

An **InstantService** White Paper

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The Unified Console: Increase Agent Productivity by Consolidating Text-Based Communications

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1 ABSTRACT

Effective contact centers require the proper balance of personnel and technology management. First, for the contact center to be effective and produce a return on investment, managers must separate text-based communications (chat and email) from all other communication channels to capitalize on the unique skill set required. Next, identify technology that unifies all text-based contact center applications while cutting the amount of needless screen interactions. Finally, introduce elements of automation whenever possible as an additional cost-effective course of action. *A unified console for text-based communications*—a single-screen, intuitive command center—is essential in satisfying all these steps.

2 INTRODUCTION

The traditional contact center is going away. In its place is a diverse, interactive mixture of communication channels: phone, email, chat, Short Message Service (SMS), and conceivably, even new web-SMS hybrid applications, such as Twitter. With this freedom of choice also comes the increased entitlement customers feel. They expect prompt replies and decisive action. The quicker the response, the more satisfied the customer, the higher the customer service ratings.

Among the tasks of contact center management is to find a technology that embraces the wide variety of technological channels, and to strike the proper balance of efficiency with the costs of maintaining the correct levels of personnel resources. This new *blended messaging* contact center environment requires customer service agents to simultaneously use phone, chat, and email, with each agent conceivably switching between various applications: CRM, billing, phone logging, as well as any additional chat and email windows.

Most articles on the subject report that a productive marriage between verbal and text-based avenues is achievable. "Industry leaders tout the wisdom that truly blended environments will maximize productivity, enhance service levels and reduce expenses while maintaining the reliability and scalability of the individual components" [1].

However, InstantService takes a different approach. While it's true this setup may initially appear to increase the productivity of your contact center, the skill set required to communicate by phone with a customer is very different from the set required for chat or email contact. Your contact center will benefit by separating phone-based communication tasks from text-based communication tasks. This provides agents the greatest chance for success and provides customers with the best service opportunity.

3 BACKGROUND / PROBLEMS

Because of their narrow profit margins, American financial institutions have long been regarded as the major testing ground for contact center efficiency. These institutions have discovered that the efficiency of your workforce in dealing with customer service encounters is the key to a profitable contact center. The proper combination of "human resource management practices and technology [to create] high-performance call center environments" [2] is needed.

Their research recognizes an often ignored fact: customers want to speak to a real person, even if that person responds to them via an email message or a chat session. Automated systems can cut costs for the more linear inquiries, but complex problems, that require a real person on the other end, offer a more personal touch while increasing first-call resolution rates.

Some contact center statistics to consider:

- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of total website traffic does not reach out for help. Only 3% does.
- The average cost of a non-automated phone call is \$34, the average cost of a chat is \$12, and the average cost of an email is \$6.
- The average order value (AOV) through assisted online sales (chat) increases 30% to 50%.
- Representatives in a contact center environment can handle anywhere from 3 to 6 chats simultaneously.

Increase Agent Productivity by Consolidating Text-Based Communications

- Customer satisfaction levels on chat are approaching 95%, while phone levels are 85%.
- Post chat surveys are completed by 34% of the customers you chat with, dwarfing phone survey rates.

Economic pressures have forced companies to downsize personnel. Expectations are that hiring projections for entry level positions will decrease by 8% [3].

Companies need solutions that boost agent productivity because they are now expected to do more with less.

In these tough economic times, companies are more willing to maintain their current infrastructure rather than risk implementing new technology that may not produce adequate ROI. A successful solution must integrate easily with current infrastructure and current applications.

4 SOLUTION

At the heart of the solution is a single concept: the *unified console for text-based communications*. A properly designed console allows your agents to access information from any of your current applications without the need to switch from screen to screen. These applications may include customer relationship management (CRM) and order management, ticketing systems, and knowledge base applications.

The core idea behind the unified console is overall resource savings. Increased productivity is the best way to reduce people costs. A by-product of the unified console translates into higher customer satisfaction levels due to better ongoing support of your customer base. Agents have more information readily available to support and sell to your customers and prospects. On average, the unified approach reduces contact center overall handle time per incident, allowing your agents to handle more simultaneous sessions with a more effective outcome.

Many organizations have discovered the advantages of a unified console. Having a single console to access all your intellectual property has resulted in:

- **Lower handling time**

Before implementing the unified console, Spiegel's attempt at offering timely responses to customer requests often averaged 36 hours. Using the unified console, response time plunged to 5.5 hours (less than half of the industry standard).

- **More capacity**

Charter Communications went from handling 80K chats a month to well over 300K chats a month after transitioning from a previous tool to the unified console.

- **Reduced ALT-tabbing**

For Day-Timer, an integrated, multi-panel user console is available on 65 agent and management desktops. Built into one efficient screen, agents can move quickly between applications to more efficiently service customers.

- **Better customer experience**

Ritz Interactive registered consistently high customer ratings in survey completed since the unified console implementation.

- **Decreased dependence on costly phone interactions**

eDiets, Simplexity, Intuit, Day-Timer, and Authorize.net have all realized a decrease in phone hold times and volumes—even as much as 40%—and cost savings when using the unified console.

How does the unified console provide this? Easier access to information from multiple sources creates a less stressful work environment, which in turn translates into higher employee morale. As agent work can be extremely motion-intensive, lowering the number of motions needed to accomplish a task results in greater productivity and higher efficiency.

All of this translates into cost savings by:

- Leveraging existing legacy systems and integrating with existing technology
- Increasing productivity
- Utilizing; the right tool for the right job
- Increasing sales and customer satisfaction through prompt, personalized service

5 CONCLUSION

Competitive advantage in the contact center may mean the difference between the success and failure for your business. Especially during difficult economic times – when a customer decides to make a purchase, they expect prompt and effective interaction from the companies with which they choose to spend their money.

Using the unified console for text-based communications provides a clearly-delineated skill set for customer interactions, and gives your agents all the information they need at a single glance. Efficient agents produce happy and loyal customers. The net effects are reduced costs at the contact center and increased sales on the website.

ABOUT INSTANTSERVICE, INC.

InstantService is a leading software-as-a-service (SaaS) provider of proactive chat and email management solutions. Since 1998, our technology and expertise have increased sales, reduced costs, and improved customer service for companies and contact centers worldwide.

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