Avoid Technology Traps As You Budget for 2011

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The recession claimed over eight million jobs and turned up the heat on those who kept their paychecks rolling. We responded by posting five straight quarters of productivity gains, reaching an annualized rate of 3.9%. But with a .9% drop in output per worker in the second quarter of this year, our "little engine that could" seems to have stalled in its tracks. We can't keep pulling that heavy load by puffing faster and faster and saying, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can." We need a bit of a boost.

Technology has often been the "hole card" for meeting business objectives when the resource deck is stacked against us. It carries the promise of delivering the productivity gains that push us up and over the mountain of work that never ends in a contact center. But with skeptics lining every corridor and budget dollars tighter than ever, you need to be especially vigilant when assembling your technology wish lists for 2011. Here are a handful of traps to avoid:

The *If-You-Build-It, The-Gains-Will-Come* Trap. Most technologies with any kind of staying power have a compelling cost-benefit story to tell. Real people in real centers give testament to the monies they've gained, the costs they've saved, or the customers they've won over. But what's often left on the cutting room floor is the painstaking effort in business process design, organizational restructuring, and/or interdepartmental coordination to reap the benefit of the investment. If you're planning a leap forward in a new area, make sure you've accounted explicitly for resources you'll need to do the hard work in design, development, and implementation so that your technology will work hard for you.

The *If-It-Was-Good-Enough-For-Your-Father, It-Is-Good-Enough-For-You* Trap. The corollary to the Field of Dreams trap comes into play for replacement technology. We take out the old and usher in the new with little fanfare *and little change*. We keep the same old processes and simply adapt them to the new application. It's a missed opportunity. If you have one of these projects on the drawing board, take the time to discover how these new tools and technologies could <u>transform</u> the way you do business. An accompanying investment in business process re-design could reap huge rewards.

The *I-Only-Have-Eyes-For-You* Trap. Self-Service gurus across the land are always trying to figure out how to get more of their real-time voice traffic to switch to an agentless medium. Unfortunately, the IVR person focuses on IVR, the web person on the web, the social media person on social media, and so on. Meanwhile, your customers may already be using as much IVR as they care to use. They may be cultivating new forms of communication with other companies. And they may have needs that <u>none</u> of your siloed service offerings address. Before you're too far down the path of next year's self-service plans, take the time to assemble the "brain trust" and think outside the box. You may need a fresh approach to multi-channel service.

The *Have-It-Your-Way* Trap. You've got to love in-house software developers who have the ambition to tailor your software applications to your specific needs. A home-grown application here, a customized incarnation of a vendor application there, and pretty soon you've created your own private ball game. The trap sets when your developers can't keep pace with the market or your requirements, or your customized software falls out of step with the vendor's new releases, or your ongoing maintenance costs start breaking the bank. Just because you *can* (customize), doesn't mean you *should*. Take a good, hard look at standardized, configurable offerings before you get too enamored with doing your own thing.

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It’s a tough world out there. Technology can be your best friend if you think strategically and get your people and process acts together and aligned. Then – at least for contact centers – the productivity dip of Q2 2010 might get some productivity zip in 2011.

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