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Building Competitive Advantage Through the Telephone: **Achieve More with Less**

Picture this scenario: A customer calls into a business for technical support. The customer is prompted automatically with a series of questions to get at the nature of their problem. The call is then transferred to an employee with the knowledge to address their question. After two rings, the employee picks up and handles the customer's issue. The customer hangs up-satisfied-thinking that he or she just dealt with a large customer service center. The reality is that the call was taken by an employee who was on the road, in route to another service call. That's the kind of functionality that the latest phone applications can deliver.


The latest telecommunications technologies have shifted the ubiquitous telephone from a simple facilitator of communication to a true business enabler-one that is becoming a key component of the competitive strategy of every small-to-medium business (SMB). Many companies are aware that deploying a phone platform through a call center is a great tool for customer acquisition. But what most do not realize is that even the smallest business can use new technologies to build customer loyalty and retention without a call center, using the existing talent and resources they already have in-house.

With Automated Call Distribution (ACD), an SMB can turn their workers into centers of opportunity. Callers can be directed straight to the knowledge resource that can help them as efficiently as possible, giving workers the ability to assist customers, answer their needs and engage in selling new business just as effectively as if they were a full-time customer support representative.

Add to that equation wireless and unified communication technologies, and an employee can be anywhere in the building or on the road, and an inbound caller can reach them directly through one number. The call will ring through to the employee's wireless handset or cell phone, with no noticeable lag in getting the customer connected.

Just the Beginning

But this is just the beginning of what can be accomplished with a mere telephone. Imagine this: An automotive repair shop has a service manager who spends an hour a day calling customers to let them know their car is ready. After implementing a new application known as Computer-Telephony Integration (CTI), a whole new way of working is implemented. Now, the computer system recognizes when a job has its status updated to "ready for pickup". Then, an automated call goes out to the customer to inform them that their car is ready.



CTI raises business productivity to a new level by integrating common software such as a CRM application and integrating it with a phone platform. With CTI, a customer service representative can pull up a customer record and dial their home phone number right from their computer. Or, when an inbound call comes in, the system can recognize the number and have all of the customer's files ready to access by the representative.

Measuring Success

But the real competitive advantage of the latest phone systems is not all customer-facing. To gain success, you must first be able to measure success. And new applications are available to enable you to measure everything from the performance of your phone system, to the performance of your employees, all right from any web-enabled device.

- How many calls are processed per hour, per day?
- Who's making inbound/outbound calls and for how long?
- How many times does the phone ring before it's answered, and how often is a customer put on hold?

These are just a few on the questions your company can answer with the right monitoring application. Management can pull up key performance data to adjust your phone system, retrain employees, or tweak internal processes as needed. It's the key to boosting customer service, enhancing productivity and minimizing cost in the most efficient manner possible.

The Right Foundation

These technologies can reinvent how you do business. But you must have a phone platform in place that is capable of supporting these new applications. Without the right foundation in place, you could create an integration nightmare as new software tries to run on a system without the bandwidth or sophistication to support it. Be sure to discuss with your IT staff or phone system vendor what it will take to get your phone system up-to-speed and ready to handle all the latest customer service, productivity and cost saving enhancements. Enhancements that will build your competitive presence in the marketplace.