

There are many reasons as to why a review of all areas of the call centre together is necessary. Firstly, from a planning budgeting and monitoring perspective, a review of the past period is the first step in the process. Without a comprehensive review of each area it would be difficult to identify strengths and weaknesses that lie within the centre.

Financial audits focus on trying to achieve a clean bill of health. The focus for a call/contact centre audit is not only picking up on operational gaps, areas of risk / non-compliance, but also highlighting areas of good management practice that can continue to be fostered.

Other audit outcomes for the planning and objective setting process include:

- The highlighting of current and future needs within the mandate given by management
- Assist other parts of the business and senior management with planning and bridging of performance and other gaps
- Identify potential opportunities for collaboration within the business and other partners.

Secondly from a cost reduction and revenue enhancement standpoint, audit from a contact centre perspective is very important as there are opportunities for revenue or cost reduction which can only be influenced by the centre. Staff management, recruitment, training, call management strategies are some areas where the centre exercises direct control within the resources and the parameters set by the organisation.

Identifying productivity opportunities, which ties up with revenue and cost reduction, is probably one of the most important products of an audit.

End to end reviews of a call centre can end up producing between 5 –30% productivity gains. How to do things faster and gain more time, how different processes can be combined for more effective results, how different approaches can help motivate staff, are some opportunities that surface from an end to end audit. Thirdly, the audit is the foundation for benchmarking. Due to the audit being a structured approach

the results can be used for comparison with other institutions using the similar structured process. One of the pitfalls of benchmarking is that if the methodology being used is not the same across the industry then you may not be comparing apples with apples.

Last but not least, the audit will provide the centre's stakeholders, both within and without, an independent view of the state of play. Whilst not all stakeholders will be privy to the results of the audit, the process should serve to increase the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

There are other soft benefits that the audit can provide such as:

- An independent view of the centre helps to clarify problems and opportunities within the centre and leads the way for greater acceptance amongst the call centre and the organisation.
- A better-motivated centre management team because of the refined focus on key objectives that need to be achieved to reach KPI's and a focus on areas for self-development.
- Smooths potential union and personal issues, in achieving centre KPI's
- Supports business cases for resourcing to achieve centre objectives, again assisting with team motivation and centre objectives.

Why don't many more call centres employ the audit as a regular process given the need and importance of one? There are a few reasons for the contact centre audit not being at least an annual fixture of the centre.

The momentum of technology and its ever increasing grip on the functioning and management of contact centre environments has made managing centres a pretty tough task for many. Combined with this, the resourcing of centres because of the particularly high

turnover and cash needs, has left little time and resource for the development or employment of processes such as audits.

Centres who recognise the need and possess resources have employed the audit process with great success, be it a small or a large centre.

However because expertise is limited in this area services tend to be expensive and reliance on internal expertise has its limitations.

Findings from a sample survey conducted by Contact Solutions amongst call centre management indicate a lack of awareness amongst some centre management and senior management of the need and the possibilities of a contact centre audit. There was also some confusion between other functional audits and projects within the centre and the call centre audit. Some felt that the audit is another form of a witch-hunt that management can use against the centre so why be the initiators of the process? There is enough slack already!

For those that know of the need and potential, finding service providers or internal staff with expertise and time is difficult. There is also the issue that an audit is not a budgeted expense and needs to come out of some other fund i.e. training / development and is a difficult expense line to get past management.

A majority of managers interviewed in the sample were convinced of the need for a structured process to be conducted at least annually. Most were of the view that as awareness of the availability of structured audits increased, centre budgets would be developed with an audit in mind. If a uniform process was applied across the industry this would make benchmarking a worthwhile exercise and enable productivity not only within the centre but the industry as a whole.



DEEPAK SELVARATNAM

Deepak counts many years of international and local experience in this area and is a partner of Contact Solutions, a consulting firm providing management, benchmarking and auditing services

to businesses and the contact centre world. Any feedback you have would be welcome. Contact him on 0274 546 460 or deepak@contactsolutions.com.