



Ten Things We Learned at the ACCE Conference

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Many people find it difficult to get the travel or training budget to attend conferences these days. Or, they think that the many free, web-based educational opportunities they can tap are adequate. Call us old school, but we still find great value in the face-to-face communications that happen at a conference – whether facilitating or attending sessions, engaging in informal conversations at meals, or exploring “what’s hot” with vendors in the exhibit hall. For those of you who missed this opportunity at the ACCE Conference & Expo (October 5-9), we wanted to share some interesting things we learned.

1. Speech analytics continues to be a hot topic, with financial services, utility and telecom centers leading the charge. Vendors have applied “downsizing” to create new product offerings (lower cost, limited functionality) to make the price point attractive to a broader audience. As the customer base grows, speech analytics may transform from a mere glimmer in everyone’s eyes to a practical technology to apply.
2. Innovation is alive and well in mature product areas, such as WFM and QM. For example, Verint is enabling more agent visibility into real-time adherence on their portal to WFM. In addition...
3. Vendors such as Verint and NICE have extended their reach to capture data on back office processes for forecasting, scheduling, and optimization of these other critical business functions. Similarly, desktop tool vendors such as OpenSpan can monitor desktop activity for process and system performance analysis and optimization.
4. If proven, a new round of technology may finally make collaborative, web integrated interactions take root. We talked with a new vendor, YakFree, in the hallways. They described a way to let customers place a call from a web site without having to download an application. LiveLink talked about how easy it can be to collaborate with customers on your web site. Stay tuned on these types of innovations.
5. Vendors are offering “try it, buy it” packages – probably a response to the economy as well as the easier channels for delivery (hosted) and open desktop tools for implementation. For example, Social Text will let you try wikis and other social media tools (up to 50 seats) for free. OpenSpan offers a no cost trial of their desktop development using Visual Studio, with the hope that small and medium businesses will see the value of their tools as well.
6. There is more emphasis on testing. Vendors such as IQ Services are focusing on how the call center and IT can work together to ensure the IVR and web site are working well, especially as volumes grow.
7. Speaking of working well together, we facilitated a session on “bridging the divide” between departments. Collaboration between the contact center and IT continues to be a hot topic. Marketing and contact centers seem to be getting their act together, which bodes well for Web 2.0 opportunities. Suggestions to foster better coordination between departments included: establishing routine meetings (biweekly or monthly); creating liaison roles; establishing governance policies that include formal review, prioritization, and approval; scheduling routine call observations (and we heard EVERYONE at Zappo’s spends a week in the center); and truly defining accountability models.
8. Speaking of Web 2.0, tons of people showed interest. There was a wide range of understanding about what it means, but a firm belief that the contact center should own and drive it, not marketing. (Do you think there’s a little bias here?!) We discussed the opportunities and tradeoffs of knowledge management tools and Wikis. We saw examples of companies that got fresh insights about their



customers and products by tapping their community of customers and prospects. We even “tweeted” about the conference. It’s exciting stuff with lots of possibilities but right now it comes with a fair dose of caution: this sea change in customer interactions will demand new rules of engagement.

9. As you’d expect, there was a lot of discussion about how to do more with less. Like-minded colleagues brainstormed about how to get more value out of existing technology, how to optimize the use of the highly skilled contact center agents, and how to tweak processes to deliver higher value the company and customers. The good news: vendors “get it” and are working to help prospects see and customers achieve the business value of the technology they have to offer. And centers are getting creative with staffing strategies and a focus on process optimization that should prove beneficial long after the economy recovers.
10. Finally, IT and contact center management were looking for guidance on positioning technology projects with senior management. A compelling case for purchase among the rank-and-file does not necessarily break through decision maker skepticism. They need business cases that transcend the clamor of economic uncertainty. So centers must step up with more robust analysis to turn wish lists into to do lists.