



Unified Desktop Systems

Wake-up call for desktop efficiency

Efficiency, customer satisfaction and profits are among the goals that are severely impacted by the complexity and multiplicity of computing systems found in many contact centers, according to a survey of 200 multi-national corporate call centers conducted for Jacada by Winn Technology Group Research.

Rather than a flexible and fast interaction with customers, some contact center agents are still obliged to labor under processes that are cumbersome and unwieldy. The research shows that

- More than 50 percent of call centers require that a contact center representative access an average of three to five applications to service a customer.
- Even more astonishing, 33 percent of call centers require agents to master more than six applications.
- More than 33 percent of all contact centers require service representatives to key the same data into multiple applications, multiple times.

The painful result: Customer Satisfaction objectives are difficult if not impossible to achieve, contact centers' training costs remain chronically high, and at some stage, agent productivity is still stagnant or already in decline.

A closer industry-by-industry look identifies today's most complex contact center environments. Retail contact centers have the largest percentage of customer service representatives who are required to key in redundant data, a whopping 54 percent.

- Banking, insurance and technology industries have the most complex call

Rather than a flexible and fast interaction with customers, some contact center agents today are still obliged to labor under processes that are cumbersome and unwieldy – with a direct impact on the provider organization and the efficiency of customer support. A new call center desktop research sheds a light on the potential still in store for call centers with a professional attitude towards State-of-the-art desktop solutions.

centers – none operate with fewer than three applications.

- Insurance, technology and supply chain sectors are as much as three times more likely than other industries to increase outsourcing of call center operations. Therefore, this industry sector will show an increasing demand for desktop solutions solving agents' as well as customers' problems. According to the survey, when call center managers were asked about improvement goals, 56 percent of respondents ranked customer satisfaction at the top of their list.

Responses show that call center managers recognize that traditional metrics such as "reduced call times", need to be ranked in context of more important goals such as for instance

- efficiency and
- customer satisfaction.

The survey results suggest that respondents understand that a long call for a routine enquiry is a disaster. However, on the long run, a long conversation where the agent is cross-selling services may on the other hand suggest improved customer satisfaction and lead to valuable sales results which make it worth talking to the customer above the normal average handling time originally scheduled by the supervisor.

However, the research indicates that call center managers do not forsake traditional metrics. Call center managers realize that a customer's experience cannot be improved without also reducing the call time. 22 percent of all respondents still

consider 'reduced call times' an important objective.

The survey indicates both the importance of qualitative metrics such as customer satisfaction and quantitative metrics such as reduced call times and more profitable outcomes. The high importance in the survey given to customer satisfaction improvement supports the trend of call centers that measure the satisfaction of customers' experience by incorporating customer feedback into evaluations of their agents. What is troubling is that the survey also suggests that improving customer satisfaction is at risk due to the increasing complexity of the agent desktop environment. 56 percent of respond-

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Winn Technology Group, Inc. (WTG)...

- Conducted the collection and analysis of the market research data utilizing outbound teleprofessional contact with subjects as well as an email campaign and web site for online collection of data.
- Surveyed target respondents who were responsible for oversight of operations, customer service, call center, and help desk. The contacts ranged from manager and director level, through vice presidents and CIOs.
- The database included 2.797 records of identified call center operations with greater than 1.000 employees. Jacada supplemented this with 680 contacts from its in-house database.
- From the final database of 3.477 records, a total of 1918 presentations were made to potential survey respondents. The results were conducted with a "blind survey" approach so that Jacada's name was not used in the survey, thus eliciting unbiased results.

Sources: Winn technology Group, Inc./Jacada

ents ranked customer satisfaction at the top of their list.

One of the key findings of the Jacada research is that contact centers run their operations with a staggering number of applications on the agents' desktops. Respondents were asked how many different applications their agents needed to know in order to perform their jobs properly. 50 percent indicated that three to five applications were required. 32 percent indicated that the number of applications was greater than six. The agent desktop affects each and every aspect of call center performance.

- Do agents have the capability to access information when it is needed for the customer?
- Does the desktop allow them to do their work with time efficiency?
- Does the flow of the application hinder the ability to focus on the customer?

In two areas – searching for information and re-keying of data – multiple applications and complex desktops have a huge impact on the customer related productivity, according to the survey.

A significant portion of an agent's interaction time with customers is spent searching for information. 49 percent of all contact centers report that the call time spent by their agents searching for information is in excess of 20 percent. Even the majority (52 percent) indicate that between ten to 20 percent of an agent's time with the customer is spent searching for information.

The impact of the complexity of the agent desktop on call centers is broader than the

» productivity of its agents.

The issue impacts:

- Offshoring and outsourcing decisions, since they are driven by an evaluation of costs, which can be significantly impacted by the desktop complexity.
- Quality assurance, since to ensure that each agent handles customer interactions consistently requires intuitive, easy-to-navigate agent desktops.
- Technological discussions, like call routing and IP in the call center, since their deployment is driven by the desktop applications.

According to Gartner, 92 percent of all customer interactions happen over the phone. In handling the phones, Gartner estimates that personnel costs account for 71 percent of a typical contact center budget. How does a contact center manager get personnel to be more productive, faster? Given high personnel costs, training is seen as one of the most important factors in lowering costs, improving productivity and helping ensure customer satisfaction. However, the cost of training new agents is becoming more and more expensive due to the ever-increasing complexity of the agent desktop environment.

The survey by Jacada shows the majority of respondents – 60 percent – conduct training that takes approximately one to two months. An additional 15 percent of call centers conduct new-hire training longer than nine weeks, according to the survey. And a significant part of this training is required due to the complexity of the applications the agent must use.

According to the research, 50 percent of the respondents indicated that the complexity of the desktop increases training costs by at least 20 percent, with 17 percent indicating it increased training costs by more than 40 percent. And these are only the costs associated with initial training. 28 percent of the call centers report that it takes more than 12 weeks after training for the average agent to become productive and self-sufficient. The complex agent desktop has a negative impact on corporate profits by increasing the expenses for initial agent training, and delaying the time it takes for them to be completely productive, servicing the all-important customer. A complex, technically heterogeneous desktop environment is difficult (if not impossible) and costly to IP-enable, further stressing the need to simply and ultimately easily IP-enable the agent desktop to take advantage of some of these significant cost savings alternatives. Call centers share common goals regarding their agents: reduce turnover, lower agent costs, make training more effective, less costly and more relevant. While the focus is on improving customer satisfaction, action must be taken on the agent desktop environment if gains are to be made in improving customer retention and loyalty. Jacada survey respondents indicated that the complexity of the desktop significantly affects agent performance. Turnover, retention, training costs, morale – all can be impacted by improvements in the agent desktop. It is highly significant that call center managers are virtually unanimous in one opinion.

Overwhelmingly, 96.5 percent of respondents said that agent satisfaction was an essential component in providing effective customer service. If a contact center provides more effective agent satisfaction it will lead to measurably better customer interactions and a more profitable business.

Source: www.jacada.com

Special thanks to Jacada

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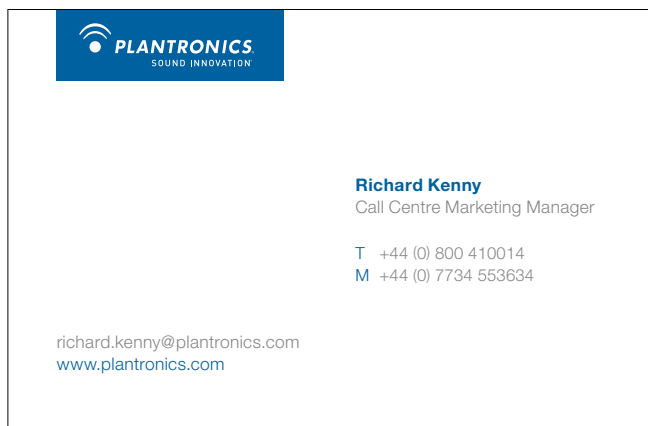
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