National Association of Call Centers

In Queue

The fun, informative, and unique newsletter for the call center industry

Welcome to the March 2018 issue of the NACC In Queue newsletter!

A Painless Forecast: How To Accurately Staff Your Contact Center

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Forecasting for the contact center is tough. Understaffed businesses can result in long wait times for customers and leave agents frustrated and even unmotivated. Customers may be forgiving of long wait times once, but don't expect them to be forgiving if it happens regularly. On the other hand, labor costs are typically 70-80 percent of the budget, and overstaffing further bloats costs.

An accurate forecast means you have the right agents available with the right skills at the right time. It's critical to a successful customer experience. So how do companies find the balance to keep both employees and customers happy?

First, it's important to decide what constitutes success. Without proper context, it's impossible to develop an accurate forecast. Typically, +/- 5 percent accuracy is the industry standard, but the math isn't always that simple. For example, if the target is set at 100 contacts, 106 contacts will show as failure, meaning contact centers can't always rely on industry standards when setting goals.

After defining success, it's important to determine metrics. Here are the top three metrics contact center managers should use to ensure an accurate forecast, every time:

Contact (call) volume
How many calls your contact center receives is a critical piece of the forecasting puzzle. But it's not the only piece. That data should not be used to simply look ahead; it should also be used to see how closely forecasted interactions match the actual number of contacts. With this complete view, you'll be able to make adjustments to achieve greater accuracy.

Handle time
How long your agents need to resolve an inquiry, or handle time, will give you an idea of agent availability to answer new requests. However, call handle time shouldn't be based on just the first transaction, but the entire series of subsequent calls that are related to the same case.

Daily contact arrival pattern
Also known as Forecast Accuracy by Interval, daily contact arrival patterns show the busiest and slowest times of day. This allows you to determine the number of agents you need to manage daily peaks and valleys. From there, you'll be able to account for schedule inflexibility. This ensures the scheduling plan matches the number of agents

required to handle the work to the required staffing based on the forecast workload and the assumptions.

While these numbers are important, how you gather them should be equally considered. Be sure to use real-time and historical data across specific time periods and apply prior year trending data to compensate for the increases or decreases in call volume. In addition, don't forget to include non-phone interactions such as chat and email, because those still require time and resources from your team.

Forecasting is crucial to staffing a contact center that consistently meets customer needs. When done effectively, it improves the experience for employees and customers while effectively managing budgets. With the right metrics and data, contact center managers can take the pain out of the process and create an accurate forecast, assuming business as usual, every single time.

Calabrio recently published a White Paper entitled, "The Top Three Ways to Forecast for your Contact Center." The paper is available now for download here. If you have responsibility in any way for forecasting in your contact center, this paper should be in your resource library.

In This Issue...

- Painless Forecasting
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- Gamification And Workforce Management
- Call Center Comics!

Pearls Of Wisdom

"It's not that I'm smart. It's that I stay with problems longer."
~ Albert Einstein

Reports From NACC

The NACC has been burning the midnight oil and typing until our fingers are sore to bring out reports to our members. Each is listed below. If you are interested to see what we are writing about, click on the links below and download the executive summary of each. If you like what you see, join the NACC so that you can view these reports and others that will be coming out soon on our website. These reports will ensure that you know the latest trends in the industry.

Artificial Intelligence In Customer Care

Ruchi Gupta, Senior Product Manager, Cisco, rugupta@cisco.com

Workflow applications are ripe for disruption with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). The magic of AI is tied to big data and the AI models. Customer care organizations that have access to rich datasets are prime candidates to ride the AI wave of change.

Companies will always look for ways to improve their profit margins, along with creating new and improved customer experiences. In the early stages of AI implementations, some aspects could be more hype than actual substance. But on a high level, artificial intelligence will transform the customer care world in three areas:

1. Digital customer experience

Chatbots are the most common way companies are implementing AI in customer care today. According to research by BT, almost 80% of customers surveyed are open to using chatbots for quick and simple queries. The trick is to design and offer chatbots that best fit your customers' needs. Many companies are currently in a trial phase, in which organizations try out a few ideas, rapidly access feedback, and refine what works and what does not. A few months into such a trial, you can make better strategic decisions about how best to use chatbots to serve your customers.

2. Intelligent routing

AI will help enable intelligent routing like never before. The magic here is access to the customer journey data. One example of intelligent routing is being able to gather Internet of Things (IoT) data and proactively engage with a customer. More than 75% of those surveyed like it when organizations notice that they are having a problem online and contact them directly to help. Other areas where we could see benefits are agent demand forecasting and staffing, and fraud detection and prevention.

3. Agent productivity

The advent of AI should not be seen as potentially leading to a reduction in agent staffing. Rather, its real benefits are in helping agents be even more productive. AI-induced automation will also optimize the use of live agents, allowing them to resolve problems faster, waste less time handling routine inquiries, and provide a better customer experience. This is where your agents turn into experts. You can use AI for identity management, agent insights, reporting, pre-population of forms, and a variety of other functions.
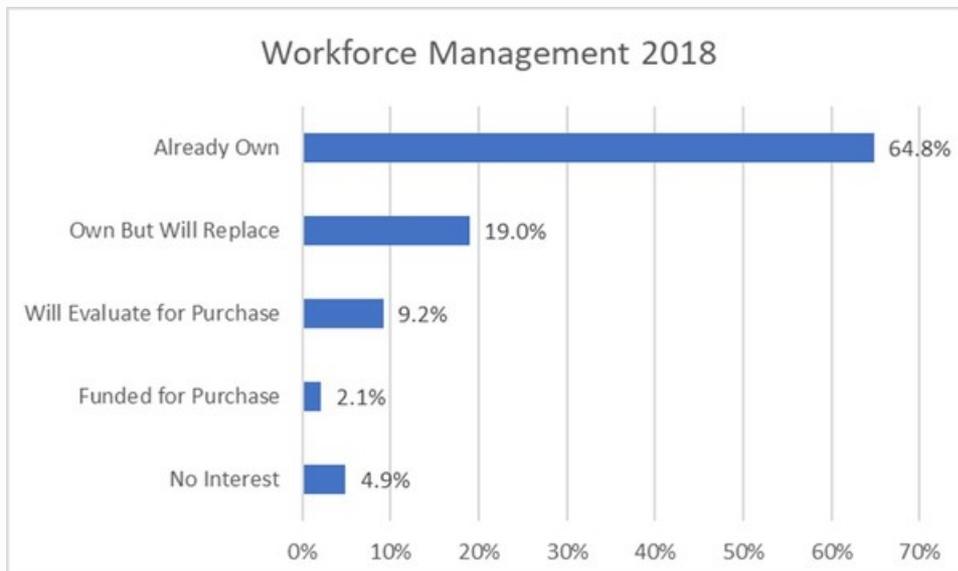
When Workforce Management Meets Gamification

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Intuitively, you may think that one of the contact center industry's most mature solutions, workforce management (WFM), would not have any sort of connection to one of the industry's newest solutions, gamification, but we recently proved otherwise. In fact, that was the topic of discussion in a webinar I did this month with Paul Chance of NICE. The recording of the webinar is now available and if either WFM or gamification is of interest to you, I suggest you take a look at this link.

As the chart in Figure 1 below illustrates, WFM enjoys a high degree of penetration in the U.S. contact center industry.

Figure 1: Workforce Management 2018
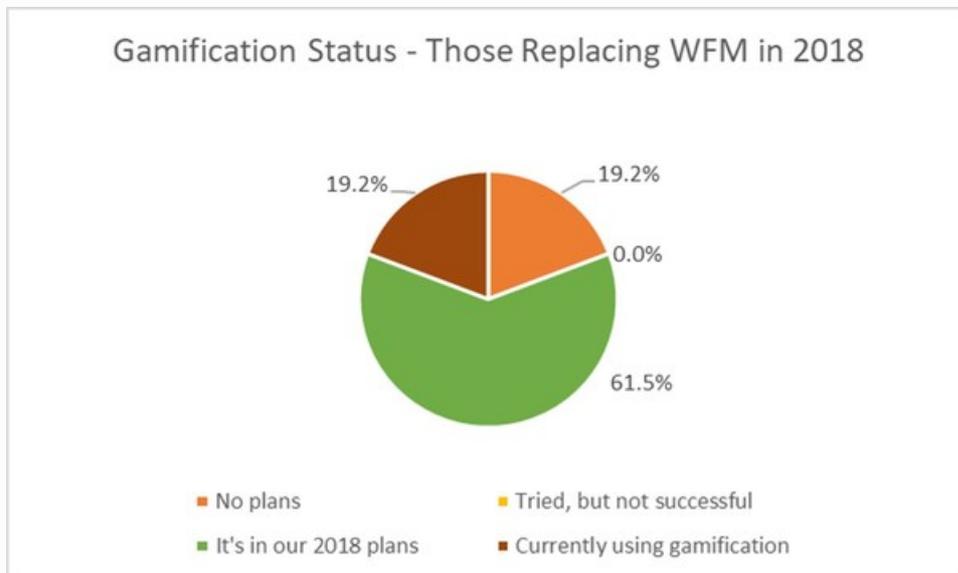

Source: Saddletree Research/NACC

Penetration of WFM in North America has reached nearly 84 percent. There is, however, a large percentage of the industry that will be looking to replace or upgrade their existing WFM software or will be evaluating WFM for a first-time purchase. Given the maturity of the WFM market segment, a turnover of nearly 20 percent of the installed base isn't shockingly high.

Where WFM dovetails with gamification is at the intersection of WFM users looking to upgrade or replace their software, and their stated interest in contact center gamification, which we were able to determine via cross-tabulation of both of these survey results.

Figure 2 shows the level of interest in gamification among those research respondents who indicated that they would be upgrading or replacing their WFM solution in 2018.

Figure 2: Gamification Intentions among Those Replacing WFM in 2018

Gamification Status - Those Replacing WFM in 2018

19.2% — 19.2%

0.0%

61.5%

- No plans
- Tried, but not successful
- It's in our 2018 plans
- Currently using gamification

Source: Saddletree Research/NACC

The chart clearly indicates a high degree of interest in gamification among those replacing their WFM solution in 2018. Over 61 percent of respondents will be adding gamification to their contact center this year, while over 19 percent of these users have already deployed gamification in their contact center.

What we can glean from these results is further evidence of the evolution of Workforce Optimization (WFO) to Workforce Engagement Management (WEM). We have discussed the growing importance of employee engagement and related contact center solutions in past issues of this newsletter (November 2017) and now we have tangible evidence that industry spending is following this trend. Buoyed by the combined need of efficient customer experience management and meeting the employment expectations of Millennial generation workers, we expect to continue to see the successful partnership between mature technologies and newly emerging innovations.

 ## Call Center Comics

INTERVIEW	I PREFER ANSWERS THAT ARE INACCURATE BUT EASIER TO DIGEST	I MEANT TO SAY THAT I'M LOOKING FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW
WHY ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A NEW POSITION?		

If you like this comic and would like to see more, write Ozzie at callcentercomics@yahoo.com and visit his website at http://callcentercomics.com or just click on the comic to tak you to his page. The NACC appreciates Ozzie letting us use some of his comics in our newsletter.

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