
Web Enabling the Customer Service Contact Center

John Kim, *ecfirst.com*

Progressive companies today realize that Web-based marketing can boost sales and bring them customers. However, simply maintaining an online presence is not enough. Servicing customers well is the key. And can you service someone when you don't know their needs? No. Astute firms know they must combine a customer needs focus with a process managed approach. The key point of contact for many businesses is their Customer Service Call / Contact Center. An e-Business solutions integrator, *ecfirst.com* describes the inefficiencies and frustrations at a call center in a large financial services company. By request, the true identity of this company will not be revealed. For reference purposes, we will call them FSC.

Problem

Customers expect efficient and quick services from the businesses with whom they interact, whether the communication be via mail,

FAX, telephone, or by e-mail through the Internet. When inquiries are made known, the company should resolve them as fast and as effectively as possible. FSC was having so many challenges, they considered it a major accomplishment to just resolve a customer's question over the phone. The following are just a few examples of the problems encountered at this call center:

- Of 400-500 calls each day, only 85 percent were answered
- Call abandoned rate was 15 percent
- Of calls answered, only 20 percent were resolved during the first call; the remainder of calls took as long as 72 hours to resolve with research, if resolved at all
- Ten percent of all calls never got resolved
- Average call-handling time was 25 minutes per call



At a Glance

Problem

FSC was having so many challenges at their call center, they considered it a major accomplishment to just resolve a customer's question over the phone. One example of many problems encountered there was the fact that of calls answered, only 20 percent were resolved during the first call; the remainder of calls took as long as 72 hours to resolve with research, if resolved at all.

Solution

Without consulting customers, management tried to solve the problem by using a flow chart to diagram the model of the call center process. However, they discarded this ineffective avenue and implemented ProcessModel. After modeling the "as-is" and "what if" scenarios, a four-phase project based on the "to-be" process was implemented. The first three phases have been completed and have been given very high marks on Customer Satisfaction surveys.

Results

"Without using ProcessModel, this project would have been a very costly game of hit and miss—sort of a guessing game. It allows us to truly focus on the needs of the customer from a process approach. We now enjoy increased customer satisfaction, a drop in abandoned calls rate below the industry benchmark of 5%, and the retention of customers."

- No Voice Response Unit was provided, only an answering machine with a recorded message
- No Automatic Call Distribution (ACD); used a PBX with 42 lines for incoming call switching, solely based on Customer Service Representative (CSR) availability
- A total of 105 CSRs in a single tier
- No access by CSRs to customer records

Solution

Without consulting customers, management tried to solve the problem by using a flow chart to diagram the model of the call center process. However, because it was a static diagram, it did not shed light on any answers. They discarded this ineffective avenue and implemented ProcessModel. After modeling the “as-is” and “what if” scenarios, a four-phase project based on the “to-be” process was implemented. The first three phases have been completed and have been given very high marks on Customer Satisfaction surveys. The as-is model provided a way to investigate the “root cause” of why calls were not being resolved. It was discovered that the inability to access customer records was the primary causative factor. Implementation of the first three phases was a total success, and the results were astounding even though calls increased by ten-fold because of the consolidation of many call centers from multiple business areas within the company into one Contact Center.

Results

After ProcessModel revealed the weak areas and they were strengthened, the following very positive changes were noted at FSC:

- 4000 calls are received daily, of which 96 percent are answered
- Call abandoned rate is now four percent
- First and Done calls resolved are at 80 percent
- Average call-handling time is now three minutes per call
- An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is in place, with well-scripted options for the customer
- ACD is used in conjunction with a Lucent switch to manage 120 lines, using Skills Based Routing
- 300 CSRs are in the first tier; 70 CSRs are in the second tier; with 35 special resources in third tier.

“Without using ProcessModel, this project would have been a very costly game of hit and miss—sort of a guessing game. It allows us to truly focus on the needs of the customer from a process approach, and not just on the technology. Technology is only an enabler.”

“The fruits of all this labor is a savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars annually as the contact center resolves a much higher percentage of first and done calls but it’s the intangibles of increased customer satisfaction, drop in abandoned calls rate below the industry benchmark of 5%, and the retention of customers as well as the cross selling/marketing opportunities presented

that no dollar figure can ever be quantified. It helped us to implement the kind of personalization which real world business transactions and customer service requires to create the real differentiator for companies to stay competitive today.”

FIND OUT MORE

About the Author: John Kim is the Director of eBusiness Development at *ecfirst.com*. John has more than 15 years experience and in-depth competencies in Strategic & Tactical Planning, Business Continuous Process Improvement & Simulations, Customer Service Call Centers, Project Management, and E-Commerce.

John holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Technical Management and an MBA from Drake University, with emphasis in Computer Information Systems. John is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command & General Staff College and was the principal attack planner for the Armor Spearhead Ground Attack during the Persian Gulf War.

Contact: If you have any questions about ProcessModel, please contact the ProcessModel team at (801) 356-7165, or e-mail info@processmodel.com.

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