



CUSTOMER REACH®

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Peaks, Spikes, Valleys and Troughs- How to manage your contact center in a high change environment.

We have all experienced this moment, just when we finally seem to have all of the many and disparate elements of our center under control; the Service Level, our speed of answer, abandon rate, handle time and quality, that's when it happens, the flood gates open and are KPI's tumble into the cellar. It is like one of the corollaries to Murphy's Law "If things are going well, just wait a moment and it will all change".

Every business faces shifts in call and/or transactional volumes. Some businesses have challenges around seasonality built into their business model such as lawn care or snow removal. Others see seasonal peaks due to Christmas or summer; some catalogue companies see more volume in the fourth quarter than they see throughout the rest of the year! Still other companies experience peaks that happen based upon the calendar; the waste company that sees an increase in call volume with recognized holidays such as July 4th and unrecognized ones such as the Super Bowl. Lastly some organizations experience event driven surges in volumes such as the 'first responders' that experienced huge spikes in call volumes following hurricane Katrina or that any company can experience with a new product launch or marketing campaign.

Regardless of how your company experiences call spikes how you, the center manager and your team deal with it can make or break your center and even your company. Peaks and valleys are standard fare in the contact center industry. We see them every day: the mid morning or mid afternoon peak in our daily arrival patterns, the Monday peak volumes versus the slow Friday. These peaks we understand, plan and staff for, they are just a part of the business. But how can you manage peaks when they represent quantum increases in volumes? How can you handle 300% more calls for an hour, a week, a month or a quarter? These are the challenges that some companies face and in this article we will examine how companies and organizations can react and respond to these eventualities.

The starting point as always in contact center management must be the forecast. You need to know how many calls, emails, chats and transactions you will process in your center when and how many staff you will need to met your KPI's in doing so. The forecast will tell you when you need to hire and train staff and you add these activities to your base volumes. You also add vacation time, special projects, marketing and business activities such as bill runs etc. It is here, on the forecast that you may first see the change in terrain as the line climbs upwards signifying increasing volumes.

As outlined above there are a number of very different types of peaks and each of these requires a different approach. There is no one approach that will meet every challenge or requirement, but we will examine a number of the major strategies that companies employ to address these challenges.

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Seasonality: many organizations see a dramatic increase in contact center volumes associated with the Christmas rush. These companies include direct marketers, cataloguers and publishers whose products are being purchased as gifts. These companies have developed strategies that help them manage this expected, planned and essential increase in traffic. Management mechanisms include;

- Temporary staff. This is a tried and true solution. If you need 100 more staff you hire 100 temporary staff and run them through an abbreviated training. Why abbreviated? Most companies cannot recover their initial investment in hiring and training staff in just 3 months, so they will often only train the temporary staff on the most common call types, such as order taking and they may only work on a single product line. When this is done in conjunction with intelligent call routing the new staff can be brought up to speed fairly quickly.
- Seasonal staff. This is very similar to the temporary staff above, but where the temporary staff model is based upon bringing in 100 new staff, the seasonal staff model is based on bringing back as many of the 100 staff from last year and back filling and gaps with temporary staff. There are obvious benefits of this approach: the staff already knows the company, its customers and systems. Of course they will require refresher training but this is far less than temporary staff would require. The key here is to maximize staff return and retention. This is often achieved through the use of return incentives. The staff is informed before the end of the seasonal rush that you will have openings again next year and would like them to come back. This is sweetened with an incentive (cash or product based), for example a \$200 gift certificate for company product or cash.
- Partnered centers. Not all companies experience the same seasonal peak. While the pre Christmas rush is likely the most prevalent it is not the only one. Tax preparation companies, banks and finance company call centers all experience surges in volumes associated with investment tax deduction deadlines and with tax filing deadline. Many contact center operators have found other contact centers that are counter cyclical. This means that staff could be shared between the gift cataloguer and the lawn care call center, with staff moving back and forth between the centers.

Event peaks: many companies experience short term often event driven surges in call or transaction volumes. These peaks may arise from a fixed event such as the Super Bowl or an opportunity event such as a very effective advertising campaign or the appearance of the spokesman on Oprah or Larry King. These events can be the most difficult to manage; the peaks may be unexpected, may last for a short duration or occur infrequently. Dealing with these challenges through traditional methods can prove expensive and ineffective. It is not always possible to add staff (temporary or otherwise), the costs of doing so can simply be too expensive. In addition to meet with spikes that are multiples of your usual volume would require similar multiples of your existing staff.

So what are the options available?

- Outsourcing. While it is true that outsource providers sell their services based upon economies of scale and the ability to handle rapid growth they are not very interested in adding additional staff to a program for a matter of minutes or hours. Some agencies offer short term support options through their DRTV teams or in a shared service group. When most companies look to outsource, they generally expect dedicated staff, that is staff that will work exclusively on their programs. This can offer the best combination from a company perspective, of value (dedicated and trained staff focused solely on their products or services). Shared staff in contrast work for a number of companies at the same time. One call for client A, the next for client B, etc. This of course impacts upon the level and detail of training that can be offered as well as the level of comprehension and recall. This generally isn't a problem if they are simply taking order, but poses more significant challenges if a more knowledgeable and detailed understanding of the company, the customer, policies and procedures are required.
- Home Agents. Remote or home based agents can be deployed through an outsourcer an agency or established by the company. The most common approach is through an outsource provider. Home agents work as self employed contractors who agree to take the company calls. They receive training and bid for shifts often through a hosted scheduling environment. As the home agents are paid by the call and are self employed they often book short shifts and if the company cannot provide enough volume they will stop working for that company. It can require a significantly larger number of home agents to process the same volume of calls as in-house dedicated agents. This number may have to grow exponentially to meet call volume surges in volumes.



Self service provides another alternative. By developing and deploying automated service solutions (IVR, Speech Recognition, virtual agents, call back messaging etc.) a company can deflect a significant number of calls to the self service solution. By extending the same approach to the web with FAQ's and chat even more customers can be service this way. There are downsides, most people do not like dealing with 'machines' and can find navigation difficult and frustrating. This is hardly the mindset you wish to instill in your customers. Automated solutions generally have a poor track record for converting leads into sales. This is a concern if the surge of calls is from prospective customers. Call back messaging doesn't purport to solve the problem through self service but rather it employs self service and/or self selection technology to allow a customer to request a call back. This affords the company an opportunity to contact the customer once the peak has subsided. The challenge with this approach can be the difficulty then in connecting with the prospect. People have busy lives and they will not sit by the phone waiting for your call. So while this isn't a lost opportunity it certainly requires addition time, effort and cost to chase down the prospect with a portion never reached.

A final alternative is often the most effective approach to managing peaks can be to look at the underlying processes and procedures that impact or create this peak in the first place. Peaks at one of our clients were caused by mailing hundreds of thousands of invoices out over three days each month. By spreading the invoices over the entire month the peak was eliminated.

There are a number of tools and tactics we have addressed in this article. There is no one magic solution the will fit all situations. You will need to assess your center, your company and your requirements. Good luck.

Let us know what you think of this article send us an email at feedback@thetaylorreachgroup.com

Survey of the Month

Will return next month

Addressing Addresses

Online, Real Time Address Management Should Be Part of Your Business Processes.

Addresses are important to you and your customers. Your customer want to get what they order. You want to only have to send the product or bill once, fewest return possible, less cost. Your business processes, especially those which are customer facing such as CRM, provide opportunities to cross-sell, up-sell and ensure the highest levels of customer care. Introducing online, real time address management into your business processes creates significant operational efficiencies and enhance your customers' experience with every interaction.

According to a recent study in Europe 35 percent of companies clean their address data once a year. Over a third of companies say they never run their address data against suppression or preference files. These practices increase costs and reduce customer satisfaction with an organization.

When implementing an address management strategy, there are many things to consider.

- Where and when in your business processes should address quality be managed?
- How is address quality judged in your organization?
- What is the data currency that supports the address management systems?
- What tools should you use?
- What address quality functions will benefit your organization and how to ensure that you capture these benefits?

Whether in sales, marketing, credit, distribution or customer service your employees need efficient and accurate address information to optimize the service that they provide to your customers. The best and most efficient way to ensure that everyone in your organization has accurate address data is to get it right from the very beginning.

What Functionality Should an Address Management Tool Provide?

Your address management tool should, at the very least, provide Canadian and US postal address correction and searching



functionality. Data capture efficiencies, such as finding a complete address based on just a postal or zip code and a street number should be fully supported. It should also provide context sensitive searches based on any partial, free-form address information. This allows users to drill down to a complete, accurate address based on incomplete and inaccurate input data. The ability to automatically correct invalid addresses and to suggest a list of valid alternatives is very important.

Transformation of addresses to meet different needs is becoming increasingly important. The ability to format your address data to meet diverse internal and external business requirements allows you to simplify your address data management while fully supporting your systems and processes. Depending on where you operate, you need to fully support languages used in addressing (English, French, Spanish etc.) and common scripts used for addresses (Latin, Japanese, Hindi etc). Keep in mind that in many jurisdictions, support for multiple languages and scripts is often expected. Similarly, the ability to work with either accented or non-accented characters may be important. Watch out for limitations imposed by internal systems associated with address support.

The Traditional Approach: Back End Batch Processes.

One of the most important things you need to know about your customer is where to find them. Waiting to get the address right means waiting to do the job right. The traditional approach to address data quality management involves entering address information into back-end systems. Then cleaning it up afterwards in a batch mode. This method is very costly and labor intensive. It also has the potential to negatively impact on your customers' experience through delays in your processes...

The Way Ahead: Online, Real Time Address Data Capture

Good address management tools ensure that the address data is of high quality and consistently formatted from the moment it is captured. What's more the right tools simplify the address capture process by reducing key stroking for CSRs and simplifying customer self-service user interfaces.

Getting the address data right and getting it early requires tools that are flexible, robust, and easy to implement in your environment. Are your online systems Internet-enabled with a service oriented architecture yet? If not, when will they be? Sooner is better than later?

The address quality tools need to give you the flexibility to quickly deliver powerful address quality features now and into the future. Tools that support a broad variety of technologies and platforms and which are designed to be easy to integrate with your systems will allow you to give your employees what they need to get your customers' addresses right the first time. Quick, seamless integration, flexibility for the future and an attractive ROI are all important things to consider when choosing the tool that is right for your organization. The ROI should include: number of returns or reduction thereof; any costs for second handling restocking and such; improvements to customer service speeds; reduction in call or transaction times for both the call center staff and the customer doing it on line; judgement on the value of an increased one and done rates.

Setting Course for the Future

Implementing an online, real time address data capture mechanism requires building integration logic and may require enhancements to existing address capture screens and processes. The benefits, however, are enormous.

Any decision about address management will be heavily influenced by your current systems. What platforms do the systems run on? Do you have the ability to customize your systems or are they controlled by a third party? What technical standards does the organization have for in-house systems?

Web services offering address management allow you to implement a robust and scalable enterprise solution in a distributed, web-based environment deployed on an intranet or the Internet. Web services use standards-based XML SOAP technologies, which dramatically reduce complex security and systems management issues. With a web services-based address quality tool, organizations are able to deploy online address data capture and processing functions quickly and easily.

Whether or not a web services-based solution is right for the organization, look for an address quality tool that runs on all major platforms so that all of your address processing applications are served, even if they run on disparate systems. This is also good insurance against any future system migration.



Transformation is becoming an essential component of address management. Address accuracy and standardized format is critical for most postal services for delivery and mailing discounts. It is also important to be able to handle the data input/output in various formats. External third parties always require the address in an alternate format. For example, if you need to provide an address to a credit bureau your success “hit” rate and costs will be significantly affected by your ability to match their input requirements.

The Benefits of Deploying an Online Address Management Tool.

Online, real time address quality implementations will provide the following benefits to your organization:

- Significant data capture productivity improvements, including reduced key stroking, drill-down address searching, and the elimination of back-end error processing.
- Allows staff to focus on customer service, rather than on fixing customer service problems caused by bad address data.
- Real-time address validation, correction and searching capabilities ensure address confirmation at the point of customer interaction, eliminating the need for costly error detection and correction processes.
- Give your customers a trouble-free experience.
- Ensure that the systems within your organization have accurate, consistent address data.

Online, real time address quality implementations deliver these benefits more quickly than other address quality implementation approaches. ROIs exceeding 100% are easily achievable if you choose the right address quality tool and integrate it into your front-end address data capture processes.

Conclusion

As Yogi Berra once said “*Yes it is OK that people move, but they should be allowed to take their address with them*”.

In order to operate an efficient and profitable organization which offers its customers a high quality customer experience, you need to have a solid address management strategy and the tools and processes to implement this strategy. This allows you to stay focused on your customer rather than on operational and customer service problems. Each year, 20% of your customers’ addresses change, requiring about 70 keystrokes per record. This represents substantial manual involvement in mundane but vital data management tasks. Using a tool that reduces this effort and ensures that problems are caught before they can impact your customers will make you and your organization more efficient and successful.

Finding the right tool and an address quality partner you can trust is worth the investment many times over. There are vendors that have met the address accuracy requirements of various national post offices. Examples include Canada Post’s SERP, or the USPS CASS program. When looking for an address data quality partner, your first stop should be the approved vendor list at the post office in your country:

Canada: http://www.canadapost.ca/offerings/address_management/pdf/serp-e.pdf

USA: <http://www.usps.com/ncsc/ziplookup/vendorslicensees.htm>

UK: <http://www.royalmail.com> (search for “Solution Directory”)

Australia: <http://www.austpost.com.au/BCP/0,1467,CH2404%257EMO19,00.html>

Michael Boorman, Nova Marketing Group

The preceding article was written by Michael Boorman. Please let us know what you think of this article by sending us your comments to feedback@thetaylorreachgroup.com

Research Studies


Recent TRG research studies

In “Outsourced Quality Monitoring: *Emerging Market or Outsourcing Core Competency?*” TRG studied more than 160 organizations and their views regarding the outsourcing of quality monitoring. Every Contact Center senior manager knows that agents require coaching, training and guidance to become more effective and more efficient, unfortunately in most organizations Supervisors spend a significant portion of their time completing non-agent related activities. The question becomes how can we



improve the supervisors' efficiency in completing all of their tasks and still ensure we coach and develop our agents.

In "Assessing Outsource, Offshore and Domestic contact center operations", TRG examines the opportunities and challenges associated with processing live agent voice calls, email and whitemail processing internally and outsourced. In addition the study examines advantages and disadvantages of Domestic near shore and offshore locations.

If you would like to receive a complimentary copy of either of these reports please email your request to info@thetaylorreachgroup.com . 

Newsworthy

In this regular column we review the latest news, predictions and trends impacting on the Call Center / Customer Interaction Industry.

Contact centre dissatisfaction rises

Consumers are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with contact centre service, but technologies such as VoIP may offer a solution, according to new research.

The Merchants Europe survey found that global customer satisfaction with contact centres has fallen to 68% from 82% last year. The telecommunications and service provider sector - including ISPs and fixed-line and mobile telecommunications companies - has the longest contact centre waiting times (at 65 seconds) and the highest rate of caller hang ups.

IT consultants Dimension Data predicts that VoIP can go a long way to improving customer satisfaction, with 20% of contact centre interactions now taking the form of email and text messages. "What we are likely to see is an increased technology presence to make the customer interaction across all of those channels seamless and less clunky than it is now," said Dimension Data's Paul Scott.

Callcentres.net

Two out of three call centres aren't planning effectively for skill-based routing, new research has claimed.

A new report from the Professional Planning Forum (PPF) shows a worryingly low 37 per cent of respondents felt that they were close to fully using skills routing and gaining benefits from it. While 76 per cent of call centre resource planners believe they have a fair or good understanding of routing options, the research also shows that only 11 per cent of centres use advance routing options with a tactical or strategic approach. "Schedulers know what needs to be done, but either the workforce management tool, their training or their priorities let them down," explained Steve Woosey, membership director at the PPF. "Not only do so few really try to implement it properly but in fact the research shows that only 10 per cent model the exact steps used in their ACD as in their workforce management tool. 30 per cent can't or don't even try." The research forms part of the 2007 annual benchmark research carried out by the PPF. Full details will be presented at Call Centre Planning 2007 in Dublin on April 25 – 26 and can be found at www.planningforum.co.uk

John Casey, the Planning Forum's director of professional development, added: "As well as up-to-date systems, today's resource planners need confidence and skills to step up to the challenge of multi-skilled resourcing challenges. Planning is an increasingly complex role and if professional development is under-resourced, then the consequence is suffered by the business". The benchmark survey analyses results from 161 contact centre organisations from all industry sectors and was conducted during first quarter 2007. The results demonstrate that the complexity of the role of resource planners and the highly specialist contribution that they can make to the effective management of call centres is increasing.

eCCF

Consulting firm launches B2B Tele-Sales Contact Center service provider



Ajax, Canada. February 27, 2007- The Taylor Reach Group, Inc. (TRG) announced today that it has launched “Teleffective Inc.” a call and contact center service provider. Colin Taylor the CEO of TRG said, “Many of our clients asked us to assist them in sourcing a high quality service provider. After some mixed experiences we concluded that we should create our own. Then we ensure the highest level of quality to our clients by proper control of the process.

No stranger to the world of outsourced call center operation Taylor spent 18 years with Watts Communications Inc. (now part of Resolve). During his tenure as CEO at Watts Colin grew the business more than 700%. He personally generated a third of a billion dollars in call and contact center sales. In addition Taylor is recognized for excellence in contact center operations through the receipt of more than 27 awards on two continents.

“To be successful in any business”, said Taylor “you must add value. We have done that at TRG and we will do that at Teleffective. At the end of the day our success will be a result of the value and benefits that accrue to our clients. We can only succeed when they do”.

“Teleffective will focus on assisting clients in: Business to Business Sales lead generation; account management, direct sales and interim inside sales/telesales programs. Teleffective will succeed through effectively developing, implementing and operating programs using best practice methods for all programs. These sales functions are grossly under serviced in both Canada and the US today and there is great opportunity to redefine the value proposition.”

Teleffective opens its doors with a stable of clients including a major technology company and large financial service organization and two business services companies.

About The Taylor Reach Group, Inc. - With offices in North America and Australia, The Taylor Reach Group, Inc. (TRG) is one of the leading Call/Contact Center and Customer Service consultancies. This award winning company founded in 2001 by Colin Taylor today boasts a stable of Fortune 1000 companies. The staff at TRG possess more than 100 years of Call Center, Customer Service and Customer Satisfaction experience in delivering effective and significant benefits from Operational Innovation.

The Taylor Reach Group, Inc. may be reached at 905-426-5055 or on the web at www.thetaylorreachgroup.com

About Teleffective – With offices in downtown Toronto and Ajax , Ontario Teleffective provides: Business to Business sales support in lead generation, account management, interim Inside sales/telesales and direct sales.

For more information on Teleffective visit our website at www.teleffectiveinc.com .

Teleffective can be reached at 1-888-732-5470 or 905-426-2305 or by email at info@teleffectiveinc.com









TRG Compendium of Contact Center Knowledge Volume 3 - Published

Delivering Operational Innovation to Your Contact Center: A Compendium of Contact Center Knowledge Volume 3, has been published by The Taylor Reach Group, Inc., (TRG).

This 105 page book is a compendium of the popular TRG newsletter Customer Reach® which has a readership of more than 5,000 contact center executives around the globe. Compendium Volume 3 covers Customer Reach® issues from November 2005 to October 2006 and features articles on a broad range of call and contact center topics including;

- Third Party Quality Monitoring,
- Building Contact Center Budgets,
- Developing and maintaining Quality programs in a Contact center,
- Attrition Management,
- Trends for the Call Center Industry,
- Root Cause Analysis in contact centers,
- Effective Call Center management,
- Outsourcing,
- Managing small call centers,
- Quality calibration,
- Customer Satisfaction,
- Developing a Call Center Strategic Plan,
- Developing an RFP,



-  Voice mail as a selling tool,
-  Workforce management,
-  Distributed Call Centers,
-  Aligning Internal and External Quality measurements,
-  Change Management and the Trough of Despair,
-  Contact Center metrics and KPI's,
-  Web chat,
-  Posting daily results,

Plus case studies, surveys and news related to call and contact centers.

This book is an invaluable resource tool for anyone who is engaged in managing and operating a call or contact center. Delivering Operational Innovation to Your Contact Center: A Compendium of Contact Center Knowledge Volume 3 may be purchased from TRG for \$69.95 (US\$) or \$77.00 (C\$), plus \$5.00 Shipping and Handling. All Canadian orders will be subject to 6% GST. Orders of 10 copies or more will receive a 10% discount.

To place your order today call or email Crystal MacIntyre at 905-426-5055 or cmacintyre@thetaylorreachgroup.com





At TRG, we believe in happy endings.
To turn your call centre problems into personal and professional triumphs, just call
Colin Taylor at (905) 426-5055 or visit us at www.thetaylorreachgroup.com



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Inside TRG

Recently TRG secured a Management Services agreement with Telepoll a Toronto based market Research and data gathering company with 15 years of experience. Telepoll's services include:

- Data gathering,
- Market Research,
- Customer satisfaction surveys,
- Mystery Shopper calling,
- Outsourced quality monitoring

TRG has secured preferential pricing for readers of Customer Reach. For a limited time Customer Reach readers who retain Telepoll services will receive a 20% discount off standard pricing. This discount will allow a company for example to complete a Customer satisfaction survey for \$5,000.

For more information about how your company can take advantage of this discount please contact Crystal MacIntyre at 905-426-5055 or by email at cmacintyre@thetaylorreachgroup.com.

Case Study

In this regular column we review the successes that TRG is part of.










TRG helped an established services organization dramatically improve their service through an integrated approach to service delivery.

The Challenge:

This very successful services organization faced a number of challenges; high turnover, low agent productivity, incomplete and inadequate training materials. All of these deficiencies lead to continued poor service performance. The company's service level was very unsatisfactory with very few calls being answered in 20 seconds, and more than 35% of all calls abandoning. They sought out the guidance of TRG to improve the service performance of their call center.

The Process:

TRG conducted a complete end to end assessment of the call center, its processes and those processes that impacted on the call center. TRG developed a call center operational model and worked with the center management and staff to implement a model that incorporated new approaches for;

-  Hiring,
-  Training,
-  Monitoring,
-  Coaching,
-  Staffing,
-  Forecasting,
-  Quality assurance,
-  Call routing,
-  Staff Budgeting,


The Solution:

New hiring practices were implemented to recruit for the desired skill sets. The process mapping resulted in revision to many of the processes to align them better with the objectives of the business. A number of these processes involved groups outside of the call center operation. The result of including these non call center processes was a significantly better alignment between the company objectives



and those of the call center. Workforce management was introduced to support more accurate forecasting and scheduling.

The Result:

By implementing the TRG Model, the company improved the service level more than 1200%, reduced abandoned calls by more than 75%, Improved First Call Resolution by more than 50%, Reduced Average Handle Time by 25%, increased customer Satisfaction and Loyalty by more than 10%. All of this was achieved in less than 4 months! 

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The Taylor Reach Group, Inc. provides Strategic and Operational customer interaction consulting services that deliver Operational Innovation breakthroughs in Contact Center operations.

Award winning service and more than 100 years of industry experience serving ‘Fortune 1000’ companies. Extensive North American and International experience with both captive (in-house) and outsource centers.

Delivering Operational Innovation to your Contact Center

-  **Contact Center Consulting,**
-  **Customer Satisfaction Consulting,**
-  **Contact Center Technologies,**
-  **Sales & Telesales Consulting,**
-  **Quality Monitoring & Assurance,**
-  **Outsourcing/Offshoring Assessments,**
-  **Total Cost of Ownership Assessments,**
-  **General Management & Consulting services,**

Award winning service...Reach Beyond! 

Phone or email Colin Taylor today at 905-426-5055

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