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THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
CALL CENTER
RESEARCH LABORATORY

In Queue

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

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NACC Investment Portfolio

Stock	Price	Value	Change
NICE	31.61	7.87	-2.13
VRNT	14.42	5.89	-4.11
SYKE	21.99	11.57	1.57
WIT	16.76	11.19	1.19
CVG	11.20	6.34	-3.66
TTEC	17.23	7.49	-2.51
ICTG	10.61	10.18	0.18
APAC	5.48	24.80	14.80
TOTAL		85.33	5.33

Economic Optimism Characterizes Contact Center Industry

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

In a recent issue of *In Queue*, we reported that the contact center industry actually showed a net gain in the number of jobs during the first half of 2009 (http://www.nationalcallcenters.org/pubs/In_Queue/vol4no14.html). Now that we have closed our 2009 *In Queue* reader survey, we can also report that the majority of our representative survey respondents believe there are better economic times ahead.

In this year's survey, we asked respondents to give us their opinion regarding how they thought the economy would perform during the second half of 2009 and how they thought their particular business would perform during the second half of 2009. Their answers are in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1: Responses to the Question, "From an economic perspective, how do you think the second half of 2009 will compare to the first half?"

Much better economically	7.3%
Somewhat better economically	40.9%
About the same economically	43.6%
Somewhat worse economically	8.2%
Much worse economically	0.0%

Source: National Association of Call Centers, September 2009

Figure 2: Responses to the Question, "From the perspective of your particular business, how do you think the second half of 2009 will compare to the first half?"

Business will be much better	5.5%
Business will be somewhat better	42.7%
Business will be about the same	42.7%
Business will be somewhat worse	8.2%
Business will be much worse	0.9%

Source: National Association of Call Centers, September 2009

Survey responses indicate that nearly 85 percent of respondents believe that the second half of 2009 will be about the same or better than the first half of 2009. Nearly 50 percent of respondents believe the second half 2009 economy will be somewhat better or much better than the economy of the first half of 2009. Keeping in mind that this survey was taken in June and July of 2009, at the deepest depths of the recession, we believe these responses are indicative of the inherently optimistic nature of the customer service profession.

The economic optimism of our survey participants also extends to individual businesses as once again about 85 percent of respondents believe that their business will perform about the same or somewhat better during the second half of 2009 than it did during the first half. About 48 percent believe that their business performance will be somewhat better or much better during the second half of 2009 than it was during the first half of 2009.

It is also interesting to note that none of respondents believed that the economy

Original Value start 11/6/2007 =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= \$85.33, a profit of \$5.33. The sound I want to make is a very loud exhale, announcing that we have turned the corner in the NACC Investment Portfolio now that it is a few dollars and then some in the black. It has been a long road.

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
2/4/09	35.68	-0.55	-1.54
3/4/09	30.94	-2.42	-7.82
4/15/09	43.13	5.25	12.18
5/13/09	50.72	2.19	4.31
6/10/09	61.67	6.00	9.74
7/8/09	54.48	-0.59	-1.08
8/5/09	73.97	7.50	10.13
8/19/09	72.54	-1.43	-1.98
9/2/09	74.97	2.44	3.25
9/16/09	81.26	6.29	7.74

The *NACC Composite Index* was up this week by 7.74%-not bad. This increase was a return to the confidence in the equity markets and the realization that the recession will be ending soon. With this realization, the risk of putting money into the market and losing has lessened and, with lower risk there is more money bidding up stock prices.

Dow Composite	5.51%
S&P 500 Composite	6.92%
NASDAQ Composite	7.79%
NACC Composite	7.74%

The *NACC Composite Index* was up 7.74% this past two weeks which is

during the second half of 2009 would be much worse than it was in the first half, and less than one percent of respondents felt that their business would perform worse in the second half of 2009. So far these respondents seem to be correct in their opinion as the majority of leading economic indicators point to recovery at the time of this writing.

These survey results are significant at a 95 percent confidence level and a confidence interval of 10.

In the next issue we'll look at what factors are influencing our respondents' purchase decisions over the next year and how those factors compare to the influencing purchase factors in 2008. You will likely be surprised by the results.

From the Trenches

Becoming the Best: Assessing your Strategic Alignment

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

Second article in a series on assessments (first article can be found at http://www.nationalcallcenters.org/pubs/In_Queue/vol4no18.html)

In the first article in this series, we defined the importance and value of conducting an assessment and developing a plan to become a top performing center. This article looks at assessing strategy, the crucial starting point in charting your course to excellence.

Defining Strategy

An assessment entails a review of the strategic triumvirate – business, operations, and technology. First, understand the business strategy and drivers and their impact on the center. Look at your target market and customers, your organization's strategic differentiators, the geography the company covers, and the mission, vision and values and what they reveal about the role of the center. Next, review the operational strategy, which defines the context for the processes, functions, and media the center handles. Finally, test the synergy of the technology strategy, encompassing architecture, applications, IT organization, and technology governance and support processes.

The contact center's strategic options include channel choices, which define the use of media, and sourcing, which defines how you staff and how you procure technology. Site and disaster recovery plans, accountability and metrics goals, and the approach to and funding for budgets round out the key elements to consider. Strategic alignment of the business, operations, and technology strategies is the ultimate objective.

Why Assess Strategy

Strategy is probably the most important area to assess if you want to become your "best." Strategy impacts and provides context for everything else. Further, strategy impacts all major decisions. Without strategic thinking, centers make tactical, isolated decisions, resulting in misalignment with the business goals and often needlessly high costs.

Most centers today would define themselves as a strategic part of the business, and likely have senior executives reinforcing this message. This positioning within the organization points to the importance of assessing and refining strategy. For centers to live up to this billing and its expectations, they must show their value by linking decisions to strategy. Clarity on strategy provides guidance for investment decisions, resulting in simplification of the budgeting process and greater ability to defend budget requests – argument enough for most centers to get on a path to strategic clarity.

Strategic Issues and Opportunities

When assessing strategy we commonly find some telltale signs that point to opportunities to improve. The first, and perhaps most concerning, is business, operations, and technology strategies that don't fit together – or aren't even clear. For example, we find metrics focused on cost control (handle time, number of calls

great...but the Dow was up 5.5%, the S&P up near 7% and the NASDAQ beating the NACC Composite at 7.79%. Don't get me wrong, I am happy that the market is up, and all is up, but I like it when the NACC Composite beats the socks off of the other indices since this shows an investment in the call center sector. With the NACC Composite up almost the same as the other sectors, this means that people are investing in most things equally, not just the call center industry. Picky, I know, but I like it when investors see the value of our industry and are as bullish on the industry as I am.

Quote

"Oh, your toilet paper is so soft"
-Alyssa Butler-Freshman in college, while visiting her parents house for dinner.

Picture of the Week



Source: clarionledger.com

The photo above ran in the September 16, 2009, issue of the Jackson Clarion Ledger. The image is of, me, well no, but people say it looks like me. It is actually a photo of Nathan Glenn, local chef, restaurant owner, and cook show dude.

See image of me below from last year. You tell me if we look alike.

per hour) but messages to the front-line staff to "build relationships and sell more..." That's a strategic disconnect. Centers may be told that customer service is a strategic imperative, but then lack sufficient budget to provide great service, evidenced in understaffing, outdated technology, or no backup plan. Another common issue is that no one can explain why the center (or IT) use outsourced staff, other than to say it was cheaper, or they wanted headcount off the books.

We often see centers that make tactical decisions without an overarching plan. For example, we've seen centers purchase technology solutions that don't integrate, adding tremendously to the burden of support staff. Or centers establish a text chat or email group that operates on a separate system, using separate people, with no plan to look cohesively at all media as part of the customer experience, or track and report effectively. An inability to assess the value or success of a change often accompanies these tactical decisions. Without a baseline, and without a means to measure the impact, skepticism builds among executives who feel their investments have not achieved the value promised.

Another concern is that the center impacts, or is impacted by, many other departments, but no one looks at the end-to-end customer experience. Excessive transfers or case escalations and low first call resolution are indicators of these issues. Centers with no routine communication with other departments, such as monthly meetings or assigned liaisons, raise flags. And lack of documentation or training on end-to-end processes serves as another sign.

Apply Best Practices to Strategic Planning

If these examples ring true to your center, you're ripe for an assessment. Any center conducting an assessment should apply best practices. Our mantra: The Contact Center's strategy should align with and support the business strategy. In order to achieve that state, consider these hallmarks of excellence:

- Business strategy is clearly defined, communicated, and understood by staff.
- Contact Center positioning in the corporation is consistent with its role in achieving business goals, and is well communicated.
- Relationships between the center and other parts of the business are appropriately defined and maintained.
- Operational practices are consistent with and contribute to achieving goals and include accountability, sourcing, disaster recovery, channel and self service strategies.
- Technology strategy is aligned with and positioned to enable operational and business success, and includes architecture, applications, sourcing, accountability, and governance.

The first article in this series defined the steps to assessments and planning. With this article providing some insights into the importance of, characteristics, and things to look for in strategy, you should be on your way to building a roadmap to success.

60 Ideas in 60 Minutes Redeaux

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Next week the NACC will release the 2008 60 Ideas in 60 Minutes report. This report, based on the 60 Ideas that were shared in this newsletter earlier this year, are now compiled into a neat, easy to read, easy to access, all in one report. This means that you can have it to read on your computer, print out key passages to share with your employees, or use it like a thought of the day calendar. The number of options are endless. However, to receive this report, you need to be a member of the NACC, so join now and do not miss the release of this report and others that are forthcoming.

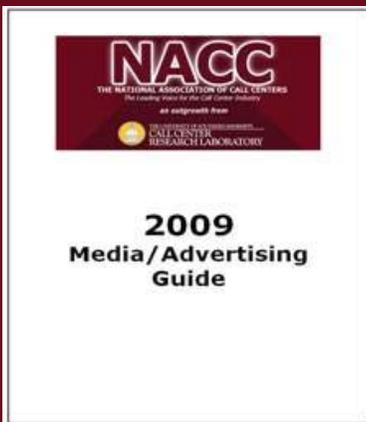
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Call Center Comics!

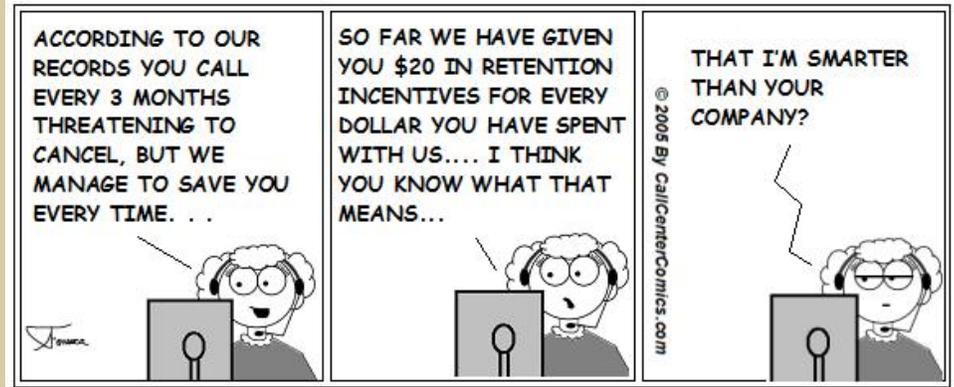


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