because each agent is a microcosm of the operation.

Table 3-1 shows how to track and improve results on the agent level. Individual agent improvement pulls up improvement in overall average agent performance, which in turn drives overall improvement in the contact center.

Table 3-1 Measures at the Agent Level

<i>Contact Center Drivers</i>	<i>Agent-Level Drivers</i>
Cost per hour of agent time	Wage rate
Agent utilization	Schedule adherence
Call length	Call length
Contacts per customer	First-Call Resolution
First-Call Resolution	
Occupancy	N/A
Conversion per contact	Conversion per contact
Dollar value per conversion	Dollar value per conversion
Accessibility	N/A

One of the first things you notice in Table 3-1 is that some contact center measures do not correlate with agent-level measures, since agents cannot directly influence those measures.

You may also notice that cost per hour becomes wage rate at the agent level, because only the wage rate directly correlates to the individual agent; all other costs are for the entire contact center.



Probably hundreds of performance drivers can impact a contact center's results. A big part of an analyst's job is to identify these relationships and gain a better understanding of how the relationships between business objectives and performance drivers work.

Contact-oriented metrics

Any number of performance drivers may be related to calls or other contacts. You can get a better handle on them by examining the measurements related to contacts. The following sections detail some of the more common contact-oriented metrics.

Contact length

Contact length is one of the most powerful measures in the contact center. It's a little controversial in that some believe too much focus is put on length without appropriate attention to other measures. However, customers want the same thing that contact centers do — a quick, accurate, and complete resolution. In general, shorter times mean everyone is happier.



A longer call can be a wonderful thing if it brings more revenue per minute. For example, if a customer gets a question resolved quickly and is so pleased with the service that he orders more product, the extra minute of tender loving care the agent provides may well result in one-call resolution and repeat business.

Conversion per contact

Let me make sure we're clear here. A *contact* is any time you say hello (via the phone, self-service, e-mail, chat, whatever).

A *conversion* is any time you generate or save revenue on a contact. Conversion per contact affects total revenue generated and other revenue objectives.

Accessibility

Accessibility means how easy it is for a person to make contact — it's how fast you're answering the phone, e-mail, or letter. It's important because it has an impact on customer

satisfaction and cost control. Here are three common measures of the many used to calculate accessibility:

- ✓ **Service level:** Refers to the percentage of callers whose calls are answered within a defined time.
- ✓ **Average speed of answer:** Also known as ASA, this refers to the average amount of time your customers waited in queue before an agent greeted them.
- ✓ **Abandonment rate:** The percentage of callers that hang up before an agent responds to their contact attempt.

Agent professionalism and ability

Agent ability is probably the most important requirement in achieving customer nirvana. Whether calling a contact center or shopping for new shoes, most customers expect the same thing of customer-service people: Know what you're talking about, and be nice! Customer satisfaction surveys can help in this regard.

Through the surveys, customers can tell you about the agents who aren't nice or who can't do their job. When you ask the right questions, customers will also tell you specifically how your company needs to improve.



Many contact centers have people listen to agent calls to determine whether they are professional and capable; this is frequently referred to as “call assessment” or “call monitoring.” The evaluator scores the agent calls against a template of key call behaviors.

First-contact resolution

First-contact resolution (FCR) refers to the percentage of customer inquiries completed on the first attempt. If customers have to reinitiate a contact once or many times because the contact center did not resolve their inquiry or concern the first time, then FCR will decline — and so will customer satisfaction.

The benefits of tracking FCR are significant. Improving this measure has an impact on customer satisfaction. It also

improves cost control — improving FCR reduces the load on a contact center as the number of repeat calls decreases.

Policies and procedures

The drivers listed so far in this part aren't the only ones that influence your operation. A large part of your analyst's job is learning how to identify and manipulate these and other drivers of contact center performance. After she has identified the variables that contribute to performance, she'll look to your company and contact center policies and procedures to understand the process behind each driver.

Setting Performance Targets

Setting performance targets is extremely important. People work better with very specific targets, whereas vague targets create vague results. When setting performance targets, you first have to figure out what's the right thing to target. You then have to determine what level of performance to expect for that target. This section provides some ideas that can help you set appropriate targets for some of the most important contact center drivers.

Accessibility/service level

Here are some examples of methods you can use to set performance targets for service level:

- ✔ **Do what everyone else does.** The default level of service for answering phone calls tends to be 80/20 (80 percent of calls are answered in 20 seconds or less). E-mail and chat don't seem to have generally accepted standards, perhaps because of their relative infancy.
- ✔ **Go with the industry direction.** A number of industries are self-regulated or even government-regulated in terms of how fast contact centers must answer the phone.
- ✔ **Develop a business case.** Do a cost-benefit analysis to determine your service-level objective. Evaluate each of your customer segments for tolerance levels for waiting in queue. For example, you may notice that for your

premier customer group, the number of abandons spikes sharply after 15 seconds, whereas the tolerance level for a general help line is much higher. If you do this analysis well, you can find the break-even point between the cost of providing faster service and the benefit of answering calls before potential customers get tired of waiting and hang up.

Abandons

Abandons are defined as customers who try to contact your business, but fail to reach an agent for one reason or another.

The most common type of abandon is a customer who hangs up before an agent is available to answer the call. Abandons also occur in other contact methods (e-mail, chat, and so on), but are easiest to track on phone contacts.



One way that some companies have helped decrease abandons is to implement a self-service system that answers the most common customer queries, without the need to involve an agent. Self-service does away with the necessity of placing a customer on hold, so customer satisfaction can be improved even while abandon rates are dropping.

Call length

Coming up with the proper benchmark for call length is difficult because there are too many variables that go into the mix. Product complexity, system capabilities, responsiveness, working environment, information collected via self-service, training, and a host of other variables can affect call length. Identifying the one right call length is nearly impossible.



What you can — and should — do is try to understand as much about your own center's (or, more accurately, each of its own individual campaigns') call length as possible. Of course, you can also attempt to make call length as consistent as possible. Ideally you also need to measure the impact of a call. For instance, does a longer call result in more revenue for the company? If so, then the agent should not be penalized for longer call lengths.

Occupancy

Occupancy — how busy your agents are with current contacts — is an important measure of whether you are efficiently using agents. If your agent occupancy is consistently very high, you could be causing agent burnout. On the other hand, if occupancy is too low, this unused agent time is adding significantly to your costs.



When your actual service level is too high above the target, it's costing you too much in labor. If it's too far below the target it's costing you customer satisfaction, revenue, and other expenses. Cost control is balanced when service level is right on the target.

Understanding Resource Management Tasks and Concepts

Okay, relax — this won't hurt a bit. You need this stuff and it's easy. This is an overview of the key concepts and tools used in contact center resource management — important for scheduling.

Forecasting

Forecasting refers to predicting the future — specifically, how much work your center is going to have. The key is to accurately determine your workload and when you'll have it, so you can match resources to demand.



Don't assume that the time it takes to process calls, e-mails, or Web chats is always the same. It makes sense that a very simple customer inquiry is likely to take much less time to process on average than a complicated, high-level technical support call. Contact length typically fluctuates over time, as does call volume.



Flexibility and versatility are key to growth for Atento

Atento Argentina is a professional customer relationship management company based in Argentina. Through 11 contact centers distributed across the country, Atento mobilizes 6,000 highly qualified and specialized professionals to meet the needs of a diverse range of clients. Launched in late 2000, Atento has experienced steady growth that has benefited from and helped to fuel Argentina's economic recovery.

Having business distributed among 11 contact centers meant that Atento faced a daunting challenge: They needed to find a technology solution that supported their growth and provided the transparent flexibility necessary for optimal customer service. The solution needed to provide a non-centralized support infrastructure and an increasing array of analytical reports.

After careful evaluation, Atento chose an Avaya Intelligent Communications solution. This choice provided the company not only with a better communication infrastructure, but the ability for customers to communicate in the way they chose — telephone, e-mail or chat.

The Avaya solution was installed first in Atento's office in Martinez, Buenos Aires, and then rolled out to their

other locations. The solution enabled the company to manage their remote centers with maximum security and reliability, to reduce communications costs, and perform the necessary traffic balance between centers, increasing available channels.

According to Hector Ruschioni, Atento's Engineering and Special Projects Director, "Avaya was able to understand our challenge and, from the results point of view, the solution they offered gave us the possibility to provide better and greater alternatives that have clearly upgraded our business."

Avaya Intelligent Communications make it possible for Atento to achieve a level of connectivity among employees, branches, and clients that enhances their business processes. The results achieved by the company include better service to customers, reduced calling and infrastructure costs, increased integration with customers, improved continuity among call centers, and protection of their communications investment.

Obviously, the ability to better service their clients is key to Atento's continued success. According to Ruschioni, the Avaya solution means that "we can integrate with our client's platform in a more versatile

way. Whether it is in their platforms or in ours, we always have the chance to provide an alternative for the most diverse requirements.”

No doubt Atento will continue to successfully meet the diverse needs of their clients with the assistance of Avaya solutions.

Scheduling

Scheduling is the process of assigning resources to meet your demand. Where forecasting provides the “how much” part of resource management, scheduling answers the “who, what, where, and when” parts. An important part of managing the contact center is providing schedules that are workable and help achieve business objectives. Some centers go so far as to measure *schedule adherence*, which reflects whether agents adhered to the schedule that was implemented.

Full-time equivalent

Usually referred to by the short form FTE, *full-time equivalent* is a way to express how many people you need to schedule.

Staffing requirements are expressed in terms of the number of people working full-time hours. For instance, one FTE may equal 7.5 paid hours. So, if call demand required 750 total paid hours to get the work done for a day, this would equate to 100 FTEs.

Real-time management of resources

As the name suggests, real-time resource management refers to making the necessary ongoing changes from your original schedule based on real-life, up-to-the-minute changes in call volume and staff availability so that your contact center achieves the best possible results each day.

Assigning Staff and Creating Schedules That Work

Sooner or later you get to the point where you need to attach the names of the agents who will work the shifts. The easiest way is for you to simply pick names and assign them to a schedule — if, that is, you really don't want people to like you.



Probably the safest (and fairest) way, especially in larger contact centers, is to post the schedules and allow staff to bid on the available shifts, giving bidding priority to senior staff members.

Some contact centers use alternatives to shift bids. These might include rotating staff through all shifts (essentially, sharing the pain), working around employees' personal preferences, assignment by employee performance, or fixed permanent shifts.

Regardless of the approach, you're bound to have less than desirable shifts. This can be somewhat demoralizing for staff, considering that the majority of folks would rather be working 9 to 5, Monday to Friday. Some things you can do to ease their angst include:

- ✓ **Re-bidding:** Redoing the schedule from time to time is a good idea. It enables your staff to move up the chain and get more-desirable shifts, and can really improve team motivation.
- ✓ **Shift-trading:** Give your employees a mechanism for trading their shifts — “You work my 9 to 5 and I'll work your 1 to 9.” It's usually done on a one-day-at-a-time basis.
- ✓ **Time bank/flex time:** Allow employees the option to *bank* extra hours they work and take them as time off at a future date. This approach works well if it's administered and tracked carefully.

Part IV

Making It Go: An Introduction to Contact Center Technology

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In This Part

- ▶ Why you need the right technology
 - ▶ Using telecommunications to get customers to agents
 - ▶ Finding the right technology to get information to agents
 - ▶ Using tools to get information to customers
 - ▶ Keeping score with technology
-

Contact center technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated and integrated — making for improved processes and resulting in increases in customer satisfaction, efficiency, and revenue generation.

The Need for Appropriate Technology

Contact centers are a response to the demand for convenience in a world that continues to move faster. Technology helps customers process transactions and obtain information more quickly and accurately and is the foundation upon which contact centers are built.



Running your contact center, however, is still about people and processes. Good operations blend people, processes, and technology into effective solutions that maximize customer satisfaction, cost control, and revenue generation. They maximize the lifetime value of the relationship. When you apply proper technology to a well-thought-out contact center plan, you can build an effective business solution.

Figure 4-1 shows the basic layout of a typical contact center network, illustrating many of the pieces of technology discussed in this part.

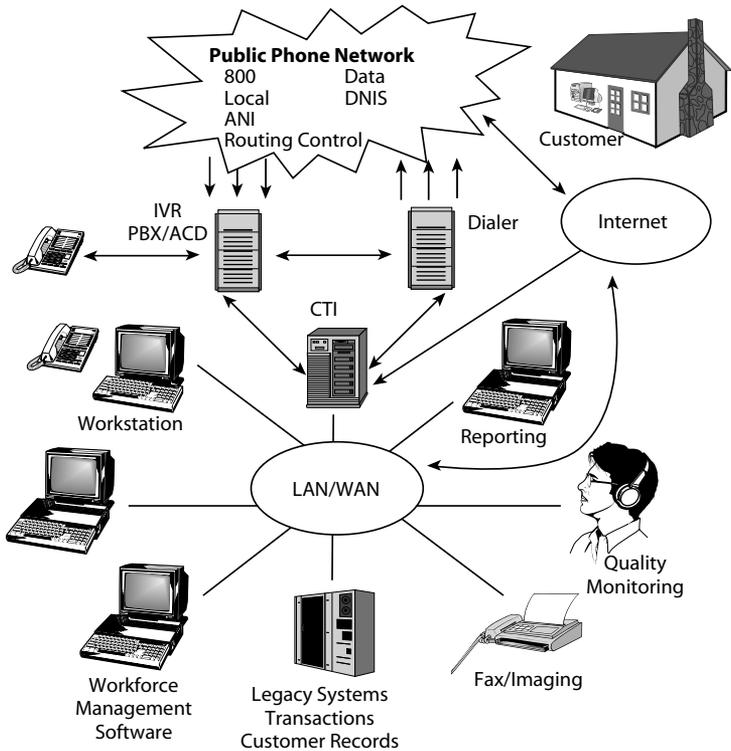


Figure 4-1: The contact center network.

Getting the Customer to the Contact Center

Most customer contact is handled through the phone. Agents spend a huge portion of their day fielding calls from customers and providing resolution to problems or issues. Today's telephone networks provide your contact center with a number of valuable services described in the following sections.

Automatic Number Identification

Automatic Number Identification (ANI) transmits the customer's telephone number and delivers it to your contact center's telephone system. In residential service, ANI is often referred to as *caller ID*.

ANI can be very valuable because the calling number information can be used to identify customers and look up account information before an agent even says hello. You can use this information to give the caller special treatment — your very best customers might be routed to an elite group of agents, for example. Special routing is a great way to boost customer satisfaction and revenue per customer.

Dialed Number Identification Service (DNIS)

Because your contact center probably has several different incoming numbers — depending on the various services or products you offer — it's important for you to know which of those numbers the customer called. Through Dialed Number Identification Service (DNIS) the telephone network provides you with the number that the customer dialed. This information tells the telephone system how to route the caller.

Dynamic network routing

This service goes by a number of different names, but the basic concept remains the same. Some contact centers have a computer that is directly connected to the telephone company's switching office. This computer enables you to control the routing of your customers' calls at the network level — before they hit your telephone system.

For example, when call volumes peak beyond a level that can be serviced in your center, you can redirect calls to other centers that you have overflow agreements with. Calls can be routed based on a number of different criteria, such as a predetermined percentage allocation to each office.



Dynamic network routing also gives you one method of providing call-prompting (press 1 for English, 2 for Spanish, for example) right in the telephone network.

An IP contact center is an alternative to network routing that leverages IP technologies to flatten and consolidate contact center infrastructure. For more information on this topic, flip to Part V.

Automatic Call Distribution

Think of Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) as the heart of the contact center. When customer calls arrive, they are delivered to the ACD — a phone system that routes a large volume of incoming calls to a pool of waiting agents. It's different from other phone systems in that it makes use of telephone queues instead of extensions. (A queue acts as sort of a waiting room for callers.)

ACD has a number of important capabilities:

- ✓ **Announcements (delay messaging):** This is the recording that says, “Thank you for calling; all of our operators are currently busy . . .” or whatever polite message you want to convey.
- ✓ **Music on hold:** Music on hold plays between delay messages. Again, the main objective of music is to encourage customers to wait for the next agent.

- ✓ **Skills-based routing:** As a variation on routing to queues, most ACDs have the ability to route to skills instead. As the name suggests, skills-based routing is used to match each caller's needs with the agent who has the best skill set (of those available at the moment) to service those needs.

Predictive dialing

A predictive dialer is a device used to manage and launch large volumes of *outbound* calls. The dialer increases agent productivity by placing more outbound calls than the available number of agents. The dialer then sorts out answering machines, busy signals, and other non-human interactions before delivering live calls to the agents.



Predictive dialers can also be a great boon for contacting a customer base with information about new products or services, or to provide reminders about appointments.

Predictive dialing can increase agent productivity by 300 percent or more over manual dialing by removing list administration from the agent and reducing agent wait time between live calls. If implemented properly, customers won't even know that they are being contacted through a predictive dialing system. The best systems deliver outbound calls to agents immediately when a customer answers, without a bothersome delay that can cause a customer to hang up.



It's best to also scrub lists based on other information you may have about a customer's interest in the product or service being offered. By scrubbing out customers who are less likely to want a product that you are promoting, you increase the quality or effectiveness of your list and make more sales over the life of the list. As a result, dialing becomes more effective.



Most countries have tabled or enacted legislation targeted at contact center practices. These laws are generally directed toward telephone sales, the use of predictive dialers, and privacy.

For example, the United States has implemented legislation that requires contact centers to scrub their telemarketing lists against government-provided "do not call" lists. By checking every list against both government lists and your own internal

do not call list, you can be sure that you aren't calling customers who prefer not to be called.

Getting Information to the Agent

The three most important technologies for your contact center agents (or managers) are the contact management system, the phone, and the computer. The contact management system routes a call from the customer's house, cell-phone, or office to one of your skilled agents.

After the contact is routed to an agent, that agent needs the best possible tools and resources to provide the customer with quick and accurate service. Today's networked computer systems are the means by which your agents access these capabilities, which include customer accounts and product or service information and pricing.

More sophisticated environments also include access to a wide range of information:

- ✔ Company knowledge bases including problem-solving guidelines, policies, and procedures
- ✔ Call guides and scripts, sometimes including dynamic scripts that customize call-handling recommendations based on individual customer characteristics and preferences
- ✔ A personal performance "dashboard," which provides agents with critical information pertaining to their job performance
- ✔ Communication tools for communicating with other available staff and management (including tools that let staff know who's available to assist with what)
- ✔ Screen pop-ups of relevant customer information
- ✔ The Internet
- ✔ Other tools such as software for e-mail, chat, collaboration, faxes, and letters

The key is to provide at the agent's fingertips everything they'll need to perform their job. If this can be done with as few applications as possible, all the better.

CTI aids productivity

Computer/Telephone Integration (CTI) refers to a system of hardware and software that enables communication between the telephone system and the computer system, all with the goal of better getting information to the agent.

A common and popular CTI application is the “screen pop,” in which the system collects the caller’s telephone number and passes this information to the computer/telephone integration system. The CTI system then looks up the customer’s information in the database. When a customer account is found, the CTI system sends the call and the customer information simultaneously to an agent’s telephone and workstation. Estimates suggest that the screen pop saves 10 to 15 seconds in average call length.

Easy access to customer info by phone number is just one example of a

computer/telephone integration application. Some other neat examples made possible by this technology include:

- ✓ **Mandatory data entry:** CTI can be used to make the entry of critical data mandatory before agents can take the next call.
- ✓ **Coordinated screen transfer:** This function enables agents to transfer what’s on the customer screen as they transfer calls to another agent or supervisor.
- ✓ **Dynamic scripting:** After the caller has been routed to an agent, CTI may prompt the agent with a customized script or call-handling approach to serve the specific customer.
- ✓ **Call blending:** Call blending occurs when agents can be switched among different types of work at any time.

Getting Information to the Customer

Technology is not only useful for getting information to your agents, but it can also be invaluable in getting information directly to your customer. Two main types of systems exist: automated response systems and speech-enabled systems. (Actually, a third category of system is emerging: Web services. This class is covered more fully in Part V.)

Interactive Voice Response systems

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems are known by several names, such as Voice Portal or automated attendant. The concept behind such systems is that the customer is presented with a series of choices from which he or she can choose. The choices made at any point in the call dictate the choices next presented.

The idea behind automated response is to provide a quick, efficient way for the customer to get the information needed.

For instance, whenever you've called your bank to determine your credit balance and used the automated account lookup, which reads your account balance in an automated voice, you've used an IVR system.



Automated Response Systems are very cost-effective. The cost of a service provided by IVR can be less than 20 percent the cost of providing the same service using a live agent. The payback on investing in an IVR can be very fast — well under a year.

Speech-enabled systems

Speech-enabled systems go one better than traditional automated response systems — they allow your system to recognize verbal customer commands. Traditional automated response systems accept input through touch-tones. Speech-enabled systems, however, can accept human language commands.

The immediate benefit of speech-enabled systems is that they are easier and faster for customers to use. With a larger percentage of the calling public using cellphones, it becomes cumbersome to continually look at the keypad and press a number. Speech-enabled systems allow customers to speak naturally and access the information they want.

See Part V for a real-life example of how Language Line Services is using self-service and speech to enhance customer service.

Using Reporting to Keep Score

Without reporting you have no way of knowing how good you are, if you're improving, or if you're actually getting worse. To be effective, reporting must be timely, complete, and accurate — all a lot easier said than done.

The reports you use to manage your contact center come from a variety of sources. The following are a few examples of the reports available from various systems:

- ✔ **Agent performance reports.** Typically available from your ACD system, agent performance reports provide statistics on each individual agent: how long the agent took to service calls, how many calls were answered, the amount of time that the agent was logged in, and when they logged in.
- ✔ **Queue performance report.** A queue is an answering group — it represents service provided and received by a universe of callers with similar needs. Separate queues are usually set up in an ACD system for callers with different needs, such as different languages. Queue reports tell you how many people called, how fast you answered the phone, how many customers hung up, how long it took to service the average call, how many agents were logged in to the system, and so on.
- ✔ **Trunk performance report.** Reports about incoming telephone lines, or trunks, are helpful to ensure appropriate facility sizing and line utilization. This report, available through an ACD or predictive dialer, is great for determining how many lines you need to lease from your phone company.
- ✔ **IVR reports.** Automated response system reports. An IVR unit provides reports on calls received, options customers selected, the length of time customers spent using IVR services, and when they used voice response services. (Figure 4-2 shows an example report for a customer opinion survey application.)

Avoid getting caught up in the maze of contact center reports and reporting. The best solution is to combine data from the various systems to create meaningful information about your customer's experience, your drivers, and your business performance.

Work Group Performance by Queue Group - Summary

[Help](#)

Work Groups: Custom Box Orders, Standard Box Orders
 Queue Groups: Billing Queues, Customer Service Queues, Reporting: queues, Sales Queues, dacsdev2: queues
 Time Period: Yesterday (Sep 18, 2007 12:00:00 AM - Sep 19, 2007 12:00:00 AM)
 Time Zone: CHI-Beijing

Work Group	Queue Group	Handles	% Transfers	% Confs.	% Redirects	% Rejects	% Held Contacts	% Disc. from On Hold	Avg. In Focus Hold Dur.	Avg. Preview Dur.	Avg. Alert Dur.	Avg. Active Dur.	Avg. Wrap-up Dur.
Custom Box Orders	Customer Service Queues	2,412	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	41%	00:00:20		00:00:00	00:00:17	00:00:39
	dacsdev2: queues	18,329	5%	0%	0%	0%	6%	7%	00:00:09		00:00:00	00:00:57	00:00:33
	Reporting: queues	1,144	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	100%	00:01:13			00:00:00	
	Sales Queues	15,917	6%	0%	0%	0%	6%	5%	00:00:09		00:00:00	00:01:03	00:00:32
Custom Box Orders		37,802	5%	0%	0%	0%	6%	7%	00:00:09		00:00:00	00:00:57	00:00:33
Standard Box Orders	Customer Service Queues	2,412	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	41%	00:00:20		00:00:00	00:00:17	00:00:39
	dacsdev2: queues	18,424	5%	0%	0%	0%	6%	7%	00:00:10		00:00:00	00:00:57	00:00:33
	Reporting: queues	1,149	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	100%	00:01:13			00:00:00	
	Sales Queues	16,012	6%	0%	0%	0%	6%	5%	00:00:09		00:00:00	00:01:03	00:00:32
Standard Box Orders		37,997	5%	0%	0%	0%	6%	7%	00:00:10		00:00:00	00:00:57	00:00:33
Summary		75,799	5%	0%	0%	0%	6%	7%	00:00:10		00:00:00	00:00:57	00:00:33

Figure 4-2: A contact center report.

With all the data available to you and an automated method of pulling these data into meaningful information, you can understand how you're performing, why you're getting your results, and how you might improve performance, all giving you very strong control. The payback of being able to read performance data and to rectify issues is immediate.

Part V

Technological Enhancements: Getting the Newest and Coolest Stuff

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In This Part

- ▶ Using enhancements in technology to ensure continuous improvement
 - ▶ Knowing how to recommend appropriate technology
-

As part of a strategy of continuous improvement, contact centers are always looking at cool new technologies that may provide improvements in their business practices.

Okay — maybe they're not all that “cool,” but they definitely make things work better!

Driving Improvement with Technology

Your contact center's analyst is primarily responsible for identifying opportunities for improvement, but everyone contributes ideas and recommendations. The manager of technology, for example, is likely to read trade journals and visit with vendors to keep abreast of new developments. He or she may come across something that may offer a net improvement, and so should generally have an answer when someone asks whether there's a technological solution to affect a driver in a particular way.

In the following sections you find some examples of technological enhancements.

IP contact centers

VoIP is the transmission of voice conversations over an IP-based data network. It represents a fundamental shift in the way that voice messages are handled when compared to traditional circuit-switched phone systems. IP telephony is the collective set of software-based voice applications that transport voice via VoIP.

For several years, businesses large and small have been saving significant amounts of money by converting traditional voice systems to VoIP solutions. The savings is realized primarily through a simpler network infrastructure (a converged voice and data network) and avoiding costly toll calls by carrying the majority of traffic on that network. Savings are also realized through significantly simpler maintenance — moves, adds, and changes are done in minutes instead of hours or days.

Some contact centers — perhaps yours — have already made the switch to VoIP and are just beginning to realize the benefits available through such a conversion. An IP contact center leverages IP technologies to flatten and consolidate contact center infrastructure, removing expensive network charges and running many locations from one centralized set of applications (or maybe two for redundancy).

It is this “many locations” benefit that can give contact centers a competitive advantage that was never before possible. Home agents, satellite locations, outsourced resources, and resident experts are easily added as extensions to the same contact center, all while maintaining centralized management and reporting. Contact center capabilities can now be extended to branch offices, providing affordable access to the rich suite of contact center applications because these applications no longer have to reside on site.

For contact centers, the real value of IP is realized by implementing a number of solutions made possible by the IP infrastructure. These solutions include:

- ✔ **Server and application consolidation.** Contact centers can radically reduce application and infrastructure complexity. The consolidation means it is not uncommon to reduce capital expenditures by 30 percent or more and ongoing maintenance and support by 15 percent. The reduction in complexity makes your center more flexible when responding to market changes.
- ✔ **Virtual site consolidation.** Assuming your company has contact center resources in differing locations, an IP infrastructure increases staffing efficiencies in the range of 3 to 8 percent by pooling agent resources across the locations.
- ✔ **Resource optimization.** Because you can utilize staffing wherever it is located (on site or off), IP contact centers typically reduce staffing costs by 3 to 9 percent and help grow revenue. It is not uncommon to also increase customer loyalty by more easily connecting the right agent to the right caller at the right time.
- ✔ **Globalization.** If you've thought of expanding your contact center to include offshore resources to provide a 24-hour follow-the-sun contact center, an IP infrastructure makes such expansion possible. Contact centers can reduce operating costs by approximately 30 percent by staffing the center with high quality, low turnover, college-educated agents from developing economies.

All of these solutions can easily cost justify themselves in stand-alone implementations, but they become most attractive when you understand that such solutions are much easier to implement in an IP contact center than in a traditional contact center.



Because IP technology represents a fundamental change in a contact center's technological infrastructure, a conversion is not something to be done lightly. Fortunately, leading IP partners, such as Avaya, know that you don't need to change everything at once. You can plan for an evolutionary change, over time, that enables you to realize immediate benefits without scrapping your current systems and grow into longer-term changes that poise your company for continued growth.

SIP in the contact center



SIP, or *Session Initiated Protocol*, is making its way into the contact center. Using the concept of presence, agents can instantly see who is logged on and what work state each expert is currently in, putting your enterprise at the service of your customers. This facilitates an agent being able to quickly invoke the help of another agent, a supervisor, or expert elsewhere in the enterprise to help with an answer for the tough questions — leading to fewer transfers and faster call resolution.

Service Oriented Architectures

You may have heard the acronym *SOA* tossed about at a cocktail party, or when you were attending an industry conference. It seems to be used a lot these days, primarily because it represents a new way of approaching older applications — a way that can result in future flexibility and less obsolescence in your contact center applications.



SOA is short for *service oriented architecture*, and it represents not a product or a feature, but a *method* of designing and implementing services within an organization. In short, *SOA* recognizes that there are certain services which are key to the organization as a whole, and those services need to be standardized. (They may already have been standardized, but the idea is that a standard for that service must exist.) Processes, procedures, and software tools are then developed (*architected*, if you will) to make use of those standardized services.

How does this relate to your call center? If your business systems are designed with *SOA* in mind, then you end up with meaningful tools that can be reused and repurposed over time. If done right, this means that there will be no software or system “waste” — you won’t end up throwing away software, but simply reusing it to achieve your changing business goals.

Cool, huh?

Web services

One of the quickly emerging software application technologies is *Web services*. This term describes a broad collection of services based upon standardized Web technologies. These

Web services make it easy for applications to use common services, such as making a call, answering a call, transferring a call, conferencing calls together, and disconnecting calls.



Web services are implemented using programming technologies such as WSDL (*Web Services Definition Language*) and SOAP (*Simple Object Access Protocol*), which allow the Web services to work across a range of hardware and software platforms. Web services hide the implementation details normally involved in successfully accomplishing telephony tasks.

Web services are useful in two additional ways. First, they allow you to re-use application components, such as a component that is used to make a call or do a customer lookup. Second, they help connect existing software by providing applications with a consistent way to link their data.

For instance, your contact center may implement some sort of chatting capability so that customers visiting your Web site can interact — via text or voice — with one of your agents. This capability can then be re-used in other applications, making the customer experience more consistent across applications.

Web services are positively impacting existing technologies as tasks previously done in proprietary systems are being rewritten to utilize the Web-based technologies. This approach is attractive to developers because it provides a more flexible data environment enabling systems to share data more easily and to be re-configured to meet changing business needs.



Because *Web services* is a leading-edge term, you're bound to hear it bandied about by some service providers, almost with abandon. If you see the term used by a supplier or provider, ask what that provider means by using it. You need to understand exactly what is meant by the term in any given context.

Agent performance monitoring

Most contact centers do a great deal of quality monitoring. In many cases, they do this by randomly listening to and grading agent contacts. Occasionally, the supervisor (or a member of a quality team) sits beside the agent and reviews the call with the agent immediately upon its conclusion.



Your growth, your way

When Language Line Services launched “Your World, Your Language,” the first free service that helps limited-English speakers buy business services, it needed a partner that could leverage Intelligent Communications to bring the offer in on time and on budget, while laying the foundation for future growth. That partner? Avaya.

With “Your World, Your Language,” consumers dial a toll-free number to talk in their own languages to a host of participating key businesses, anytime and at no charge. It was critical that Language Line maximize its agents’ productivity by connecting customers to interpreters as quickly as possible. According to Tom Sterns, Director, Advanced Technology Development, “Our goal is to make that connection in 12 seconds or less, every time, every day.” Yet Language Line’s legacy infrastructure was proving too costly, too cumbersome, and too limited to get the job done.

“We needed a larger feature set to keep up with our growing product line and wanted better text-to-speech and speech recognition services than the old system could offer. We also wanted to be able to expand more flexibly and cost effectively than our existing systems allowed,” Sterns says.

Language Line was also being restrained by its communications infrastructure, which was composed of several disparate systems. “We hungered for the interoperability and reliability that a single, comprehensive communications platform would afford,” Sterns explained.

With the October 2006 launch of “Your World, Your Language,” Language Line needed a platform that would move its business forward. They considered six vendors for the job. Avaya was the only one that was able to work within the launch timeline and within Language Line’s existing Conversant environment. Avaya Voice Portal and Avaya Dialog Designer were able to interoperate with the company’s own homegrown systems and legacy switches.

A Web services-based software platform, Avaya Voice Portal enables Language Line to deliver efficient voice self-service applications by combining the power of open standards, Web, and IP telephony. A single Avaya Voice Portal serves all seven of Language Line’s large interpreter centers. It supports voice self-service applications within Language Line’s existing IT environment and includes best-in-class integrations with the latest in IP telephony and speech recognition, making use of Service Oriented Architecture (SOA).

Language Line uses several voice self-service applications to improve its responsiveness to customers and interpreters alike. These include an inbound customer service line with an auto attendant feature that routes callers to the correct resource. Home-based interpreters also use voice self-service applications to log in without a PC, registering themselves as available to take calls. By making home-based interpreters extensions of the contact center, these applications ensure business continuity and flexibility.

Language Line uses Avaya Dialog Designer to quickly and easily program Avaya Voice Portal so they can bring their applications online more quickly. The result is that Language Line is more responsive to customers and more competitive in their market.

Avaya Voice Portal and Dialog Designer are improving Language Line's efficiency, improving customer satisfaction, saving the company money and space, and preparing Language Line to continue to flatten, consolidate, and extend its network at its own pace. Avaya Voice Portal is also contributing to improved agent productivity.

The "Your World, Your Language" service is proving to be a boon not only to limited-English speaking consumers, but also to business clients. AT&T, which uses the service to sell their own consumer services, credits Language Line with helping it achieve a phenomenal 57 percent close rate. Results like that can't help but give Language Line a strong competitive edge.

Other times, the supervisor may record the call remotely and review it with the agent at a later date. This method can be effective, but it has its drawbacks. Most significant is that it is very time consuming for the supervisor. Some supervisors have claimed that they can do about one call per hour when they include feedback.

Because the process is so labor intensive, it's difficult and impractical to target specific agent needs — such as long call length, low customer opinion, poor sales, or high returns.



For most contact centers it's beneficial to purchase an automated quality monitoring system and integrate it into your infrastructure. Such systems can dramatically increase your supervisors' productivity and enable them to provide to the agents a greater volume of feedback with more specific detail.

The system automatically captures complete agent phone calls — recording both the voice conversation and a screen

capture of the agents' navigation of the systems. When supervisors are ready to review agent calls, they simply log in to the system from their workstations, retrieve sample calls from the agents or services that they want to review, and begin scoring.

Scoring is also done through the system. After a supervisor finishes scoring, he or she can e-mail the results to the agent, with comments. The agent can also retrieve and review the call. The supervisor is relieved of the administration and wait time associated with manual quality monitoring. As a result, in some contact centers using this technology, supervisor productivity has more than tripled.

CRM technology

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a business term that refers to the process of relating to your customers to maximize the length and value of that customer relationship. It involves data collection and analysis to better understand your customers' needs and wants. It also includes customized strategies for addressing unique customer needs. The whole point of CRM is to get new customers, to keep the customers you've got, and to maximize the value of the relationships you have with those customers.

The core of any CRM strategy is to create a philosophy and plan on how you want to treat your customers, what you want to get from your customer relationships, and what you plan to give customers in return. The execution of the CRM strategy requires careful advance planning and evaluation. With such planning and evaluation you can improve your customer relationship management and your business results.



CRM applications can help a contact center totally shift their focus to the customer in ways never before possible. If your CRM applications are meaningfully integrated within your infrastructure, then your customers' experience is enhanced and operations effectiveness is improved.



Don't forget to make data analysis part of your overall CRM strategy. This analysis can be as simple as preparing reports and conducting database queries, or as complex as building predictive models in an effort to forecast the future behavior of your customers.

How to Recommend Technology

Okay, you're a technology genius and you found some technology that's going to make a big difference. So what's next? How do you go about getting approval so you can start saving the company money? Why not keep it simple? Try the one-page cost-benefit analysis.

The one-page cost-benefit analysis

The most appropriate and effective way to submit a proposal for technology enhancements is with a one-page cost-benefit analysis. It's easy, and only two specific rules apply:

- ✔ The analysis should easily fit onto one letter-sized piece of paper.
- ✔ The argument for spending money on new technology should be communicated in one minute or less.

Certainly, some proposals are going to be a lot longer than one page. The point is that the business case for new technology needs to be so clear and so focused on business objectives and drivers that it can easily be summarized in one page. And you know what? Few decision makers ever read those other pages anyway.



The easiest way to meet both of these rules is to use the business model outlined in Part II. The model says that all business activities go toward the key objectives of generating revenue, minimizing cost, and satisfying customers. To make the case for new technology, you have to define the benefit of new technology in terms of those key business objectives.

To make your business case, you have to show that the new technology can affect at least one of the performance drivers in a manner that results in a benefit to your company substantially larger than the cost of that new technology.

Considering the technology payback

Any technology recommendation needs to take into consideration payback — after all, that is the reason that any cost-benefit analysis is done. The goal of the analysis is to show that the payback of any technology investment is greater than the investment.

When considering payback, you must also consider intangibles. For instance, if a new system can decrease average call length by 30 seconds, that's an easy savings to quantify.

If the same system can also increase agent satisfaction, how do you quantify that? Further, how do you even determine that increased satisfaction is a potential payback until you've had agents try the new system?

These are questions that analysts face every day. As you are working on your recommendation, consider working with your existing analysts; they may be able to identify and quantify items that you never considered in your research. They definitely can help you identify current costs and measurements so you can compare them to the anticipated costs and measurements of the target system.



When considering any technology investment, work closely with your vendor or technology partners. Chances are good that they have experience in identifying and quantifying different ways that your investment can provide the payback you need.

Also consider payback in terms of strategic positioning — does a proposed system help position your contact center for greater growth or competitive advantage? Such intangibles are important in any business, and rightfully enter into any payback consideration for contact centers.

Part VI

Ten Ways to Improve Your Contact Center

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In This Part

- ▶ Make automation work for you
 - ▶ Get a handle on call processes
 - ▶ Make your contact center larger
 - ▶ Mix types of work for better agent utilization
 - ▶ Train during idle time
 - ▶ Look for ways to offload unnecessary contacts
 - ▶ Enhance customer support with speech
 - ▶ Add work-at-home agents
 - ▶ Invest in your staff
 - ▶ Become a proactive manager
-

Generally speaking, contact centers provide a very efficient way to communicate with a large number of customers. However, since contact center expenditures are frequently one of the larger line items for corporations, the costs are usually closely scrutinized.

In this part you find some general tips for improving your contact center by implementing efficiencies and decreasing overall costs.

Automate the Hard Stuff

Contact centers need to be constantly vigilant to determine what can and should be automated. The fact is, if you can automate processes that you previously did manually, you free up agent time (and management time) for more productive revenue generation. And automation can improve customer satisfaction, too: Many customers prefer an immediate self-service option to waiting in queue for an agent.

Fortunately, contact center software is becoming much more sophisticated, and what used to be difficult to automate can now be routinely handled by the software.

A case in point is the handling of priority customers — those who have the greatest chance of benefiting your bottom line. In days gone by, it took human interaction to identify and route such customers to the proper agent. New software (such as Avaya Business Advocate) that can automatically prioritize and route such calls has become available.

Each call center is different, of course, because a task that is automated at one location may not be automated at another. Make sure you analyze your particular situation and start a process of automating what you can.

Improve Call Control and Map Call Processes

Implementing a better call control strategy can have an immediate impact because reducing call length without sacrificing service is an effective way to reduce costs.

A good way to improve control is through the development of a contact guide. Guides can be as simple as an outline of the general flow and content of each contact — perhaps on one piece of paper — or can be very complex, using sophisticated scripting software and logical branching.



Any control mechanism you put in place for phone calls can also be generalized and adapted for other contact methods as well — including Web, chat, e-mail, and self-service. The idea is to improve the customer experience by ensuring the

contact never takes longer than is necessary to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Mapping your processes for handling various types of customer calls is another useful exercise. Start by identifying the eight to ten primary reasons customers contact your center.

Then sit down with a group of agents, perhaps a supervisor or two, and a trainer to map out (on paper or in software) how each contact is to be handled.

After you map the top call types, you can ask the group, “How might this be done better?” Simplifying and improving processes can result in tremendous improvements to call length and other call objectives.

Enlarge Your Contact Center

You can enlarge your contact center in many ways — and not all of them involve using more physical space. In general, larger contact centers are more efficient than smaller centers.

The easiest way to make your contact center bigger is to work together. If your contact center is running separate call-handling groups (customer service and collections, for example), then by merging these two groups you can take advantage of the economies of bigger contact centers.



You can continue to have call-handling groups logically separated, but with the ability for available agents in one area to handle overflow in the other area.

Implementing an IP contact center can help make your operation more scalable, which means you can enlarge without costly build-outs or investments in your plant. Instead, you can utilize and manage agents — through your IP infrastructure — as if they were physically in your office.

You can also expand your contact center to take advantage of personnel in lower-cost labor markets. If your contact center is located in the heart of Capital City you may have access to lots of the best-qualified people, but they’re likely to be expensive.

It often doesn't cost as much for the same quality of staff in Rural City, USA; Frostbite Falls, Canada; or Farfaraway, India. If you have an IP contact center, expanding in such markets is much easier than in traditional contact centers.

Blend Work

You can benefit from improved agent occupancy by blending inbound and outbound contact center work. A classic example of blending is mixing outbound telemarketing into an inbound sales or service queue. In this case, you make use of agent *idle time* — time agents spend waiting for incoming calls — to do your outbound work. As a result, your agents are busier (more occupied) overall. Should inbound volumes increase or spike, your agents stop making outbound calls and are automatically allocated to handle the inbound calls.



TIP

Outbound collections calls and customer-service “welcome” calls can also be used for blending, perhaps as an alternative to telemarketing. Or other types of work can be blended in, such as answering e-mail, chat, or regular mail.



REMEMBER

Provide your agents with tools to maximize their efficiency. By providing screen pops of relevant information, an easy-to-use agent desktop, perhaps softphone, and the ability to access experts for the tough questions, you increase the number of one-call resolutions and customer satisfaction. And you decrease the overall volume of calls to your contact center.

Turn Idle Time into Productive Training Time

Even in larger, more efficient contact centers, idle time can make up 15 percent or more of an agent's day. You can monitor agent activity and inbound call loads, and when an agent has sufficient idle time, a CTI system can send training material to the agent's desktop. If the application is sophisticated enough, material can be customized to the needs of the individual agent, and testing can also be added.

Eliminate Unnecessary Calls

Unnecessary calls come from a variety of sources, including calls handled poorly on the first attempt, confusing marketing materials, incorrect or confusing invoices, misdirected calls, and so on. Reducing them is a basic step in increasing contact center efficiency. Here are three quick ways to reduce unnecessary calls:

- ✔ **Implement self-service.** Using an integrated voice response — where automated voice prompts are used to service customer contacts — offers customers a fast and efficient means of self-serving their calling needs 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Depending on the environment, an IVR can offload between 5 and 25 percent or more of your center's call volume.
- ✔ **Use Web pages.** The use of company Web pages to provide customers with self-service options has a bright future. Self-service through a company Web site is cheaper than via an IVR, it's generally always available, and the complexity of transactions that can be done through the Internet is greater than any IVR solution. In addition, Web Services can be used to feed information from Web sites into self-service applications that can enhance your contact center and ensure that you're conveying a consistent company image.
- ✔ **Analyze why customers are calling.** A slightly more complex way to reduce unnecessary calls is to track the reasons for the contacts. Tracking, in detail, why customers call highlights the number of call types that are unnecessary and avoidable.

Add Speech Self-Service

Although speech self-service can reasonably be considered a method of eliminating unnecessary phone calls, the technology's promise to leverage existing Web investments really makes it stand out. In a speech self-service system, your "automated agents" can understand normal human speech and provide the information needed by customers. Beyond automated agent interactions, today's speech automated systems use open standards technologies like VoiceXML to better

leverage existing Web self-service investments. This information can be provided quicker over any telephone and with less frustration than with a more traditional touchtone system. (Customers can get tired waiting for “press 1 for this, 2 for that, and 3 for something else.”)

Consider Work-at-Home Agents

Many companies expand their contact centers through the use of work-at-home agents. Four basic motives lie behind the use of such agents, and each motive can help improve customer service, agent satisfaction, and the company's bottom line. These four key motivators are:

- ✔ **A desire to find and retain the best agents:** This task is made easier if you can offer those agents the opportunity to work where they are, rather than coming to where you are. In addition, if you remove the need for a person to physically come to your location, you've immediately increased the pool of potential agents.
- ✔ **Saving expenses on work-at-home agents:** You no longer have to provide physical space for the individual (desk, chair, parking, and so on), which can be quite expensive. You can instead focus on the data network that makes work-at-home possible; after all, it is much easier to move data than it is to move bodies.
- ✔ **Ability to enhance business continuity:** Because work-at-home agents are scattered hither and yon, you don't have to worry about a single point of failure that could damage your presence in the market. Multiple agents, widely dispersed, mean that a loss of one or several of them won't take you down completely.
- ✔ **Environmentally conscious company goals:** In this day and age, work-at-home agents have less of an impact on the environment since they no longer have to commute.

Spend More on Staff

Sooner or later, most contact centers fall into the trap of focusing too heavily on cost of labor. In fact, much of the outsourcing industry has been stuck in this dilemma.

It goes like this: Senior management wants the lowest possible cost of service. As a result, you reduce wages. You then spend more time than usual sifting through recruits trying to find the best cheap labor. You might even spend a lot of time training, but you don't want to overdo it because training is expensive.

After the agents are active, you do your best to monitor, coach, and program them to make them the best that they can be.

What you end up with is cheaper labor with reduced skill and motivation. As a result, although the cost of your service is low, the capability is also low. Results of this cheaper service include longer calls, less revenue generation, the need for more training, substantially higher levels of errors and call-backs, and, ultimately, dissatisfied customers who may stop doing business with you.

Bottom line: Consider spending a bit more on labor upfront.

Proactively Monitor and Manage

You meet two types of managers: reactive and proactive. Those in the former group are perpetually behind the gun, racing to get on top of some problem or catch up with the competition. Those in the latter group analyze data, anticipate problems, and plan for changes that head off the competition.

If you want to be proactive, learn what reporting capabilities your systems have and how you can best use the data they provide. If you're running an IP contact center, pay attention to reports generated not only in your contact center applications, but in your network management systems. Over time you can identify opportunities and circumvent potential problems, all to the benefit of your organization.



If your converged network is brand-new, don't be afraid to seek outside help from qualified vendors — such as Avaya — to help you make sense of the new management tools you'll have available.



Effective communications improves doctor/patient relations

Every year Privatärztliche VerrechnungsStelle (PVS) Schleswig-Holstein processes more than 1.5 million patient invoices for doctors in a number of countries. The company focuses on putting the business interests of those doctors first, and has been doing so for 80 years. PVS stays at the forefront of its industry by using the most up-to-date IT, printing, and logistics technology available.

The telephone remains the most important means of contact between PVS, its 3,300 clients, and the patients of those clients. The PVS call center receives approximately 12,000 calls per month from both clients and patients. A reliable telephone system and efficient call center management are therefore crucial to the success of PVS.

Avaya has been a long-time partner of PVS, providing key technology and support that is critical to the organization's success. PVS combines the fail-safe IP telephone system with the Customer Interaction Express contact center solution. This combination allows the intelligent distribution of calls throughout the call center and prevents callers from waiting in a queue for long periods. The addition of a unified messaging

solution increases the capability of the technology to meet the demands and needs of PVS employees. Through an easy-to-implement interface, the Avaya system is also connected to an internal Lotus Notes installation.

Technical staff can use the solutions provided by Avaya to create detailed usage statistics that aid management in making timely business decisions for PVS. They are easily able to identify and react to peak calling times. The result is better agility and the ability to flexibly meet the needs of both clients and patients.

Through the solutions provided by Avaya, PVS is able to attain a high level of customer focus. The benefits to those customers are a short wait time and the delivery of skilled staff to where they are needed.

PVS is also able to optimally use their in-house resources through intelligent call distribution and detailed analyses of call-center metrics. All of these help to ensure smooth and efficient communication.

The bottom line is that Avaya solutions help PVS to better serve the needs of both doctors and patients in a high-demand industry.

EMPOWER YOUR CONTACT CENTER WITH AVAYA INTELLIGENT COMMUNICATIONS.

Deliver more effective customer contact with Avaya Intelligent Communications—advanced, IP-enabled business communications applications that enable you to interact, share information, and work together in real time—anytime, from any device, anywhere. These applications allow you to connect your business to your customers; connect customer service personnel to internal customer databases; access expert resources within your enterprise; and provide status on process outcomes in other enterprise applications—increasing productivity while lowering costs.

SPEED TRANSACTION TIMES. CLOSE DEALS FASTER. MAKE CUSTOMERS HAPPIER. WITH THE AVAYA CUSTOMER INTERACTION SUITE.

This award-winning technology—a most comprehensive integrated contact center software suite—is so effective because it is

- fully IP-based, supporting a highly distributed architecture that can enable you to consolidate and extend your contact center applications
- highly available, scalable, and secure
- built on open standards to integrate with other business applications
- supported by Avaya Global Services — and partners like the Avaya DeveloperConnection network, which builds value-added applications into your contact center environment

It's all part of Avaya's unique approach of embedding communications into the core of business, helping make people more effective, processes more intelligent, and customers more satisfied. Partner with a global leader in contact centers and turn your contact center into a strategic asset for growth. Because the fact is, the importance of a positive, responsive customer experience to your company's success can hardly be overstated.

AVAYA

COMMUNICATIONS
AT THE HEART OF BUSINESS





Turn your contact center into
a strategic asset
for growth

Get up to speed on the latest technologies for transforming your contact center

The importance of a positive customer experience is the key to your company's success. For anyone managing a contact center, this handy guide can put key factors into perspective and help you make better business decisions to make the most of your agents' time and skills with current technologies. Expert authors provide invaluable information for managers on how to run an efficient, profitable contact center, and real-life case studies of technological solutions to contact center quandaries. Find out how Avaya solutions can help your contact center become more effective, your processes more intelligent, and your customers more satisfied.

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DUMMIES
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Explanations in plain English
"Get in, get out" information
Icons and other navigational aids
Top ten lists
A dash of humor and fun

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