



In Queue

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

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All leading call center companies and suppliers should examine the new *NACC Underwriting* opportunity in 2008 as evidence of their dedication to the growth of call center industry. See the [2008 Media/Advertising Guide](#) link below for more information.

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NACC Investment Portfolio

Chugging Through a Recession

By Paul Stockford, NACC Advisory Board Member

In this issue of *In Queue* we continue to review the results of the readership survey that was launched in February. After the last issue was published, many more readers decided to add their input to the responses already received and we thank you. If you would still like to give us three minutes of your time and respond to this brief survey, we'd be happy to have your participation. You can find the survey at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=Ao5IAuJge5nJmE39L1mznmw_3d_3d

In this week's posting of my NACC blog, I ponder the question of whether contact center professionals are optimistic by nature, or if perhaps learned optimism is coloring operational intentions for 2008. In either case, I was pleasantly surprised at the relatively positive outlook of many of the survey respondents and was pleased to see that the attitude of many of the respondents was to meet economic challenges head-on rather than hiding in the shadows until it's all over.

If you'd like to see how economic conditions are affecting your industry colleagues' attitudes and intentions, join me at the NACC blog by following the link below:

http://nationalcallcenters.typepad.com/nacc_blog/

I'll continue to report on the survey results in future issues of *In Queue*. In the meantime, your comments and opinions are always welcomed.

Update Your Contact Center to Meet New Demands

Richard Snow, NACC Advisory Board Member and VP and Research Director for Contact Centers Ventana Research Richard.Snow@ventanaresearch.com

Contact Centers are much maligned, and in many cases for good reasons. Customers are still frustrated by long queue times, complex Interactive Voice Response (IVR) menus where more often than not customers have to repeat the information when they get through to an agent anyway, being put on hold while agents try to resolve their issue, being transferred because the agent is not empowered to resolve their issue, and after everything else not having their issue satisfactorily resolved. But the news is not all bad; a small minority of centers are getting right. So what are these centers doing which if others followed they too could boost their performance? Research carried out by Ventana Research during mid-2007 points to four things: adoption of a multi-channel customer service strategy, deployment of more intelligent call routing, deployment of a smarter desktop, and adoption of customer-focused operational performance management.

Creating a multi-channel communication platform has never been easier. Voice over the internet protocol (VoIP) has become the foundation platform for a number of companies and there are now many vendors such as Interactive Intelligence, Noble Systems and Touchstar that provide software only applications that sit on the top of VoIP and provide full multichannel communications. Even cost need not be an issue as companies will now provide

Stock	Price	Value	Change
NT	6.94	3.81	-6.19
NICE	31	7.72	-2.28
VRNT	16	6.53	-3.47
SYKE	16.75	8.82	-1.18
WIT	10.64	7.10	-2.90
CVG	14.42	8.16	-1.84
TTEC	20.07	8.73	-1.27
ICTG	8.52	8.18	-1.82
APAC	0.9	4.07	-5.93
TOTAL		63.12	-26.88

Original Value start 11/6/2007
=US\$90.00 or US\$10.00 per stock

Total Portfolio Value Now= \$63.12

The *NACC Investment Portfolio* lost ground in the past two weeks as more evidence data points towards a recession within the United States and an expected follow-on slow down in Europe and Asia. Because a recession is measured by two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth, and most GDP growth it tied to consumer spending, there will be an impact on call centers.

NACC Composite Index

Date	Value	Change	Percent
11/6/07	100.00		na
11/8/07	94.62	-5.38	-5.69
11/16/07	94.94	0.32	0.34
12/5/07	94.38	-0.56	-0.60
12/26/07	97.90	3.53	3.60
1/15/08	80.89	-17.02	-21.04
1/29/08	77.54	-3.35	-4.31
2/13/08	75.56	-1.98	-2.63
2/27/08	76.72	1.16	1.51
3/12/08	65.47	-11.25	-17.18

The *NACC Composite Index* was up down 17.18% over the past two weeks. This means that the previous several week's gains have been all washed away as portfolio investors attempt to place money in safe stocks. Several investment advisors called me over the past few weeks and they all asked me similar questions about the call center industry. Most revolved around the industry's growth or decline during a time of recession and what new opportunities exist within the call center industry for

these services through an on-demand or software-as-a-service model. The biggest challenge for most companies is creating integrated services to ensure customers get a consistent experience regardless of channel. This involves revamping the customer interaction process, where vendors such as Graham Technology provide an application that is fully focused on these complex processes.

There is a lot of talk in the contact center industry about the "virtualization" of contact centers, which is no more than saying interactions are going to be routed to more destinations across the enterprise than just the contact center. The Ventana Research studies show this has been happening anyway with many, if not all, business units in companies handling customer interactions. The core challenge lies in deciding where interactions should be routed and what technology is available to make it possible. The good news is that vendors such as Genesys and the other VoIP vendors mentioned above have upgraded the call routing applications so they can route all types of interaction based on a single set of rules, and the rules can now include agent availability, agent skills, and the profile of the customer.

One of the biggest challenges for agents handling interactions has been the desktop they are forced to use. These have been highly complex; requiring agents to login to several applications, navigate between several screens (within and across applications), enter data in more than one system, and they have not been configured to match interaction processes. The really good news is that this no longer needs to be the case as there has been an explosion of vendors such as Cincom, Chordiant, eglue (Autonomy), Intranet, Jacada, Openspan, SmartPoint, and Teradata that in different ways support a smarter, more intelligent desktop. These can go as far as replacing the desktop with a new user interface that is interaction handling-centric, or providing easy look and linking to applications, to providing proactive prompts to the desktop to help the person as they interact with the customer.

The hardest thing companies face improving the performance of their centers, or interaction handling in general, is finding tools to show anything much more than basic throughput information. For many years they have had to rely on the reports provided by their infrastructure providers and not very many vendors had overcome the basic challenge of getting data out of complex, proprietary, and disparate systems to enable a fuller view. Again this is another area where there has been a considerable breakthrough with some of the main stream Business Intelligence (BI) vendors such as Business Objects and Cognos providing solutions alongside several specialist vendors such as AIM Technology, Clickfox, Enkata, HardMetrics, Inova, Informiam, Latigent, Merced Systems, and Symmetrics. And the breakthroughs continue as vendors such as Nice Systems and Verint add the ability to include unstructured data such as recorded calls into the mix.

There is no doubt centers still face significant challenges meeting the needs of the business and customers, not the least they still operate under severe budget constraints. But as a slow down of the economy begins to bite then some judicious investment in some of the technologies identified above, supported by a change in processes, is likely to pay dividends and result in lower going costs, higher levels of customer satisfaction, and more business.

60 Ideas in 60 Minutes Round VII

For an introduction to the "60 Ideas in 60 Minutes" essays, or to read previously published rounds, please visit our archives and start with [Volume 2, Issue 22](#) of *In Queue*.

David L. Butler-I would like to reiterate the idea of sitting on the phones. Every single one of you sit on the phones. This is not a matter of trying to handle the call demand. It is not debasing yourself. It is not you saying to yourself, "I started there and I don't want to ever go back there again." It is a matter of building trust from your reps. They will respect you. You do not have to do it publically; you don't need to have a three-piece band out there, just go out there, take calls, and then walk away. They will talk about you in the break room. It will build huge esprit de corps more than you will ever realize.

improvement in processes and services in both corporate captive and third party call centers. This suggests that portfolio investors are trying to decide if the call center industry is recession proof, a recession bellwether, or if the call center industry is hurt more than other industries in a recession and make investment decisions accordingly.

Dow Composite	-4.60%
S&P 500 Composite	-5.44%
NASDAQ Composite	-4.90%
NACC Composite	-17.18%

The *NACC Composite Index* outperformed all of the other major indices two weeks ago. This week it underperformed the indices by 3x. This suggests that investment in the call center stocks in the portfolio are being sold at a lower rate than general indices across the board.

Real Estate

If you are looking for a new call center location you should check out the [NACC Real Estate](#) page by clicking on this link to see some of the available existing sites.

Quotes

"It's a recession when your neighbor loses his job; it's a depression when you lose yours."

-Harry S Truman (1884 - 1972)

Picture of the Week



This is a photo of the Chambord chateau in the Loire Valley, France. This chateau was the hunting lodge of the kings. The beauty of the chateau is in its hundreds of chimneys that decorate the top of the castle like a mini-skyline.

Secondly, invite your executives to your call center. Obviously they can come anytime they want, they sort of own the place, invite them. Let them know that you know who they are and let them know who you are. Continue inviting them. Bug them slightly. They will eventually show up. And then when they do, get them on the phones. Most of them are scared to death of the phones. You may not realize it, but they are. Let them be uncomfortable, that is not a bad thing, let them understand. Then you have an advocate for you within the company. Stay in contact with them, informally if they are not in your chain of command. Keep those lines of communication and networks open.

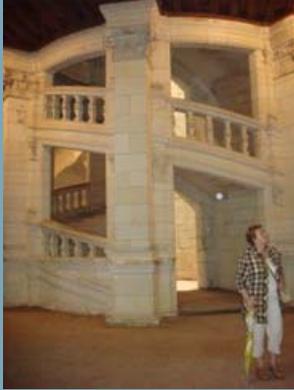
William (Bill) Durr-That is a good idea. I met an executive who spent a day in his contact center on the phones and the first phrase that he got down pat was, "let me put you on hold for just a second." It was great. He was truly humbled by the experience.

So everybody's budgets are tight, right? And I know a lot of call centers really like to have some benchmark information to compare themselves to other organizations. Similar industry and size and that kind of thing. So, in the face of tight budgets how do you get the benchmark information? Got a real simple way. You call your competitors and time it with a stop watch until you get to an agent. You do that a couple of times a day, at random times during the day. What do you say when the agent says "hello?" Nothing. You say "thanks" and hang up. They will be really happy for the short call; their stats are going to look better. Now you are probably wondering, "is that why I am getting those short calls in my contact center?" Well, yeah, I have talked about this around the world.

Penny Reynolds-To take that benchmarking idea one step further, stop worrying so much about industry standards. I get probably an email a day on average with some question like, "what is the industry standard for 'fill in the blank industry' for after call work time?" How long is a piece of string? The answer, as always is "it depends." So if you are again short on budget dollars I would not go spending my money on benchmarking studies. Again, call and see what other people are doing. But the other thing is delve into your own numbers if try to find out where to improve. Delve into your own numbers. The story is there. Another math thing that you need to understand is how to calculate correlation coefficients. If we want to track what has the biggest impact on customer satisfaction. What in my numbers has the highest correlation with that? Is it handle time? Is it first call resolution rate? Is it employee satisfaction scores on our internal surveys? So delve into your own numbers to see where the best possibility for improvement are and stop worrying so much about benchmarking studies. Most of them are garbage anyway.

Garry Schultz-Growing your employees. Career growth. Real simple. You all know about "to do" lists. We started a program where we took an agent to supervisor or supervisor to manager and we had them construct a standardized "don't do" list. With the "don't do" lists we found had more credibility than the "to do" lists. What the "don't do" list does is to keep the person in the new position from going back to their comfort zone. From agents who go to supervisor you find that they go back onto the phones, helping out agents and that sort of thing. They go back to their comfort zone. So have them do a "don't do" list and the first thing they "don't do" in that scenario is don't get back on the phones. You are coaching now. Simple.

Chris Crosby-Take out the garbage, and I am not talking about employees or customers, but I am actually talking about reports. One of my pet peeves, and I could go on for hours but I will go on for 45 seconds, is when you walk into a call center and you see these reports that these supervisors are looking at every day and the first column you see is calls answered, calls offered, and this is for an agent. Johnny had 27 calls yesterday and was logged in for 15 hours, bla, bla, ba, bla. Step back and ask yourself what value you are getting out of this information. So take your 30 column report and pare it down to four or five columns that you can actually impact that you can actually take action on. So if you can't impact whether an agent is logged on for six hours or seven hours, get rid of it. Just say, you know what, what was their schedule adherence, what were their values that you can impact? Then write out a business value for each column on that report. Are you going to see service level on there? Write down why you need to see that so you can articulate that back to the people



Within the chateau Chambord there is a double-helix staircase that was designed by Leonardo Di Vinci. Two people can start at opposite sides of the staircase and make the climb to the top and never once see each other in the climb. Very neat.



Adventurous tourists will walk into holes, nooks, and crannies. That is what I did and found the center of the double-helix spiral staircase. Taking a photo upward from the bottom center of the staircase looks like you are in a well with many windows looking down upon you.

Thank You

My publisher just sent me the sales of my book last quarter and the numbers were up. I suspect, but do not know for sure, that the reasons why book sales were higher was because readers like you wanted to know more about me, the NACC, and my research of the call center industry and that curiosity led you to buy the book. If this supposition is true, I want to thank you personally and would like to hear how you like the book and if it has lead to improvements in your call/contact center.

that are looking at that every day and why that is important.

Kevin Hegebarth-I want to talk about something that Penny talked about and go on record here by saying that I am a math geek by training. So all of this statistical analysis is near and dear to my heart. I thought I had forgotten it long ago. We run our centers on averages because it is the easiest thing for us to get our arms around. You know bell shaped curves, standard deviations, and where people fall on a curve, and where calls fall on a curve and things like that are really tough for us to get our arms around in general. And then when we add coefficients to that and sensitivity analysis and all kinds of other things managing a call center can become an extremely complex mathematical problem as opposed to just a human resource and operational issue. But my tip here is to get somebody who is a math geek to get their arms around this stuff because you will be surprised at some of the improvements you can make by doing things like sensitivity analysis, by doing standard analysis, and a 10 second increase in average handle time may have an 50% increase in sales rate or closure rate.

Call Center Comics

Next issue we announce our winners of the call center comics and show you the comic ideas they generated and Ozzie drew from their ideas. I think they are great and cannot wait to show them to you.

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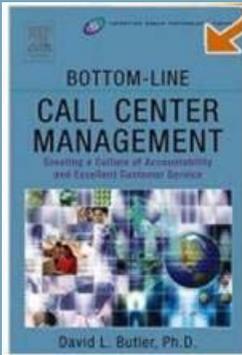
DAILY ALL-EMPLOYEE MEETINGS WILL CONTINUE UNTIL WE CAN DETERMINE WHY OUR PRODUCTIVITY IS SO LOW.

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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If you would like to contribute to *In Queue*, please reply to this email with "Contribute" in the subject line.

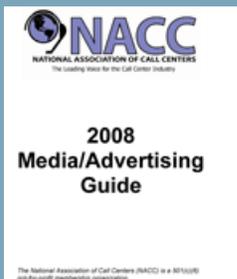
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If you have not purchased a copy and are interested, clicking on the book image above will take you to Amazon.com. The price of the book has fluctuated much lately at a high of around \$40.00 a few weeks ago and now down to a price of \$35.00 plus some change. I suspect that over time the price will increase, rather than decrease, so if you want a copy of the book at the lowest price possible, it would probably be wise to purchase now rather than later. As oil prices increase, the cost of every item, including books, is likewise bound to rise. The trouble with potential stagflation.

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