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CRM has evolved; embrace CPM – Contact Point Management

At the turn of the millennium, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) was trumpeted as the next great thing to drive efficiency in the call centre, increase sales and maximise service call resolution at the first point of contact.

Undoubtedly, the core CRM concepts retain their importance – understand and anticipate your customers' needs and deliver products and services to meet those needs as efficiently as possible. But CRM often fails the call centre when a business decides that the CRM equates to the implementation of a specific set of software and over rigid processes.

In recent years the call centre's purpose has changed from simple transactional activity to an environment where your customers can contact you for a wide range of reasons and through a variety of media. And in today's fast moving consumer environments a call centre's business aims and targets can be changed almost at the drop-of-hat. For example, your marketing offer can change on a daily, if not hourly, basis in response to competitive conditions; for many business sectors the regulatory framework can change overnight.

Forget leviathan CRM systems in the call centre. Our experience is that large centralised CRM systems simply cannot cope with the necessary speed of change. For example you may wish to emphasise a new product or service feature during your calls. The call centre manager wants to try out a few different scripting approaches to introducing the new feature in the conversation; the Financial Director wants to know the impact on sales volume. Centralised CRM systems could take days or even weeks to put the data infrastructure in place.

Failed attempts to align call centre dynamics with over-structured processes has led real-world call centre agents needing to work with a myriad of information systems, central IT, spreadsheets, external data verification and handwritten notes stuck to the computer screen!

The challenges facing the call centre agent will only get more complex. Transactional call centre activity is swiftly migrating to 'non-live' media, such as Interactive Voice Response, the Internet, SMS and mobile data. This means that from the call centre agent's perspective, the types of call received are less routine, more challenging and time-consuming. From the call centre manager's perspective, the agents' necessary skill sets will be less about dealing with the mechanics of transactions and much more about maintaining good relationships with customers using all the available information.

Managing and applying structure to a seemingly unstructured set of data sources is a major challenge for call centre agents.

This is where Contact Point Management (CPM) comes into play. Contact Point Management unifies the customer interaction without being strait-jacketed by the underlying IT systems. At the same time as presenting context-and-customer-sensitive data from multiple sources a strong Contact Point Management system must also support business processes to ensure the right information is given and received at the right time.

Measurement is also critical. Call centre management cannot afford the time to pull together MIS information sources. Dynamic call centres need to know what's happening now and need the flexibility to act on exceptional circumstances immediately.

You want your customer service agents to have the latest information. The Marketing department wants to test different customer approaches. The Financial Director wants to know how the new campaign twist is improving sales.

Contact Point Management systems bring customer, product and service information from multiple sources to the agent, and deliver dynamic real-time operational and call-outcome data to call centre managers and the wider business community.

We are not saying that CRM is dead. Quite the opposite. The basic Customer Relationship Management philosophies are of clear benefit to the business and the customer. But business leaders must recognise that for many organisations the call centre is the primary contact point with customers. It's where relationships happen. Using Contact Point Management (CPM) will allow you to learn at the point of delivery and rapidly evolve your systems to exactly meet your call centre and customer needs.

www.rostrvm.com/cpm

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