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Optimizing Call Results

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Do you have all the processes for optimized outbound campaigns?

List and campaign life cycle

Very long lists can limit the ability of contact center and marketing managers to be proactive, because it is difficult for them to measure the relevance and quality of the contacts on the list before it is completed. Furthermore, towards the end of all lists, the quality of remaining contacts and productivity deteriorate or pass due. Thus, if the list is very large, the period near the end of it can extend over several hours, which can affect agent focus, sap their motivation, and significantly reduce productivity because of the longer wait time between calls. The shorter the list, the more these unproductive periods can be limited. In the collection environment, calling lists must be even shorter to take into account the daily payments made by customers without the intervention of outbound collection calls. The lists must either be the appropriate size to cover one day of outbound collection calls or, if a bigger list is chosen, it must be refreshed each day.

1. The size of a list must be calculated according to the number of agents, call length, and calling hours, and not just according to the number of contacts.
2. It is important to have a central calling list large enough to allow segmentation into campaigns or sublists within a campaign, but not large enough to stretch over several weeks of calls.

Predictive Dialing is widely used because it is, without doubt, the most productive for agents. Predictive dialers use historical statistics and sophisticated algorithms to calculate agent availability. Thus, based on past trends, the solution will know exactly how many dialing attempts and how much time are required to reach a live contact, as well as exactly when an agent will become available to take that next outbound call. Therefore, the dialer can start dialing to reach the next available customer/prospect even before an agent becomes available and connect this live contact as soon as, or shortly after, an agent becomes available.

Since the predictive algorithm analyses a number of factors, including the number of available telephone lines and agents and the probability of a call not being completed (e.g., busy signal, no answer, etc.), it becomes impossible to establish a "magic" rule to determine the number of agents required for the planning algorithms of the predictive mode to select the perfect rhythm. However, a dynamic rule can be constructed according to three closely linked criteria; in order of importance, these are:

- call length
- length of after-call wrap-up
- the number of agents for one campaign and its sublists

Uniformity whether there are 5 or 25 agents, the important thing is that all agents have an average talk time and an after-call wrap-up time that varies little from one agent to another, so that there is constancy to the events for the predictive algorithm. Obviously, the shorter the calls are, the more this consistency of one call to another can be respected. Thus, a number of best-of-class contact centers are using the predictive dialing mode for some of their outbound campaigns with as few as 6 or 7 agents and with an average abandon rate of 4% to 5 %, because calls are short and very homogeneous.

It is thus optimal to create groups of agents with the same experience and skills, since the predictive algorithm will be at its best when all calls from a specific agent group have very similar talk time, after call work time, and not ready time. New agents should therefore belong to a separate group until their productivity becomes more aligned with other groups; they can then be paired with other, more efficient agent groups.

Abandon rate

With governments in various countries imposing restrictions on the number of abandoned calls, intelligent use of a predictive dialer is no longer a choice—it's a necessity. In predictive dialer terms, an abandoned call is often one where the dialer releases the line after a person answers because there is no agent available to take the call. Obviously, the abandon rate will be directly linked to the productivity criteria. Thus, some contact centers use the predictive mode even with as few as five agents and maintain a normal abandon rate, while other contact centers, with three times as many agents, do not even achieve a good rhythm in predictive mode, because their calls are too lengthy and lack uniformity in talk time, after call work, and not ready time.

The campaign pace is the key

Many dialers allow contact center administrators to set an acceptable abandoned call rate. Government requirements and DMA (Direct Marketing Association) recommendations are usually less than 5%). The dialers will automatically adjust the call initiation rate as the abandoned threshold approaches or recedes. It is thus important to remember that the faster the pace, the more abandoned calls will occur, but too slow a pace can affect profit potential.

It is also recommended to optimize management of dialing rates in predictive mode by adapting the percentage of the agent busy rate. This parameter enables a level of uniformity among the telephone performances to be achieved, and can have a very positive effect on abandon rates and wait time between calls. On the other hand, adjusting this parameter too frequently can destabilize the dialing algorithm by increasing the abandon rate or the wait time between calls.

In conclusion, when used as part of a well-planned campaign and with respect for regulations concerning abandoned call rates and Do Not Call requirements, predictive dialers can produce impressive results. Because a higher number of calls can be handled, there is a significant increase in agent productivity and sales. Efficient dialing and screening for machine responses reduce operating costs. Agent homogeneity is also a desirable outcome. Real-time campaign monitoring and historical reporting are also key benefits of any dialing solution, because you can only manage what you can measure!

Signals	Contact Center Average
Invalid signal / No signal / SIT / Fax	2%
Busy	8%
No answer	10%
Voice mailbox	31%
Abandoned call	4%

Answered calls: These are the targeted outcome of a list, and where the work of the agent begins.

Items measured should include:

- **Wrong numbers**
- **Right party connect**; It is very hard to give an objective for right or wrong party connect, since this will vary significantly depending on the type of contact strategy.
- **Scheduled call back to complete the offer.**
- **Completed offers**
- **Messages left**, if part of the calling strategy.

Whether to leave messages depends entirely on the contacts, the campaign, the list, and the nature of the call. In some situations, however, messages will be left; contact centers tend to leave messages in highly targeted campaigns or promotions. In these cases, a more significant number of messages tend to be returned.

- If messages are left, two important actions must be taken. First, on the dialing strategy side, the contact center must identify when to leave a message, after how many attempts, and how long they should wait before dialing this contact again. Second, on the measuring side, they need to capture all statistics regarding the number of messages left, the ratio of returned calls, and the delay before callback, in order to improve their approach the next time around.

- If a message is left, the contact center will also have to devise a strategy for answering the returned calls. Since the very nature of contact centers is to rapidly route a call to the next qualified and available agent, it is preferable to route returned calls to agents of an inbound contact center. The agent who left the message will most likely be on line with another customer when the prospect returns the call.

List penetration rates

An important indicator to measure when it comes to dialing results is list penetration. The penetration rate of a list must always be measured because it represents the total number of records or contacts completed. A good penetration objective is around 75%. Penetration of less than 70% indicates a less profitable list, while more than 80% significantly reduces dialing algorithm productivity, since it is more difficult to reach contacts, and most of these are second, third, or more attempts.

Agent Productivity Statistics

Telephone statistics are the most commonly used indicators of agent productivity, because they can easily be collected manually, even if a dialer is not used. They have also been used by inbound contact centers since the introduction of the ACD. Agent Productivity statistics are measured to show the telephone productivity of the agent and to benchmark them to the group or past results. Although useful, they do not indicate the quality of the response or the relevance of the sales approach. For this reason, we suggest that the quality aspects of monitoring activities be taken into consideration when evaluating global agent performance, as well as sales results. An agent who shows a longer talk time but also shows a higher sales ratio often represents higher profitability.

The most commonly measured call statistics are:

- Contacts per hour
- Call duration (talk time plus after-call work)
- Talk time
- Not ready and/or after-call work
- Wait (between calls)
- Transfer
- Login time

Business Profitability Statistics

Business statistics are the raison d'être of outbound activities. It is thus not only essential to measure them properly, but also to enhance them with other data in order to adopt a proactive approach to optimizing the elements of an outbound strategy, including calling lists, contacts, and the speed of call treatment to close sales.

Business statistics measured should include:

- Sales Per Hour (SPH) or, for collection teams, payment agreements
- Conversion rates (% of calls concluded with a sale or an agreement)
- Cost per call
- Profit per call

Call Termination Codes

Obviously, one source of information used to better understand why sales offers or solicitations fail is, without doubt, the call termination code. Almost all contact centers use these codes, but incorrect coding appears to be an important problem in some contact centers. Termination codes can be a rich source of information for customer response analysis and the subsequent adjustment of offers, agent skills, and expertise. However, in order to glean the correct information, it is necessary for agents to take the time to code each of their calls properly. If calls are not coded appropriately, the exercise is obviously useless.

When coding calls, less is definitely more! The list of call termination codes should therefore never contain more than 20 choices, including sale code and removal from calling list. Preferably, 10 would be more efficient. Also, the choices must be sufficiently clear and varied so that each choice can be revealing enough to use as a basis for the improvement of sales arguments, agent skills, calling lists and promotions. This method also avoids over-use of "other". Ideally, if an agent selects the "other" choice, he should be required to enter a brief explanation to improve the code choice menu or the understanding of the codes. The explanation could be simply two or three words to clarify what "other" means for that particular call. The target objective should be not more than 2% to 3% of calls coded as "other".

To improve the success rate for code use, it is important to offer a scrolling menu that displays all possible choices, and to require that a code be selected before the agent can complete the file and close it. For these reasons, it is recommended that the agent's cockpit be used to enter the call termination codes. The information can then be written to any database used to produce management statistics.

- Optimizing Call Results

Dialing results also give a clear indication on business strategy performance and impact on contact centers. There is a direct correlation between the number of times the system dials before reaching a contact and the agent wait time between calls. Statistics for non-transferred calls can indicate a significant number of voice mailboxes, rather than live contacts, reached. For voice mailboxes, it is worth using the best calling hours according to geographic zone, with planned strategies for a limited number of callback tries at different times. For busy signals, we recommend planning a tighter callback strategy. For example, following a busy signal, the strategy would be to call back 10 minutes later, then 15 minutes later and, finally, another day. A limited number of tries should also be planned. To optimize calling lists and campaign productivity, the recommended strategy for dealing with voice mailboxes and busy signals is four or five callback attempts within one campaign or a one-week list. Finally, if the data are not in line with the established objectives, different contributors will have to analyze the situation, diagnose the problem, and find a solution.

Once the call is connected to an agent, sales numbers and conversion rates need to be carefully evaluated. To increase conversion rates, that is, the percentage of sales within the completed contacts, which includes total sales, refusals, and not qualified two things, may be done:

- First, at the contact center level: improve training, telephone monitoring, and coaching.
- Second, at the marketing level: improve segmentation.

Call termination code results, particularly if the “other” category is used sparingly and only with explanations, can provide valuable feedback to marketing for list creation and promotions, and to contact center management for agent training and coaching. The information from these codes can thus indirectly help to improve business statistics.

It is clear that an efficient, productive, and profitable contact center does not just “happen” and is not merely the result of choosing the best tools and solutions. Rather, it is the result of mutual understanding and collaboration among various departments or business units. Knowing what statistics to collect, why you should be collecting them, and how to collect them will allow you to gather important and valuable information that can be used throughout the enterprise—after all, you can’t manage what you don’t measure. Analysis of these statistics will indicate what you’re doing right and what could be improved, so that you can better serve your customers and enhance your bottom line!