THE 7 DEADLY SINS
OF CONTACT CENTERS

Is Your Contact Center Guilty?

Just like the humans who run and staff them, contact centers have their "vices" and can fall victim to the 7 Deadly Sins, resulting in customer service hell. Learn how to avoid these common struggles and give your customers an experience that's a little bit of heaven instead.

1. LUST

def: intense desire

The Sin

Every time members of your staff complain about your current phone system, you find yourself desperately longing for a better way to manage your contact center. You dream of a single system that simplifies daily tasks – like transferring data between different systems or manually pulling information to run reports. Or a system where adding new employees wouldn't be such a pain. You've heard that cloud-based solutions can help with these things, but you're afraid to make the move. Whether it's because your IT department insists on staying put or because the legacy framework is just ingrained into your call center, you've always used an on-premise system which makes cloud-based solutions feel foreign and unknown. So instead of digging in to find a system that can address your needs, you just spend your days lusting for something shinier.

The Salvation

There's no requirement to dive in head first with a good cloud-based provider. Find one that best fits your needs or take baby steps by leveraging hybrid solutions. You can develop a "committed relationship" and, with features like the ability to add licenses as you need them, you can move it along at your own pace by easily migrating departments, teams or locations in small batches onto your new software.

That single system you dream of? The flexibility to add new staff with ease? These features can easily be a reality with the cloud. Integrations between cloud-based systems are often pre-built or easier to facilitate. Look for providers that offer open APIs and robust developer tools which allow you or a third-party developer to create an integrated or customized solution that will fulfill your dreams. Once you've implemented a cloud-based solution that removes the roadblocks in your processes, your staff can focus on their most important task: serving your customers.

2. GLUTTONY

def: over-indulgence to the point of waste

The Sin

Overspending on your communications system is a form of gluttony that manifests itself in increased costs, extra equipment and the additional manpower needed to maintain everything. In general, on-premise systems require significantly more on-site equipment, (e.g., servers and other hardware) which demand upfront investments in both capital and human resources. But it's not just your system that can cause you to overspend. If your company employs seasonal staff, deals with dramatic call volume fluctuations, or is rapidly growing, you've likely been forced to buy extra licenses and equipment upfront to support those growth spurts. While these extras might be used for a time, they can sit around unused for weeks-to-months on end, collecting dust and wasting money - an inefficient and expensive way to run a contact center.

The Salvation

Put the brakes on right now. The beauty of the cloud is that it usually allows you to operate on an operating expense (OpEx) model instead of a capital expenditure (CapEx) model. Typically, phones or contact center software seats can be added as you need them, which allows you to stop paying upfront for capacity that you won't use for months, yet still affords you the ability to easily scale when needed. This will help reduce your long-term total cost of operations and moderate cash flow. While this is beneficial for any business, it's particularly valuable for rapidly growing and seasonal businesses such as hospitality and financial services, which would otherwise be hemorrhaging unnecessary cash on what-ifs.

While more common with on-premise systems, overbuying can happen in the cloud as well. Using cloud-based systems to fill your every need without a clear overall process plan can result in a patchwork of providers that may or may not work together to cover all the functionality required, or may not bring you any additional operational efficiencies.

Carefully vet your potential cloud vendors to find one that can provide the features you need within one system, or whose software can easily integrate with systems you may already have in place.

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3. WRATH
def: extreme anger

The Sin

Hell hath no fury like a customer scorned. Nothing will drive a customer from irritated to incensed faster than unfriendly, unknowledgeable or untrained agents. You may have a great product, but if the person who answers the phone is short, rude or doesn't have the resources to resolve customer issues, there will be more problems after the call than when it started. The worst part -- both the customer and the agent will end up feeling disgruntled or angry. Agents who don't feel like they have the tools, knowledge or training to easily do their job will harbor their own "wrath," which is likely a contributing factor to the initial poor customer service and is apt to perpetuate a vicious cycle of bad experiences for everyone involved.

The Salvation

Quell the potential for wrath before it even starts in a few simple ways:

1. Start with your staff. Your customer service team is the front line responsible for your company's reputation, so hire with that thought in mind. Would you put a new, inexperienced employee in front of your top client? Probably not. Instead, you'd send the employee who is well-trained, has a good attitude and knows your product inside and out. The best customer service reps are skilled problem solvers who are crucial to your sales and customer loyalty efforts. In order to hire the right people, first know your customer, what they want and what challenges they may encounter with your product. Be strategic about whom you hire and how you communicate the importance of their role in your organization's success.

2. Invest in their training. Make sure your staff has the tools, information access and authority they need to truly solve customer problems. This is where excellent contact center software can help transform a mediocre agent into a top performing agent, which can result in the difference between angry or happy customers. Features like effective call routing, supervisor queue monitoring, and integration with your customer relationship management (CRM) can provide agents with the data and tools needed to do their job with ease.

4. PRIDE

def: believing to be better and more right than others

The Sin

As it turns out, the traditional approach of measuring customer service performance may not be so right after all. Contact center managers often take pride in cutting average talk time down as much as possible or pounding out an ever-increasing number of outbound calls - but that's only part of the picture. Your customers don't care about the fact that your average talk time was only two minutes if their problem wasn't solved or if they sat on hold for 20 minutes to get there. That means you need to not just factor in traditional metrics, but also what impact they're having on customer satisfaction, call resolution, customer loyalty and sales opportunities.

The Salvation

Swallow your pride and take a broader look at your metrics. Today's best contact centers view metrics more holistically, with customer experience driving the stats that really matter. A low average talk time doesn't necessarily mean a more successful call. Instead, what can be more meaningful is looking at the call time in combination with the hold time, if there was a first call resolution, and how the customer responded to a post-call survey or if an additional outcome occurred like an extra purchase. When you look at the data collectively, you may find that you want your agents to spend more time on the phone to thoroughly address a customer's concern because it eliminates follow-up calls, produces higher customer satisfaction scores or offers upsell opportunities.

Consider bringing these metrics to the top of your contact center analytics:

1. Transfer rate. Ideally, your calls or processes will direct customers to the best-suited agents right away, meaning customers will get fast, effective answers without being transferred at all. If transfer rates are high, it's time to re-evaluate your IVR menus and call routing practices.

2. Employee satisfaction scores. Disgruntled agents can affect the service that customers receive. Invest in tools and training programs that give staff the information and resources they need to succeed.

3. First call resolution. Resolving customer problems in a single call can save both customer time and staffing resources. When you make this metric a priority, it's easier to see where your process needs to improve to make every call a one-time occurrence.
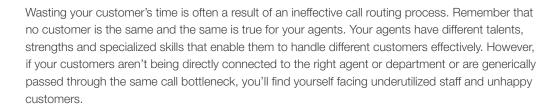
Look for contact center applications that provide in-depth reporting functionality so you can tie call metrics to company performance data. This will allow you to see how factors such as call times are impacting repeat calls (what is that costing you?) or customer attrition (what is THAT costing you?) and lead to a better gauge of your bottom line.

5. SLOTH

def: laziness; not using one's talents/gifts

The Sin

Taking too long to get customers the answers they need or sending them through hoops to get it can be a killer. Based on a 2015 survey conducted by ShoreTel and Instant.ly, 25 percent of customers will only wait on hold for up to 5 minutes and 57 percent feel that lowering hold times is the biggest area in which businesses could improve customer service.

Wasting your customer's time is often a result of an ineffective call routing process. Remember that no customer is the same and the same is true for your agents. Your agents have different talents, strengths and specialized skills that enable them to handle different customers effectively. However, if your customers aren't being directly connected to the right agent or department or are generically passed through the same call bottleneck, you'll find yourself facing underutilized staff and unhappy customers.

The Salvation

Your contact center software can go a long way toward solving this complex trap by properly routing calls to the agent best equipped to deal with the situation, and by helping you to manage call volumes in ways that minimize bottlenecks. Accurate call routing is essential to cutting down hold times, increasing first call resolutions and avoiding "pass the caller" syndrome.

Look for a solution that offers integrated reporting so that you can start by evaluating what customers are really calling in about. Then, reconstruct your phone menus and call flows to facilitate faster, easier access to the most appropriate call center agent.

Conducting routine customer satisfaction surveys will help you gauge the effectiveness of your new processes and identify weak spots earlier, so you can fine-tune your process and maximize both employee productivity and customer success.

6. GREED
def: excess desire for material possessions

The Sin
Greed can be particularly problematic for outbound call centers, where quantity over quality can often be the primary driver and measure of success. That can mean quantity of leads, quantity of calls placed, quantity of touches to a given prospect – whatever it takes to make more money and get more business. Unfortunately, more-More-MORE doesn't always translate to higher customer conversion rates or increased engagement if the customer experience is sacrificed in the process. Plus, putting "more output" ahead of all else can pose regulatory or compliance risks…something you definitely don't need or want.

The Salvation
Replace the desire for MORE with a desire for BETTER. Start with contact center technology that facilitates effective campaign management and integrates with your CRM as a way to ensure data integrity. Instead of focusing on calling as many leads as possible, try focusing on qualifying leads further and having meaningful conversations that lead toward your ultimate goal of conversion, retention or other engagement that leave the customer wanting to further the relationship. Your team could end up placing fewer calls, but if they're calling the right people at the right time, you'll be more likely to win the business.

If you're doing any outbound telemarketing, updated TCPA regulations should also be considered. Your contact center system provider should not only understand the regulations, but also offer tools or processes in their product to help you abide by them - particularly if you're in a highly regulated industry like financial services or health care. Start by adding compliance standards that you may be required to follow, such as PCI, SOX or HIPAA, to your vendor checklist to ensure you cover your bases in terms of compliance and quality control.

7. ENVY

def: discontent toward someone's traits, status, abilities

The Sin

When buying software, t's easy to assume that a longer feature list must mean a better solution. This can be especially true for smaller or mid-sized companies that can feel pressured into buying more functionality than necessary in an effort to keep up with "the big guys." However, seeking and overbuying complicated features that you and your staff will rarely use is much like that fancy laptop you bought because all that memory and processing speed was what everyone else was buying at the time. In reality, you only use it to stream television shows, surf the web and do some basic word processing and as a result, probably spent more than you needed to. The 80/20 Rule applies when it comes to software in that the majority of the features are used only by power users, which likely won't be most of your staff.

The Salvation

Instead of nit-picking over individual features, focus on the big picture of what you're trying to accomplish within your organization and how a given provider can help you achieve those goals.

For example, are you trying to close more sales on a tighter budget? Improve customer satisfaction scores? The best software will have configuration or customization capabilities to help you use a system in a way that's best suited for your company's goals and processes, instead of forcing you to adjust your processes to fit what everyone else is doing. You should carefully choose a system with your ideal processes, staff and customers in mind. If they only need a few simple features to be effective, that's what you should give them. This way you make the process as easy as possible, which will significantly improve user adoption and lead to a better customer experience.

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