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Contact centre top tips to collectively transform our industry

Link: Mats Rennstam (<https://sabiogroup.com/people/mats-rennstam/>) - Managing Director

What would someone who has benchmarked over 1,000 contact centres annually, list as the key things the industry need to improve?

Ciara Leddy caught up with Mats Rennstam, MD and founder of Bright to get his view on how we can raise the game in the contact centre industry. Bright has been reviewing and benchmarking customer service operations for 15 years and have unique access to trends and insight to what would drive change across the sector.

“There is no one single panacea to significantly turn things around”, says Mats. “However, there are a number of things most centres need to change if we are to raise the game across the board. We have identified two basic things everyone needs to improve on and five additional improvement areas for more mature contact centres.”

1. The obvious one: Why do customers call?

Out of the two basic “quick fixes” for the industry the first one is to measure why customers are calling in a structured way. This may sound ridiculously obvious, but many companies still don’t do this on an ongoing basis. By listing the top 10 contact reasons every month they would be able to (through root cause analysis, improve self-service and FAQ’s on the web for example) significantly increase their first contact resolution, customer satisfaction, planning and feedback to the rest of the organisation whilst reducing a high volume of avoidable contact.

2. Measuring what matters

Secondly, we recommend that contact centres stop measuring (and thus managing) what’s easy rather than what has the biggest value to both customers and the organisation. A classic example of this is the 80/20 calls answered service level target that so many companies adopt. Very few centres reach this mark (the average is 55% of calls answered within 20 seconds) and yet it persists – driven, we believe, by senior management’s desire to have one number to focus their efforts on. More importantly; most centres genuinely believe achievement of this target is key to delivering customer satisfaction but when measuring what impact a 30 seconds shorter

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hold time has, we see that it hardly affects c-sat at all (unless the total hold time exceeds 2 minutes). Just a small dip in FCR (First Contact Resolution) or employee engagement however, sends customer satisfaction through the floor.

Before setting targets for any operational metrics, the strategy needs to be clear; companies need to define what their overall purpose is and what factors will affect this strategy? It's the combination of not choosing KPIs that drive strategy and a lack of data on how those KPIs affect each other that makes many centres work very hard yet only become efficient, not effective. What's more focusing on these targets in individual appraisals will systematically drive the wrong behaviours.

3. Employee engagement

As mentioned before, the way agents sound has a bigger impact on customer satisfaction than we've previously realised. We've however also seen a direct correlation between this and efficiency metrics. Engaged agents believe that they can have an impact on most areas including costs, revenue and quality. That's the type of staff we want!

Don Pepper defines engagement as "Positive proactive involvement". We like this definition; it's not just about being satisfied, we want people to be proactive. Staff that don't just wait for management to explain that a problem needs fixing but people who can identify a problem and look for solutions on their own.

When measuring engagement, we also recommend you measure the top drivers, e.g. achievement, recognition and development, so as to make the results actionable. Finally make sure that you benchmark the results. Receiving a result that says "53.67% engaged staff" means little until you get an external reference.

4. Busting myths and benchmarking

Measuring and following up the relevant KPIs will tell you how much better or worse you are doing from your previous review period. It however won't tell you whether the resultant figure is good or bad. This can only come from external benchmarking; comparing you to peers and other centres out there.

Very often you will be surprised by the findings. It is easy to misjudge our own performance and think that we are worse at many more things than we actually are or vice versa. A benchmarking exercise helps you prioritise and optimise time, budget and resources where they are really needed.

Benchmarking against your own sector is of course of biggest initial interest, they have the same challenges as you do. For quality KPIs though, don't disregard cross industry averages; not many bank customers call banks other than their own. They will however call their Telecom / Utility / Retail centres and that's where they will form their overall opinion on what good customer service is!

We need to get better at proudly marketing our industry to the outside world and communicating fact not fiction. For example, neither attrition nor absence is worse at in-house centres than other sectors. The average centre is actually performing significantly better now than 2 years ago, the volume and complexity of calls have however increased at an even faster rate. All of us and particularly associations like the ICS and the CCA need to have access to better data and communicate this proactively to the media.

5. Building internal status

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As well as good for increasing external status, there are some KPIs that aren't just of use for measuring your centre's performance but also great tools to increase the contact centres' status within the organisations.

In order to get the necessary funds to maintain and invest in a centre, managers need to improve internal equity and market themselves effectively inside the organisation. They can achieve this by using KPIs to prove value to the different stake holders around the company and speak their language. What metrics would a financial director be interested in (targets for becoming more cost efficient?), the marketing director (how the centre measures and drives customer satisfaction and behaviour?) and the CEO (how feedback of information to other departments is supporting them in their development?).

6. Get with the times but tread carefully

Apart from the opportunities in home working, voice analytics and other new technology enabled areas, companies need to keep up with a generation that are now used to communicating in other ways than over the phone. Multi-channel solutions are a must for servicing and listening to customers in different ways. Companies should monitor the sites in order to listen but the decision to interact is a different matter. We regularly see people saying, "why hasn't company X picked up my complaint on this site" and at the same time comments such as "if we'd wanted you to contact with us we would have told you".

7. Find the links!

It is clear that a contact centre cannot measure performance, employee engagement or customer satisfaction in isolation. They all drive each other and by measuring them in parallel a whole new world will open up. Managers can see who their most productive agent are but also their most effective at generating satisfied customers. Or see where their breaking point is for hold time on the phones; maybe they can lower their service level targets and spend the savings where it will have a much bigger impact on customer retention, etc.

By adopting a more holistic view to performance management, as well as getting the first two basic points right; the industry will be able to significantly raise the game!

If you would to talk to us in more detail about improving your contact centre performance, email [Link: info@sabiogroup.com](mailto:info@sabiogroup.com) (<mailto:info@sabiogroup.com>).

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