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Everything you need to know about...

Optimising People Performance Through Technology

A Global Speech Networks Whitepaper

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Level 12, 114 Albert Road

South Melbourne, Victoria 3205

(+613) 9015 2555 | www.globalspechnetworks.com.au

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Table of Contents

Legal Notice	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Streamlining Systems	2
3. A More Interesting Job	3
4. Effective Performance Management.....	4
5. Contact Details	5

1. Introduction

Technology is not often seen as a solution to agent attrition. In the past, human resource strategy has been based around people and culture, leaving technology to those on the shop floor. However implementation of the right technology can make the difference between agents who leave and agents who stay.

Technology can be used within HR strategy in three key ways; to make day to day processes easier for agents with user-friendly desktop tools and interfaces, to enable agents to be the best they can through feedback and review systems, and to create genuine career path and development opportunities for agents through interaction blending and multi-skilling. While these areas would no doubt be covered in all centres' HR strategies, the solutions would not traditionally have been seen to have a technology component.

Implementation of appropriate technology solutions can be used in conjunction with HR strategy to more effectively reach the long term HR goals of the organisation.

2. Streamlining Systems

By implementing user-friendly desktop tools and interfaces, including CRM systems and integrating the people process with these, management can alleviate much of the day-to-day frustration for agents. Working off multiple systems not only causes frustration on calls, but can be a barrier to efficient customer service delivery. Being unable to quickly locate customer information means the agent must 'ad lib' on the call, losing consistency of customer experience. In the long term this can be demoralizing and draining, increasing agent attrition. Multiple system usage also means agents require a much higher investment in training, and call times and wrap-ups tend to be longer than necessary.

Customization of desktop tools such as phone control 'soft phones' can provide agents with immediate performance stats. Queue depth and time, call entry queues, average call and wrap up times and other customized stats can all be provided within soft phones. Providing agents with real time performance stats enables them to modify their on-going performance in line with customer and business expectations. This technology, used in conjunction with on-going training and performance metrics ensures centres are actively working towards overall business strategy and remain customer focused.

3. A More Interesting Job

In the past many agents have left the contact centre industry due to the lack of career opportunity and progression. With little chance to develop specialist skills within the industry, agents must rely solely on progression through tenure and natural attrition. With the increased use of self-service technologies, agents are finding call types and customer interactions are changing. Simple transactional calls are being directed to IVR and speech recognition services, and agents are able to focus on calls requiring a high level of detail and care and hence, value. In addition, this reduction in call volume frees up agents, enabling the introduction of blending and multi-channel communication, including web chat and email.

Furthermore, there is increased direct benefit in improving the usability of CRM and knowledge management systems in relation to centres that have implemented self-service.

With self-service technologies removing a large proportion of the easier queries, agents are no longer able to ease their way into the business and build up their knowledge base.

Therefore, agents need to have access to comprehensive information systems on the call to be able to confidently deliver effective customer service.

4. Effective Performance Management

An area where management and agents continually find themselves at loggerheads is performance metrics and statistics. For the organisation, performance metrics are an opportunity to optimize contact centre output to meet business objectives. Professional agents see themselves as customer service specialists, and often find performance targets and metrics constraining in the delivery of this. The key to using metrics effectively without getting agents off-side is to report on behaviors and timings appropriate for your organisation. Taking a generic measurement, such as Average Handling Time and applying it to an organisation blindly can have appalling results. Some centres may require longer call times due to the nature of the business; others may need longer wrap-up times due to large amounts of after call work. It is important to implement metrics specific to your business and the intended customer experience, and should target quality and improvement strategies accordingly. With this in mind, having a technology platform that is able to easily customize metrics and reporting to give the business the insight it needs into its contact centre should go hand in hand with a strong HR strategy.

While technology can by no means replace the need for an effective HR strategy, it should certainly be used to compliment efforts to increase agent retention. When the solution is built to be user-friendly and customer focused, agents can focus on delivering optimal customer service and achieving the broader business objectives. Happy agents make happy customers, which translates into a better bottom line.

5. Contact Details

Address: Level 12, 114 Albert Rd
South Melbourne 3205
Victoria Australia

Telephone: (61 3) 9015 2555

Fax: (61 3) 9015 2550

Email: sales@speechnetworks.com.au

Web: www.speechnetworks.com.au

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