STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CONTACT CENTER VALUE AND VISIBILITY

It's time to be proactive about how others view your contact center.

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Contact center leaders must take charge of the inevitable transition to positioning the center as an enterprise strategic asset rather than a factory-like, back-room operation. The identity of your contact center in the enterprise is undeniably linked to how others see you—or perhaps *don't see you* at all. The contact center's value is inextricably tied to the management of your enterprise-wide visibility.

Ignored or poorly managed visibility is a chronic condition that leaves many centers suffering from *enterprise isolation*. This condition is often accompanied by disappointing budget allocations; little or no input to strategic plans or technology design and acquisition; and poor cross-functional support and communication. The time has come to be proactive with regard to how others view your contact center. Consider the following strategies.

Learn to Speak the Language of Value

Learning and using the language of value must be deliberate. This is not new or terribly difficult; it just takes awareness and practice. First, take a good, hard look at how your contact center is perceived. Remember that this is how others see you, not how you see yourselves. If you don't want to ask the question directly, just look at how the contact center is treated within the enterprise. If marketing runs campaigns and promotions you know nothing about, it is not because they want to do harm. It is actually worse than that and much more likely that the needs of the contact center are "invisible" rather than visible. Establishing the contact center's value is dependent upon managing your visibility.

Think about visibility within your organization. While few may know the CEO personally, their high-profile position grants tremendous visibility. The CEO's actual performance defines value. Speaking of high profile, marketing folks get lots of "attention" (aka visibility). *And what comes with visibility?* Budget allocations, technology investments and resources! One often wonders how some of these positions/departments earn such grand sway. Most likely, they are fluent speakers of the language of value. This language is based on integrating key business drivers into everything you do. For most organizations, the key drivers are market share, margins, revenue, growth and brand. While some may carry more weight than others, it is absolutely critical to be able to articulate your performance, your contribution and your needs in ways that resonate with business drivers. A perfect segue to my second point...

Understand and Relate to All Things Strategic

Know thy *annual report*! Read the letter from the CEO. It essentially outlines the direction in which the company wants to move. The annual report also allows a peek into your company's financial performance and where revenues are strong/weak, etc. If your company does not publish an annual report, it is your job to identify vision, strategy, brand,

etc., as well as the plan of execution for initiatives that support strategic objectives. Know your market, with whom you do business, and where growth and efficiency lie. When you embrace and adopt this information, you have the foundation for the language of visibility. And that becomes the framework for your value campaign.

Improve Reporting to Reflect the True Value of the Contact Center

Traditional contact center reporting is clogged with a bunch of statistics that few people outside the operation genuinely understand and often communicates numbers more suitable to factory production. *How many* and *how long* are two major elements present in far too many contact center performance reports.

Then there are the "targets." These are often established free from anything more than a *rumor* of an "industry standard" or referencing some "benchmarking report." I feel compelled to comment a bit here. First of all, there are NO "industry "standards." Why? There is NO governing body or jury to evaluate the claims. Are there commonly used service levels and the like? Absolutely! But beware: Essentially, anyone can publish anything claiming that some metric achievement categorizes performance as "world class."

The contact center industry bleeds with benchmarking data. While findings may be interesting, they are often the result of small samplings or convenient methods that yield desired outcomes. (It is similar to a pharmaceutical company publishing results of its own research; results often lean too heavily to the desired outcome.) Benchmark reports are often used by vendors to attract attention to themselves and their ability to "help" your operation. For the most part, benchmarking in the contact center arena is primarily about metric achievement and output with wanton disregard for the variations in industry, processes, customer demographics, technology... the list goes on and on. So, before you hang your hat on someone else's "standards," consider being your own "benchmarker" and governing body. Don't waste time focusing on the "output" of others. Focus your eye on the "inputs." That is where you dig for the value-add the contact center can deliver. Take a good, long, hard and even harsh look at what reports you provide and to whom. Do they have a favorable impact on your visibility? Do they represent value to the recipient? Or are they all about production? (Don't get me wrong. Production measurements are absolutely necessary to keep an eye on bottom-line strategic objectives and to improve processes, performance, etc. However, they often neglect to connect the metrics to adding value and/or contributing to the quality of the customer experience and the contribution to strategic objectives.)



> "Let's give them something to talk about, a little mystery to figure out."
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> —*BONNIE RAITT*

Few of the traditional metric performance data frequently used by contact centers will fit into improving your value. It just doesn't fit the language. There are very few ways to relate topline growth via traditional metrics such as service level, handle time, abandon, etc. How would you relate improvements to market share, wallet share, brand deepening and relationship building? It is kind of tough. This is why I say that "information is currency." Information is your visibility and value-building *bargaining chip*. Ask yourself these questions:

- What information do I have that will have relevance (value) to another department?
- What do senior executives really need to know that I'm not telling them?

Think about the marketing example. If marketing neglects to provide information you need, guard against being thought of as the "whiner." It is your responsibility to build effective cross-functional relationships that deliver value to the enterprise and, most importantly, to the customer experience. Think about what other departments need to know... what information. Make that information your *currency*. Get creative and bolster up reporting to enhance your value and visibility. When information is shared, it provides value to others and visibility to your operation.

Identify Technology to Support Objectives

As much information as the contact center has, sees and knows, if it is impossible to get at, poof, there goes your mission! Technology tools we now have are able to position the contact center to obtain high-value information. Speech analytics software (a feature of some quality recording applications) allows a library of phrases to be created and sorted according to your own preferences. The result is distinct and specific files of call (and other channels) recordings. Imagine providing marketing with a *voice of the customer* report only hours into a new campaign or promotion. Won't legal be surprised when you are able to capture calls and report specifically on issues like confusing letters being sent to customers and forcing them to call for clarification? In some cases, protocols around content review have been set by the contact center "communication gatekeeper" to assist in the simplification of communications to reduce or even eliminate unnecessary low-value contacts.

We also see technologies that allow "workflow" to be tracked throughout the process and to measure the impact of cross-functional alignment. When alignments are in place, fewer calls occur because fewer problems happen. Customers are happier, costs are lower, and quality is improved across *multiple departments* rather than just one. This is the language of visibility. Link operational activities to strategic elements—improved customer experience, additional revenue, customer retention and brand penetration—and you will find yourself being a sought-after and trusted advisor. That's what



happens when you manage your visibility!

Take the time to understand your technology infrastructure and emerging options. I cannot tell you the number of contact center professionals I have met that cannot name their telecom system. This is no longer an acceptable practice. If you want to "get in on the action" of technology acquisition, you must take the time to learn the features, benefits and what works for you. It can be enlightening just to learn how many options exist on your current systems that are not utilized or under-utilized due to lack of knowledge.

Get to It!

Take a long look around, check on your identity, and go nuts adding nuggets to existing reports and discovering some interesting bits to send over to marketing. Draw out the cross-functional workflow, ask other leaders to lunch, and invite them to your contact center "anytime." Always have an "observation post" at the ready for visitors. Have a chair and second headset ready to support anyone in the company interested in stopping by. Offer an electronic "guest book," take pictures and post them, and generate "word of mouth" about your contact center. You will enjoy the benefits of a well-managed value campaign that promotes the value and visibility of the contact center. Please let us know how you have successfully managed your visibility campaign!





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