

# Achieving Service Transformation Through Improved Contact Management

## A holistic approach is key to transforming customer contact

For some reason us Brits do love the phone. UK by far and away tops the charts in Europe for contacting Public Services by phone (over 400 million calls per year!) over other channels. Yet for too many of us, Contact Centres are a continuing source of irritation and frustration.

We must get the channel mix and the contact right if we are to present that desired “one-face” of public services to customers<sup>1</sup> both individually and across agencies.

For Customer Contact to operate optimally, a number of pieces in a complex jigsaw must be in place. We focus on four where analytical modelling will ensure the right decisions are made to deliver marked improvements:

**A Contact Strategy** to consider how best to organise resources to deal with contacts, and how to direct customers to the most appropriate channels.

**Contact Centre Planning** to optimise the configuration of centres (allocating workload into categories, across channels, team set up teams, defining rules for handling workload).

**Performance Management** to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of contacts.

**Managing Volatility** to deal with day-by-day and even minute-by-minute variability in workload.

### Contact Strategy

When services are launched or upgraded, the impact on Contact Centre workload is frequently

underestimated. In many cases these new services generate totally new volumes of contacts, which need to be planned and managed. This is best achieved as part of a contact strategy underpinned by modelling of contact handling options. This is typically configured to ensure that contact is made to optimise cost and customer experience, and that:

- A consistent face is presented to the customer
- Requests for information are directed to web, SMS, or auto-email
- Straightforward transactions, updates and progress tracking are undertaken by self-service wherever possible
- Workload is scheduled to avoid spikes in Contact Centre call volumes.

Given the pressures to improve customer experience, and to be frugal with budgets, a similar modelling approach is often valuable as part of a review of existing operations. This is particularly important when considering physical or virtual amalgamation of centres in order to gain economies of scale within or across agencies.

*In such cases, modelling of the combined operation will identify the most efficient configuration of the available resources, while taking account of constraints around systems availability and contact routing.*

### Contact Centre Planning

When call centres were first introduced the operating model was of a single reactive group, handling purely inbound calls and dealing with a limited range of transactions and enquiries.

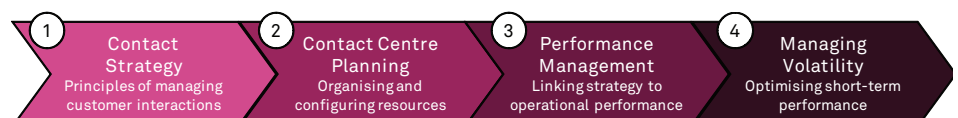
Improvements in technology over the years have allowed the model to develop into the modern contact centre, dealing with inbound and outbound calls, emails, sms, and handling a much wider range of Customer Relationship Management tasks.

The traditional approach of setting up specialised discrete teams to deal with a narrow range of tasks is rarely the most efficient way to deal with the increasingly complex range of workload. Such ‘siloed’ operations also fail to meet the need for a joined-up view of customers and their needs.

Optimisation modelling is the key to understanding the issues affecting efficient contact handling, and typically takes account of factors such as:

- Workload volumes and profiles
- Channel mix options
- Skills and training requirements
- Target response times and service levels.

Simulation modelling based on a range of scenarios is a powerful way to demonstrate the likely impact of



**Footnote:**

1. We use the term “customer” in its generic sense to cover business and citizen/user/consumer/voter/...

changes to any of these factors, and of validating the potential efficiency improvements.

*An analytical approach will optimise the use of resources in a complex contact management environment.*

### Performance Management

Most day-to-day monitoring of Contact Centre performance concentrates on a narrow set of operational efficiency measures. These typically include:

- Average Handling Time
- Average Wrap Time
- % of calls abandoned
- Average time to abandon
- Answering performance vs. target (e.g. 80% in 20 seconds)
- Schedule Adherence (% of logged-in time spent on calls or waiting for calls)
- Occupancy (Call time as a % of call time plus wait time)
- Calls per agent per hour
- % Sickness
- % Attrition.

The next level of performance management focuses more on the quality of the service, using measures such as:

- % of transactions completed/ issues resolved at first Point of Contact
- Customer Satisfaction score.

At a more strategic level, attention should be placed on measures like:

- Accuracy of call and contact forecasts
- Root-cause analysis of reasons for contact
- Trends in channel mix compared to targets set as part of Contact Management strategy.

*All of these measures are best used in a Performance Management framework that provides a consistent thread linking Contact Handling strategy back to Contact Centre targets at an individual and team level.*

### Managing Volatility

Contact centre workload is renowned for its variability. Even if overall volumes and profiles are stable, random variation often results in sudden peaks where service levels are hit. Once this has happened it is difficult to recover the service level in the remainder of the day.

Rather than accept this as inevitable, tactics can be developed to give early warning of potential problems and allow corrective action to be taken dynamically before service levels are seriously impacted. Such tactics may include:

- Use of call overflow between groups/ sites
- Constraining call time by taking brief details and offering to call back
- Cut-in of recorded messages to filter out non-urgent calls.

Similar tactics can be used during dips in workload:

- Changing call allocation rules to concentrate the slack time on groups of agents who can then concentrate on other tasks
- Proactive contact – spending more time advising citizens and customers about services that they might use.

The techniques that support these forms of tactical management include:

- Within-day Forecasting – together with live information on agent availability, this flags up imminent workload/ staffing mismatches
- Simulation – allows tactics to be tested and refined in a controlled way before live trials.

*Workload smoothing tactics are a valuable way to manage volatility and maintain operational performance.*



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