CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE
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SOME NICE NICHE TECHNOLOGIES

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Contact Center pipeline

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Key considerations to get the most out of our favorite niche technologies.

BY Lori Bocklund & Ken Barton, Strategic Contact

Mainstream technologies get a lot of press. As the backbone of contact center operations, they're on everyone's radar and they need to function at peak efficiency. But we'd like to put the spotlight on a few niche technologies that we find intriguing. Here are a few of our favorites along with some key considerations and next steps you can take if you like them, too.

Desktop Analytics

Desktop analytics—aka Desktop and Process Analytics, or DPA—captures agent desktop activity. It can reveal which applications they used, how much time they spent in them, what process steps they took, what information they looked at, what information they captured, etc. It can be effective for frontline reps or their back-office colleagues. It can be used to discover issues and provide visibility into what is really happening in the hundreds or thousands of interactions and processes each day. Improper systems use, process noncompliance or inefficiency, and training gaps or failures can all surface with a good tool and an astute analyst.

Here's an example: Agents often struggle to find answers using various "knowledge tools." DPA supports root-cause analysis to identify the most common challenges in finding and using information. Armed with this insight, the center prioritizes what to fix—the desktop interface, the search engine, end-user training, etc. Analysts in the center work with IT and the training department to tackle the problems. With a good baseline before changes are made, the tool can then help verify whether or not the fixes worked. The potential results? Handle time goes down, first-contact resolution goes up, answers are correct and consistent, and customer experiences improve.

DPA can help with messier issues, as well. In the era of increasing regulation and compliance, desktop analytics can be a key tool in the fight for reinforcement and validation. It can be used to aid PCI compliance, such as turning off recording when the cursor goes to a credit card field. And with an abundance of potential agent distractions (e.g., websites, social media), it's a simple tool to remind reps that abuse is visible or provide evidence for disciplinary processes when needed.

Mature centers may use this tool to make performance optimization an ongoing thing. Others may want a one-shot or targeted improvement effort. In either case, key decisions surface about using a premise or cloud-based tool, allocating internal resources to manage it or rely on external experts, and pursuing a managed service (ongoing) or a professional services engagement. Vendor options include standalone tools like OpenSpan and workforce optimization suites like Verint and NICE. In today's diverse marketplace, options abound. Regardless of the approach to DPA, the center (and the IT and HR/training peers) need to commit to acting on the results.

A word of caution is due for those excited about this tool: Our project experience as well as the surveys we've run with *Pipeline* ["Workforce Optimization Survey: The Results Are IN(teresting)!," May 2014; "2014 Contact Center Analytics Survey Final Results," November 2014] have shown that analytics tools often fail to meet expectations, primarily due to lack of resources and processes to use the tool effectively. So build competency across reporting and analytics, and/or use external experts to ensure success.

THE WATCH LIST

Here are a few additional niche technologies that may be worth a look in today's centers:

- **HIRING TOOLS.** Smart tools can aid the screening process and close the loop to build desirable hiring profiles based on the most successful agents, leading to better hiring and retention.
- **TRANSLATION TOOLS.** The question of whether and which languages to staff (not to mention which media) is always a tough one, and those with an increasingly diverse customer base may find translation tools offer an exciting (and potentially lower cost) alternative to multilingual agents or language services.
- **SECURITY TOOLS.** A slew of tools are coming along to help bolster identification and verification, flag potential fraud, and generally keep the good guys ahead of the bad guys. Anyone with financial risk could see value in putting these tools in place.
- **SIMPLIFIED DESKTOP TOOLS.** A Chromebook with Internet access can provide a great, low-cost, anytime, anywhere technology for business continuity and disaster recovery, as long as you're using web clients.

Speech Analytics in Quality Monitoring

DPA has an older, more mature, attention-getting cousin: Speech Analytics (SA). It's been around for years and always gets people excited. It started out with a focus on quality monitoring, with some vendors even pitching it as a QM replacement. That message seemed to have died down, but has new life as the tools bring new capabilities and a stronger track record in aiding with QM optimization.

Some SA vendors have a feature to auto-populate agent scorecards for efficient QM review. Others use it to find the appropriate calls to review—based on length, categorization, statements, actions, etc. On the back end, SA can bring more targeted and complete information into the coaching sessions that result from quality review. So the message that SA can shorten, simplify and improve QM has new resonance.

Here are a couple of examples: CallMiner is one of the few remaining standalone SA vendors. (Most have been purchased by WFO suite vendors.) They can automate scoring of every contact and provide feedback in graphical performance dashboards. Utopy (now owned by Genesys), Verint and others automate call selection for QM based on keywords or phrases. Some vendors can also use real-time capabilities to notify supervisors of a quality issue as it's occurring. Coaching can happen in real time or as a follow-up to opportunities the SA/QM tool reveals.

We find this niche use of a technology compelling because most QM efforts fall short of best practices for number of contacts reviewed and feedback provided. So SA can deliver great value in doing more QM to improve the customer experience (nearly every center's goal these days) and to aid agent development, performance and retention (also high on the list). It is a useful technology for calibration sessions with supervisors and the quality team, and to support more meaningful coaching sessions. Beyond the individual, SA can help an analyst look at trends and overall scores to determine if new training and/or processes (or things like cross-selling new product offerings) are taking hold.

We'll throw the same caution flag with this one as the first one: Enthusiasts need to either commit resources or ante up for a service. A good option is to consider a company like MainTrax (www.maintrax.com) because of the expertise you can gain through knowledge transfer on how to use the tool while you're getting more immediate and targeted value from the investment.

"Contextually Aware" Applications

Niche applications and buzzwords often go hand-in-hand, and "journey mapping" and "omnichannel" are undoubtedly buzzing. Some vendors mention the terms when they describe their routing and what occurs at agent desktops, leveraging each contact (type, content, duration, etc.) on "seamless and integrated" customer interaction journeys across a wide variety of media. The data about those contacts provides "context" for what you can do with applications in routing and contact handling. That leads us to our next attractive niche.

To us, context-aware applications are really about "mini-CRM" (customer relationship management) in that they use and display aspects of the customer interactions (who, when, channel, etc.). In some cases, they may use hooks into traditional CRM applications to leverage additional data (or context). Applications use context in targeted routing, as well as screen pop of customer information and their interactions—kind of a next-generation CTI with data-directed routing and enhanced screen pops. Avaya, Cisco, Genesys, inContact, ININ and Kana (Verint) are examples of companies emphasizing this new direction.

So what makes this one exciting if it's just glorified CTI, which has been around for 20-plus years? Many centers don't have CRM (even if other parts of the business do), and even if they do, it may not provide all the tracking needed for contact routing and handling. Or, they are not using data effectively (especially if it's buried in notes in their core customer information system) through integration and business rules that leverage the right data to benefit customer interactions, not to mention the visibility into outcomes through reporting and analytics that follows. Using context effectively can lead to increased agent productivity, customer satisfaction and upsell/cross-sell opportunities.

A key challenge with this one is that center leadership rarely owns all channels, so they must engage their counterparts (e.g., IT, Digital Channels and Marketing) to work on getting all contacts into the information source, whether self-service or assisted service, and to leverage the full CRM if appropriate. Beyond the need for technology integration, effective use of context also requires process work and training to leverage the information and coaching to provide reinforcement to make sure people access and capture information effectively and consistently.

If this niche resonates, the starting point is probably a

FUNDAMENTALS

What is the opposite of a hot, niche technology? It's the fundamentals everyone should have in place (and working) before they consider what is new and exciting. Admittedly, it's a hot button because I've had some less than stellar personal experiences with a few centers lately. So here is my list of things you should do before you become enamored with the latest, greatest technology:

- Institute accurate screen pop on arrival and on transfer based on ANI or caller-entered identification.
- Design and implement a good main menu—short, to the point, low level of effort (and no irritation factor!).
- Provide representatives with as much information as the customer can see online—or better yet, more.
- Give representatives easy access to the right knowledge at the right time, making sure that it's up to date and consistent across channels.
- Follow through on problem-solving *by taking action* on commitments made to the customer.
- Follow up on bad survey feedback by having business rules trigger action on low scores—e.g., root-cause analysis *and* a call from a leader.

conversation with your current vendor to see what they offer. Define the data required to support contact routing and handling across all contact types as well as how you will present and use data at the desktop. Define the role of CRM (if you have it) and your core system, and the role of your routing system in gathering, maintaining and presenting information on contacts at the desktop.

Gamification

Based on interest at conferences (people are literally out into the hallway), this topic needs little introduction as a hot one, but it is most certainly "nichey" in its role in performance management. Gamification formalizes incentives and performance management through gaming tools, creating both competition and collaboration. It can create a new focus on and visibility to performance targets. Success yields points that enable people to pursue rewards such as gift cards, but the greatest reward may be the recognition and labels that go with "success."

Employee engagement is yet another buzz phrase and contact center pain point, so if technology helps to improve it, it's worth a look. Gamification can apply to compliance, adherence and offers, but can also include things like knowledge contribution, assisting peers and suggesting continuous improvement opportunities. Gamification can be utilized in the short term for targeted initiatives, or in the long term to ensure that performance measurements don't become tiresome or ignored. The direct tangible paybacks are in agent retention and performance, which can also lead to customer retention. The value increases with the right targets and incentives (e.g., by rewarding high customer satisfaction or effective upsell).

Most metrics measured in a contact center can be gamified in some way, but you need the right support staff to ensure you're looking at the right things and driving the right behaviors. That includes closing the loop and analyzing results to see if the goals were met, and ending or changing the program if they aren't.

Gamification lives in the realm of standalone vendors such as Badgeville, Bunchball, LevelEleven and SnowFly, but it is increasingly part of suites of some of the big WFO/PO vendors (whether developing, partnering or acquiring). Gamification solutions are also sometimes incorporated into CRM solutions, like Salesforce and Oracle. Regardless of the solution, make it part of an overall performance management plan with the right metrics, communication and analysis to be most effective.

So Much Opportunity…

It's easy to get excited about the next great thing. In addition to the DPA, SA, contextually aware applications and gamification, we're keeping an eye on some other technologies on our "Watch List." And while I don't want to temper enthusiasm, I would be remiss if I didn't highlight the "Fundamentals" sidebar. It is a bit of a rant, but with good intentions.

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