The Following Is A Sample From Call Center Basics!

Some Call Center Basic Terminology!

Before we can discuss call center basics and operation, we need to understand the “lingo” or the terms used in the call center industry. Here are some of the common terms you may encounter when dealing with the call center industry:

- **ACD –** Automatic Call Distribution – this is when calls are automatically routed to an agent, or groups of agents, based on specific criteria. This may be by phone number, type of service needed, or by product line. This insures that the agent picking up the call has the expertise required to resolve the situation.
- **AHT –** Average handle time – this is the total amount of time the agent spends on the phone with the customer plus the time spent after the call doing paperwork or other tasks associated with that call.
- **ASP –** Application Service Provider – an off-site option that allows you to access external customer call centers
- **Autodialing –** this is software that automatically dials pre-programmed numbers and provides a pre-recorded message to the customer. The message may ask for information to be entered via the phone keypad or just provide information the company wants to provide their customers.
- **Call Accounting –** an application that accepts data and archives it for generation of reports.
- **Call Center –** a facility that accepts, directs, or otherwise processes phone calls, e-mails, or generated forms for a company or group of companies.
- **Call Blending –** allows agents to both inbound and outbound calls depending on need and call volume.
- **Call Volume –** the number of calls fielded by agents in a specific time frame.
- **Concurrent Users –** the number of people who can use a call center at the same time.
- **Conditional Call Routing –** this enables calls to be routed according to instructions that you give to the software. For example, you can program that calls go to another agent when the number of calls one agent has reaches a certain level. This will improve response time.
- **CRM –** Customer Relationship Management – gathers and compiles information on customers.
- **DNIS –** Dialed Number Identification Service. Shows the number from which the customer has called in from. Can be used to specifically route calls based on certain information.
- **Database Call Handling –** handles called based on data stored in the database.
- **Display –** another term for monitor, screen or CRT.
- **Escalate –** the act of taking a call that is sensitive or problematic and transferring it to another agent, usually a manager or supervisor.
- **Handled Calls –** the number of calls that came into the call center or that were handled by a specific agent.
- **Handling Time –** the length of time it takes an agent to talk to the caller and process transactions.

- **Help Desk –** this usually refers to the area where customers or employees receive assistance and support for computer related issues and needs.
- **Hold Time –** the amount of time that elapses between when the customer is connected to an electronic answering system and the time the phone is actually answered by a live agent.
- **IVR Interactive Voice Response –** this option allows a customer to use ordinary voice commands to access specific information or to have a call routed to the appropriate agent.
- **Least Cost Call Routing –** when more than one line or carrier is available to process outgoing calls, the IVR system selects the least expensive line and directs the call to that line.
- **Monitor –** another term for screen, or display. Sometimes referred to by the old name of CRT.
- **Multi-Media handling –** allows agents to also process requests and information on other types of media such as e-mails, faxes, web forms, chat requests, etc.
- **Offshore Call Center –** a call center that is located outside the United States.
- **PBX –** Private Branch Exchange – an in-house switching system that connects multiple phones to each other and to one central network. The PBX can contain multiple options to allow for call routing and other functions.
- **Predictive Dialing –** an outgoing call option that automatically places calls and only directs them to an agent when the phone is answered. This minimizes downtime and increases efficiency.
- **Preview Dialer –** allows a call center agent to view information of the caller prior to answering the call. Similar to the home option “caller ID”.
- **Prompts –** another name for menu selection. These would be messages, questions, or options presented to the caller that are used to direct or process the call.
- **Queue –** this is the area where calls are held until an agent is ready to take a call. Calls in the queue can be assigned according to priority or who called first or any other programmed criteria.
- **RDBMS –** Relational Database Management System – links files together by comparing data. Allows information to be accessed by cross-referencing information on a customer or account. For example, you could pull up a customer by keying in a phone number.
- **Real Time Data -** data that is constantly updated as the data changes. For example, software that counts the number of calls coming in would be referred to as real time data if the operator could pull the data up instantly at any given time. Data that can be accessed only at the end of a specific time frame such as daily, weekly, etc. is not considered real time data.
- **Remote Access –** the ability to access functions or databases from an external location via an Internet connection.

- **Reporting –** the information on current performance over a specific reporting time frame.
- **Scripts –** a pre-arranged set of responses to common issues or questions that allow agents to give standard replies to common requests.
- **Skill Based Routing –** the ability to route calls to agents with specific experience levels or knowledge.
- **Softphone Function –** using computers to control phone functions at a call center.
- **Screen POP –** having information on the caller “pop up” on the screen when the agent receives the call.
- **Speech Recognition –** software that converts spoken voice into text that can be read by the agent on their display.
- **Tier –** a level of agents in a call center where agents are divided according to skills, knowledge, or expertise.
- **Time Per Call Average –** the average amount of time an agent spends on the phone with a customer.
- **UCD –** Uniform Call Distributor – sends calls to agents and provides some reporting functions.
- **VRU Voice Response Unit –** an automated system that responds to a caller’s speech or phone keystrokes without the need for an operator.
- **VoIP –** Voice Over Internet Protocol – technology that allows you to make telephone calls over the computer via the Internet.
- **Workforce Management –** options that help call center processes including call monitoring, recording, scripting, etc.
- **Wrap Up Codes –** unique codes that allow agents to identify the types of calls they work with.

Call Center Dynamics & Overview

Call Centers are physical locations where customer contact is created and/or processed. This contact can be written, as in e-mail or letter form, or most commonly, over the phone.

There are two primary types of call center communication, **outbound** and **inbound**. Outbound calls are calls made **from** the call center **to** people. These types of calls may be soliciting purchases, which is most commonly referred to as **telemarketing**. Another example of an outbound call would be to offer the purchase of extended warranties or to follow-up with a customer after purchase when no complaint or request has been made.

The second, and most common type of call for call center would be **inbound** calls. These are the calls made by people from outside the call center looking for information, problem resolution, or to make purchases of products.

Call Centers are usually organized into groups of agents called **tiers**. Tiered call center are configured so that all calls are initially handled by one group of agents, which provide basic information or route the calls to a specific agent or group of agents. This tier is usually referred to as tier 1 but could be easily referred to as something else by the company. In this kind of configuration, most, if not all, calls are first handled by tier 1 agents.

In some cases, this type of task might also be handled by an automated response system, which would screen calls and transfer them to the appropriate group or location. These types of systems are efficient and less costly to use but they also can be received poorly by people who prefer speaking to a real person.

It is common for a call center to have several tiers of operation. Generally speaking, the higher tiers have more specialized and highly skilled agents working those lines. They are usually more experienced and receive job specific training to enable them to provide accurate information and service to the callers.

Call Center tiers can be located all together or sometimes can be in entirely different locations. In some call centers; a single agent may even work more than one tier at a time especially during less busy times or when staffing levels are low. With today's technology, it is easy to route and re-route calls depending on coverage and call volume.

The heart of any call center (other than their staff!) is the electronic hardware that routes the calls and provides the telephone and/or computer interface with the caller or customer.

Over the years, there have been many improvements that have reduced some of the complaints from customer who have been frustrated by call centers in the past.

Predictive Dialing is one of the improvements we now see and hear from many call centers. It let's the caller know approximately how much time it will take to connect with an agent. This can be very important during very busy times when the wait might be 10-15 minutes to speak to an agent. Being able to let the caller know this in advance will set a reasonable expectation of time required and also allows the caller to decide to hang up and call later. The message usually states something like; "This is one of our busiest times of the day when our callers experience the longest wait times. It is expected that it will take approximately 10 minutes to speak to an agent. The best time to call is usually between 7 pm. And 11 pm. Thanks for calling (company name)."

This addresses one of the most important issues regarding telephone customer service. That is the waiting for an agent to pick up the phone. By stating the time expected, you let the customer know up front and they do not get angry waiting and waiting.

Other innovations that help call center agents become more productive and better equipped to serve their callers are **Automatic Number Identification** and **Caller Prioritization**.

Automatic Number Identification shows the agent who is calling and from what number. This can make it easier to obtain callers previous files and information before talking to them. This can come in very handy if there is a history of this caller being abusive or threatening or having special needs or problems.

Caller Prioritization enables emergency situations to get answered faster. This is useful in a number of situations and allows a call center to create a special number or type of customer that will receive escalated treatment of their calls.

Computer assisted problem resolution is another tool that some call centers us to help their agents answer technical or problem issues without having in depth technical knowledge. These programs give agents specific questions to ask caller. Their answers are entered into the system and another more specific question is asked or a solution given. Each question is designed to narrow down the causes of a specific complaint until the most likely answer is left.

Technology is important but is must always be remembers that the heart and soul of the call center lies with the agents who handle the phones and the

management that supports them. Without having the right people in these positions, the best technology would not be enough to satisfy the customer.

In-House or Outsource?

This is a decision that a lot of businesses struggle with everyday. Do they keep an in-house call center or subcontract the call center operations to established call center companies? Sometimes this is an extremely difficult decision to make. While we cannot make the decision for you, we can make you aware of the factors that you should consider when making these decisions.

Volume

Depending on the size of your call center operation, it may be cheaper to outsource the operation rather than do things yourself. This is especially true if you need several types of skilled workers to fulfill all your requirements.

Profitability requires that people have a somewhat full workday to justify their presence. For example, if you require a highly skilled computer technician to support your computer customers, but you only receive 5 calls a day for that need, hiring a full time technician would not be cost effective. You would either have to outsource that position or have other duties for this person when he is not fielding call center calls.

Generally speaking, the more calls you have for a particular type of call center agent, the easier it is to justify having that person in-house on a full-time or a few on a part-time basis.

Cost

Speaking of volume, call-centers usually operate on a **cost per call** basis for measuring the cost of operating that call center. For example, if your call center costs you $1,000,000 a year to operate and it handles 1,000,000 calls, you cost per call would be $1. If you handled 100,000 calls each year, you cost per call would be $10 and so on. Therefore, the more calls your call center handles, the cheaper the cost per call would be if the staff remains the same. In the beginning getting an accurate estimate of call volume can be difficult. This is

especially true if you are going to transfer other tasks to the call center such as product information, literature requests, or any service not presently offered.