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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CALL CENTERS
The Leading Voice for the Call Center Industry

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
CALL CENTER
RESEARCH LABORATORY

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

Volume 4, Issue 7 - April 3, 2009

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Circulation

In Queue circulation 54,205

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NACC Investment Portfolio

Stock	Price	Value	Change
NICE	25.47	6.34	-3.66
VRNT	3.40	1.39	-8.61
SYKE	16.59	8.73	-1.27
WIT	7.00	4.67	-5.33
CVG	7.29	4.13	-5.87
TTEC	11.41	4.96	-5.04
ICTG	5.30	5.09	-4.91
APAC	3.39	15.34	5.34
TOTAL		50.65	-29.35

Original Value start 11/6/2007

A Ray of Light

Paul Stockford, Research Director, National Association of Call Centers and Chief Analyst, Saddletree Research, Paul.Stockford@nationalcallcenters.org

Over the past few weeks the NACC has seen an encouraging increase in the number of membership, sponsorship and project inquiries from the market. Could this be an indication that the contact center industry is emerging from its protective shell, facing forward and shielding its eyes from the glare of light emanating from a brighter future?

I have a hunch that the customer service industry as a whole will soon be announcing positive financial results for the first quarter of 2009. These anticipated positive results are likely reducing the anxiety that most companies were experiencing at the beginning of the year despite generally strong financial performance in 2008. I speak to many contact center companies during the course of the year and at the end of 2008 just about all of them reported good financial results for the year and a strong fourth quarter performance. I was not expecting the industry to respond the way it did.

At the beginning of this year many of these companies with strong 2008 financial performance behaved as if their financial foundation was about to crumble. Normally sound managerial minds began to function out of fear rather than out of confidence and logic. My greatest fear was that it would become a self-fulfilling prophesy. With so many companies expecting the worst, the worst was bound to happen. We will soon find out that fortunately, this was not the case at all.

I think what we have learned during the course of the first quarter of this year is that the customer service function will survive this recession and will continue to be important to any organization in a competitive market regardless of economic conditions. As the doomsayers, pessimists and financial managers are emerging from their shrouds of gloom to find that the world actually didn't end during the first quarter, budgets are beginning to loosen up.

We also expect to see venture capital and merger and acquisition activities to gain momentum during the second quarter as evidenced by the recent interest of Canadian banks in strengthening their positions in American markets. Canada's banks have remained profitable despite global economic uncertainty and are now looking to invest in American businesses. This influx of cash cannot avoid positively impacting the customer service industry across business sectors.

As budgets loosen and optimism returns to the contact center industry it is a good time to consider joining us and supporting the industry via membership in the NACC. As a true non-profit, university-based industry organization the NACC continues to focus on the advancement of the contact center and customer care professions through a variety of activities including ongoing research, peer interaction and shared information. For more information on NACC membership and sponsorship please visit <http://www.nationalcallcenters.org/membership.php>.

From the Trenches

Technology Optimization Part 1: Routing and Skills

Lori Bocklund, President, Strategic Contact, Lori@strategiccontact.com

=US\$90.00 or US\$10.00 per stock. Then Nortel went bankrupt so we have adjusted the investment portfolio and now the new start value would be \$80.00 or \$10.00 per stock.

Total Portfolio Value Now= \$50.65! This is up over \$8.00 in the past two weeks. This means at \$50.00 we are 5/8 the way to the original value of the portfolio. I hope by late 2009 or into 2010 I can report to you that we are at \$90, \$100, or even \$110 in the portfolio.

NACC Composite Index

Date	Value	Change	Percent
11/6/07	100.00		na
12/5/07	94.38	-0.56	-0.60
1/15/08	80.89	-17.02	-21.04
2/13/08	75.56	-1.98	-2.63
3/12/08	65.47	-11.25	-17.18
4/9/08	68.98	1.06	1.54
5/7/08	77.31	3.14	4.07
6/4/08	81.51	2.93	3.60
7/2/08	70.28	-10.20	-14.52
8/13/08	65.57	-0.97	-1.48
9/10/08	66.55	-1.69	-2.54
10/8/08	43.24	-13.67	-31.62
11/5/08	43.26	1.43	3.31
12/3/08	36.19	3.30	9.13
1/7/09	42.75	2.10	4.92
1/23/09	36.23	-6.52	-18.00
2/4/09	35.68	-0.55	-1.54
2/18/09	33.36	-2.32	-6.96
3/4/09	30.94	-2.42	-7.82
3/18/09	36.13	5.19	14.36
4/1/09	37.88	1.75	4.63

The NACC Composite Index was up again this week by 4.63%. This is two-two week gains in a row, which is a nice trend if it continues. We are still far from the 100 points we started with, but this is a step in the right direction.

I conducted two interviews this week, one with the Atlanta Journal and Constitution and one with the magazine FDI. During one of these interviews, someone asked if call centers can act as a bellwether to the rest of the economy. I thought this was a good question and one that I have never explored before, but given the fact that call centers touch so many sectors in the economy, they might make a good measure from which to examine the total economy.

We have a wealth of technology in the contact center, but companies frequently underutilize it or poorly apply it to business needs. Now is a great time to review your deployments and find ways to optimize their business value – through technology, process, and/or people changes. With this column, we begin a series of articles that address technologies ripe for improved use. We start with routing and skills, technology that lets us do amazing things to deliver calls to the proper agent.

Many elements play a role in routing, including the network, IVR, ACD, and potentially CTI and databases. Centers need to review or define a call path carefully, end-to-end, to apply the technology properly. Skills capabilities allow agents to handle various call types and priorities, and conditional routing makes “if...then...” decisions for each call. Most centers focus on phone calls, but also “route” emails and perhaps fax, mail, or even text chat as part of contact handling. So as we look at routing and skills, we also need to consider it across media.

Many problems in contact centers are due to overly complicated routing and skills. Making skill structures too granular makes it difficult to effectively route, track, manage, and optimize. It puts customers through needless gyrations to call different numbers, navigate prompts, and bounce around queues. “Command center” staff move calls and/or agents around to try to match resources to workload, rather than letting the technology work on their behalf. And in the end, callers often end up in the same place in spite of all these efforts. At the other end of the spectrum, some centers suffer from overly simplified routing and skills. They put everyone into one bucket and expect their “super agents” to do it all. They wind up with a high transfer rate and low first call resolution.

Each center needs to strike the right balance, applying technology effectively to meet business needs. Here are some tips to optimize your routing and skills:

1. Keep it simple. Define end-to-end routing with the customer in mind and ease of management as a complimentary goal. Define channel use (toll free numbers) and prompts (whether in the network, IVR, and/or ACD) carefully to match skills while minimizing the burden on the customer. Define skills only to the degree needed for the call types - not for tracking, not because you can break it down that much. Finally, define routing paths with the right conditional options but not too many gyrations. You don't want “spaghetti routing” where you can't decipher what goes where (and why) or what works and what doesn't.
2. Use the technology. Set up appropriate conditionals and skills to find the best available resource – including looking at backup skills or other sites. Use a routing tool for email – whether it's a function of your ACD or CTI, or a separate email routing engine. You've got to be able to route, track, and optimize more than just phone calls.
3. Make changes when necessary, and with purpose and understanding. Part of getting routing and skills right is continuous improvement; few environments are truly static. Use your reports to monitor results, and analyze, assess, and optimize based on what you learn. (Stay tuned for our next column which will address reports)
4. Tie routing and skills technology into the process and people aspects as well. Training is key to aligning skills and contact types. You can use routing and skills to help define career paths and create opportunities – across products, customer types, media, or other dimensions.

The bottom line: Most centers have an opportunity to clean up superfluous skills and messy routing paths, and more effectively apply this powerful technology to make the customer experience better, increase resource utilization and efficiency, and make it easier to manage. Now is the time.

Call Centers and the Economic Stimulus Bill Part I

David L. Butler, Executive Director, National Association of Call Centers,
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I have been reading the full US stimulus package, all 785 glorious pages, to see how the call center industry will be influenced by this bill if at all. The only direct reference to call centers shows up on page 690 under the section on Trade Adjustments for Communities. Specifically the bill says, “*The Conferees believe small- and medium-sized communities, and in particular, those in rural areas where the manufacturing sector has historically been a significant employer, would benefit from the technical assistance and grants available through this program. Such communities have been disproportionately impacted by the adverse effects of trade, where some lumber mills, factories and call centers, for instance, have scaled back operations or closed entirely in response to increased trade and globalization*” (p. 689-690) (bold mine).

Dow Composite	3.67%
S&P 500 Composite	2.06%
NASDAQ Composite	3.89%
NACC Composite	4.63%

The NACC Composite Index was up this week as were the other indices. The Dow, NASDAQ and S&P all gained, but the NACC Composite beat them all with a 4.63% rise with the NASDAQ closest at 3.89%.

Quotes

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."
-Mark Twain

Picture of the Week



STOLEN! This morning I woke to find one of my potted plants missing from my front porch. The image above shows the flowers that I planted for my wife this spring. In the bottom right hand corner, the missing spot, is where I had another 12 inch terracotta planter with a large and pretty growth of red impatiens. This morning the pot and flowers were gone. Disappeared. Poof. Who would steal a potted plant? Sure it was the nicest one of the total group, so they chose the best, but who would take it? It is heavy, it has little monetary value. Crazy I tell you. I hope more do not start to disappear in the coming nights or I might have to chain them down or get a real mean large dog to protect them.

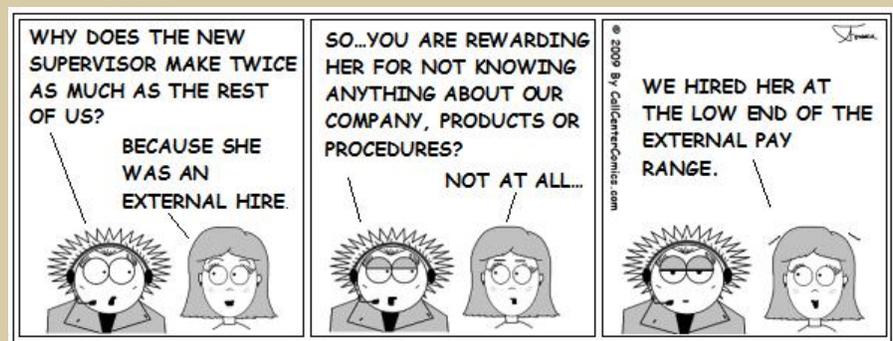
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Unfortunately, the only reference to call centers in the bill is one of a negative light, suggesting that call center jobs are jobs that are lost due to trade. Though in part, some call center jobs have been lost due to trade (wage differences in Asia versus the US for instance), many new jobs in call centers have been created within the United States, Canada, the UK and other places for over a decade. Moreover, often when a community loses call center jobs, those jobs are transferred within the United States to another region, state or community where there is less upward pressure on wages or more availability of labor. Not all call center jobs lost go offshore. I wish the writers of this bill would have read my congressional testimony from September 11, 2008, and they would have seen data to this effect.

In forthcoming parts of this essay I will address how specific issues in the stimulus bill could influence the call center industry, directly and indirectly. Future issues will cover the investment in telecommunications infrastructure, including rural broadband access, trade imbalance payments to companies and communities, economic development grants for call centers and much more. Stay tuned.

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.

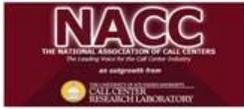
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