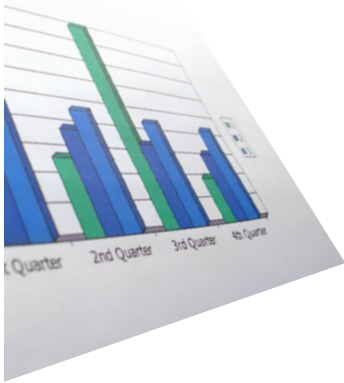


insight On:



Performance Management: Tools that Drive Action, Not Just Reports

Contact centers are constantly seeking ways to improve the quality of customer interactions without increasing costs. And, a big part of that is looking at the effectiveness of customer contact and operational processes, as well as agent performance and how that is contributing to customer satisfaction.

Delivering relevant and timely performance measurements across people and technologies has been an ongoing challenge for contact center managers. But, performance management applications address this issue by allowing managers to continuously monitor, measure, and improve contact center business processes.

And, by providing scorecards and analysis that keep contact center employees focused on the organization's key performance indicators (KPIs), performance management drives improvements across sales, collections, and customer service

processes to help companies realize cross-functional alignment with strategic goals.

However, analytics alone is not enough. Contact centers need tools that drive action, instead of just reporting on results. Advanced performance management applications enable a structured process through which a company can take steps to improve overall performance against key metrics. These applications can initiate and track actions automatically in response to an indication of a performance problem, thereby reducing reliance on supervisor and manager diligence. At the same time, executives can immediately see performance issues in their organization and track their resolution. Performance management is sometimes confused with the terms: performance optimization or workforce optimization. Gartner states that the key functional components of a Contact Center Workforce Optimization solution, or CC WFO suite, include: workforce management (WFM), quality monitoring (QM), performance management (PM) and e-Learning (eL). A well integrated CC WFO solution enables information, insights, workflow and core functions to be melded seamlessly together so that they complement and align with a business's high-level strategy¹. As such, performance management applications are just one piece of the workforce optimization or performance optimization perspective, but it's an important component.

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¹ Gartner. MarketScope for Contact Center Workforce Optimization, 2007. J. Davies

² 2008 Contact Center Performance Management Market Report, DMG Group.

With performance management, the ultimate goal is to align everyone in the organization so they are working toward the same set of goals, and give the company a much greater chance of achieving those goals. With automated alerts and workflows, configurable forms and dashboards, interactive analytics, and thin-client access for the entire organization, all employees know where they stand relative to expectations. They are empowered to manage their own performance against targets that have been clearly defined. And supervisors can easily and efficiently manage, track and identify root causes for performance shortfalls and take timely corrective action, as needed.

Creating a Performance-Based Culture

The key purpose of a performance management solution is to synchronize resources, consolidate information, and transform data into actionable results. Performance management provides on-demand, personalized views of KPIs versus goals, while also initiating actions for timely improvement through automatic alerts and workflows. Unfortunately, many performance management solutions do not have the ability to enable contact center managers to take action, e.g., to schedule an agent coaching session, so it's important to weigh vendor choices carefully to ensure they can offer the full array of capabilities. By having an application that can translate consolidated data, trends, and metrics into actionable strategies, a contact center will be able to truly optimize its performance.

Performance management ultimately helps create a performance-based culture in which each level of the organization is empowered with the information it needs to align performance with corporate objectives. In this way, organizations can easily identify the root cause of issues hindering performance and take corrective action to resolve them.

The first step in any performance improvement plan is to understand overarching business goals for the organization, such as, "improve my business's profitability by 20 percent this year." These high-level KPIs should then be translated into more operational metrics for managers, supervisors, and agents. Performance metrics are used to create alignment and accountability within the contact center. So, for example, if an organization wants to increase profitability by 20 percent, decrease operating costs by 10 percent, and improve customer retention rates by eight percent, they will need to translate these high-level objectives into operational metrics, such as revenue per call, schedule compliance, and service level or agent quality scores in order to drive success across sales, collections, and customer service processes. They can then use these operational metrics to develop long-term benchmarks and identify the KPIs that will enable them to align with the business strategy, such as talk time, average handle time, shrinkage, and schedule adherence.

Because every organization and its related business process have different objectives, KPIs will vary by company. Whatever those metrics may be, the contact center must communicate those KPIs to frontline employees to ensure every member of the team can see how they are contributing to the business – increasing the likelihood of creating a performance-based culture.

Coaching for Continuous Process Improvement

The key benefit of performance management applications is that they help automate actions to correct agent performance shortfalls so they don't fall through the cracks or negatively impact customer satisfaction. The application provides agents with easy access to their own performance data so they can take self-corrective actions. In addition, pre-defined alerts and workflows can be setup to consistently monitor agent performance. If an agent misses his or her targets, the system can automatically notify supervisors or managers and initiate a coaching workflow.

Performance management applications can also automatically initiate needs-based coaching sessions so a personalized performance improvement plan can be put in place. Information captured during coaching sessions is stored in the system and can be used to determine the impact that the coaching plan has had on agent performance. Additional capabilities may include eLearning, supported with learning management and content authoring tools that can assign agent modules to help address performance shortfalls.

By incorporating call monitoring and speech analytics with performance management solutions, a contact center manager or supervisor will have a holistic view of the effectiveness of the agent and the quality of the customer interaction. Quality management feeds into performance management, enabling managers to do root cause analysis, teach best practices, and improve agent interactions with customers.

The Business Benefits of Performance Management

The benefits that a performance management solution can bring to the business are numerous, which is why there is increased interest in these types of applications. By implementing performance management solutions, supervisors spend less time chasing down data, and more time coaching; agents are able to see their own production stats, enabling self-correction; and executives gain greater management control. And, by automating reporting and operational tasks, contact centers can improve decision making and save significant management, IT, and analyst time.

When a performance management solution is synchronized with other contact center performance optimization applications, such as workforce management for agent scheduling, quality management

for call monitoring or campaign management for outbound best time to call, this can effect tremendous change in an organization's effectiveness. Performance optimization solutions, including performance management, can ensure the contact center has the right resources available, with the right skills, at the right time, it can optimize sales and collections campaigns, record and monitor calls to hear actual customer interactions, and ultimately drive behavior changes that improve competitive position and bottom line profitability.

Companies are also beginning to look at how contact center performance management can be integrated with back-office applications, like financial databases, CRM solutions, and fulfillment. When the information and data from all contact center applications are synchronized with performance optimization solutions and back-end systems, companies will be able to attain a full view of the contact center connected with the enterprise. A synchronized suite of performance optimization solutions can provide this holistic view.

And because it's a valuable analytics tool that can identify opportunities for enhancing processes in relation to strategic business objectives, performance management "helps enterprises to improve the customer experience, increase sales, improve productivity, reduce costs and agent attrition, as well as enhance the perception of the contact center within the enterprise. It assists contact center managers in working synergistically with their peer organizations to increase revenue and improve the company's bottom line. Contact centers that use performance management on a consistent basis have improved agent and contact center performance and reduced operating expenses. Many of the early adopters consider performance management a 'must have' for building a culture of continuous improvement and service excellence."³

In a nutshell, performance management provides the greatest of business benefits - a holistic view of the organization that allows the contact center to make changes to processes and staffing on the fly with full understanding of how that will impact the value and service it is bringing to its customers creating a very meaningful competitive differentiation.

Summary

Delivering relevant and timely performance measurements across people and technologies has been a challenge for contact center managers. Performance management addresses this need, not only by providing on-demand, personalized views of KPIs versus goals, but also by initiating actions for timely self-and assisted-improvement through automatic alerts and workflows.

An advanced performance management tool can create fully customizable dashboards that show at-a-glance summaries of key reports with personalized content for agents to help them track their performance and automatically trigger coaching initiatives.

Performance management solutions should offer customizable views of KPIs and integrate with almost any data source, automatically, creating a single platform for reporting and taking action. Personalized dashboards for everyone in the operation through a thin-client interface provide complete management reporting, alerting, and task automation. Performance management tools can provide a unified view of performance, while giving users the ability to analyze root causes and take corrective actions. Performance management also helps create a performance-based culture in which each level of the organization has access to the information they need to align contact center performance with corporate objectives. When everyone across the enterprise is focused on achieving corporate objectives, the company can realize a significant competitive advantage. Over time, performance management trends readily show whether or not the business is "moving the needle" on the metrics that truly matter.

³ 2008 Contact Center Performance Management Market Report, DMG Group.

About Aspect

Aspect provides software and consulting services that turn the potential of unified communications into real business results across the enterprise and in the contact center. Applying 35 years of insight and experience, Aspect helps more than two-thirds of the FORTUNE Global 100, as well as small and medium enterprises, power their business processes with communications. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

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