



## Customer-Driven Knowledge and Proving your Contact Center's Value

By Dr. Jodie Monger and Anne Nickerson

In today's time of constant cost cutting and cutbacks, some contact centers have found the correct way to prove their worth to the organization and prevent wrongful cuts that can damage service quality. Center managers are challenged to defend their department as executives and CFOs, many unfamiliar with contact center operations, review plans and budgets. While the usual defense is to arrive with numbers in hand and ways to slice and dice the budget, the best defense is to walk in and say 'this is what **your customers** are saying and here is the Contact Centers' value to the bottom line.'

No matter how much information and numbers the management team has available to them, no one can argue with actual customer feedback. With the Voice of the Customer (VOC) in hand, management can hear what customers are saying – about your company, your service and the individual representatives who assisted them. Customer satisfaction, word of mouth, and loyalty impact the bottom line. Use post-call surveys to get the right information you need to prove your value to the organization. A continuous measurement program allows for an ongoing ROI assessment to occur. But how? It is not as difficult as you might think.

### **The Best Offense is a Good Defense**

The first step is to verify that you are collecting the *right* kind of customer satisfaction data from your customers. This is where most companies lack the understanding or know-how to launch a good offense. Without the right kind of information, the true voice of the customer is not heard and an ROI measurement becomes an invalid, unreliable measurement. If you, as many companies are doing, are only collecting numeric satisfaction scores, you only have part of the story about how the customer feels about their interaction. What you truly need is an effective VOC program that collects scores AND comments. You need the "Why?" part. Be certain that the customer can elaborate on their scoring about the service interaction... in their own voice. It's the *feelings and intent* behind the scores and analysis that are critical to the improvement process.

The second step is to capture the caller satisfaction data at the right time. The best method for an accurate and reliable VOC measurement is through immediate post-call surveys. The evaluations are completed immediately after the interaction with the agent and allow the caller to answer both qualitative and quantitative questions about their interaction. According to scientific research, analysis

from evaluations that are delayed has several biases (errors) and is, therefore, not as reliable. Using a delayed evaluation program for a service interaction is based on the caller's recall of the interaction. Anything other than real-time measurement inherently introduces this recall bias (error). Use delayed methods to assess other types of service quality, for example, the follow up process or the correction of billing problems.

One of the key advantages to surveys taken with the "immediately following the interaction" method, is that all the customer information, including qualitative and quantitative feedback, can be directly and accurately linked to the CSR who handled the interaction. Accuracy is possible if you properly review and scrub the data. This powerful tool allows direct access to specific details about the interaction with the customer and pinpoints, better than any other tool, specific behaviors that agents can be trained and coached upon. It is here where the ROI measurement starts to take form.

## Customer Intelligence is the Foundation

In the previous articles in the series (<http://www.metrics.net/Articles.asp>), Metrics and Call Center Coach gave you specific examples of how the comments from the customers can be used to enhance your training and coaching programs. While the articles provide more examples, here is a sample of how you can use the information from customer comments:

*"I feel the employee answered the questions, but there were no feelings behind the answers. I asked a question and the answer was just 'no'. I think there could have been a little more feeling or 'I'm sorry, we don't offer that feature.' It was almost like I was speaking with a computer. Thank you."*

*"Don't rush through the call. Help the customer with whatever they have. Answer the questions fully."*

These comments offer an opportunity to go back to the agent directly and coach them on how they are being perceived by the customer. Since representatives take call after call, the work does become monotonous, and sounding like an indifferent machine sneaks into their voice tone, pace and genuine interest in the caller's needs. Sometimes, we have not given representatives the ability to offer alternatives that will satisfy the customer. These types of issues will affect the caller's satisfaction with call.

When agents must enforce corporate policies, satisfaction is also affected:

*“My issue isn't with the representative, but with the policy of this company. This can't get handled until next week. That's a very weak policy on behalf of this company. This will affect my future purchase decisions.”*

*“Offer some kind of acknowledgement...Your customer service offered no help. I realize it's your policy, but it wasn't very good.”*

These comments offer an opportunity to train agents to constructively “read policy” in a way consumers understand and accept as fair to both parties. First and foremost, companies need to frequently review policies to ensure they are fairly serving both the customer and company. Agents need to understand the intent behind policies, rather than use them as a crutch. The customer comments above give us some insight in how to coach agent behaviors. For example, putting a different spin on how information is delivered can make all the difference to customers. Compare these two statements: “Our policy is that you cannot get your payment for at least a month” versus saying to the customer, “I understand you were expecting a different outcome. I am forwarding your request to our specialists who will review your situation. You can expect a follow up call no later than the end of this week.” A customer’s psychological response to the first will be defensive, whereas the second statement shows the customer that the agent is doing what is within their control to help out.

As the comments show, there are many ways that the customer responses can aid in the training and coaching of your representatives. How does this fit into the big ROI picture? Since this information is directly from the customers, it gives you insight into how to improve your training and coaching programs within the center. The improvement of the service delivery should be directly linked to customer satisfaction scores. As you make changes based on customer insights, track the ROI of your center. You should also track employee satisfaction over time so you have the link for your center to prove what the research shows - with happier agents come happier customers. Agents are happier because compensation and scoring are tied to more meaningful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and more meaningful feedback and development is possible. Customers are happier because they are increasingly getting better service from your center. Outcomes from the voice of the customer measurement program are felt by customers, employees and the company.

## The Contact Center is a Strategic Weapon

Stand up and claim the value that is derived from your contact center. Your agents are the relationship manager for your customers and you have the power to protect or destroy that relationship. The financial report for your center is more than “how much is your budget and how many calls do you take for that money?” Do not allow your worth to be looked at strictly from a cost-productivity perspective. Think customer relationship management center. Think protector of the customer base. Think revenue enhancer or producer. Think strategic weapon for your company. Now talk about the value of your center!!

## Building the Offense

Focus on developing a Profit and Loss Statement (P&L) and an ROI for your center (and then for each team) that underscores its value to the organization. Take credit for protecting the relationship only at the delighted level; take responsibility for damaging the relationship and prove what the center is returning for the investment made in this required channel.

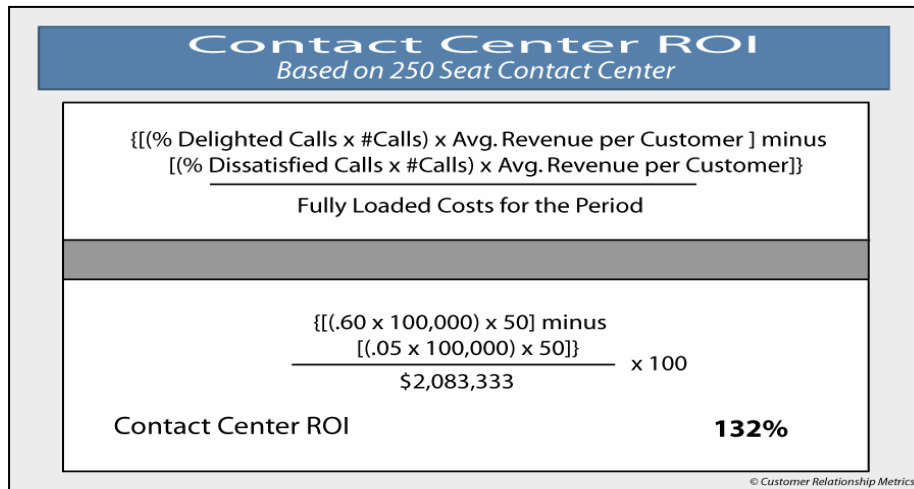
By using the P&L statement below that was created for a 250 seat contact center, you can easily see the impact the voice of the customer can have on the value of the center and ultimately the company. Using this type of reporting and analysis, you can easily communicate to executive management the value of coaching and training in your center and the impact of greater or poor service delivery.

Profit and Loss Statement Based on 250 Seat Contact Center	
Income (Value of Delighted Callers)	
Calls per month handled by CSRs	100,000
Monthly Customer Value	\$50
Center Asset Base Control	\$5,000,000
*60% Delighted by experience (protected)	\$3,000,000
*5% Dissatisfied by experience (lost)	\$250,000
Monthly Revenue Ownership	\$2,750,000
Cost of Goods Sold	
Monthly Contact Center Budget	\$2,083,333
Net Income	\$666,667

\*1% increase/decrease in service delivery ± \$50,000

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In conjunction with the P&L, the below formula can be customized to your environment. An ROI should be applied to the center, to each team and even to the individual agent. Use the ROI to prove the value of your coaching and training programs, the value of technology investments, and everything else that is ultimately felt by the customer.



As you can imagine, as you use the VOC program in your center and for the training and coaching programs, the percentage of delighted callers will increase and the percentage dissatisfied callers will decrease. Therefore your ROI will be positively impacted as long as you invest your resources wisely. It is with these numbers that you will be able to armor yourself when management and the CFO come calling. In the end, you will have more satisfied customers, agents, and the voice of the customer will be loud and clear to your management team.

Dr. Jodie Monger is the President of Customer Relationship Metrics, ([www.metrics.net](http://www.metrics.net)) and is a pioneer in customer satisfaction research for the contact center industry. Prior to creating Metrics, she was the founding Associate Director of Purdue University's Center for Customer-Driven Quality. Her expertise is working with organizations to help capture and analyze the voice of their customer.



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\*\*For more information or to schedule an interview contact Jim Rembach at 336-288-8226.