

Widening the way for wikis in the contact centre

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Bringing more automation to customer contact centres is something I come across frequently, both in my discussions with contact centre managers and vendors. One subject in particular that is cropping up more and more and is strongly linked to the ongoing uptake of corporate Web 2.0, is wikis. For anyone not familiar with the concept, a wiki is essentially a website (or part of a website) where every visitor is free to contribute new pages of content. Usually this is via a simplified mark-up interface that allows the user to contribute text and some basic imagery.

Wikis don't normally rely on one individual or institution compiling this knowledge repository (or 'warehouse'); they are the result of a common effort made by people who happen to share specific knowledge. The subsequent sharing of this knowledge could then benefit the public at large, or an explicit group.

Wikipedia is one very large specific example, a high-traffic site modelled on a classic encyclopaedic format, where one can find explanations for almost any term, concept, person, event and more. Anyone can make a contribution to Wikipedia and indeed a lot of people have taken the opportunity to do so.

Most wikis are much smaller and have much more specific uses. For instance, Noetica uses a wiki for the purpose of storing all the company's internal knowledge. This ranges from technical articles on how to perform certain tasks to information about clients. Everyone in the company contributes pages to the wiki and it is in everyone's interest to keep it as up to date and as accurate as possible. Public wikis, such as those on the web range from information sharing between cult TV fans to fashion tips. The fundamental difference between wikis and the even more ubiquitous bulletin boards and forums is that wikis are not dialogue-based and they do not encourage conversation. It is a way of publishing knowledge without asking for feedback.

Part of the whole concept of automation in the contact centre is the reduction of the volume of live contacts and their redirection to automated channels. Large numbers of inbound calls are often requests for information. Typically, the only way in which agents can provide any meaningful answers is searching various sources of

knowledge rapidly and accurately. These range from Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) systems, to various types of knowledge bases and intranet sites.

In some cases, organisations can be slow to react to new types of information requests, so by the time it manages to feed its way back into the knowledge base it could be already out of date.

Sometimes, the caller is not seeking information, but is actually volunteering to provide it. In such situations, the company needs to react swiftly and assuming that more than one person will call in with this piece of information, they need to make agents aware of this issue by updating the knowledge base.

Wikis can provide the dynamism and sense of camaraderie similar to the one that powers the world of social networking. Imagine a hypothetical media company broadcasting a documentary or current affairs programme, which contains some inaccuracy, or makes a statement that may not necessarily be true. Some of the audience of such a programme may spot the problem and feel that they wish to set the record straight, so they will probably pick up the phone and call the contact centre. The caller is not seeking information, but is actually volunteering to provide information. In such situations, the company needs to react swiftly and assuming that more than one person will call in with this piece of information, they need to make agents aware of this issue by updating FAQ and knowledge system instantly.

Media companies are good examples of organisations where people may call in to provide information rather than ask for it. Utilities are another example where people may call in with information of fallen power cables, burst mains or gas leaks. Technology companies are regularly told about workarounds and solutions that their users managed to ingeniously find around known faults in their products.

Here is the crucial point. The main reason these people call in is not in order to altruistically help the company they are calling but in order to assist their fellow customers. As they have no way of knowing who these fellow customers may be, their only way of doing so is by notifying the company in the hope that it will pass this information on. The contact centre agent plays almost no role in this. They have no means of checking whether this information is accurate or not (although one assumes that the higher the number of people volunteering similar information, the more likely it is to be true). All they can do is pass this on to someone within the

organisation who can decide whether the information is reliable and whether communicating it to their customer base is helpful.

Intelligent use of wikis can simplify this process dramatically and give customers a voice and in the process, efficiency gains and savings are also achieved. Instead of agents taking hundreds of identical calls, a wiki moderator can ensure that information coming from the public is disseminated back after being verified. The agent may also be empowered to access the wiki so that if the customer chooses not to update the wiki directly, the agent can do so on their behalf. Callers may even be redirected to reduce call durations.

Ultimately, it makes perfect sense to integrate wikis into the contact centre workflow or agent guidance system. As agents use these systems to move through the call, they can easily determine if the call includes any potentially useful information that the caller provided and automatically, without any agent intervention, pass this information behind the scenes to the relevant wiki editorial or moderation team. That piece of information could be on the wiki within minutes and available both to the public (on the website) and to agents (in the contact centre).

It is a classic win-win situation; a way to deliver better customer service and reduce costs at the same time. Like any other tool, it is mostly a question of using it wisely and sensibly.

-ENDS-

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