

Better customer service, improved staff morale and increased efficiency at Computeach

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Alison Whitehouse – Communication Centre Manager, Computeach

Computeach are the longest-established IT training company in the UK, with more than 40 years of experience in the industry. They provide innovative learning solutions to a wide client base which includes both individuals and companies – and consider themselves to be ‘an inspiration to people who want to change career or improve their job prospects’. With a combination of self-study material, classroom-based workshops and ongoing tutorial assistance, Computeach have helped thousands of people to realise their true potential - working to understand their training needs and then to develop and deliver the right programmes for them.

The company’s unrivalled level of service has led to accreditations and awards from many industry bodies, including recognition as a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner and a gold accredited Training Provider of the Institutue of IT Training. They are a recognised assessment centre for NVQ and SVQ awards and were also the first company of their kind to achieve the international quality standard ISO 9001 - subsequently achieving the new ISO 9001:2000 standard through a single audit. In addition, Computeach also carries the Investors in People accreditation, an accolade which recognises the efforts a company makes to improve performance through people.

Dedication not only to customer service but also to supporting their staff effectively is core to the Computeach business and their people always come first. It was this ethos, which led the management team to look at how technology, a subject with which their business is so closely linked, could also benefit their own employees.

Supporting staff and customers

A large proportion of the Computeach business revolves around providing IT training for individuals who want to equip themselves for a new career and improve their overall job prospects. As such, this means that their marketing activity is heavily driven towards individuals, rather than businesses. However, the company does not believe in cold calling as a means of contacting these potential customers - and instead prefers to market it’s services via television, the Internet and other advertising mediums. This activity is very effective and subsequently generates a significant amount of inbound enquiries, but it also generates a high volume of requests for ‘call backs’ from potential customers who would like more information.

As a result of this marketing strategy, Computeach need to have an efficient and highly trained customer service team who can deal with the inbound enquiries and also make outbound calls to these ‘warm’ potential customers. Sales Operations Director Andy Coleyshaw explains further:

“We knew that we needed to help our customer service team to be even more efficient and we were aware that a predictive dialler would achieve this. But there is far more to running a successful call centre operation than just call volume. From our point of view there were a number of negatives associated with going down the route of having a dialler. It’s all very well to improve efficiency and make more outbound calls per hour, but not at the expense of staff morale, legal compliance or customer service - or if it would affect our ability to managing the inbound calls properly as well.

We needed to find out more and so at this stage we took the somewhat unusual step of speaking to some of our industry competitors, with whom we have good business relationships. This process confirmed that a predictive dialler could definitely benefit our business considerably, if we could find the right one for our needs and if it was implemented correctly.”

Making the right choice

Once the decision was made, Andy then spoke with Computeach’s chairman and it was agreed that they would start to look for the right dialler for their business. This process took some 12 months and involved Andy, along with his communication centre manager Alison Whitehouse, visiting a selection of potential suppliers and seeing a number of demonstrations. It quickly became apparent that there were many options to choose from, but that a large proportion of these were ‘all singing, all dancing’ solutions which were outside of Andy’s budget - and which did many things that Computeach really did not require. So the challenge was to find a solution which was the right balance of cost versus functionality.

Having been through a lengthy investigation process, Andy spoke with his existing telecoms provider, to get their views. They recommended the Adaptive Predictive Dialler, so Andy went to see it in action at New Media Software’s offices in Eastleigh, Hampshire.

“It was very important to me that we made the right choice,” explains Andy. “So I took Alison, plus one supervisor and one of our customer service team members with me. We spent a full day on site and New Media Software allowed us to take a ‘hands on’ approach to the demo, which gave us the opportunity to try out different scenarios which we would come across in a live environment. From this, we were able to prove that the Adaptive Predictive Dialler would meet all of our requirements – and for the right cost. It was not the cheapest we considered, but was clearly the best value for money. It offered the perfect balance of doing what we needed it to, but still being financially viable for the business.”

Changing perceptions

The new predictive dialler was installed in June 2006 and went live after the customer service team had undertaken an extensive two-stage training programme. For Computeach, it was especially vital that everything worked properly. They were not dailling ‘cold calls’ from a database but were in fact contacting people who had already expressed an interest – so it was essential that these potential customers were handled efficiently. It would be simply unacceptable to call someone and for them to experience a ‘dead line’ when they answered the phone. Alison Whitehouse takes up the story:

“I was very suspicious to start with. As communication centre manager, the happiness of my team is equally as important as meeting my target call volumes. I had a concern that implementing a predictive dialler would cause problems with morale and could lead to us losing staff – something which we must avoid at all costs as recruiting good agents is not easy. The last thing we wanted was to upset staff and risk losing our valuable resource.

But I needn't have worried as the Adaptive Predictive Dialler has been an absolute godsend. Not only are we making more calls per day than previously, my team are not having to listen to an outbound dialling tone all day, which is a real benefit for them. It came at exactly the right time and has in fact dramatically improved morale rather than the opposite, which we had feared might be the case initially!"

It is clear that the decision to implement a predictive dialler has been a good one for Computeach and that the choice they made was the right one. As a company whose core focus is on the quality of their employee's working environment and on the customer experience, Computeach have seen that it is possible to implement this type of technology solution without any of the negatives which they previously believed might be associated with it. They have been very pleased with the overall service from New Media Software, as Andy commented:

"As with all technology implementations, it was not without its teething troubles, but where these occurred they were fixed quickly. New Media Software hand-held us through the process and worked with us through every stage, dealing with any issues that arose very well and very efficiently."

How it works

Alison has 19 agents in the main customer service team, which is based in Dudley, West Midlands. Their role is to set up appointments for the field-sales team by contacting the 'warm' prospects who have responded to advertising. There is also a team of eight telesales staff who target a slightly different audience to sell training packages via telephone – and a further six agents based in the Hammersmith office, who look after training requirements for individuals who are being funded by their employers.

Since implementing the Adaptive Predictive Dialler these teams have been able to undertake campaigns far more efficiently than was previously possible. Yet at the same time it has also made their lives – and the lives of the team managers – much easier. Outbound calling is now managed in a structured fashion and inbound calls are always prioritised. Once this has been done, no more outbound calls are presented to that agent until the inbound call is completed. In addition, for new agents who are still learning how to use the system, they are able to select an 'unavailable' status so that no incoming calls are sent to them while they get up to speed with using the outbound dialler. Alison concludes:

"The dialler enables us the ability to set the amount of calls per agent and to round up time duration. This gives us the flexibility to start off very slowly, which gives the team confidence in the early stages.

Now, even if we have staff on holiday or off sick, I can manage multiple campaigns effectively and still keep on top of everything because it's a much more structured approach. The dialler has been a real morale-boost for the team, to the extent that they now proactively come to me to ask for new campaigns to be set up. I don't know how we would manage without it!

Just one day after the second training session we were already running five campaigns simultaneously and using all of our available PCs. We have a great team here and the Adaptive Predictive Dialler is definitely an asset to the department - so we complement each other and the resulting benefits are huge."