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Automating Your Call Center Feedback

(Version 2)

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We've all heard someone totally upset over a bad experience with a phone call to a call center. At some point, we've each probably felt that way ourselves. It may be wait times that are too long, poorly recorded messages, or an agent who just doesn't communicate well – everyone seems to have a bad story and most don't seem to mind sharing those stories with others. From the moment of the bad experience they tell the story over and over to friends, warning them about doing business with "that company" for fear of poor service.

"The agent was rude."
"I couldn't understand the agent's accent."
"They had no idea how to solve my problem."
"I just kept getting passed around."

Are your customers saying this about your contact center? If they are, are you aware of why they are saying these things?

Customer feedback is a key to great call center performance. When used correctly, companies are willing to accept honest criticism and develop programs to improve their interactions. When used incorrectly, or completely ignored, company performance suffers.

For a lot of call center businesses, several major issues are:

1. Their customer feedback *systems* are old and out of date, and
2. Customer feedback is *not operationalized* in a *timely manner* at the *agent level*.

Some feedback systems are so outdated, so inconvenient for the customer; they might as well not have one at all.

Some companies with reliable systems are not receiving the data quickly enough, and others simply aren't using the data to take action. That's why the most successful contact centers are turning to leading-edge automated feedback solutions and developing processes to incorporate feedback into daily operations.

Collecting Feedback
Most businesses use one of two basic methods of acquiring feedback after a customer contact. Either (1) a live agent places a call back to the customer, or (2) an automated system does it (either while the guest is on the call, or shortly thereafter.) Each method has advantages, each has drawbacks. Overall, most centers find they receive the biggest benefit for the cost by choosing the automated solution.

Why is Automated the Better Solution?
For starters, any time an agent spends taking feedback, is time taken away from making new calls. That's time spent on a customer who's already been served, as opposed to a new call. If meeting call quotas are important, the lost time on feedback can hurt. Automated solutions can give time back to agents and new customers.

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Another negative to agent-driven feedback systems is that overloaded agents may not be able to make a feedback call within a reasonable time frame, increasing the chance that important details of the original customer experience might be forgotten. When customers aren't questioned *promptly* after the original call, the feedback isn't as sharp or reliable. Automated systems approach the customer directly after their service experience.

Finally, the most important aspect of automated feedback, relative to live feedback, is a system's ability to mitigate the natural tendency of most customers to be conflict-averse. Automated surveys provide a risk-free way for customers to provide open and honest, yet confidential feedback.

Automated surveys aren't without their issues as well. Many systems are expensive, with some requiring large pieces of hardware to attach to your existing systems. That means more space, more energy, more maintenance, and more cost - most of which contact centers have too much of already. Also, some systems aren't compatible with home-based agent setups. But newer, purpose-built automated systems are inexpensive and, because they are hosted, there is no hardware or software to install.

Customize On-the-Fly

The benefits and potential return on investment of automated surveys are too obvious to ignore. It's costly to acquire new customers, so keeping the ones you already have is critical. Using surveys to keep close tabs on their feelings and making appropriate changes – immediately – is the core of any customer/business relationship. Automating this process is the great way to maximize the potential benefits.

Besides lowering costs and increasing agent productivity, one of the newer benefits of automated surveys is that technology can be programmed to adjust questions on-the-fly, based on earlier customer responses. This goes beyond the standard questionnaire, to probe into details – going beyond the "what," to find out the "why." Live agents can do this as well, but only after considerable training and practice, which further impairs productivity.

The goal isn't just to get answers, but to learn about a customer's feelings and emotions regarding the service experience. As nice as simply solving a person's problem may be, it won't mean much if that customer isn't motivated to continue using your services – and just like any other relationship, knowing the most about what makes the customer happy is the best way to keep them.

Real-Time Feedback, Instant Action

The most important benefit of real-time feedback is the chance for a manager to receive the feedback, walk across the room, and speak with the agent immediately. Not only will you get more consistent and accurate agent performance, but you'll be able to stop bad information dispensation, prevent policy violations, and remind agents about any changes in offerings and service.

Some systems allow customers to leave verbatim voicemails, seamlessly integrated with the quantitative responses. These actual recordings of the "voice of the customer" are where the best nuggets of feedback are often found. Whether happy or unhappy, the goal is to drill down and find

the source of the way they feel. While it may sound strange to think a computerized system would be better at capturing feelings, it's been demonstrated that customizable, automated surveys often reveal the most about customers, because the fear of talking to a live person has been removed.

Many companies outsource their surveys to vendors such as Mindshare Technologies, which charge a small monthly subscription fee. Mindshare is a hosted solution, so there is no software or hardware to buy. Mindshare's reporting system is web-based, so the cost ends up being relatively minor when compared to buying and maintaining another piece of equipment or having live agents make the calls.

As stated earlier, both types of surveys have their drawbacks and benefits. But if you're looking for the most cost-efficient, effective and reliable solution, then automated, real-time customer feedback surveys is the best way to acquire, retain, and recover customers.

This is how I see it.

About Richard D. Hanks and Mindshare
Richard D. Hanks is the President of Mindshare Technologies, a leading provider of real-time, automated customer and employee feedback solutions. His experience spans multiple industries and disciplines, including many years as an adjunct professor at Cornell. He is an author and frequent teacher/speaker at trade, academic, and professional gatherings. Mindshare's business monitoring tools help companies improve operational excellence and minimize customer attrition through personal customer involvement. Mindshare's proprietary survey technology captures the voice of the customer in real-time and immediately transforms it into actionable intelligence through powerful enterprise reporting. As a hosted system, Mindshare is affordable and flexible, with surveys and reports tailored to fit a company's individual needs. For more information please visit: www.mshare.net. To reach Rich directly, contact him at rhanks@mshare.net or (801) 263-2333.

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