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Call center success

Creating a successful call center experience through data

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Summary

Many organizations are looking to be data-driven. Terms like big data and business intelligence have proliferated our businesses and affect many strategic decisions across the organization.

Today, information contained within a company's database is viewed by senior management as a critical factor in decision making, customer interaction and service delivery. In fact, 93 percent of companies believe data to be essential to their marketing success.

The call center is one area greatly affected by data. While organizations operate across many channels, the call center is a critical channel utilized by many businesses as a key component of customer service. When customers have a problem with a shipment, a question about a booking or need to open a new account, the call center provides an area for the customer to speak with a person directly about their individual need.

In order to provide that high level of service, call centers need data and insight. The problem today is that businesses collect data through almost four channels and it can be very difficult to keep that data accurate and consolidated.

In addition, it's often siloed by channel or department, dividing customer records across various sources.

However, consumers do not view a business by channel; they see the complete entity. They expect that no matter the point of interaction, the company is aware of past interactions. Creating that level of understanding is a key driver for creating a positive customer experience.

Call centers need to work diligently to collect accurate information from the consumer and have a complete understanding of the consumer during the interaction.

Data and the call center

According to Forrester, 80 percent of companies want to use their customer service experience as a way to differentiate themselves from the competition. In addition, Forrester states that 89 percent of consumers who experience poor service with your brand will leave for your competition.

While customer service occurs across all channels, the call center is one key component in the service area. Despite the fact that many companies now offer online service or mobile chat, 79 percent of consumers would prefer to contact a customer service center over the phone, according to Nuance.

Data plays a key part in the positive or negative interaction the customer has with the call center. While call center operators first collect contact information to locate an account, details are used for many other initiatives including operations, business intelligence and customer engagement

Operations
Information collected during a call can also be used for a host of operations, including fulfillment, billing, customer support and more. Customer contact information is vital to these operations as it ensures the delivery of shipments and bills, as well as any correspondence after the interaction.
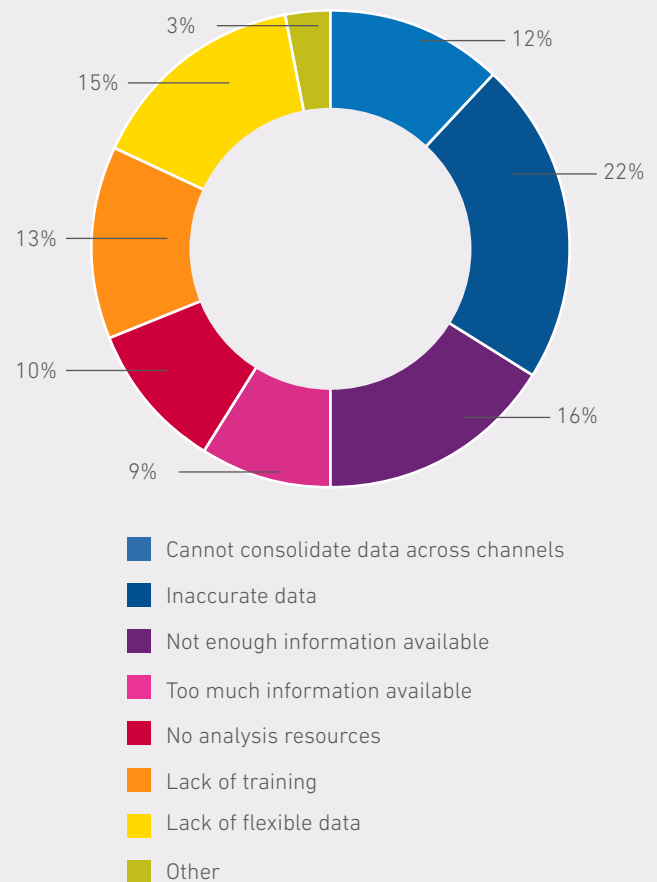
Business intelligence
An increasing number of call centers are using business intelligence and analytics to better understand consumers. Business intelligence is not only utilized to make strategic, long-term decisions, but also to make more informed decisions with clients while they are still engaged with the call center operator. This is often in the form of upgrade offers or additional products.

According to a recent Experian Data Quality survey, 87 percent of companies now use their data in a strategic way for business intelligence and predictive analytics. In fact, both the U.S. and Spain stand out with more companies conducting business intelligence and analytics on their data. But organizations and call centers are struggling with business intelligence. Eighty-one percent of organizations encounter problems when trying to generate meaningful business intelligence, mainly due to inaccurate data.

93% of organizations think some form of data is essential to marketing success.

79% of consumers would prefer to contact a customer service center over the telephone.

Chart 1
Problems with business intelligence

12%
22%
16%
9%
10%
13%
15%
3%

- Cannot consolidate data across channels
- Inaccurate data
- Not enough information available
- Too much information available
- No analysis resources
- Lack of training
- Lack of flexible data
- Other

Customer engagement

Customer engagement programs are also affected by inaccurate data. While 84 percent of companies have customer engagement programs, 74 percent have problems in this area mainly due to a high level of inaccurate information. Other causes include not having enough information on the consumer and an inability to analyze customer information.

Unfortunately, poor data negatively impacts operations and analysis. If the call center agent takes in bad information, it can affect numerous downstream processes that dramatically impact customer experience.

Chart 2
Problems with customer engagement programs

Category	Percentage
Other	7%
Lack of customer participation	28%
Unable to create compelling offers	18%
Inability to access disparate customer information	21%
Inability to analyze customer information	25%
Having enough information about the consumer	24%
Having ianaccurate information on the consumer	35%
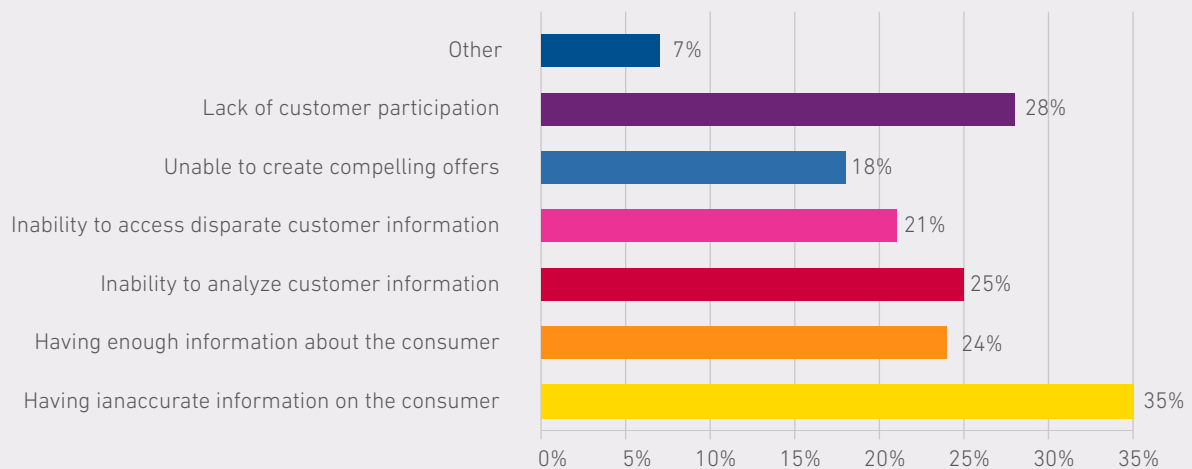
Poor data quality plaguing organizations

A high degree of inaccurate information is plaguing not just customer service, but organizations as a whole. According to a recent Experian Data Quality study, 83 percent of companies believe revenue to be affected by poor data. On average, 23 percent of departmental budget was wasted, up 11 percent from the past year.

Some common impacts from poor data include mailings sent to the wrong address, sending customers the same materials multiple times, negative customer perception and then also lost customers.

Level of inaccurate data

Businesses face a high level of inaccurate data. Ninety-seven percent of companies suffer from common data errors, up six percent from the previous year. This only shows that data quality problems are impacting more and more businesses each year. The most common data errors are incomplete or missing data, outdated information and inaccurate data. Because of the prevalence of these errors, the vast majority of companies suspect their contact data might be inaccurate in some way.

Globally, the average amount of inaccurate data has risen to 23 percent from 17 percent in the past 12 months. U.S. organizations actually believe they have the highest percentage of inaccurate data at 25 percent.

That level of inaccurate data is staggering when considering the different areas where data is utilized across the organization, but also how essential information is for call center operations and the customer experience.

Data collection challenges

Call centers face unique challenges in data collection. Call center operators must collect information quickly to keep call handle times low and respect the customer's time. In addition, they also face challenges around language barriers, bad phone connections or background noise. Operators need to decipher all of these factors to correctly capture accurate customer information. Collection challenges are creating a large amount of inaccurate data.

Call center operators must take in information extremely quickly to keep call handle times low and respect the customer's time.

25% of data is inaccurate on average within U.S. organizations.

Because of the prevalence of these errors the vast majority of companies suspect their contact data might be inaccurate in some way.

77% of organizations think at least some of their departmental budget is wasted sue to poor data.

Sources of bad data

Data inaccuracy is mainly due to human error, which occurs as consumers and individual employees enter information manually. Almost all information collected in the call center is entered manually by a call center operator. Individuals typing information may leave off fields, input data into the wrong sections, use abbreviations, misspell components and more.

Other reasons for data inaccuracy include a lack of communication between departments and a poor data strategy. A poor data strategy often involves silos between departments and a lack of data management centralization. Sixty-three percent of companies lack a coherent, centralized approach to data quality, down

three percent in the past 12 months. This shows that more and more companies are recognizing the importance of having a data quality strategy.

While the call center may have its own data management process and the website may have another, variances in standardization and data practices make it difficult to share data and consolidate information across the organization for a single customer view.

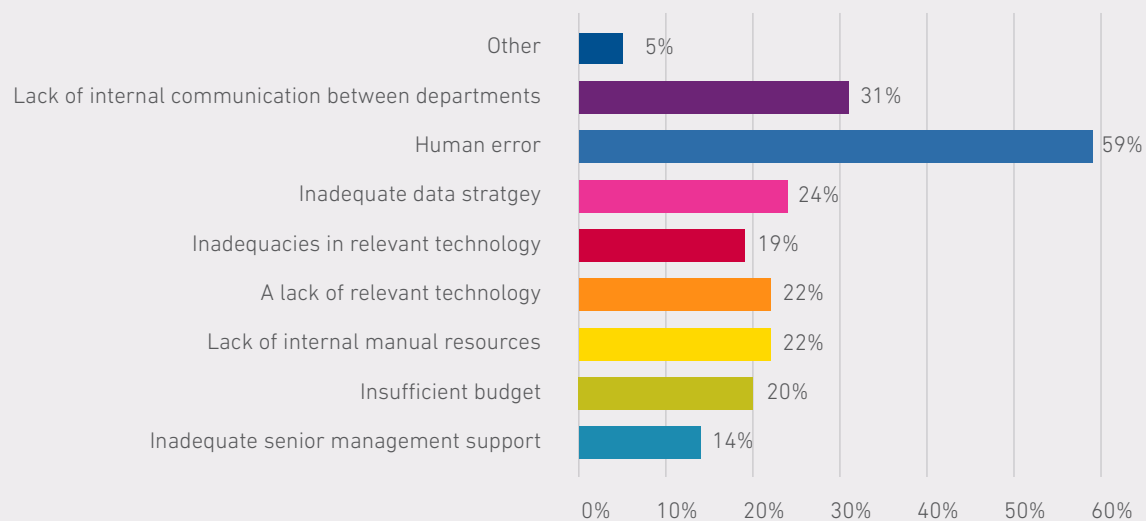Data management strategies are often segemented between departments.

30% manage data quality centrally.

66% lack a coherent, centralized approach to data quality.

Channels for poor data collection

Certain channels are more problematic for data collection than others. In fact, 78 percent of companies have problems with the quality of information they collect from different channels. Call centers are the most problematic channel most likely due to the challenges around data entry. This is followed by websites and mobile devices.

Chart 3
Reasons for data inaccuracy

Reason	Percentage
Other	5%
Lack of internal communication between departments	31%
Human error	59%
Inadequate data stratgey	24%
Inadequacies in relevant technology	19%
A lack of relevant technology	22%
Lack of internal manual resources	22%
Insufficient budget	20%
Inadequate senior management support	14%

Tips for managing data quality

Given the data collection challenges, there are four main areas that call centers should focus on to improve data quality, and ultimately the customer experience. Those are to understand and consolidate your data, manage duplicates, verify data upon entry and to utilize data enhancement.

Understand and consolidate data

Businesses need to start any data management project by understanding the information contained within a database. It is important to understand how it is entered, how it is used and its current state. Most organizations start by creating a data map to gain this insight. To create a data map, take the following steps:

1. **Identify all sources of data in the organization.** The average organization has eight different databases, not including the various spreadsheets or other sources of information outside the database. It is very important to know where all of the information is stored today to prepare for consolidation.

2. **Check the formatting and accuracy of the information.** Assess what fields are within each source and how the information is standardized today. If you notice areas of inaccuracy or a lack of standardization between resources, correct the data or define formats.

3. **Assess how data is entered.** Obviously, data is entered in the call center, but determine the other channels used to collect information.

4. **Understand when duplicates are created.** Duplicates are easily created from human error. Duplicates are often created when a staff member is unable to locate an existing record. Think about where those areas are for your organization and put processes in place to prevent duplicates from being created.

5. **Define benchmarks.** When you are looking to improve data, it is important to know current quality levels and goals for accuracy and consolidation. Data map creation is the perfect time to assess current levels so similar benchmarks can be measured later to determine improvements.

Manage duplicates

Once data have been analyzed and standardized, organizations can begin to merge databases. A duplicate identification tool should be used given the volume of data and the risk of human error.

When evaluating a tool, there are some important features to consider:

Fuzzy and phonetic matching	Many names, especially those collected in call centers, can have spelling errors. Therefore, a tool should be used to identify variances in spelling and abbreviations.
Customizable matching logic	Every business is different in how they define a duplicate. Look for a highly customizable tool that you will be able to manipulate for your business needs.
Seamless integration	Duplicates enter your databases constantly. Build duplicate identification right into your CRM or ERP system for continued maintenance.
Real-time search and match	Being able to use real-time search and match technology will prevent duplicate contacts and accounts from entering your system.

Verify data upon entry

Verifying data is extremely important in the call center. As call centers are most prone to data entry errors, standardizing and verifying records for accuracy will help improve operational efficiency and reduce staff time correcting inaccurate data. More importantly, it will prevent human error from damaging the call center interaction with the customer.

Software tools can be put in place to verify structured customer information, such as email address, mailing address and telephone number. In a call center environment, there are actually tools available that can speed data entry. These tools can also account for misspellings and prompt the call center operator for any missing information. Verifying data upon entry ensures the accuracy of customer information as it is collected, as quickly as possible, to give the operator more time to up-sell and cross-sell.

Utilize data enrichment

Call centers can get a more complete view of the customer by utilizing third party data enhancement. Businesses append third party data in real-time as accurate customer data is collected. Data assets can include demographic information on where the consumer is located or behavioral information on given interests, such golfing or biking.

This information can be added on an individual, household or geographic level. In addition to segmentation abilities, this data can be fed into a modeling system. While the customer is still engaged, call center operators can be prompted with specific offers in real time. With this information, call center operators know what to up-sell, rather than utilizing a standard script for every customer.

In fact, 79 percent of companies say customer profiling is important or very important to their overall business strategy. In addition, 82 percent of companies have an analytics department to improve customer intelligence or to enhance loyalty and better target offers.

Conclusion

Data is everywhere today, however, businesses need a better strategy for collecting and using information. The call center is a key component in this evolution, both because this group collects a lot of information, but also because it can use it to dramatically change the customer interaction.

The high degree of inaccurate data is hurting business intelligence and loyalty efforts. Call centers need to take steps to improve data accuracy and management for better access to valuable information.

Experian Data Quality helps your call centers use the most accurate data possible. Test out our solutions for yourself!

Try a demo

Experian
53 State Street
Boston, MA 02109
T: 1 888 727 8822
www.edq.com