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Contents

1	History of Call Routing	2
2	Introduction to ACD technology	3
3	Uses in call center applications	5
4	Benefits of ACD and Skills Based Routing	6
5	Technology and System Design	8
Call Flow		9
Enh	nanced ACD, IVR and Skills-Based Routing	11
СТІ	Server Enhanced	11
Out	tbound Call Centres and Campaign Management	12
Virt	tual Call Centre	12
Fully Integrated Call Centre		13
6	Choosing an ACD Vendor	14
7	Current Players in the Market	15
8	Enhancing Customer Service Through ACD Routing	17
9	Enhancing Call Centre Profitability Through ACD Routing	19
10	Disadvantages of an ACD System	21
Cost		21
Breakdowns		21
Caller Frustration		21
Business image		21
11	Conclusion	23
Ref	erences	24

1 History of Call Routing

In the initial days, call routing to a set of agents was achieved through a switchboard operator, who would manually look up the extension numbers and connect the call to the extension which was free. This led to several problems such as manual errors and delays on the part of the switchboard operator and uneven workloads for agents. Soon, CTIs were introduced and this helped to automate the call routing process. ACDs in the initial stages did nothing more than route calls to an available agent.

In the initial days there was no integration between the Private Branch Exchange (PBX) systems which were used to route the calls and the computer systems which contained the customer data. The agents would answer the calls which were routed to them by the PBX system and then use the computer system to verify the customer identity based on information provided by the customer. After verification, the call centre agent would then obtain access to the customer's records which would help in resolving the customer queries. When ACDs were introduced in these systems all they did was attach themselves to the PBX. Once configured, it was difficult to change it.

However, ACD routing today has improved drastically and advanced skill based routing enables companies to incorporate complex business rules to <u>decide which calls get routed to which agent</u>. ACD systems also offer reporting capabilities to measure the productivity of the agents, the number of call drops and other such metrics.

2 Introduction to ACD technology

An Automatic Call Distributor or Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system is used to distribute incoming calls to one of the many interchangeable agents. It is usually a part of a computer telephony integration (CTI) system which manages the integration between the telephonic network and the computer network in an organization. The role of the ACD is to route incoming calls to available agents, and is mostly used in businesses such as airline booking offices, hotel reservation desks, call centres or customer service departments that handle a large number of incoming calls from people who need not talk to a single individual, but can be assisted by one among a group of people, and where call response is of critical importance.

An ACD device recognizes and routes incoming calls based on business rules configured in the system as well as caller actions during the call before deciding on where to route the call. Advanced ACD systems also have the capability to generate reports on the type and volume of calls, as well as efficiency measures of agents.

In its most basic form, ACD does not make use of any business rules. It assigns each incoming call to the terminal that has been idle for the maximum period of time. If all terminals are busy, then the incoming calls are queued and the calls are assigned to terminals as and when they become free on a first in first out basis.

Advanced ACDs use an application based routing where they would access a rule database that is resident in the user's data server through an application bridge, and intelligently route the calls to the most appropriate agent as per the configured rules.

Some of the key features found in most ACD systems are detailed below:

Call Back services: Most ACD systems today allow users to leave a call back message if all agents are busy, so that they do not have to wait for a long time to talk to an agent. Advanced ACD systems also measure the average likely wait time and <u>offer callers the choice to either give a call back message or to</u> <u>hold until an agent becomes available</u>.

Direct Call Routing: Most ACD systems allow callers the ability to direct themselves to the appropriate agent by providing the nature of service requested. This is done by pressing certain numbers for each choice in response to an IVR system that is integrated with the ACD system. Some ACD systems also have the capability to perform intelligent routing or skill based routing based on business rules. ACD systems also have built-in data validation mechanisms whereby users can self authenticate themselves by dialing in personal details such as an account number or date of birth.

Remote Routing: Today ACD systems are no longer limited to the internal telephone network of the company and offer the ability to route calls to remote agents. This helps to have your workforce located at different places in the globe and helps the call centre to take advantage of a larger skill pool while selecting agents. ACDs coupled with routers can help to create virtual call centres.

Prioritized call routing: ACDs also help to prioritize call routing by allowing privileged customers to be placed ahead of the queue and thus face a lower wait time during peak periods.

Ease of Use: Unlike the initial days where operating and configuring an ACD was a very technical task, today most players offer easy to use GUI interface which aids the business users and managers in the call centre to easily configure the business rules as well as measure and monitor the key performance metrics.

Multimedia support: Today ACD systems offer much more than the plain vanilla solution of call routing. Apart from the ability to generate reports, most ACD systems also support alert emails, chat capability and support for both inbound and outbound calls.

Report Generation and Analysis: Advanced ACD systems have the ability to capture and store extensive call information which helps the call centre administrator to analyze the performance of the business rules and tweak them, if necessary.

3 Uses in call center applications

ACDs are most widely used in in-bound call centres in order to enhance customer experience as well as to improve the efficiency of the call centre agents by minimizing agent idle time and distributing workload uniformly. ACDs can also be used in outbound call centres for effective campaign management activities.

When combined with advanced technologies such as Computer-Telephony integration, IVR and Predictive Dialers, ACDs offer amazing capabilities for call centres.

The effective use of an ACD depends on how well the rule base is configured. Typically the rule base is configured such that each call type is initially directed to a small group of agents. If all the agents in that group are busy, then the ACD looks for a free agent in a wider circle. This goes on until a free agent is identified.

There are several creative ways in which ACD rules can be configured to achieve maximum customer satisfaction with the minimum number of agents. This will enable call centres to cut down on agent costs without sacrificing on customer delight. Here we will look at some of the ways in which business rules can be configured:

- 1. **Linguistic Basis**: If the callers belong to different linguistic areas, ACDs combined with IVR systems can be used to route the call to agents proficient in the chosen language.
- Product Basis: If a call centre caters to customers of different products, then the calls can be routed to agent groups based on knowledge and experience in specific products. For example, a call centre for a bank may typically have different agents who handle savings account customers, credit card customers and loan customers.
- 3. **Call History Basis**: In some cases, such as in a hotel where customer service is of paramount importance, calls may be routed to the same agent every time, so that the agent can respond effectively to the caller's personal requests such as booking them in a specific room number.

Often call centres use a combination of these rules to route the calls to an agent who can most effectively respond to the caller's needs.

4 Benefits of ACD and Skills Based Routing

Automatic call distribution has several features, but the most talked about feature is that of skill based routing. It is touted as the biggest advantage of ACD in call centre circles across industries. In this section we will look at some of the key benefits of skill based routing.

What is Skill Based Routing?

Skill based routing aims to match a particular type of call to a specific type of agent with defined skill sets. It is essentially a mapping of business rules which direct calls from a certain call-group to a predefined agent group. Incoming calls fall into a certain call-group bucket based on several factors such as nature of query, previous call history, whether the customer belongs to a privileged group and so on. Agents are grouped into buckets based on clients handled previously, skill levels and so on.

Sometimes, calls may get routed initially to a primary agent group and if all agents in the group are busy, then the search expands to include a secondary agent group.

Enhanced Customer Service: This is the biggest advantage of ACD and skills based routing of calls. When configured correctly, one can easily enhance the customer experience by routing the call to the agent who is knowledgeable enough to address the customer's query. Other services that can be offered include a convenient call back, speedier transactions as well as the ability of the customer to do more automated transactions.

Reduced Waiting Time: ACD significantly reduces waiting time for customers, thereby making it easy for customers to reach call centre executives. This will also reduce the call drop rate.

Cost savings: In the absence of an automatic call distributor, calls will need to be manually distributed by a receptionist or a switchboard operator. Having an automatic call distributor helps to save significant amount of dollars that would be spent as salary and related expenses for a switchboard operator.

Increased efficiency: While most call centres today rely on ACDs business houses which have in house customer care, executives are slow to adopt the new technology. However, using an ACD helps to improve the overall efficiency of the receptionist, especially if she has other job responsibilities as well. A significant amount of time is spend in looking up extension information and routing the calls to the

right executive. If there is traffic of nearly a hundred calls each day, as much as one hour of productive time could be wasted in just looking up the relevant information.

Expanded call capacity: ACDs allow your business to handle more calls per hour without having to hire additional operators. An operator would take at least a couple of minutes to handle each call. With an ACD in place you can achieve call routing in a matter of seconds, thus allowing you to handle more calls per executive.

Extended hours of operation: Having an ACD allows you to accept calls at any time of the day or night. Even if your call centre executives work only during normal business hours, you can offer all automated services to your customers during non office hours, thus making it a better experience for the customer.

5 Technology and System Design

An ACD based call routing system consists of the hardware for the agents or terminals as they are called, the switches to route the calls, the telephone lines as well as the software for the routing strategy. The software essentially consists of a set of business rules that tell the ACD on how the calls must be routed, so that the best available employee responds to every incoming call. Often the ACD system also includes an IVR system to help collect additional information from the caller in order to determine the reason for the call and also to validate the caller's identity.

In the initial days, the ACD functionality was built into the PBX system of a company. This was very rudimentary in nature and did not have much flexibility when it came to the routing logic. Soon the ACD functionality was shifted to a separate computing server with which the PBX communicated, in order to receive directions on how to route the call.

The external routing applications also enabled the integration of the agents computers and telephony systems. This helped to improve efficiencies of call handling by providing the relevant customer data on the agent's PC screen as soon as an incoming call is routed to him.

The most common protocol used to achieve Computer Telephony Integration (CTI) and ACD is the CSTA protocol. However, most vendors of ACDs successfully build a programming GUI layer above the CSTI layer in order to make it easier to use. It also helps faster configuration and increases the ease of editing the routing rules.

The other advantage of an external ACD is that it can combine multiple PBXs from different vendors into one virtual system and also enable common report generation across remote sites.

In the diagram below, the internal architecture of a typical ACD based call centre is depicted:



Call Flow

The first step in configuring an ACD system is to create a customer database. Every time a new customer is added, they are assigned to a specific customer queue based on their attributes which may vary from their native language, to the product that they have purchased from the company, or a combination of several factors. A queue can be either for a live human agent or an automated machine agent. Queues may either be static, which means specific customers always fall into a certain queue or it may be dynamic based on the purpose of the call.

Once customer queue attributes are defined, then agents are assigned to each queue based on their skills to service calls. Both live agents as well as machine agents are assigned to queues. Machine or automated agents help customers in self- servicing their needs such as information requirements. A typical example is a call to a banking call centre to know the account balance.

Since automated agents are typically used for a specific set of customer requests, they are assigned in common to all customer queues. A single agent may be assigned to multiple queues based on the skill levels. The agent assignment to a queue can be edited by the administrator based on call statistics which are available in a real time manner in advanced ACD systems.

Every time a call comes in, the ACD routing algorithm determines which queue the caller should be assigned to, based on the profile of the caller which may be collected either using a DNIS system or an ANI system. Further profiling can also be achieved from information collected dynamically during the call using an IVR system.

Ideally calls should be routed to the agent who only has the skills needed to handle the call. For example, if you have an English speaking agent and a bilingual agent, then a caller who needs an English speaking agent should always be routed to the former agent first. This will keep the agent with additional skills available to handle calls which require those skills.

Although intelligent queuing rules can minimize the need to change the queuing rules often, it cannot be completely avoided. This is because the number of live agents available and the nature of calls as well as the call volume keeps changing every day, and often an administrator would need to monitor the ACD statistics very closely to ensure that critical Service Level Agreements in terms of customer service quality as well as agent utilization are met on a near real time basis.

In addition, queuing rules will need to be modified every time an agent is hired, fired, or retrained as the number of agents available in a certain queue directly determines the efficiency of the call centre as a whole.

External forces may also force an administrator to change the queueing rules in the ACD system. These include a new product being introduced by the company, the company expanding into a new geographical area, and so on.

Ideally, the initial configuration as well as tweaking needs to be done by administrators who are proficient in the concepts of queue management as well as the patterns of calls received by the call centre. Unless configured properly, an ACD system can actually lead to an increase in call drop as well as maximum wait time for customers.

There are several technology architectures that have been adopted in the implementation of call centres which use ACD. These architectures vary from one another in terms of complexity, costs, and skills required to implement and maintain them.

In this section we will look at some of architectures such as:

- Enhanced ACD, IVR and Skills-Based Routing;
- CTI Server Enhanced;
- Outbound Call Centres and Campaign Management;
- Virtual Call Centre; and
- Fully Integrated Call Centre.

Enhanced ACD, IVR and Skills-Based Routing

In this model, an ACD and IVR system is used to direct calls to agents based on their skill levels. A graphical user interface that is attached to the ACD allows the administrator to set up priority levels and business rules to route the calls. Thus the system can be customized in such a way that a customer is always handled by the same agent every time he calls. The IVR helps to handle a lot of calls that do not require agent intervention and provides the caller the ability to get information directly, thus allowing more calls to be handled with the same number of agents. An IVR can accept verbal inputs as well as inputs from the keypad. It can also be programmed to respond in multiple languages. Experienced callers will also be able to speed up the transaction by interrupting the IVR system using their responses. The biggest advantage of including an IVR along with an ACD system is to be able to provide the ability for the call centre to operate around the clock without having to employ physical agents beyond normal business hours.

CTI Server Enhanced

Post Computer Telephony Integration (CTI) came into existence, the concept of an ACD has undergone revolutionary changes. A CTI server allows telephony devices to be controlled from a PC as the telephony controls are also built in into the application. The main benefit of CTI is to be able to provide the customer information to the agent at the same time that the ACD routes the call to their headset. The PBX system would use either CLI (Calling Line Identification) or ANI (Actuating Line Identification) to

identify the inbound caller. This number is then passed to the CTI server which obtains the caller's information from the database based on the dialed number. The caller information is then passed on to the application server which delivers the relevant transactional and historical information about the caller to the screen on the agent's workstation while the call reaches their headsets. The other main advantage of CTI based architecture is that it allows a combination of both inbound and outbound calls. CTIs can monitor the idle item of agents who have been assigned to an inbound call queue and then dynamically route them to handle outbound calls, thus helping to achieve load balancing.

Outbound Call Centres and Campaign Management

ACDs play a key role in outbound call centres. ACDs are especially useful in campaign management through an outbound call centre where predictive dialing methods may be used. A predictive dialer (PD) would be fed with an outbound call list from a database and the PD would transfer the calls to the ACD once the call is live. The ACD would then route the calls based on business rules to the respective agents. This helps to save on the productive time of agents as they do not have to spend time in dialing or waiting for calls to connect.

Intelligence can be built into these systems at various levels. For example, the integrated system can be configured such that calls answered by fax machines and answering machines can be dropped from the database to be used for future campaigns. A list of unanswered calls can be maintained for later calls. Rules can also be configured to drop numbers from call lists after the call goes unanswered for a certain number of times.

Virtual Call Centre

Today most organizations cater to global markets and as a result have call centres which are located in geographically diverse areas. In this model, several smaller call centres can be connected through a Wide Area Network and an ACD can be used to dynamically route calls across agents located in any of these centers, thus making the geographic location of the agent transparent to the caller. Virtual call centres have several advantages including the ability to effectively perform disaster recovery if one or more physical locations have a problem.

Fully Integrated Call Centre

In a fully integrated call centre, an intelligent router may be used to transfer both voice and data across a PSTN so that both calls as well as customer data can be passed on to remote agents without affecting the call quality. If a web server is used to enable internet telephony then live chat can be enabled in websites for users to directly speak to an agent while browsing through their details online.

6 Choosing an ACD Vendor

Today there are several players in the ACD market and choosing the right vendor for your needs can be a daunting task. The first step in <u>choosing an ACD system</u> is to look at the overall design of your call centre. You will then need to profile the nature of your callers as well as your caller profile. You must also have a fair idea about the kind of services that you plan to offer your customers via your call centre. Once this is finalized, the next step is to decide on the number and type of agents that you need. You may have to recruit agents with different skill levels and experience for your call centre operations.

After identifying your caller profiles and agent profiles, you can decide on the type of features that you need in your ACD system. Here are some of the questions that you must ask your vendor before choosing an ACD system:

- 1 How many skills can an agent be assigned at a given time?
- 2 Is there a restriction on the agent profiles?
- 3 Can a call be queued concurrently against multiple queues and if so is there a restriction on the number of queues in which a call can be placed?
- 4 What tools (such as integrated IVR) are provided to identify customer needs?
- 5 What types of real time and historical reports can the ACD system generate?
- 6 Can custom reports be generated from the system?
- 7 Is there a provision to integrate multi-site operations?
- 8 Do you offer any training for administrators in configuring the system?
- 9 What is the cost of ownership of the system?
- 10 What is the maximum capacity of the ACD system in terms of call volumes and agents that can be configured in the system?

Ease of configuration is an important parameter to consider while choosing an ACD system. An ACD system which can be easily integrated to your existing network will be far more helpful than one which requires your entire system to be revamped. This will not only lead to additional hardware costs in terms of wiring and ports, but also have the issue of effective change management within the organization.

You must remember that budget is also a key consideration while choosing an ACD system. While evaluating the price of each system, you must not only look at the cost of the system and its configuration, but also look at the total cost of operation.

ACD systems are also prone to a lot of malfunctioning and it is best to negotiate the maintenance contract and the purchase contract when you invest in an ACD system.

7 Current Players in the Market

In this section we will look at some of the product offerings of key players in the market. While some solutions cater to only call centers with a few seats, others offer products that can route calls to more than a thousand agents based on a complex array of criteria.

There are mainly two types of ACD systems in the market – the first one is based on a hardware switch which routes the call, and the second is a virtual ACD that relies on software to route the incoming calls. In the virtual ACD market, FrontRange solutions offer a tool called the IP Contact Center which incorporates the features of an ACD and an IVR. It also offers the ability to generate customized agent screens which provide support records based on the customer's contact information.

DSC: Database Systems Corp. (DSC) is another leading player in the ACD systems and software market. The DSC system comes integrated with an IVR software which can answer incoming calls and process these calls before routing them. DSC offers both digital and analog ACD systems; the digital ACD system goes by the brand name of PACER and the analog system is known as the WIZARD. Both systems offer the ability to manage multiple call queues, maintain call logs and other call group activity metrics such as call queues, agent idle time and hold time. The DSC product also comes with a robust software library that allows users to develop their own IVR applications. The IVR systems in the DSC ACDs operate in a client/server environment.

inContact: The inContact platform is an integrated solution that offers much more than just ACD routing. It includes skills-based routing, IVR with speech recognition and CTI capabilities. The platform also enables administrators to generate reports, optimize workforce, and even measure customer satisfaction. In addition, the platform also includes an e-learning and recruitment module. It also enables multi-site integration.

Other players in this space include Avaya, Cisco and Genesys. All of these players are global leaders in the call centre and enterprise customer communication solutions market space, and provide the hardware and software needed to operate a robust ACD routing system.

Angel.com is a recent entrant into the market and provides a hosted solution for call centre management. The software includes the call distribution capabilities of an ACD system as well as the

capabilities of an IVR system. The hosted nature of the solution allows quick deployment and offers call centre administrators a lot of flexibility without having to invest heavily in new hardware and systems. It also allows real time monitoring and report generation capabilities.

CosmoCom's Universe is another major player in the virtual ACD category. It helps to link various modes of communication such as text chats and IP telephony as well as legacy PSTN systems, and route all of them to various agents.

There are several other players as well in the market and the choice of vendor should essentially be a well thought out decision.

8 Enhancing Customer Service Through ACD Routing

The biggest advantage of an ACD system is that it never gives a busy tone to the customer. There are several ways in which customer service is enhanced by the use of an ACD routing system.

Faster Connection Times: An ACD helps to route the calls to an available agent automatically. This helps the caller to be connected to an agent much faster than in the traditional method of using a switchboard operator. This also ensures that customers do not get frustrated with having to listen to a busy tone every time they try to reach a customer service executive.

Minimal Waiting Time: Once the call is connected, ACD systems calculate the wait time of each caller and ensure that callers do not wait for more than a prescribed time before being connected to an agent. If live agents are busy, the system can at least connect the caller to an automated agent which allows the caller to perform a lot of activities without the aid of a human agent.

Higher Percentage of First Call resolution: With skill based routing, ACDs enable better call resolutions at the first call itself. First call resolution is a great factor which influences customer satisfaction levels and consequent customer loyalty towards the company and its products. When customers are reassured that they will be served effectively and fast whenever there is a problem, then it not only increases the revenue and brand image of the company, but also provides a lot of word of mouth publicity.

Faster Complaint Resolution: Skill based routing at the ACD level combined with IVR technology enables the complaints to be routed to an agent who is knowledgeable and authorized to take action in order to resolve the problem. This will help in faster troubleshooting and issue resolution for the customer.

Increased Service Offerings: Today ACDs help to offer an increased basket of services to your customers. The first and foremost among them is the availability of 24*7 support, which goes a long way in ensuring customer delight. In addition to this, ACDs also allow call backs to be configured if the expected wait time exceeds a certain threshold. In the case of skill based routing, complaint resolution calls can be routed to the same agent every time thus helping the customer to get a familiar person to assist in his problems. In addition, CTI integration has ensured that the relevant details of the customer pops up on the agent's screen as soon as the ACD routes the call to the headset of the agent. This makes it easier for the agent to resolve the problems of the customer as there is no time wasted in inquiring about the details of previous transactions with the company.

ACD was the first technology which revolutionized the concept of call centres. Today with multimedia integration and CTI systems in place, customer service has come a long way and customer expectations have also skyrocketed. It is no longer enough to just maintain your own internal metrics when it comes to customer satisfaction. You must always offer your customers a better service than your competitors and at a lower cost. ACDs play a key role in achieving these twin objectives effectively. Today the routing rules in your ACD system is as much a competitive advantage as a new product feature in your product. While the initial sales of a product may be driven by your market reach, customer loyalty and customer upgrades are totally dependent on the level of service that you can offer to your customers. Call centres and your agents play an important part in this.

9 Enhancing Call Centre Profitability Through ACD Routing

While ACDs can be used to enhance customer experience when they contact your call centre, they also serves to enhance the profitability of the call centre in several ways. In this section we will look at some of the ways in which an ACD system helps to improve the profitability of call centres.

Increased Conversion Rates: If the customer is calling a call centre to purchase a service such as an airline ticket reservation or a hotel room reservation, then it is important that they are responded to quickly and by a knowledgeable person. If they are not attended to promptly and effectively, customers would search for alternate service providers. ACDs play a crucial role in reducing call drops and consequent loss of sales. In addition, if effective skill based routing is used, then ACDs can make sure that customers are attended to by the right agent, thus helping to improve the conversion rates of live calls in both inbound calls as well as outbound calls.

Ability to Upsell or Cross Sell: With the use of an ACD and IVR system, the wait time of the caller can be made advantageous to the call centre by informing about the various new products and services on offer and allowing customers to sign up for them. Thus an ACD system effectively aids in upsell and cross sell of the company's products. If the caller chooses to sign up or wants to know more about a certain offer, then the skill based routing algorithm will route the call to an agent who can explain the offer and get the customer to sign up immediately.

Increased Hours of Operation: An ACD system combined with an IVR system allows to give more power to the caller by removing the need for an agent for most transactions. This helps the call centre to be operational 24*7 without having to incur the additional cost of additional agents. By incorporating a call back feature, ACD systems allow the call centre to prevent customers from defecting to the competition.

Measurement and Analysis: You cannot improve what you cannot measure. ACD software allows the recording of key statistics of calls and also generates custom reports which help call centres to analyze agent productivity, call drop rates, conversion rates, and so on. Administrators can then perform tweaking of rules such that the productivity of each agent is maximized.

Reduced Staff Costs: An ACD system reduces unproductive time spent by agents, which in turn helps to minimize the number of staff needed to handle a certain call volume. As a result, the company saves on

staff costs. In the case of an outbound call centre, an ACD combined with a predictive dialer helps to save time spent on dialing and waiting for a call to connect. Incoming calls also get routed to the best possible agent, thereby preventing delays caused by having to escalate calls to other agents for issue resolution. It also helps faster resolution of issues by providing agents with the relevant customer information on their computer screens through a CTI system. It also helps to free up agent time which would otherwise be spent on authenticating customer identity.

Advanced ACD systems also help in reducing overall cost of ownership in the following ways:

Optimising Infrastructure: ACD systems combined with other call centre technology allows creation of virtual call centres, thereby helping to centralize and optimize resource usage.

Reduced Licensing Costs: In a traditional call centre, all calls hit an ACD first. Today however, an IVR is used to effectively screen calls that need to hit an ACD. This reduces the licensing costs of the ACD and helps to handle additional call volumes by just adding ports instead of entire PBX systems.

Optimize Outsourcing: If the call centre operations are outsourced to multiple vendors, the total cost of ownership can be reduced by using an ACD at the initial level to create a virtual and seamless call centre across vendors, thereby helping to reduce the cost per call.

10 Disadvantages of an ACD System

Although an ACD system offers a lot of benefits, it also has its share of pitfalls. In this section, we will look at some of the common problems associated with an ACD system.

Cost

A state of the art automatic call distributor system can cost a significant amount of money in terms of hardware purchases and software license costs, not to mention the cost of customization and maintenance. Other expense heads would include additional handsets for agents, wiring and connectivity costs, as well as creation of a directory. Moreover, although an ACD system will help to save on the cost of a switchboard operator, you may still need to have a receptionist for people who are unable to navigate the phone system.

Breakdowns

One of the common problems with a rudimentary ACD system is that like all other technical devices, it may breakdown from time to time. When that happens, unless you have a maintenance agreement with the vendor with specific SLAs for restoration of service, it may actually affect the operations of your call centre. This can be a significant source of inconvenience to both employees as well as callers. The other option of having a backup ACD system, may not always be cost effective, especially in the case of small time players.

Caller Frustration

While ACDs in general increase customer satisfaction, a lot of callers may get frustrated with an IVR system based ACD, especially if there is no way to bypass the system and reach an agent in a few seconds. This may lead to a loss of customers and potential revenue from customers who do not want to navigate through a complex IVR system.

Business image

The business rules configured in your ACD system will indirectly influence your callers' perception of your business. For example, if the voice in the IVR system is difficult to understand, then the caller may

perceive your company as being unprofessional. If your ACD requires users to divulge a lot of information before being allowed to speak to an agent, then again customers may not perceive your business in a positive manner.

11 Conclusion

Today ACDs are an integral part of any call centre operations. In the initial days an ACD was used only to reduce the reliance on a switchboard operator and to answer calls faster. Today however, ACD systems and software has evolved and offers several benefits for both the customer as well as the call centre. It is thus a win-win situation for both parties. Operational efficiency is increased by ensuring that calls are routed appropriately, your call centre is functional around the clock, and customers can perform a lot of activities by themselves even when the main call centre is not operational.

Choosing an ACD is only one part of a complex process of designing your call centre architecture. ACDs vary widely in cost and features and in order to have a profitable and customer friendly operation, you must choose the hardware and software that is right for your needs. Certain customers may not be happy dealing with an automated system and the nature of your callers is a key factor that should determine the level of automation you want to build into your call centre as well as the business rules that you configure on your ACD system.

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