

# Contact Centre Action Newsletter

## **Welcome to another Contact Centre Action Newsletter!**

An article appeared in a major daily newspaper this week, which has prompted me to make a few comments of my own. The article talks about automation technologies, how companies are 'forcing' customers to talk to machines, do companies' work for them by entering data through telephone key pads and so on. The author implies that all customers would prefer to talk to a live person, every time.

I have been to a few presentations lately - interestingly, many related to speech recognition. While I understand that the presenters probably have a vested interest in promoting automation technologies, there is a valid, opposite opinion to the 'live person every time' theory. Below are some thoughts, gathered from personal experience and listening to various presenters.

Firstly, it need not be a case of everyone using an agent or everyone using automation. The technology exists today that allows customers to choose, in advance or on a call by call basis, whether they use automation or not. Unfortunately, few companies are utilising this capability.

Secondly, there are people who WANT to use automation. Generation Y's want information and they want it NOW. They want to be able to recharge their phone card from a night club, they want to be able to do their banking while they are waiting for a train - and if you guessed that there are young adults in my house - right again! Even old blokes like me - I changed mobile phone provider because my old one closed their IVR at 8PM, so I couldn't pay my bills late at night when I was doing the rest of my banking.

If you ask people 'would you rather speak to a live person or to a machine?' - most would say 'a live person'. Think back not that long, to a time when standard business hours were 9AM to 5PM Monday to Friday & it was impossible to do your banking, pay your bills, book a holiday or transact in any other way outside these hours. Re-word the question to something like 'would you be happy speaking to a machine if you could do all your transactions 24 hours a day?', the answer may well be different.

The article also asserts that companies with little competition are deliberately forcing customers to stay in queues to reduce costs. Firstly, there are very few companies these days with captive markets. Secondly, a policy such as this is fundamentally flawed.

Consider the real impact. The longer you make people wait, the more people you will have in your queues at any one time. The more people you have in your queues, the bigger your phone system needs to be and the more trunks (lines) you will need, and the higher your maintenance cost will be. This comes at a significant cost. Further, most contact centres have 1300 or 1800 numbers, where the call recipient pays for the call. The longer the queues, the higher the cost. There are also hidden costs - if your queues are long, your customers will be angry and will take that anger out on the first person that answers the phone. In this time of low unemployment, how do you think agents will react if they are being yelled at all day? They resign and go elsewhere. At an average cost of around \$15,000 to find, interview, hire and train an agent, this is also a high cost.

I have done calculations and proven that, in some circumstances, a company can reduce costs by hiring more staff. Think about that for a minute.....

The article did get one thing right. Senior management of many companies don't realise their customer's frustration, but this is more a reflection of poor management. Contact centres should not be regarded as a cost centre - they have become the primary interface

between a company and their customers. They have the understanding of what the customers need or want, they are an absolute goldmine of customer intelligence, competitor intelligence and feedback. Despite this, many companies still put their least-experienced staff on the phones, and they don't empower the staff or provide the mechanisms to capture the intelligence and provide it to key decision-makers so it can be acted upon.

I am not pro-automation, and I am not defending all contact centre managers. As with all industries, there are good and there are bad, some do an excellent job and some require improvement. However, I am getting tired of the negative publicity around our industry - an industry that employs somewhere around 300,000 people, is growing at 13% per year and, on the whole, really does try to do a good job.

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### **Boosting People Performance in Contact Centres.**

I am chairing a conference in November in Sydney on behalf of the Ark Group entitled 'Boosting People Performance in Contact Centres'. I have attached a brochure for your information. Please note - CCMA members are entitled to a significant discount off the registration fees.

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### **Interesting New Product.**

A company called DeskActive has recently released an interesting new product onto the Australian market, which is ideally suited to contact centres of all sizes.

DeskActive is an Australian developed desktop product that delivers exercise programs to staff desktops, tailored to each staff member and taking into consideration any pre-existing ailment or injury they may have. The aim is to make desk-bound staff more active and reduce fatigue, injury and illness caused by sitting still for long periods. Staff are often placed into teams and compete against each other to further encourage participation. DeskActive users have two way communication with an internal or external corporate health professional who can see their participation level and easily make changes to activities provided. Health tips are also available. For more information see [www.deskactive.com](http://www.deskactive.com)

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### **CCMA Activities.**

Check out [www.ccma.asn.au](http://www.ccma.asn.au) for coming events for the rest of the year. These events include two lunches in Melbourne, training courses in Melbourne and Sydney, the Contact Centre World Awards in Las Vegas in October and various other domestic and international events the CCMA is supporting. Book early to avoid disappointment.

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For your convenience, all our previous newsletters are on our web site - [www.ccaction.com.au](http://www.ccaction.com.au). Please have a look - there may be something in a previous edition that you may find interesting.

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Do you know of anyone else who would like to be added to our distribution list? Please ask them to email their details to [spels@ccaaction.com.au](mailto:spels@ccaaction.com.au).

Until next time....

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