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Workforce Optimization

How to “Up” Efficiencies in a Down Economy

By Bill Durr

Amid market conditions, global organizations are constantly on the hunt to attract business, and thus, new streams of revenue. Yet in doing so, they also must strike the fine balance between operational costs, revenue generation and the delivery of consistent, high-quality customer experiences. While acquiring new customers is always a top priority in today’s economic environment, more than ever, companies are placing a renewed focus on retaining their existing customers and growing those relationships.

Workforce Optimization in a Down Economy: In the quest to balance these often conflicting business dynamics and gauges, the priority around customer service can be compromised. Yet the fact remains that despite business pressures and reduced consumer spending, customers still expect the same high-level service.

As a result, organizations are looking to Workforce Optimization (WFO) technology to give meaning to business intelligence, structured and unstructured customer data, and day-to-day service delivery. With a WFO software suite – comprised of a unified set of quality monitoring/call recording, workforce management, analytics, performance management, eLearning and coaching solutions – businesses can deliver smarter customer service, balancing cost reduction with customer centricity.

WFO combines software, services and supporting business processes to help global organizations improve customer service operations across the enterprise – from customer interactions in the contact center to underlying back-office business procedures. WFO not only helps companies capture customer intelligence, it also can help organizations proactively identify and react to emerging trends, address problematic issues and more fully maximize available workforce resources. It captures information on workforce performance, customer interactions, service levels and customer loyalty – which in turn help both front- and back-office departments make necessary process and staffing adjustments, among other changes, that can impact the cost and quality of the customer experience.

Market Insights into Workforce Optimization, Customer-Centric and ROI-Driven Solutions: When times are tough, CIOs and IT decision makers turn to solutions that can help them address inefficient internal business processes, better manage their staff and mine enterprise data for insight into their customers' needs. Software solutions – such as WFO – can offer near-term return on investment (ROI) and help enable greater business efficiencies that yield stronger customer relationships.

DMG Consulting's 2009 *Quality Management/Liability Recording Product and Market Report* states that WFO vendors experienced an increase in revenue of 18.3 percent in the first half of 2008 compared to the same period in 2007. The firm also stated that the "quality management/liability (WFO) market defies recession."

Frost & Sullivan points to other cost-saving measures that WFO suites can deliver. In its report entitled *Contact Center Operations in a Down Economy – Market Insight*, it states that workforce optimization tools – such as analytics – can be turned on for a small added cost, which could save a significant amount of money in the long-term.

The Power of Analytics-Driven Workforce Optimization: With speech and data analytics as part of a WFO suite, organizations can better identify market opportunities and competitive threats, while surfacing trends that might otherwise go undetected. Speech analytics software combines structured and unstructured data, analyzing and identifying key circumstances that may positively or negatively impact business performance. Add to that data analytics, which identifies anomalies that could be negatively impacting performance. Customer surveys also can be leveraged to deliver vital "outside in" feedback from customers based on what they share during interactions with organizations' contact centers.

Other cost-saving tools that afford a host of efficiencies include quality monitoring (QM)/recording and workforce management. QM delivers multi-channel customer interaction recording, along with agent evaluation and reporting capabilities to help improve staff performance and increase supervisor productivity. Such solutions support the need to focus on quality assurance and compliance requirements. Whereas, workforce management enables organizations to meet customer demand and carefully manage the largest contact center cost component – the staff.

With performance management, organizations can benefit from scorecards and an extensive set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to help all levels of the organization gauge how they're performing against their goals – from individuals, to teams and departments, and even up to the executive level. eLearning and coaching deal with the critical dynamics of staff development and the remediation of skill gaps, helping organizations consistently build employee knowledge and proficiencies in new products, products, processes and regulations. And, application analysis captures desktop activities and application usage to show employee workflow patterns and the root cause of inefficient internal processes that may cause unnecessary customer inquiries into contact centers, service centers and branch offices.

The Customer Experience Prevails: It's been said that it costs more to acquire a new customer than to retain an existing one. This is no secret in the customer service industry. Frost & Sullivan avers that "when the economy sours, the need to protect the customer base is even more pronounced." Other industry analyst firms concur. In its *Obstacles to Customer Experience Success* report (published in February 2009), Forrester Research conducted a poll asking respondents how a continued economic downturn will alter the importance of the customer experience this year. Sixty three percent of respondents responded that it will become more important.

Down economy. Recession. Economic crisis. For the better part of the past year, these terms have consistently been in the headlines, on the tip of our tongues and top of mind. Smart companies that value customer service in tough times will reap the reward of customer loyalty when the economy recovers – making them a special breed that have identified the customer experience to be more important now than ever.

Workforce Optimization (WFO) technology is proving to be an effective contact center and enterprise solution in both up and down economies. With WFO, contact centers are becoming even more valuable enterprise assets with their ability to help foster customer relationships, capture and disseminate valuable business intelligence to groups across the enterprise, and introduce new-found efficiencies to streamline operations, not to mention drive revenue into the business. Especially attractive for its ability to help drive down costs, maximize resources and heighten service quality, WFO can deliver on the quantifiable results and ROI that so many businesses today mandate in their technology decision procurement processes.

IT spending priorities are clearly a point of conversation as we move further into 2009. CIOs and IT decision makers are seeking technology solutions, among them WFO, that hold the promise of reduced overall operating costs, greater efficiencies and the ability to do more with less. At the same time, it has become critically important to maintain customer service levels to foster satisfaction, repeat business and loyalty – all key factors that are driving increasing demand for WFO in the contact center and across the enterprise.

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