Omni-Agents – Fact or Fiction? asks Teleopti

As the great multi-skilling debate continues, Tommy Palomäki of Teleopti outlines the challenges and offers three tips for scheduling multi-skilled agents.

LONDON, UK, May 15, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Omnichannel has been a buzzword for a few years now as modern consumers demand a consistent, satisfying and effortless experience, every time, whatever the device or communications channel. On the one hand, this has put increasing pressure on contact center agents to be experts in everything – verbal communication, a linguist, gifted email writer, snappy Tweeter and vibrant video agent. On the other hand, managers have welcomed the whole concept of multi-skilling as a cure-all for today's epidemic of 'do more with less' culture, allowing them to deliver greater workforce flexibility, maximize agent skills and lower staffing costs all in one go.

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> The right WFM technology used in the right way can maximize agent skills and boost customer satisfaction, whatever the channel."
> *Tommy Palomäki, Customer Success Manager, Teleopti.*

It might come as a surprise to discover that the latest research from Call Centre Helper[i] reveals an actual decline in the number of contact centres multi-skilling their advisors, dropping from 90.5% in 2015, to 80.4% in 2017. Therefore, the big question is - in asking agents to do it all and contact centers to have it all, are we searching for the impossible?

Are we expecting too much of our agents?

Of course, today's technology makes it possible to schedule agents for both blended and dedicated contact centre environments. However, if you then expect agents to provide the same excellent service across all channels, you'll likely encounter some challenges:

• One size does not fit all - while text and email often involve similar content and require the same style of dialogue, dealing with social media or the most challenging of all, switching between voice calls to Web Chat or other social media requires a completely different tone and approach altogether. Adding multiple support channels simply adds complexity. While we might be able to ask agents to handle emails between calls, or work emails between chats, it's unlikely you'll find agents who can consistently do chats and calls at the same time with the same proficiency.

• Blending for response – in a blended environment the problem with routing is that channels invariably uses different platforms and is often assigned different priorities and Service Level Agreements (SLAs). This makes it difficult to track and predict service levels on an equitable basis across the entire contact centre.

• Juggling too many plates – this is exactly the case when we expect agents to handle all channels at once - sooner or later one of the plates is going to break with a detrimental impact on customer service. Can we expect an agent to be in the middle of a Web Chat conversation but have to put that conversation on hold when a voice call comes through? By the time they go back to the Web Chat, their train of thought is lost possibly along with the customer, irritated by being abandoned and left waiting in the virtual ether.

Top Three Tips for Scheduling Multi-Skilled Agents

Whether you choose a blended or dedicated contact center approach to serve your super-connected customers and support your agents, make sure you rely on the latest Workforce Management (WFM) software to smooth the path to success. If you have time to do little else, focus on the following three areas:

1.Accurate forecasting whatever the channel – it always amazes me how many contact centers still plan for voice and then fit everything else around it. Try and forecast for all types of channel as accurately as possible.

2.Optimize schedules – real-time management provided by WFM means team leaders can modify schedules to accommodate unplanned changes or seasonal peaks and troughs. They can automatically compare actual agent status with their schedules to make informed decisions and necessary improvements quickly. Historic data then allows them to predict, create and search future schedules effortlessly to ensure the right-skilled agents are in place to deliver an exceptional multi-channel customer experience at all times.

3.Consider what's best for agents and the customer – every contact center is unique so establish what works best for yours. While blended is generally better for small teams and dedicated is better as teams grow, it's worth experimenting. Don't ignore the hard evidence. If call center statistics demonstrate that the majority of enquiries are voice-based or your organization handles sensitive or highly emotive issues, don't force customers to abandon traditional engagement methods in favor of the latest Web Chat or social media. If necessary, use your WFM to switch agents to different channels at different times of the day depending on customer demand.

Finally, don't forget your agents! Help them multi-skill more easily by giving them the tools to do their job. For example, the ability to access, share and input into dynamic knowledge bases boosts performance and fosters team collaboration.

The reality is that contact centers need to evolve into customer experience hubs where no one agent is expected to do it all. Instead, it's often easier to assign agents with different tasks at different times of the day to ensure the best possible experience for agents and for customers. Combine this with the right WFM technology and utilize it in the right way to maximize agent skills and boost customer satisfaction, whatever the channel.

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