

# A need-to-know basis

How can you shake up management information within call centres? **Tim Burfoot** says getting to what you really need to know is easier than you'd think...

**D**ata and information are not the same thing. Contact centres, like many other high-volume operations are awash with data. In fact there seems to be an insatiable desire for ever more of it. As a consequence, in recent years the sector has witnessed a huge growth in spending (much of it wasted) on data warehouses and other forms of storage. The crux of the problem is that data and information are not the same thing and, in most cases, call centre managers know as much about their operation now as they ever have done — not a lot.

Research backs this up. A recent survey by *Metrica* amongst UK contact centre managers revealed that 44 per cent feel failed by the lack of relevant information available to them. The same number also said they felt dissatisfied by the quality and timeliness of the information they are given to carry out their jobs and agreed that it doesn't allow them to identify issues early enough. On average they said they spend one work day per week (19 per cent of their time) identifying and addressing everyday

makes the difference between good, bad and ugly customer service on any given day.

Getting at the information that really matters to an individual's particular department is a key challenge, as reports are often generic to the centre as a whole. As a consequence, time is wasted wading through the report to extract the figures that matter — if indeed they can be found.

Contact centres need a steady flow of operational management information delivered directly to the people who are delivering for the customer and as close to real-time as possible. Some might say "but I have that already via the ticker screen."

However, whilst this will tell you how many calls are in the queue and the percentage of calls answered, it won't reveal how individuals are performing, nor will it tell whether trends are going upwards or downwards, and what the levels of customer satisfaction are.

Centres also tend to judge themselves on historical measures, which are easy to calculate, such as calls answered this week



*Tim Burfoot, md, Teasel Performance Management*  
[www.teaselpm.com](http://www.teaselpm.com)

+44 1223 370 184

carry on, as it demotivates staff and encourages bad practice, such as cutting off customers before queries are resolved.

Things can be done better and there are various tools on the market, which can give a much more detailed picture of how a contact centre is performing. They don't replace existing technology but use analytics to get at the most important information residing within systems and display this through an interface that we all know and understand — a standard web browser. Because they operate in real-time, a manager can track performance and make the adjustments

*According to Metrica, nearly one in two contact centre managers feel failed by the lack of relevant information available to them at present*

problems. This is a crazy amount of time.

For those who work in the industry, these figures will largely come as no surprise. There's just too much "noise" and an over-reliance on volume over quality. It's not unusual for managers to receive 50-plus page reports on a daily basis. The major problem is that they are retrospective — managers can't correct problems that happened yesterday, a week, or even a month ago. Contact centres are high-intensity operations that are in constant motion. With experience, 90 per cent of their daily activity can be predicted, but it's the way in which organisations respond to the unpredictable 10 per cent that

versus last. This can be useful, but it doesn't give the full picture. How have individual agents and departments performed? How do different sites within an organisation compare against each other? Amazingly, few actually benchmark or even measure the very reason the centre is supposed to exist in the first place — customer satisfaction.

The point is that not only is poor measurement failing customers, it's also failing staff. Good staff — typically those that go out of their way to service customers — are not being identified and rewarded. In fact they can often be marked down for having higher than average call lengths. This can't

necessary to iron out bottlenecks and improve performance as events occur. It also empowers agents, since they can be given controlled access to information about, for example, their personal performance over a month so they can set themselves improvement targets. A major advantage is that it also negates the need for retrospective reporting once and for all.

That's not to say technology can cure all of the current ills. Companies have got to want to do things better and motivate staff towards metrics more related to customer satisfaction. However, at least the tools are now available to enable them to do it. ■