Contact Center Conferences: Invest a Little to Learn a Lot

By Lori Bocklund, President
The National Association of Call Centers | Volume 6, Issue 10, November 4, 2011

After attending ICMI's CCDemo in Dallas, it's clear that investing a few days in a conference still pays off. There is nothing like a few education sessions and some time on the show floor to boost your insights into what's real and what's not, what's new and what's hot. Here are some things we learned:

Multi-channel communications seems to be ready for the next step. Most centers receive email and many are doing chat or planning for chat and other web-based and mobile channels. The discussions in sessions and on the demo floor seemed to reveal people are starting to use the multimedia routing engines and the associated reporting to manage their center – regardless of media. And one of the channels that keeps coming up is…

Social media is settling into the organization. We're past the point of awareness on how the center needs to be attuned to the power and potential impact of social media while recognizing that marketing is the more likely owner (at least for now). It's time for the center to take the next step to really play an active role. Tools from vendors (familiar and new to our industry) help find comments that the center needs to address and route them to the right people for response. The analytics and insights marketing gains may still be the big game, but the contact center is now a player.

Cloud-based solutions continue to grow. More and more centers are considering hosted solutions for their core contact center technology (ACD), IVR, performance applications, or a specific application as IT continues to be resource-constrained and the vendors continue to proliferate.

Speaking of resource constraints, you can use **services** to get farther faster when your internal resources can't find the time. Want to do analytics (speech, text, data) but don't have the time and resources? Vendors can help. Want to optimize hiring or IVRs? Vendors can help.

We need BI and AI to have CI! Business Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence were talked about as mechanisms to Continuous Improvement in areas as diverse as hiring and IVR. Using information about what works and what doesn't can optimize process flows, interfaces, and results.

Better desktop tools lead to better interactions. Through easier means of web collaboration, desktop integration and analytics, you can optimize the experience of the customer and the agent. Handle times go down while first contact resolution goes up. It's a win-win.

Metrics, Scorecards, and Analytics are all hot. These user-friendly tools are leading to smarter use of all that data the center has had for so long. Improved presentation leads to better informed staff – from the CSRs in the trenches to the CxOs in their offices. And the enhanced ability to integrate and access data from multiple systems leads to greater insights into what to work on next.

Video is being emphasized as a primary component of enterprise Unified Communication and it is (once again) looking for a home in the contact center. Perhaps in this new world where everyone is mobile, everyone has a video device (aka smartphone or tablet), and a lot of people use desktop video for other reasons, real contact center applications will finally emerge. It's not just about CSRs doing video calls with customers. It's about showing something using video – whether it's problems or solutions,

clarifications, or curiosities. The customer may show the contact center, or the center may show the customer. It looks like it's time to imagine the possibilities for video as part of the "call flow" to better serve customers.