



In Queue

The fun, informative and interesting newsletter for
the call center industry.

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In This Issue

[Executive Vice President of Call Centers](#)
[Understanding Research](#)
[What I am Reading](#)

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Quotes

"An optimist stays up to see the New
Year in. A pessimist waits to make
sure the old one leaves."
-Bill Vaughan

Executive Vice President of Call Centers

The mission of the National Association of Call Centers is to help professionalize the industry. This is great and all, but what does that really mean? To us, call centers are a vital part of an organization or business because they are connecting directly with customers. Therefore, we believe that call centers, like other vital functions of a company, deserve a seat at the executive table. This has already occurred in some companies that have created a vice president for customer service. More work still needs to be done.

Do you deserve, as a call center professional, to have an executive vice president of call centers or customer contact in your company or organization? Just think back 30 or 40 years ago. Only in recent history has the field of marketing become a discipline in universities and acquired a seat at the executive table. Before that time marketing was nothing but a sales force. Now marketing commands a large budget in companies, and claims successes, even if there is not direct evidence. Additionally, it is very difficult to draw a direct causal line between a marketing investment in a company and direct revenue. Though many try, and will continue trying, the reality is that there are correlations between advertising spending and revenue, but a strong causal relationship is hard to find. In short, marketing is a cost function, part of the cost of doing business.

Does this ring a bell? Do any of the statements ring true? Have you heard these arguments before? Probably so, but instead of the word "marketing" you can insert the word "call center" or "customer contact" and the message will sound identical. The goal here is not to suggest that marketing does not deserve a seat at the executive table, in fact I believe they do, but that call centers offer as much, if not more, value in customer contact interaction than marketing within an organization or company. Therefore the NACC will fight for the establishment of call center executive vice-presidents in companies.

Fun Facts

The majority of call centers workers travel less than 25 minutes to work. This means that the average labor shed of a call center is connected with a 25 minute concentric circle around the call center from which most of the employees will travel.

Source: NACC State of the Industry Report #3 2005: A Labor Survey of the Industry, p. 59.



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Picture of the Week



This image I shot from my car this past week as I was going to a call center meeting. I thought the image represented how many professionals in the call center industry feel about the future path of the industry-foggy and unclear. Part of what we are trying to achieve at the NACC is to lift the fog of the future for the industry by helping to chart a clear, strong, and sustainable path to the future.



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What can you do to help foster the concept of the executive vice president of call centers? Learn not only how to manage a call center, but know everything there is to know about your company/organization's core business and business in general. The more you know about business and your role in the business, the more valuable your thoughts and ideas are to your company/organization. Additionally, the more you understand about business, and not just call centers, the better you can position your call center(s) into the correct value perspective within your organization. Already you are on the road to form an executive vice president of call centers. That is one way to meet a mission goal of helping to professionalize an industry.

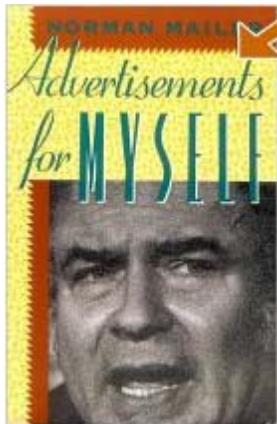
Understanding Research

Part of the role of the NACC is to try and understand what is going on in the industry. Moreover, since the NACC produces reports from data it collects with the Call Center Research Laboratory at The University of Southern Mississippi, we are also in the business of seeing what other organizations are producing in terms of research to ensure we are not duplicating efforts. Too many of the reports that I have read about the call center industry have been poor at best, misleading and just made up at worst. The goal here is not to teach people to produce better research (we can do that later) instead it is to teach the typical professional consumer of these industry reports how to discern good from bad research through a series of essays. This first essay will focus on the idea of sample size.

The first thing you need to do when you receive a report on the call center industry is to look at the sample size. Sample size is the total number of non-repeating people who participated in the survey. This number is often reported as "n=###" with "n" equaling "number." So why is this important to know? To have a valid survey which allows the ability to extrapolate to a group of people or a whole industry, a researcher must have a large enough sample size to be valid. Otherwise, the sample will not be representative and thus could be just random occurrences.

For example, suppose you have on a report that 58% of the people surveyed said that they were going to purchase a particular product or service in the next year. If the sample size is not adequate enough, then this data cannot accurately be extrapolated to the whole industry and the statement that 58% of the call center professionals are going to buy a product next year is

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invalid.

Still with me? How about another example? If you have 100 call center reps, and you call 10 into your office and ask each what their favorite color is and you find that 2 of the 10 like the color blue, you cannot then, with accuracy, go out onto the floor and announce to everyone that 20% of the total call center reps have blue as their favorite color. Why? Because the 10 people are not a large enough sample to represent your whole 100 person call center and therefore their answers cannot be assumed to represent the total group.

The minimum sample size for any research that it is representing the entire industry is 100. Ideally you would want the number closer to $n=200$. If a report that collected data from the industry does not indicate a sample size, or a " $n=100$ " or more, turn around and run away, because chances are the content within the report is flawed and cannot be understood to represent the industry.

What I am Reading

I like Norman Mailer as an author. I loved reading *The Naked and the Dead*, *American Dream*, and *The Executioner's Song*. It is for that reason that I purchased *Advertisements for Myself*.

Advertisements for Myself was originally published in 1959 as an autobiography and edited collection of writings in one. The book is broken into five parts each containing chapters called "advertisements" where Mailer introduces the essay, story, or interview with background information and personal insights before we read his published work. The book is 532 long pages chronicling his work from the 1930s through the early 1950s.

First let me tell you what is good about this book. I believe that the book is a solid attempt to reach into the mind of Norman Mailer from 1958-1959 as much as a book can achieve this. The author shares with the reader his insights, thoughts, biases, prejudices and many of his personal life experiences, feelings, and tragedies. Interestingly, though written at the height of black and white television, *Leave it Beaver*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and such Americana, Mailer in this book is strung out on drugs, sees the world and America through less than rose colored glasses and is a type of forerunner of the 1960s peace movement and free use of drugs in America. A man ahead of his time.

The book was a struggle to get through. Though Mailer is

an excellent writer in a literary sense, his ramblings and reflections on his own work were a struggle to read each evening. Though insightful early on, his "advertisements" became less interesting over time as his writing appeared to be more for his own personal reflection of his psychosis rather than an attempt to tell an interesting and compelling story. Moreover, when I purchased the book with a 1992 print date I did not realize that the original print date was 1959. I think Mailer's best works are post publication of this book in 1959, so I was a bit disappointed not to hear him reflecting upon writing *American Dream* and *The Executioner's Song*.

Unless you are a real die hard Norman Mailer fan, I would not advise anyone to purchase this book, even then, I would pause and reflect first. If you want to purchase it anyway, the book cover can be found over there ← for you to click on and it will send you to Amazon.com.

Other books I have recently purchased that may show up in a future "What I am Reading" essay include: *This Side of Paradise*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Prince*, *Iron Council*, and *Darwin's Children*.

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