

ADVANCED CALL CENTERS DRIVE INCREASED BUSINESS POTENTIAL

Sophisticated Call Center Capabilities Enable High-Technology Companies to Provide Better Service, Generate Additional Revenue, and Strategically Impact Future Business Strategies and Direction

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After many years of optimizing business processes, pursuing smart cost-cutting decisions, and reducing call volumes and wait times, high-technology companies have transformed their cost centers into profit centers. Yet, by many standards, call centers and technical support environments still remain dramatically underutilized tools for creating a competitive advantage and increasing profitability. This is largely due to an inability to transform volumes of service information into valuable intelligence for shaping business, product, and sales strategies.

As a result, progressive high-technology companies are increasingly transforming their technical support centers into strategic assets by capitalizing on their tools and capabilities to rapidly identify which products customers use, track all post-sale customer issues, and create a complete, “360-degree” view of each customer. This information then helps ensure better service, shape business strategy, and continually increase overall growth potential.

To create advanced call centers and related self-service capabilities that achieve these objectives, companies must convert service departments into highly-visible assets, by integrating and aligning them with other customer-facing business groups to quickly identify and resolve issues and guide future sales, marketing, and product development efforts. The goal is not to transform service teams into sales teams, but rather to imbue service personnel — and by extension, customers — with knowledge of related and relevant products, services, support, add-ons, and enhancements. This knowledge will then drive increased product uptake, improved customer loyalty and retention, and additional revenue.

BEYOND EFFICIENCY GOALS

Achieving these business outcomes requires that call centers must first become problem-resolution centers. In other words, companies must balance efficiency improvements with achieving customer retention by effectively solving customers’ problems and ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction. Simply concluding calls as rapidly as possible is not the best technique for retaining customers, providing better service, improving customer relationships, and ensuring long-term business success.

Excelling at customer service also entails successfully anticipating users’ needs, and then proactively meeting and exceeding them. Accordingly, one approach to ensuring excellent service is to resolve problems before customers even call — perhaps through proactive

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software updates or product recalls. Providing advanced self-service portals that solve problems without having to wait in call center queues also leads to more satisfied customers. Notably, the cost of online help averages just \$0.20 per transaction, compared with \$8 or \$10 per call center transaction. Therefore, the savings from well-designed self-service portals can be substantial.

CREATING KNOWLEDGE-BASES

SHOW, DON'T TELL

Progressive companies are moving beyond staid call center scripts to best-call libraries. Such libraries allow agents to listen to greetings the company considers excellent, understand the diagnostic approaches customers most appreciate, and hear different ways of handling every important part of a call from an engaging greeting to an appropriate closing. This avoids robotically in toned scripts, and allows representatives to add personality to communications, increasing engagement and boosting customer satisfaction.

Similarly, some high-technology companies now offer short, online video clips that show customers how to resolve problems. Often, customers prefer these videos to customer support staff telling them what to do. Despite an initial production investment, videos generate notable cost savings by reducing labor costs. In fact, such videos can cost 60 percent less than support calls, which practically creates a business imperative for pursuing this “show, don’t tell” option.

To provide customers with the information they require — via technical support or online self-service tools — high-technology companies are increasingly deploying knowledge-bases that contain product marketing information, instruction manuals in PDF format, technical diagrams and schematics, and extensive details on problems logged and their resolutions. Given the number of documents stored within a company’s knowledge-base — hundreds of thousands of documents at larger companies — the information must not only be useful, but also retrievable, searchable, and sufficiently formatted. Furthermore, companies require a plan for ensuring that new information is both added to the knowledge-base, and tagged and formatted appropriately. This information is then available to other business units, to help guide product development and future sales and marketing efforts.

One Innoveer customer, Aspect Software, faced a challenge, as many of the software problems its service department found, and the subsequent solutions, never became part of its customer support knowledge-base. This resulted in duplicate efforts and slowed problem-resolution. To solve this problem, Innoveer helped Aspect find and cull all of its existing support documents, format them for easier retrieval, and implement improved business processes to collect, standardize, condense, and continually catalog all new information. Employees rapidly adopted the updated system, which presents information in a consistent and easily searchable manner — resulting in increased efficiency, decreased costs, and most importantly, increased overall customer satisfaction levels. Furthermore, Aspect now collects valuable information on customer feedback and functionality requests, which it uses to direct future product development.

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RELAYING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Today's service departments capture significant insight regarding the overall software, hardware, and services their customers utilize, plus their satisfaction levels and the performance problems or scalability issues they encounter two weeks or two months into a product implementation. Accordingly, many high-technology companies have expanded their customer management systems to better capture service information and ensure that these customer insights reach the organization at large, helping all business units better understand customer needs, improve decision-making capabilities, and manage future sales and marketing endeavors.

Information alone, however, will not transform an organization: A top-down mandate is also essential. The heads of service, product development, IT, marketing, engineering, and sales must ensure that their employees learn to work together, and gather and share essential information, since the sum of all of their efforts impacts the overall customer experience. Thus, excelling at customer care demands a unified, cross-business effort in terms of both process and technology.

INTEGRATE SERVICE AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Mastering the ability to use service as a strategic asset creates numerous opportunities. For example, PTC, a \$721 million software provider, worked with Innoveer to integrate its product development and customer service departments. In many companies, these two groups clash, however at PTC, virtually integrating these groups has enabled better tracking of bugs, release of more stable and better software builds, and improved distribution of release notes.

By better capturing, integrating, and analyzing service data, PTC also identifies software bugs in production code more quickly. This then saves money, since eliminating bugs early in the software or hardware development lifecycle costs much less than attempting to eradicate them from code that is already in testing, or released to customers. The support data also helps prevent any major bugs from spreading, and enables PTC to quickly release new software builds to fix major problems. All of this directly impacts the business by increasing customer satisfaction, creating a greater impression of product quality, and proactively reducing service calls.

INTEGRATE SERVICE WITH SALES

Support must also better integrate with sales to enable visibility into a customer's history and existing hardware and software prior to pitching new products or opportunities.

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Especially within the high-technology industry, customer satisfaction directly correlates with purchasing: Happy, loyal customers purchase more software licenses, are more likely to renew service contracts, and are easier to service — saving support costs and also providing positive referrals. By contrast, unhappy customers are more likely to switch to competitors. For a high-technology salesperson offering a new licensing opportunity to a current customer, understanding whether or not the customer experienced problems in the past and what products or services interest the customer will be crucial information for closing the sale. Likewise, service groups that ably track customers' problems and rapidly resolve them will boost customer satisfaction, and drive customers to purchase more licenses, additional products, and higher levels of support.

To arm salespeople with all necessary information before conducting sales calls, one Innoveer past customer, BroadVision, which sells enterprise business portal software, trains its customer service representatives to query customers on a variety of data points beyond the symptoms of a given problem, including how many people use the product, and in which departments. This helps illuminate and resolve support issues, of course, but also allows salespeople to pinpoint new sales opportunities, and better target future products to customers' actual needs.

CROSS-SELLING POTENTIAL

Likewise, service personnel may themselves increase sales by cross-selling during customer support calls. At one Innoveer high-technology customer, representatives frequently ask customers — who often call for replacement parts — if they also want to purchase related accessories for their products. Meanwhile at PTC, customer support personnel regularly raise awareness about the company's other products, and based on a customer's use of a particular product, may suggest add-on software to better meet their needs. The PTC online store also offers related product suggestions when customers purchase software. Providing information that is relevant to a customer's needs — and not a blatant attempt to turn the support channel into a sales channel — has helped PTC markedly increase sales, improve its customer knowledge, and ensure effective customer service.

ADVANCED WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT

To further increase business impact, leading high-technology companies are using advanced workflow management tools to handle call center volumes in real time, route callers based on their service-level contracts, and connect customer service representatives with every available support channel — from phone, to email, to Web-based chat. One

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high-technology manufacturer, for example, can view when incoming calls are increasing, and summon additional representatives to handle the overflow. To avoid such situations in the future, however, Innoveer helped this company create a Web site which allows customers to create and track their own trouble tickets, and implement sophisticated email analysis tools to scan for incoming, support-related emails; extract a product-related serial number; and generate a relevant trouble ticket. As a result, this company can now more quickly respond to customer service requests, spot and rectify emerging problems, direct future service strategies, and ensure customers remain informed, and thus satisfied and loyal.

SERVICE AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

One emerging trend at many high-technology companies is the vice president or director of support now reporting directly to the president or CEO. This shift reflects the growing importance of service within high-technology organizations. By properly integrating service information with that of sales, marketing, product development, and business development, high-technology companies gain a powerful resource for competing more effectively, while retaining and growing their customer base at the same time.

In particular, providing better, more relevant service information helps companies proactively solve customer problems and refine products, creating more satisfied customers, improving customers' perceptions of product quality, and leading to renewed and added licenses and increased revenue. Hence, advanced service capabilities allow high-technology companies to create call centers and technical support environments, which are not simply profit centers, but strategic assets for improving efficiency; guiding company direction, product development, and sales efforts; and increasing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall revenue.

ABOUT INNOVEER

INNOVEER SOLUTIONS, an award-winning customer strategy and solutions consultancy, provides advanced customer management services to high-technology and healthcare companies, among others, in the areas of planning and strategy, technology implementation, and optimization. The company's deep industry knowledge, broad technical skills, and Multishore methodology enable organizations to address their critical customer-facing issues and achieve an integrated view of all customer information. With an exclusive focus on customer management since 1998, Innoveer has worked with more than 300 organizations to increase their overall business growth, improve internal efficiency, and enhance the customer experience.

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