

NACC

National Association of Call Centers

In Queue

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

Volume 7, Issue 8 - September 7, 2012

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Virtual Call
Agents?

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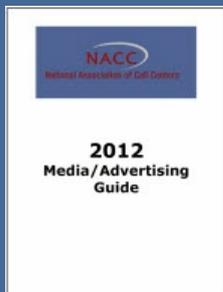
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Quote

"Once we discover how to appreciate the timeless values in our daily experiences, we can enjoy the best things in life"

What's New in In Queue

Paul Stockford, Research Director, NACC and Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research, Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org

New Research Kick-Off. Concurrent with the 2012 NFL football season, the NACC is gearing up to launch our annual survey of end-users. All NACC members and readers are invited and encouraged to participate. Results are published throughout the year in this newsletter so your participation will allow you to better understand the results and benchmark your attitudes and intentions against those of your peers and colleagues. We'll post the survey link in the October issue of *In Queue*.

In the meantime, we're still looking for volunteer members who would like to trade 30 minutes of their time during the course of a year for an annual NACC membership at no cost. NACC membership gives you access to reports, our Job Board, business opportunities as they come to us, and the opportunity to tap into the membership network for inquiries, advice and review. We promise to ask for no more than 30 minutes of your time to participate in our surveys during the course of the year. It's a great deal. If you'd like to join us, send me an e-mail with the word "Volunteer" in the subject line and I'll set up your membership. If you have questions don't hesitate to contact me.

New Reports. Speaking of reports, the quarterly industry reports that David Butler authors are now available for the first and second quarter of 2012. These reports are stored at the NACC website, www.nationalcallcenters.org, and are available to all members, including NACC volunteer members.

If you're interested in speech analytics, you'll probably be interested in a series of papers I recently authored on the subject. Sponsored by Nexidia, these reports get right to the point and are a quick read. You can download these research notes at the following URLs:

<http://nexidia.com/files/Static%20Page%20Files/Research%20Brief%206-12-12%20Nexidia%20Interaction%20Analytics.pdf>

http://nexidia.com/files/resource_files/Research%20Brief%206-13-12%20Nexidia%20OnDemand.pdf

http://nexidia.com/files/resource_files/Research%20Brief%206-14-12%20Nexidia%20Capture.pdf

Guest Author. Our guest author this month is contact center Art Rosenberg of The Unified View. Art is an authority on unified communications and has spent most of his career in the contact center industry in one capacity or another. I've known Art as an industry author and analyst for many years and we're very pleased to have Art write about mobile devices and the impact that multi-modal communications are having on the customer service profession. Art can be reached at artr@ix.netcom.com or by phone at 310-395-2360.

This issue's thoughts from the blogosphere was blown away by Hurricane Isaac, which dumped sufficient rain on The University of Southern Mississippi to keep David Butler busy with a mop and bucket while waiting for power to return to his office. In the meantime, I've written an article regarding contact center legislation and employment fluctuations that you might find provocative.

"Customer BYOD" Is Changing Contact Center Operations

Art Rosenberg, UC Strategies Expert, The Unified View
artr@ix.netcom.com

In a recent [webinar](#), the speakers from the National Association of Call Centers described what industry members were doing to improve their operations through technology. There were two key factors mentioned. Paul Stockford, Research Director for the Association, highlighted the fact that "Big Data" analytics for contact centers includes all customer interactions, including voice calls, email, and chat. David Butler, Executive Director of the Association, pointed to the growing need to automate simple customer service tasks with self-service applications to minimize demand for live assistance.

As it turns out, the rapid adoption of mobile smartphones and tablets, will not only facilitate consumer abilities to exploit self-service applications, but will also drive an increased need for customized options to flexibly access live assistance on demand through the various forms of contact available to consumers. Such flexibility comes under the label of "unified communications" (UC), and may well make the Contact Center the biggest source of ROI for UC-enablement.

While there is a lot of discussion about how new "BYOD" (Bring Your Own Device) policies will impact organizations in supporting their employees with mobile access from different devices and operating systems, what has not been properly acknowledged is that consumers/customers will also be bringing that issue to the challenge of designing and exploiting self-service applications. In addition, the flexibility of multi-modal mobile devices, coupled with any demand for live assistance, will also require greater flexibility on the part of customer-facing agents to interact with mobile customers.

Reports from the 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.

- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2012 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2012 Data
- Contact Center Mobility Study: May 2012
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2011 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 3rd Quarter 2011 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2011 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2011 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2010 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 3rd Quarter 2010 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2010 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2010 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2009 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 3rd Quarter 2009 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 2nd Quarter 2009 Data
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 1st Quarter 2009 Data
- North American Contact Center Industry 2008-2009: The Year in Review and a Look Ahead
- State of the Call Center Industry Report: 4th Quarter 2008 Data
- 60 Ideas in 60 Minutes: 2008 Session
- 60 Ideas in 60 Minutes: 2007 Session

The Customer Perspective

For consumers, who were restricted in the past by legacy IVR applications, self-service applications no longer have to start with a phone call. In fact, the reverse is becoming true – online (visual) applications are becoming a primary gateway to a voice or chat connection for live customer service. Many market studies have confirmed that most consumers would prefer direct access to information and business transactions, rather than have to deal with a live person. Of course, such access would have to be simple and easy to use from an interface perspective. That is one area where the combination of speech input (like Apple's Siri) combined with visual information output would be the fastest and easiest way for a mobile user to interact with an online application. However, the choice of user interface has to be dynamically controlled by the mobile end user, depending on their circumstances, e.g., while driving a car, in a noisy environment, or sitting in a meeting. Such flexibility is now possible with Mobile UC technologies and multi-modal devices.

Bottom Line For Contact Center Management

As mentioned in the webinar, while more self-service applications may reduce the total demand for live customer staffing, it will increase the need for greater flexibility in customer interactions with customer service staff. This in turn, will make management of contact center operations and performance more complex, especially in the design of user interfaces to maximize the Customer Experience and minimize the need to "click-for-assistance."

"Cloud"-based applications (private, public, hybrid) will facilitate the development and management of contact center applications, including self-service "mobile apps." Contact center technology vendors are all moving into this service space, making it easier for existing contact centers to start adding new self-service applications, as well as allowing remote agents and contact center management to easily be involved with both current customers and the next generation of mobile customers. Key to mobile flexibility is "unified communications" (UC) that enables communication contacts to be initiated in any form and to be dynamically shifted as needed (e.g., from a text/voice message to chat to a voice connection).

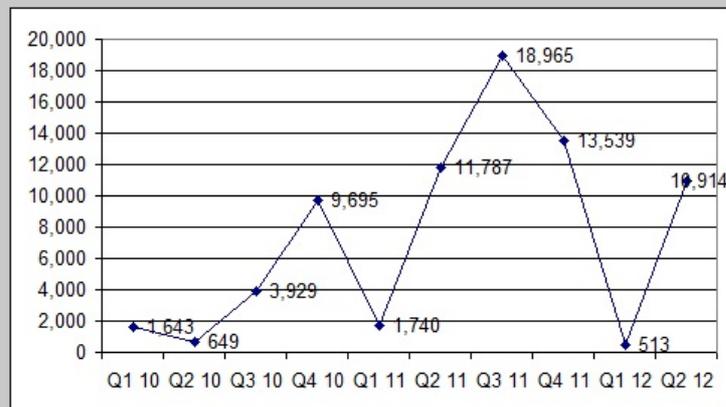
Did Contact Center Legislation Drive Industry Job Losses?

Paul Stockford, Research Director, NACC and Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research, Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org

In the April 6, 2012 issue of *In Queue* I wrote about pending contact center industry legislation at both the state and federal levels that had the potential to severely impact the penalties companies could pay for moving American contact center jobs to offshore outsource. At the federal level House Resolution 3596, introduced in December of 2011, proposed the creation of a public list of all employers that relocate a call center overseas and to make those companies ineligible for Federal grants or guaranteed loans. It also required companies to disclose the physical location of business agents engaging in customer service communications. The difference between HR 3596 and its three legislative predecessors was that this one seemed to have legs.

There have been legislative attempts to address the offshoring of U.S. contact center jobs since 2005 but none made any significant progress toward becoming law. In fact, one attempt at contact center legislature introduced by Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) in May of 2010 was never even introduced to the senate. HR 3596, however, was different. It was progressively moving through the six steps required for a bill to become law. I believe this caused a couple of wireless companies to start to feel the potential legislative heat.

Regular readers of this newsletter will recognize the graph below, which details U.S. contact center employment on a quarterly basis since January of 2010. As you can see, there was an uncharacteristically sharp drop in employment gains during the first quarter of 2012.



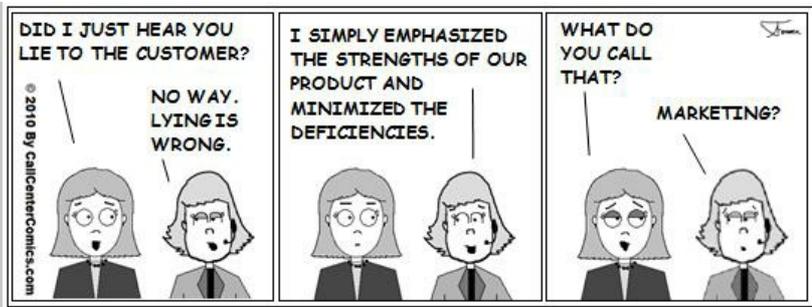
Source: NACC

As it became clear that there would be a senate vote regarding HR 3596 in 2012 with a good possibility of passage, business decisions were likely accelerated. We believe that this was the impetus behind the combined 6,500-plus contact center job reduction from wireless communications providers T-Mobile and Verizon during the first quarter. All of these jobs were transferred to offshore contact centers.

As it turns out, HR 3596 was defeated by a vote of 56 – 42 on July 19th of this year. At least 60 votes are required in the U.S. Senate for a bill to be enacted into law.

Our concern for the future focuses primarily on the potential impact of any new industry legislation that may be introduced in the years to come. While it appears that any contact center industry legislation seems doomed to failure, the damage caused by the knee-jerk reactions that some companies may take presents a risk too great to ignore. In the meantime, construction of new buildings designed to house call centers continues in the Philippines where the industry is expected to employ some 1.3 million Filipinos by 2016.

Call Center Comics!



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/cartoon_categories.htm or just click on the comic to take you to his page. The NACC appreciates Ozzie letting us use some of his comics in our newsletter.

To view past issues of *In Queue*, please [click here](#).

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