

# The Paradoxes of Contact Centre Management Today

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - CCA MEMBERSHIP POLL 2008



### TRANSFORMATION OF CUSTOMER CONTACT

The economic downturn, the increasing demands of customers, the emerging world of social networks, the ever-present tension between cost-cutting and the delivery of excellent service are some of today's major challenges. Working in the midst of these challenges, and many more, are the managers and leaders who run contact centres. They steer their way through a myriad of threats and opportunities and their decisions impact thousands of people every day – the 24 members of the CCA Industry Council alone handle over 500 million contacts each year. What is it like to manage contact centres in an environment impacted daily by pressures and demands from within and without? How do those who guide the industry think customer contact is moving forward, and in what ways is it being held back?

The inaugural CCA Membership Poll was launched in September 2008 to bring the voice of the hard-working and committed contact centre professional to the fore; it provides insights into the work involved when managing contact centres today. The results, gathered from 266 managers **in over 200 private and public sector organisations**, reveal contact centre leaders operate in a world full of contradictions, where great hopes and harsh realities often collide. Fortunately, this challenge exists side by side with a strong commitment to improve and drive contact centres forward.

In this Executive Summary, some of the study's key findings are outlined around the theme of the paradoxes of contact centre management today. The industry is searching for a new model of management, aware of impending changes, but has yet to clearly identify the way forward.

CCA is grateful to Teleperformance and Confirmat for sponsoring the CCA Membership Poll. To access the full survey results, and to learn more about the industry leaders' views on a wider range of topics, please contact [ashley.reid@cca.org.uk](mailto:ashley.reid@cca.org.uk) and 0141 564 9800.

### THE OLD AND THE NEW: WHERE IS OUR INDUSTRY REALLY HEADED?

**69% agree:** The traditional manufacturing model used to manage call centres is outdated

Contact centre managers believe that our industry has evolved and that the traditional model of contact centres is outdated. The related paradox is that few organisations have yet been able to define and implement a viable alternative, with the promise of Next Generation contact centres, there exists more rhetoric than reality. Organisations that have experimented with new management models often complain of loss of cost control and revert to traditional approaches. The industry needs a new vision for effective management models for the future.

*The full report explores what managers from over 200 organisations think are the biggest challenges for the future of contact centre management*

### IS SELF-SERVICE THE ANSWER?

**87% agree:** In the future, more basic customer contact will be handled by self-service leaving agents to take complex or emotional calls. Agents will become knowledge workers

There is a common perception that the contact centre model will change based on a new era of increased self-service and increasingly skilled staff – the knowledge worker. Yet the Membership Poll highlights the fact that live calls are not necessarily declining. **In fact, 50% agree with the statement: In my experience, the impact of internet self-service in reducing call numbers is overstated.**



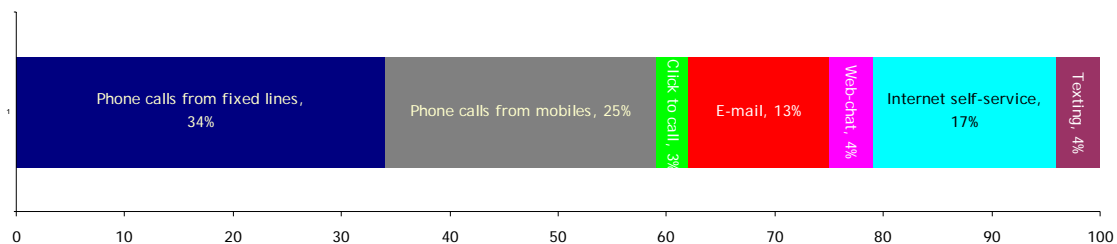


The full report highlights some of the new communication channels contact centre managers would like to see deployed to drive self-service

## PREDICTING CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

The CCA Membership Poll asked contact centre managers to predict the relative usage of channels in their organisations.

In 5 years what do you expect your contact profile to look like?



The expectation is that contact will still predominately be phone based, with e-mail accounting for just 13% of the total expected. Inevitably, it is difficult to predict customer behaviour, but we already know from consumer research that e-mail is the now the number 1 contact channel for customers dealing with organisations. Nearly three-quarters of the UK population is now online, so e-mail contact numbers may well grow faster than expected.

The full report details the ways in which customers are becoming more demanding:

- customer types
- customer behaviours (eg quicker answering, complaining to the regulator, asking for someone more senior)

## TECHNOLOGY: NEEDED AND TRUSTED?

**58% agree:** Our contact centre performance is hampered by older legacy systems which need to be upgraded

The clash of old and new is evident when contact centre management models are viewed. Yet, in the sphere of contact centre technology, this paradox is seen in particularly tangible ways. Management sees the potential of technology to aid them in their pursuit of excellent customer service. What this survey has revealed is that this potential is far from being realised and one of the barriers is that **53% agree that Technology suppliers are always trying to sell us software, etc. which is unnecessary.**

The full report outlines:

- technologies which contact centre managers would like to see deployed
- brand awareness for technology providers
- brand reputation of technology providers

## HUMAN RESOURCES: TICKING THE BOXES BUT LOSING THE PEOPLE

**82% agree:** We make every attempt to manage our people so they feel they have a long term career with our organisation

When it comes to human resources, much is being done well in today's contact centres: personal development plans are in place; effective training structures have been developed for agents, team leaders and managers alike; appraisal systems have been





successful; employee satisfaction surveys are being conducted. The paradox is that in spite of these robust HR practices, **attrition levels within our industry remain high – 36% for some types of agents within contact centres.**

The full detail of the perspectives of over 260 contact centre managers on:

- effective and new recruitment strategies
- approaches to training and personal development
- attrition levels for agents, team leaders and managers
- expectations of the changing industrial relations climate

## WINNING BOARDROOM SUPPORT

**93% agree: Contact centre performance is a key factor in building organisational brand trust**

One of the crystal ideas to emerge is that the contact centre is a key factor in building organizational brand trust. During these times when customers are more suspicious of organization brands, and trust is easily erode, the everyday conversations between agents and customers are key to trust. However, work by the CCA Industry Council has consistently revealed that many organisations' boards still undervalue the contact centre and expect it to consistently lower costs.

## IS THE MEDIA RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INDUSTRY IMAGE?

**94% agree: The industry as a whole needs to raise customer service standards**

The Contact Centre industry continues to get media coverage that is not always complementary but **only 38% of contact centre managers blame the media for this coverage.** The industry is working hard to improve standards but much of this good work and commitment is undone by poorly performing contact centres.

The full report explores what steps can be taken to improve the industry's image and which brands are most admired by customer contact managers

## THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN - MORE FOR LESS

**Given the economic downturn, if contact centres need to reduce operating costs by 20%, what action would you recommend they take?**

**Improve planning and forecasting ...97% agree**

**Have a more flexible workforce...94% agree**

**Reduce calls by increasing customer self-service on the web...88% agree**

Contact centre managers have clear priorities to improve planning and forecasting, workforce flexibility and promoting self-service as ways for dealing with the economic downturn. But an emerging paradox could be that more dramatic forms of cost cutting may be enforced on contact centre managers. Indeed **some 24% think that offshoring of contact centres will grow again and 42% think that outsourcing can be beneficial in terms of reducing costs.**

The CCA Membership Poll full report rates 8 options for actions to deal with the economic downturn as voted for by managers from over 200 organisations





## THE LIFE OF A CONTACT CENTRE PROFESSIONAL TODAY

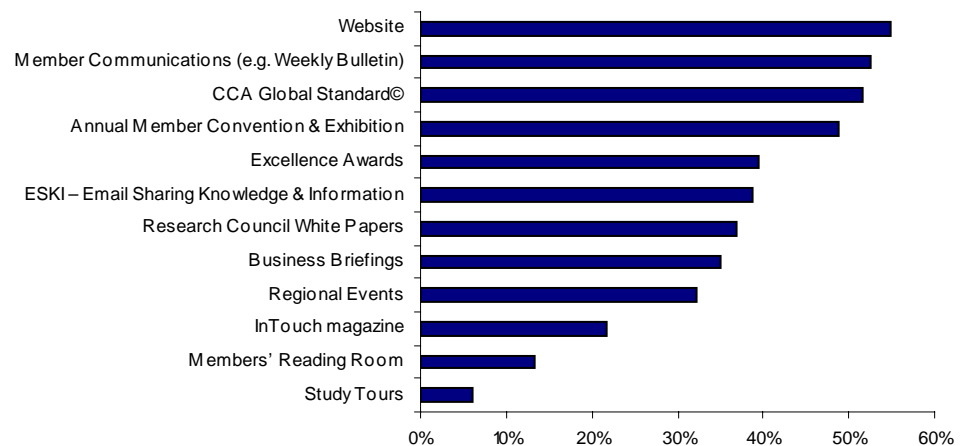
Contact centre professionals are talented and committed people who are often in the middle of successful careers. How do they work to gain promotion, what are their expectations for the number of years they will remain in the industry? What hours do they work and what are their dream jobs (if not as contact centre professionals)?

The full report answers these questions.

## CCA'S ROLE

The CCA listens carefully to the views of individuals from its 850 member organisations. The CCA Membership Poll is one part of this process. We believe that great customer service is even more necessary in a poor economic climate. CCA shares in the commitment to continuous improvement and assists customer contact professionals in their pursuit of excellent customer service. We use our resources carefully and our members rate our services as follows.

Which of CCA's products and services have been particularly valuable to you?



## CCA MEMBERSHIP POLL – THE FULL REPORT

Organisations can benefit from the opportunity to hear the thoughts of industry leaders on a range of key issues by purchasing the full report of the CCA Membership Poll.

- Actions that should be taken during an economic downturn
- Changing customer demands
- Best practice in recruitment, training and retention
- Trade unions' impact on everyday management
- Perceptions of technology supplier brands
- Top technologies for investment
- The career goals of managers and thoughts on promotion
- The future challenges of customer contact

To order your copy of the full report, or to register your interest, please contact [ashley.reid@cca.org.uk](mailto:ashley.reid@cca.org.uk) and 0141 5649800 or visit [www.cca.org.uk](http://www.cca.org.uk).

