Call Centre: Vision, Technology & Socio Economic aspects

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Abstract
Definition of Call centre ,Origin of call centre .Myths & Legends Vs actual facts .Jobs undertaken by Call centre .Their Contribution to Socio-Ecomonic environment. Need of Call centres in existing world .Present and Technology integeration in Call centre .Futuristic vision, aspects and aspirations .Limitations of Call centre.

Definition

Call Centre *:* Where calls are handled by individuals who are trained to resolve those calls as a one stop shop, either for customer service, sales or enquiries. Call centers are found in virtually all-vertical industries, but are especially renowned in banks, insurance companies, airlines and hotels.

The call center is the **shop window** of the organization and should reflect what is to be found within: an efficient, responsive, reliable and stimulating organization that handles 'moments of truth' consistently well. Winning companies are customer - centric, and know that superior customer service offers the only sustainable route to wealth creation.

The Origin of the Call Centre

Call centres really began to 'take-off' in the late 1980s and early 1990s, although similar operations were to be found in the home shopping sector but these mainly dealt with mail enquiries. In these first call centres little emphasis was placed on improving customer care and the main focus was on increasing efficiency, reducing costs, increasing revenue and market share. This was the typical attitude of the high street banks and insurance companies as they saw call centres as a means of achieving cost savings through closure of branches and reduced head-count. As a result many of the people who had worked in the branch operations moved into the call centres

Myths and Legend

And so the call centre industry was born initially staffed mainly by women. And so the first myth was also born: that women worked in call centres because the work was low paid, mundane and required a low level of skill. The second myth to emerge was that call centres resembled Victorian factories – offering cramped conditions, unsociable hours and a strict 'big brother' regime. The final myth arose from the belief that supervisors and call center managers subscribed to the 'big brother' mentality and that in order to be successful they had to be very hard on the people that worked for them. This gave rise to the feeling that female call centre managers had to

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work harder and be more masculine than their male peers purely because they were women.

Facts

Whilst some of this has elements of truth, in reality the situation was quite different

Telemarketing, for example, had a high percentage of male agents.

The myth that call centers are staffed mainly by women has eroded over time. The truth is that the female-male ratio is changing and that it is often dependent upon the type of call centre itself.

There are many call centers that offer a pleasurable working environment

The idea that call centres also offer low rates of pay is also now somewhat unfounded. Agent skills are very much in demand and in areas of high call centre concentration, salaries can be very high. Geographical location also has a significant bearing on salaries.

Jobs of Call Centres:

On individual level : A person who is totally engrossed with his day to day office and home activities rarely gets time to look after it's other important prerequisites such as looking after car insurance, shares and small investments, home maintenance etc. Here call center plays an important role .It takes care of all these an in addition to that it also sends delivery of packets like buying sweets and couriering it to the requisite destination .

On Corporate Level: Most of the IT Industries buy and sell the contracts and projects through call centers. Even many of them utilize the services of cal centre for recruitment and outsourcing   of employees.

Contribution to Economy

Utilizing the campaign management features of call centre applications enables organisations to divorce themselves from the standard 'departmental' campaign management, and to use the call blending capabilities of business applications. The idle time of agents is significantly reduced, having a direct impact on increased productivity. Gathering customer information generates a data warehousing effect, which in turn creates the basis for decision-making tools, leading to more accurate business strategies. The Call Centre Agent has all the information your customer needs at his/her fingertips. Customers are more deliberate today and demand more focused and accurate attention. Attaining this high service level results in 'customer delight' - which is what all organisations are striving for as 'customer satisfaction' is no longer good enough!

You can maximise your moment of opportunity by cross-selling, up-selling and servicing your customer on the other end of the channel
Customer Relationship Management, where companies use a variety of methods and contact strategies to build lasting and profitable relationships in order to retain the best customers and generate profitable revenue'.

Why Call Centre ?

The new millennium is here and businesses are on the move. In an environment of ever increasing competition, organisations such as banks, insurance, brokerage, investment and other service companies are seeking new ways to differentiate their product offerings, reduce costs and improve customer service. We take a look at the call centre's role in this changing world.

lifetime customer loyalty has disappeared, The market has changed into a 'buyers-market'. Customers are no longer loyal to a brand, but tend to go for convenience instead.

Mergers, acquisitions and convergence of various technologies, have also changed the competitive landscape. Organisations are dealing with increased competitive pressures, larger and more geographically dispersed client bases, and more expansive technology infrastructures. The challenge of balancing these disparate factors is pushing companies to develop strategic plans for their customer care processes.

As companies move their focus to one-to-one marketing, call centres, which started out as basic helpdesks, are becoming an important - and often the primary - point of contact for acquiring, retaining and cross-selling to customers.

All the essential elements of a call centre solution make it possible for the first time ever for world-class enterprises to realise the benefits of integrated interaction management. That is:· to reduce the cost per interaction, · increase the direct revenue per interaction,· to use each interaction opportunity to deepen the relationship and broaden the value exchange between customer and enterprise.In effect, a call centre provides the solutions needed by an enterprise to manage and optimise its interactions with its key constituents: customers and business partners. Thus, it treats each interaction as an asset that is to be managed according to business rules. The result is improved cross-selling success and higher customer retention.

While CRM enables segmentation of customers by studying past data, and **computer telephone integration(CTI)** - where the computer and telephone interact with each other, enabling you to give commands to the telephone through your PC, and vice versa. helps to reduce costs and increase call centre efficiency, it is the integration of the two that takes into account the business context of a customer interaction. By integrating CRM and CTI into a single function which includes customer content and the company's information, -goals and resource availability, businesses can put into place an analytical solution that enables far more targeted marketing. Deploying IT solutions was traditionally all about cost savings and increased efficiency. Today it is about increased revenue, opening new markets, and enabling cross-selling. New

systems such as data-warehousing, data-mining, CRM, and call centres come into play, which have changed the way organisations look at **return on investment** (ROI). Call centres were traditionally looked upon as necessary evils whereas now they provide an opportunity to increase revenues. Call centres function as the engine of many institutions' customer sales strategies in addition to customer support, which places great importance on the quality of the customer service they provide. With the ability to integrate customer profile data from diverse sources, institutions are gaining a clearer view of their customers and the types of products and services that are most appealing to them.

Technologies

The 90s have seen huge strides forward in computing and telecommunications technology and, in combination, they can provide dramatic improvements to the effectiveness of CRM. Given that call centres and their staff are expensive, the best way of providing cost-effective customer contact is to enable customers to interact with the organisation via multiple channels, including the Internet. Properly implemented e-commerce systems now enable customers to not only request information and register their interest in a particular product or service, but to place orders as well. Many business processes have been defined carefully and logically so that even quite complex transactions can now be conducted across the Web.

But for those customers unwilling or unable to interact with an organisation by the Internet, or simply prefer the phone, the call centre is indispensable. Although customer surveys often indicate that people hate dealing with automated telephone response systems, technology such as Intelligent Voice Recognition does at least have the advantage of narrowing down the field of interest the customer has. When they finally speak to a computer supported applications (CSA), they're much more likely to be in contact with the person who can actually deal with their query effectively.

When combined with advanced technology such as Caller Line Identification and computer-integrated telephony, it's even possible for a CSA to have the customer's details displayed on screen before the CSA has actually spoken to the customer. Response levels of that quality will undoubtedly impress customers raised on a diet of being passed from pillar to post, only for the final CSA to be unable to deal with their query. Furthermore, it can have the benefit of turning the call centre from an overhead into a profit centre by giving the CSA cross-selling opportunities that would not otherwise have been possible.

 As companies move their focus to one-to-one marketing, call centres, which started out as basic helpdesks, are becoming an important - and often the primary - point of contact for acquiring, retaining and cross-selling to customers. The call centre used to be focused on handling telephone interactions only. But the interaction today could be in any form: it could be an e-mail message, a phone call, a help request from somebody browsing a web page, a chat-session, a VoIP conversation, and so on. To realise better interactions customers must find it easy to communicate with the company to get information, to execute a transaction, or to solve a problem. Technology is developing at lightning speed, with the constant introduction of new

delivery channels. Ten years ago automated teller machines (ATM) and point of sale (POS) terminals were considered high tech.

Today, a new medium is launched several times a year. Mobile phones with SMS capabilities, personal digital assistants (PDA), the Internet, web-enabled ATM's, voice over IP (VoIP), and so on, introduce new ways of interacting with customers, offering yet more choice.

As Internet access spreads too, customers expect 24x7 access to companies on the Web, so organisations must find some way of maintaining 100% uptime to the customer, but still allowing databases and hardware to be shut down for upgrades and backups. Performance is also a significant issue. The response that customers experience when interacting with an agent in the call centre is the sum of the response times of the various underlying systems. Even minor delays can seem like an eternity to customers holding on the line. Finally, how can companies continue to take advantage of packaged "best of breed" software and other elements of their existing IT infrastructure while focusing on the customer?

Next Generation Technology:

Teleworking: people working from home either full time or as part of their working week, mean that there is no longer any physical reason for many kinds of office work to be done in one location rather than another - distance has become irrelevant.

The impact of teleworking can be defined in terms of its consequences at three levels - for society as a whole, for the organisation and for the employee. In one survey of large organisations, 60% of employees said that they would prefer to work from home at least part of the time. At an organisational level, teleworking can provide very tangible benefits to the organisations which implement it. At the same time, they can hire skilled personnel, temporarily or permanently, who would not otherwise be available to them. teleworking can also result in increased productivity through faster decision-making and shorter lead times. teleworking can have significant environmental consequences.. If 15% of the workforce became teleworkers, reports estimate that 2.7 million gallons of fuel would be saved daily. teleworking can also help to reverse the trend to concentrate population in urban areas. Indeed, this is one way in which information technology can be used to promote rural development. In fact, the quality of life for the whole nation could improve with higher levels of skilled employment, reduced pollution and less road congestion. Many believe the way forward for call centres is **IP**. The benefit here is that a variety of information can be delivered over the same connection such as new technologies such as **VoIP**, Internet, e-commerce and wireless application protocol **(WAP)** the call centre requires a comprehensive workflow strategy and software tools that pull all the complexities of the business together with technology. This means making a call centre Web-enabled. A **Web-enabled call centre** is one which is linked to a Web page, and which allows surfers to make calls from this page. This is usually a "talk" button on the Web page that allows visitors to obtain additional information from a human via IP telephony directly at their computers, as long as a microphone and speakers, as well as the right software package are used.The advantage of Web

enabled call centres is they offer personal interaction over and above the information available on the Website

It also enables new services to be deployed without modifying the existing network switches. Filtering and redirection, for instance, ensure optimum agent availability. Call filtering using announcements, prompts, PINs and screening -- carried out by the network -- helps free up both call centre lines and agents, the two principal call centre costs.

Future of Call Center

The growth in the call centre industry is a trend, which shows little sign of abating. As a result, the onus is on call centre staff to communicate a positive brand image through excellent service.

The two main areas where we will see change is the development of the multimedia Call Centre, and the maturity of the Call Centre from a departmental tool to a corporate strategy. The Call Centre will provide live video conferencing links to retail branches, will exploit the Internet as another means of customer contact, and will utilise video on demand and PC multi media to provide immediate information to callers. As we move towards the turn of the century we will see more organisations providing a single telephone route into their company and integrating Call Centre technology into the rest of the organization

The trend will be towards smaller centres, dispersed regionally and networked together. The economic factor that should make this a reality is employment. Companies realise they can obtain lower cost wages by not requiring people to commute long distances. Home agents will not grow to any great condition - they will exist but not to the extent people are predicting.

Everything will become software driven; the customer premises equipment will eventually become processing engines controlled entirely by software and there will be a duplication of places from where specific functions of a Call Centre will be controlled. CTI will become as commonplace in the Call Centre as Windows in the office environment is now. We will be dealing with transactions in and out of the Call Centre on a variety of communications media; Internet and video as well as voice calls

In the next decade, call centres will continue to multiply, become more sophisticated, and better respond to multiple customer communication channels.. They will develop far beyond the hyper-connected, fully integrated call centre; and they will perform the role of the transforming agent which converts the entire organisation into a 'virtual customer service centre' – rendering themselves obsolete in the interests of service progress. Of course, those customer call centres with poor service delivery – in attempting the feat – will merely produce more of the same indifferent service. Those organisations with a strong, effective base call centre operation, will be able, via a process of people, process and technology 'osmosis', to extend 'case – working' and service excellence to their entire organisation. They will usher in a whole new way of

doing business. The critical success factor in bringing this about will be a strong, effective activation of the workforce, applying a new millennium leadership ethic and practices:

It is a truism to say that these are exciting and challenging times in business. E-commerce, intense competition, globalisation and deregulation are only the most prominent of a host of key drivers that are turning the old world of business on its head.

The possibility of 24 hour, global call centre support is being realised. Calls can be routed to a range of call centres located across the globe. This means that the provision of seamless call centre support around the clock, with calls being routed to far flung fields such as Far East and the US, is now a reality

As companies strive to focus on their core business to be globally competitive, **outsourcing of call centres** will also become a common practice.

According to Datamonitor the number of call centres in 2000 was 5050. The estimated number of call centres in 2001 is 5210 and 5370 in 2002.

Mitial have stated that in 2001 there were 360,000 people employed in the call and contact industry in the UK and expect 398,000 in 2002.

Limitations of Call Center

Unexpectedly high customer response leads to overload and an inability to meet these either the volume of calls or individual customer expectations, resulting in a lowering of their positive perceptions of the organisation

Shortcomings of insufficiently tested or appropriate information and communication technology

Discovery that poor, outdated business processes not suitable for the new way of working

Lack of a proper understanding of required service agent competencies

Conclusion

With increasing demands of timely and effective services both at individual as well as corporate level we find the need of mediator or 'one stop shop',indespensable .The technological advancements such as VOIP makes the current interaction global ,resulting in acceleration of the growth of call centers.It being a profitable business even at the time of recession unveils its potential leading to big companies like GE Capital and Reliance to invest in this particular field .In a nut shell –"An Apple a Day ,Keeps Doctor Away" similarly "A Call Centre in Your Way , Put the Problems Away".

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