Editorial Series

Utilizing intelligent call routing for high-interest-level consumers
Direct response callers require unique strategy

What do you think? Will direct response callers, if sent to a higher performing agent, convert at higher rates? And, would these callers be willing to stay on hold a little longer because they have a higher level of interest in the product they are calling about?

While working with one of our clients, we had a hunch DR callers would indeed remain on hold a little longer. And if this hunch was correct, we could then intelligently route the caller to the highest performing agents as they became available, increasing sales conversion rates without increasing abandon rates.

Direct response callers are different from most call-in consumers. They have a high level of interest in the product based on what they’ve seen, read or heard – certainly enough to compel them to pick up the phone. But, unlike traditional phone product orders, a direct response sale is not a given. While some people may arrive in your call center ready to buy, most require additional information and some sales finesse before they decide to seal the deal.

That’s when your contact center agents become game changers. A good agent who understands the needs, motivations and reservations of the customer can mean the difference between a conversion and a lost sale. This is why it’s imperative to deliver each and every call to the most experienced agent. Fortunately, technology is allowing us to do just that. By intelligently routing calls to agents, companies can increase phone sales conversions and build greater brand equity.

Providing a potential customer a great phone experience

Targeted routing, also commonly referred to as intelligent routing, is the system of matching specific contact center agents with calls based on their training or proficiency for a particular type of call. For example, if there are 100 agents trained on a particular program, the 10 best agents in the group would be given priority over the other agents when a call comes into the center. This technology helps ensure the best agent available to handle a call is the one on the line. Take it one step further and couple targeted routing with real-time script on screen technology that tailors the script to the person calling, and you are very close to true one-to-one marketing.

The major benefit of targeted routing is connecting consumers with agents more adept at answering consumer questions and intuitive in addressing issues or reservations and removing any obstacles. By providing a potential customer a great phone experience with a confident, knowledgeable agent, you are more likely to convert a call into a sale. Additionally, superior call center experiences lead to better brand impressions – which lay the groundwork for future purchases and the most effective direct response sales tool of all: customer recommendations.

Each program has a set of metrics that are determined upfront by the client’s goals for a particular program. Depending on the program, these metrics could be a communicators ability to close a sale, upsell or cross sell, conversion rates, response rates, etc. However, targeted call routing is not a good fit for all campaigns. For example, it wouldn’t be a good fit for a client who has low hold times, meaning the person calling in won’t stay on hold for very long before hanging up. It’s also not a good tool for call spikes because we need to be able to answer all of the calls coming in.

A great example of how a targeted routing strategy helped increase sales conversions is a test InfoCision conducted with a direct response company specializing in selling portable heating units. The case study can be downloaded by going to www.infocision.com/companyinfo/resources. The company was generating roughly 200,000 inbound calls each month through print advertisements in national publications. InfoCision was one of three contact centers employed by the company to handle these calls – including the company’s own in-house call center. With conversion rates hovering around 22 percent, InfoCision decided to perform an in-depth analysis of the program to see where adjustments could be made to boost sales.

InfoCision began looking at call arrival patterns and quickly noticed a figure that stood out: above-average wait times. Callers were holding on the line longer without hanging up. InfoCision theorized that because callers had exhibited a high interest level in the product, they were willing to wait longer than the average hold time – approximately 45 seconds – before speaking with an agent (or communicator, as phone representatives at InfoCision are called). This discovery seemed to be distinct to direct response callers. It also indicated that
callers exhibited high enough interest levels that having the right agent on the line could make a difference in conversions.

**Route calls to top call center agents**

The decision was made to test targeted routing on the direct response company’s program in an attempt to improve conversions. InfoCision’s test program involved 650 communicators who took calls for three months. These communicators were selected for the program based on tenure and direct response training. The communicators also received specialized training on the client and the product – including product demonstrations, best practice call reviews, and intensive role playing. As they went to work taking calls, InfoCision monitored their numbers.

Communicators were ranked based on their sales conversion rates. These statistics were the driving force behind the integration of targeted routing technology. Using the ranking system as a base, InfoCision set parameters on its dialers to hold calls, if necessary, for communicators with the best conversions – distributing more calls to better performing personnel. While this was happening, arrival patterns and hold times were being constantly monitored. Wait time thresholds were adjusted as needed to prevent an increase in abandon rate.

**Higher conversion rates**

The objective of the targeted routing test was to boost sales conversions and the DR company’s return on investment without increasing InfoCision’s abandon rate. The test was a success on both counts. As a result of implementing targeted call routing, InfoCision was able to improve its conversion rate by 2.17 percent. Simultaneously – and more surprisingly – the abandon rate actually decreased by more than 9 percent.

With targeted routing, InfoCision’s conversion rate was higher than the competing call center and even several percentage points higher than the client’s in-house contact center. This test was the first time InfoCision used the targeted call routing strategy and, because of its success, has been rolled out successfully to other clients across industries – including all direct response clients.

**Targeted routing to the right agent**

When it comes to direct response calls, the voice on the end of the line can make a big difference. Because consumers call in with a high level of product interest already established, sometimes all it takes is a little extra skill and polish to move the customer toward a buying decision. Having a system in place to increase the likelihood your customer will talk to the most qualified agent also increases the likelihood you will convert the sale.

Through this test, integrating targeted call routing technology proved to be an effective method of increasing conversion rates. It also revealed that, with proper monitoring, targeted routing can assist in decreasing the number of abandoned calls. Ultimately, the potential benefits of targeted routing for companies can be many: additional sales, fewer hang-ups, enhanced brand value, and the marketing ripple effect of more positive customer experiences.

To download the targeted routing case study, please go to www.infocision.com/Companyinfo/resources

Dawn Keathley is director of new business development at InfoCision Management Corp.

InfoCision is a leading provider of contact center solutions for many verticals including direct response, consumer services, B2B, financial services, pharmaceutical and telecommunication, as well as providing inbound and outbound marketing for nonprofit, religious and political organizations. You can reach Dawn at Dawn.keathley@infocision.com

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