Inter actions

Callback – the science behind the art of customer relationships

This whitepaper addresses four critical areas to maximize the positive impact of Callback

- The core competencies required to successfully deploy Callback
- How key performance indicators (KPIs) impact Callback
- Workforce management considerations
- The impact Callback will have on existing technology

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Callback – the science behind the art of customer relationships

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A well-known authority on callback response technologies and cross-channel communications, Mr. Starcher stewards a team focused on monitoring new customer experience technology trends, impacts to business/call-center dynamics, and the psychology behind successful company and customer interactions. A devout proponent of the importance of a well-crafted callback strategy, his efforts have helped numerous companies enrich customer relationships, achieve greater customer loyalty, and grow brand equity.

When it comes to supporting a contact center, there's a reason you rely on your vendor's knowledge. Vendors have experience with the unique challenges technology may present to your business. Callback platforms are no different.

While the actual process of making a callback is not difficult, protecting the customer experience and delivering on proper expectations can often be tricky. To properly deliver on the promises Callback offers to both your customers and your operations, you need a solution that is built on years of experience coupled with the flexibility you need to customize it to your specific environment.

Why? Because Callback is more than simply processing a call back to the customer. It has the ability to enhance or degrade the customer's perception of your business. Customers can tell when a "feature" has been added to their experience that has more benefit to the business than it does for the customer. Take, for instance, the IVR. While it allows your business to properly segment callers and lower the overall cost of support, customers continually point to the IVR being a source of greatest frustration when interacting with a business.

When implemented properly, Callback is one of the few technologies that can leave an immediate, positive impression on your customers and your business. This whitepaper addresses the four critical areas you need to address to implement Callback for the maximum positive impact.

1. *What core competencies are required to deploy Callback successfully?*

2. *How does Callback impact key performance indicators (KPIs)?*

3. *Are there workforce management aspects to Callback I need to consider?*

4. *What impact will Callback have on existing technology?*

1

What Core Competencies Are Required to Deploy Callback Successfully?

Where do you take your car for service? A mechanic. Why? Because when we have a problem with our car, we want someone who has experience working with cars and understands engines and transmissions to fix it.

The same goes for Callback. Only instead of engines and transmissions, you need to understand virtual queuing concepts and predictive algorithms.

Virtual Queuing

At the foundation of an exceptional Callback strategy is a basic, yet broad understanding of queuing and how contact centers use queues to manage their business. When deploying Callback, it is imperative that the systems integrate with your current queuing approach rather than requiring wholesale changes or worse, dedicated resources.

This is best accomplished through the use of virtual queuing. Virtual queuing leverages your existing agent queues to track a customer's callback request. When done properly, this strategy allows your center to manage both holding calls and callback requests together for the same agent resource.

An effective Callback strategy takes advantage of your existing queuing approach. You have enough on your plate managing the day-to-day changes required to meet service level targets; the last thing you need is to duplicate the effort. Callbacks need to be presented to the originally intended agent group resource to avoid complicating your center's configuration further.

Predictive Algorithms

Layered on top of virtual queuing is a set of predictive algorithms that are designed to handle the complexities of contact center operations. The building block to these algorithms is the ability to calculate an Expected Wait Time (EWT).

What's important here is that no two queues behave the same, which requires Callback to have the ability to customize the EWT calculation associated with each individual queue. Callback should support configuring the way in which EWT is communicated to the customer as well.

Another predictive algorithm required for Callback to be effective is the Per Call Wait Time (PCWT). Unlike the EWT, which is calculated at the beginning of a call and only once, the PCWT is a value that is constantly changing and estimates the amount of time left before an agent will answer the call.
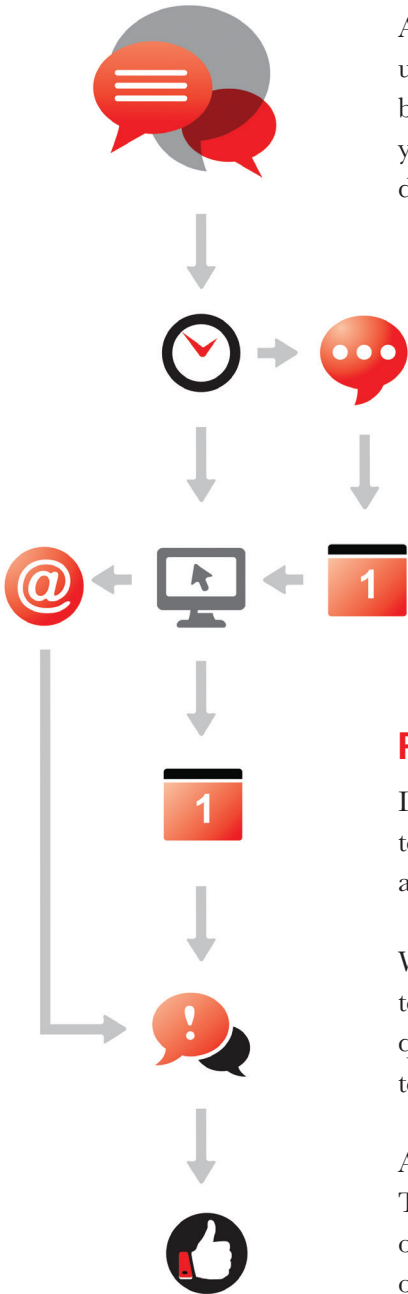
Experience

Perhaps the most important competency required to get the most out of Callback is simply having experience that only comes from deploying Callback hundreds of times. While contact center technologies often look the same, the approach to managing a center often varies, which will have an affect on how well Callback performs.

In order to deliver the optimal customer experience, Callback needs to be integrated into your business processes as well as your technology. Business rules (features, functions, and processes pre-bundled and delivered as part of the solution) allow you to benefit from previous deployments of Callback. Ergo, the more companies using a particular Callback solution, the more business rules you would expect the solution to offer. In the end, when it comes to Callback and the customer experience, experience counts.

2 How Does Callback Impact Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)?

If you run a contact center, you probably have dashboards similar to those used on the USS Enterprise. Understanding how Callback will impact your current KPIs and what new KPIs are required for you to start tracking is crucial to the daily management of your operation.

Your center runs on statistics. Managers are measured by statistics like Service Level, ASA, and Abandons while agents are measured against Occupancy and Handle Times. Tracking and reporting on important KPIs are the lifeblood of the contact center and are often at the core to making important decisions throughout the day or week.

Understanding how Callback will impact your KPIs is crucial to gaining insight into how these metrics will change, how you can interpret these changes, and, more importantly, how your day-to-day management decisions may have to change.

Service Level

There is a direct correlation between the amount of time a customer waits on hold and their overall satisfaction levels. Service Level measures the correlation between hold time and customer satisfaction, and Callback removes the hold time experience for customers.

As a result, measuring the "non-hold" time for customers is an unfair representation of how well your center is performing. Your Callback system should take this into account and ensure that your service level calculations are positively impacted.

Agent Handle Time

There is also a direct correlation between hold time and the amount of time an agent takes to "handle" the call. Handle time typically represents the total time it takes an agent to manage an interaction.

Long hold times increase talk times as well as the duration of time an agent spends doing after-call work. A properly implemented Callback solution will reduce agent handle times as callers who receive a punctual Callback will behave as if there was zero wait time for them to speak with a representative.

While service level may be the single most important measurement of customer satisfaction when waiting on hold, after you provide the option to exit the queue and receive a callback, new expectations have been set with the customer that require more insight. Described below are three new KPIs that are critical to measure after you have deployed Callback.

Reconnect Rate

The percentage of Callbacks successfully reconnected with the customer, measured by each attempt, as well as a percentage of the total callback attempts.

Callback Hold Time

The amount of time a caller is on hold after the callback has been made and the caller is transferred to the queue – this assumes a predictive callback mode.

Callback Punctuality

This measures how closely the callback was made to the caller within an acceptable range of the quoted estimated wait time (EWT).

When blended with your existing KPIs, these statistics allow you to make operational decisions that take into consideration every aspect of your customer's experience. We encourage you to get familiar with these statistics and how you will operationalize them.

3 Are There Workforce Management Aspects I Need to Consider?

In a nutshell, the answer is yes. On the surface, it may seem that Callback is simply an agent augmentation strategy; however, Callback should provide you with strategies for managing your operations as you get close to the end-of-day and for periods where your center is closed (after-hours).

Most Callback solutions have at least two operation modes: on and off. But what happens if you want to make operational changes to react to the changing conditions that naturally occur in contact centers?

Consider the following scenario: the contact center experiences an unanticipated spike in call volume driving wait times to high levels. Simply offering a first-in-first-out (ASAP) Callback may compound the call demand you are experiencing, creating an ever-growing wait time condition.

Having "smart" op modes allows the Callback system to automatically respond to high wait time and react in a way that would benefit the contact center. A better alternative is to only offer scheduled callback options encouraging callers to push demand to another part of the day or week providing a relief valve to the center.
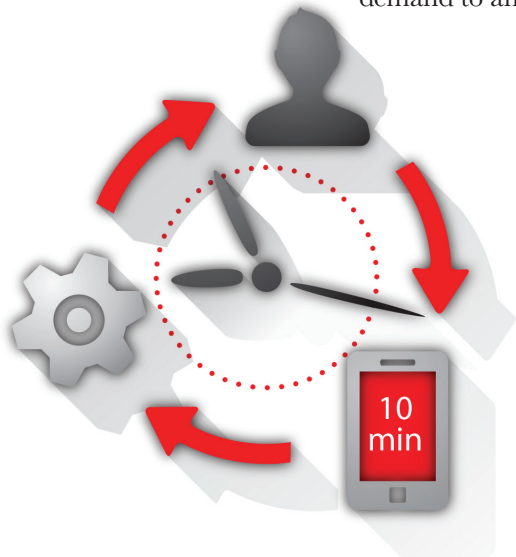
Another potential scenario to consider is when the wait time exceeds the amount of time left in the day. Prior to implementing Callback, the strategy to stop routing calls to queue and play a "we are closed" message at a particular point in time (i.e. 9:00 PM) allowed you to control the amount of demand your agents need to satisfy the end of their shift.

But what happens at 8:55 PM when the wait time is 10 minutes? Do you really want to set an expectation with a customer that an agent will call them back after your center has closed?

Callback systems should have the capability to determine when the wait time for a particular caller exceeds the amount of time left in the day and offer to schedule a callback during normal business hours the following day. This not only protects your staff from having to work past the end of their shift, but it also lowers the customer's overall effort to satisfy their needs.

The Callback system should be able to automatically manage the customer experience based on the current conditions.

Traditionally, a customer hears a "we are closed" message when they call your center after hours. While the message offers important pieces of information such as your normal business hours, it potentially frustrates customers as it requires them to call back in during your normal business hours.

Callback can also offer a better experience for callers after hours. Rather than playing a message and hanging up on the customer, offer them a scheduled callback for a future time during hours of operation. Not only can this particular mode assist with your contact center after hours, but it can also relieve the contact center of the morning bubble caused by callers who attempted to call the previous evening.

You want a Callback solution that can properly respond to your needs dynamically, and you need this capability "baked in" based on the experience of hundreds of contact centers using the solution. When it comes to the customer experience, experience counts.

4 What Impact Will Callback Have on Existing Technology?

The devil is always in the details, and implementing Callback is no different. Whether done properly or improperly, Callback will have an affect on your routing, queuing, and agent desktop platforms.

Too often, we see Callback solutions pieced together using a voice app, some dialer functionality, and some duct tape. This shows little regard to the challenges that managing a separate queue of callback requests presents to your routing applications, your queuing applications, and your agent desktop application.

Routing Applications

You depend on the success of your IVR and routing applications to properly identify the customer, their need, and the agent group that is best equipped to serve them. When you introduce Callback, you interrupt the data exchange between these two technologies at the time the customer is actually presented to the queue.

Here are some questions around your routing applications we suggest you explore prior to turning Callback on in your center:

- What data is the routing application expecting to receive in order to route the call appropriately?
- Once a callback has been made, how will this data be associated with it?
- Are there special routing applications or steps that need to be created to attach data collected from the original inbound interaction to the outbound call
- How will your routing application identify the proper queue to which in send the call?

Queuing Applications

Queuing applications can exist as part of your routing applications or completely outside of them. Regardless, callbacks require special treatment in order to connect the customer with the right agent as quickly as possible. The primary mechanism to accomplish this is through priority queuing.

Our suggestion is that you don't give into the temptation of treating callbacks like second-class citizens. The only calls that should be given priority over callbacks are life-threatening emergency calls (i.e. gas leaks, people who have fallen and can't get up). If the queue doesn't take these types of calls, callbacks should be given priority over all other callers in the queue.

Tip: Do not setup special agent groups, skills, or queues for callbacks. You will lose all efficiencies gained with proper virtual queuing of both holding calls and callbacks. The best approach is to queue both types of calls to the same group of agent resources.

Agent Desktop Applications

Once a customer has reached the agent, the agent has about two seconds to make a lasting positive impression. It starts with a personalized greeting that includes the customer's name. This information is generally provided to the agent via their agent desktop application and is collected in the IVR as part of the inbound interaction the customer had with your center.

Callback should not interrupt this process. Data collected during the original inbound interaction with the client should be persisted through the callback process and populate appropriately on the agent's desktop.

Conclusion

Callback is one of the few technologies that can leave an immediate, positive impression on your customers about your business. On a customer level, frustration is taken out of the equation by employing a Callback solution which provides your customers with the option to exit the queue and receive a callback. By eliminating wait time, you're showing respect for their time. The result is a more productive interaction and a more positive customer experience, which contributes to a higher level of brand loyalty and recommendation. Never forget, a great experience is often shared, and a bad experience is echoed through the canyons.

Your Callback solution needs to give back to your business-operation efficiencies such as the ability to better manage peak, unexpected, or end-of-day call volume and intelligently perform when your business is closed. Callbacks require special treatment; they're not call-you-when-I-have-a-chance mechanisms. To your customers, Callbacks are your commitment to return their call when, where, and how they've designated and with an agent who can deftly and quickly answer their question or resolve their issue. So, make them a priority. And remember, when planning a Callback solution, details, processes, and proven experience matter!