

Raising the status of outbound dialling in contact centres – a two-point plan, from Puzzel

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Outbound dialling sometimes has a dubious reputation but used properly, is a powerful outreach tool. The trick is to embed it firmly into agent culture and the customer journey – Christian Thorsrud at Puzzel explores the options

Whatever way you look at it, traditional outbound dialling has received bad press over the years. From simple calls for contact list updating, surveys or verification services to hard-sell telemarketing, sales or fund-raising calls, customers often dread outbound dialling, complaining of time-wasting at best, harassment at worst and of course “silent calls” where agents aren’t connected to destination numbers quickly enough, resulting in a silent call.

However, it is a very different story for the organisations using outbound today. FiveCRM cites five vital benefits of ‘outdialling’ as a valuable outreach tool,(i) particularly when put into the hands of the contact centre. Far more cost-effective than hiring traditional outbound sales teams, a contact centre set-up has the potential for more predictable overheads than travelling salespeople. Furthermore, contact centres can reach a far larger geographical area more quickly and connect with far more people in a single day than a field sales team ever could.

So, why the disparity of opinion between contact centres and those on the receiving end of outbound dialling and what can be done to close the gap? Essentially, it’s a case of joining the dots between agent culture and technical innovation. It’s also time to raise the status of outbound dialling from tactical, second-class citizen to strategic enabler of a first-class customer experience.

Step One: Take the right approach

Far too often, agents make a half-hearted attempt at outbound dialling without any real thought behind it and then wonder why it doesn’t work. Consider these three steps: you might think them logical and simple, but you’d be surprised how few organisations actually take the time to follow them:

- Be prepared and professional - understand the reasons for outbound dialling and establish the end results you’re aiming for. For example, if it is straight sales, ask yourself how many calls you will need to make the campaign successful and financially viable. Know your audience: find out the name of the person you should speak to – ‘proprietor’ or ‘managing director’ is just not acceptable! Then, call at the right time – when people are more likely to answer the phone ie. not during meal times. Finally, schedule agent breaks and training during quiet times to maximise productivity and campaign results
- Measure what you do and act upon it – Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are there for a reason but they need to be actively monitored and adapted to changing customer and business requirements. Make them relevant and use the results to plan for the future
- Reward and train agents – they’ll work harder if you do. However, be sure to set realistic targets and incentives for agents in the short, medium and long-term, with something they actually want (within reason) to keep them motivated. Never under-estimate the importance of good, ongoing training.

Help agents to understand the customer information being presented to them so they keep preview times to a minimum and keep human interactions to a maximum.

Step Two: Make technology work for you

Now you have established the right culture, take a closer look at the technology underpinning your contact centre. It could be the perfect opportunity for a complete refresh. As we all know, automated cloud-based solutions bring a series of significant benefits: including preview, predictive and power modes for outbound dialling activities; skill-based routing to accelerate first call resolution rates; integration with databases and CRM systems and support for new communications channels. Furthermore, efficient blending of inbound and outbound calls increases agent productivity, streamlines staffing and improves customer service. The most recent innovations in outbound dialling take these benefits to the next level through:

- Efficient call scheduling - if customers do not have time to take or finish a call, agents can arrange a future outgoing call at an agreed time. Customers can also request callbacks online, specifying both a day and time for the call. At the scheduled time, the same agent is called as soon as they are available, and on answering, the destination number is called
- Easier integration of data – the flexibility of the latest technology enables data to be imported easily from CRM solutions, databases and campaign management systems. At the click of a mouse, customer contact details on imported lists can be added, deleted or edited without having to de-duplicate external lists prior to import. This saves time and guarantees the latest customer data is always used
- Relevant reporting – different metrics are often applied to outbound activity, however, the most important are the most relevant to your campaign. These are likely to include the success or hit rate ie. the number of connected calls that lead to a conversation and the outcome of those calls such as sales (conversion rates), agreed call backs or no further interest. Quality reports are more relevant than simply counting volumes.

Running an effective and profitable outbound campaign is about combining skilled, dedicated people with efficient technology and giving agents the right tools to do their job. It might be time to re-assess your own approach to people and technology with this simple two-point plan. Be ready for the outbound challenge!

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About Puzzel

Puzzel builds on 20 years' heritage. It was one of the first pioneers to develop a cloud-based contact centre. Puzzel also encompasses leading mobile messaging and mobile payments to deliver a flexible and customisable customer interaction platform to meet the needs of today's omni-channel and mobile environments. Puzzel can be adapted to accommodate from one to several thousand agents using any device, in any location and integrates with multiple applications seamlessly.

Headquartered in Oslo, Norway, Puzzel employs people who are all passionate about delivering innovative customer interaction solutions for contact centres and mobile environments.

For more information please visit PUZZEL (<http://www.puzzel.com>)

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(i) FiveCRM (<https://fivecrm.com/5-crucial-benefits-of-outbound-calling>)