CALL CENTER GLOSSARY

Abandoned Call/Contact. A call or other type of contact that has been offered into a communications network or telephone system, but is terminated by the person originating the contact before any conversation happens. In an outbound calling scenario, abandoned calls refer to connects that are disconnected by the automated dialer once live contact is detected and no agent is available to match up with the call.

ACS (Automatic Call Sequencer). A device for handling incoming calls. Typically it answers an incoming call, gives the caller a message and puts them on hold, signaling agents a call is waiting. It has no internal switching mechanism and does not affect the call in any way. It provides an indication of which call should be picked up next in order of arrival and keeps statistical information on the progress of calls. No agent statistics are provided.

Activity Codes. Codes entered by agents to indicate the type of contact handled. Also called wrap-up codes, these codes allow reporting by contact type.

ACD (Automatic Call Distributor). A specialized phone system used for handling many incoming calls. The ACD will recognize and answer an incoming call; will look in its database for call routing instructions. It will send the call to a recording or a voice response unit (VRU) or will send the call to an available agent according to the instructions for that call. An ACD will normally produce management information tracking both calls and agent performance.

Adherence. The term used to describe how well agents stick to their planned work schedules. May also be referred to as compliance.

Advanced 800 Services. A set of toll-free services named initially by AT&T that includes long-distance calls routing into an organization based on time-of-day, point of origin, or percentage allocation of call volume.

After Call Work (ACW). Work immediately following an inbound call or transaction. If work must be completed before agent can handle next contact, then ACW is factored into average handle time. Work may involve keying activity codes, updating database, filling out forms, or placing an outbound contact.

Agent. The person that handles calls in a contact center. Also referred to as a telephone service representative (TSR) or customer service representative (CSR).

Agent Group, Split Or Gate. A group of agents handling a specific type or group of calls or contacts.

Agent Occupancy. Generally a percent of logged in time that an agent spends in active contact handling states (i.e., on incoming calls, in wrap-up activity, on outbound calls).

Agent Status. The current work mode of the agent, such as Busy on Call, Available, Unavailable, After Call Work, Off-Phone Work, etc.

AHT (Average Handle Time). The amount of time an employee is occupied with an incoming contact. This is the sum of transaction time and wrap-up time.

All Trunks Busy (ATB). A state in which all trunks in a specific trunk group are busy. May occur when all trunks are actually occupied with calls, or when some portion of trunks are artificially blocked by system user in periods of understaffing to minimize number of calls in queue.

ANI (Automatic Number Identification). A series of digits received from one of two sources: the ANI received from a long distance phone company that may arrive over the D channel of an ISDN PRI circuit or on a dedicated single line before the first ring.

Area Code. A three-digit number identifying geographic areas of the United States and Canada. It permits direct distance dialing on the telephone system. Also known as Numbering Plan Area (NPA).

ASA(Average Speed Of Answer). The average wait in queue experienced by all callers to an ACD group during a specified period. It includes both calls delayed and those answered immediately in the calculation.

Automated Attendant. A device that answers callers with a recording, and allows callers to route themselves by dialing digits associated with menu choices.

Automated Greetings. The capability of an ACD or add-on system to allow an agent to record a greeting that automatically plays when call is answered. Also called voice-saver system.

Automatic Call Back. A feature of a telephone system that permits a caller to hang up and instruct the system to call back as soon as a busy station or trunk is free.

Auxiliary Work State. A work state other than actively handling calls. As an example, agents may go into an auxiliary work state to process paperwork or emails. Agents will not receive calls while in auxiliary work state.

Available Time. The period of time spent waiting to accept and/or busy on an inbound or outbound contact.

Average Delay Of Delayed Callers. Average wait in queue experienced only by those callers who are delayed. Does not include those calls that are answered immediately.

Average Delay To Abandon. Average time callers are held in queue before disconnecting (prior to agent answer).

Average Handle Time. The amount of time it takes on average to handle a contact to completion, including talk time plus after-contact work time. To calculate, divide the total seconds of work time by the number of contacts.

Base Staff. The minimum number of agents needed to provide service in a given period of time. Also called "bodies in seats". Does not account for non-productive work factors such as breaks, training, meetings, etc.
Beep Tone. A tone heard before a call arrives, also called a zip tone. Beep tones are sometimes used to announce that a call is being monitored.

Benchmarking. The process of measuring performance against some set standard. Benchmarking in the contact center industry refers to comparing demographics, processes, and service with other organizations to identify strengths, weaknesses, and improvement opportunities in one's own organization.

Blocked Call. A call that cannot be completed because of a busy condition.

Blocking. The inability to complete a connection between two points because of a busy condition in the pathway.

Business to Business. A term used in contact centers to represent the type of contact that is primarily to/from other business

Busy Hour. The two consecutive half-hour periods of a day in which the largest number of calls/contacts are offered.

Callback Messaging. A feature in which callers on hold can leave an oral message or their telephone numbers using the keys of a touchtone telephone pad for later callback from an agent instead of remaining on hold.

Call/Contact Blending. The process of combining the flow of inbound/outbound calls and other contacts such as email or web transactions to a set of agents. Contact blending can be accomplished manually or by means of automated systems that route the contacts to the agents capable of handling them.

Call Center. An operation with two or more persons handling incoming or outgoing calls. Call centers may be help desks, customer service centers, catalog sales centers, reservations centers, or telemarketing/collections operations.

Caller ID. A telephone network feature of the local telephone company by which the telephone number of the caller is passed to the called party.

Central Office. A synonym for switching center also referred to as a telephone exchange.

Completed Call/Contact. A contact that is handled to completion by an agent, or in an outbound dialing scenario, a contact that has been through maximum recycle attempts.

Conditional Routing. The capability of the ACD to route calls or contacts on an "if…then" basis. Routing conditions can include day of week, time of day, agent availability, type of call, service needed, etc.

Contact Management. Software applications and systems that keep track of all customer contacts for subsequent contacts and as an audit trail.

CRM. Customer Relationship Management. The strategy of identifying customer needs, improving customer interactions, and customizing contacts, sales approaches, and automation to provide optimum service to each type of customer to maximize the bottom line benefits to the organization.

Cross-Selling. The technique used by telephone representatives to sell an additional product or service while engaged in a customer contact.

CTI (Computer Telephony Integration). The linking of the computer in the ACD system to the computer which houses the company's database to permit faster and more efficient handling of calls. Screen pop is a function of CTI which can direct the data screen of the calling person's account to the terminal of the agent as the call is being routed there, saving the agent from having to identify the caller's account number, key it in, and wait for computer response. Also permits transfer of data screens to a second agent when a call is transferred and many other capabilities impossible with only one or the other system independently.

Customer Service Representative. A teleservice representative who handles customer calls and contacts including account inquiries, complaints, or support calls.

Database. Collection of data structured and organized in a disciplined fashion for quick and easy access to information of interest.

Data Directed Call Routing. A capability whereby an ACD can automatically process calls based on data provided by a database of information resident in a separate data system. For example, a caller inputs an account number via touch-tone phone. The number is sent to a data system holding a database of information on customers. The number is identified, validated and the call is distributed automatically based on the specific account type.

Data Mart. A small, single subject warehouse used by individual groups of users.

Data Mining. The automatic detection of trends and associations contained in a set of customer data.

Data Warehouse. Collection of physical data stores designed to present an historical perspective of events or transactions that occur in an enterprise.

Day Of Week Routing. The routing of calls to different destinations based on time of day. Generally used to route calls to alternate sites or automated systems on weekend days or holidays when agents may not be available at traditional destination.

Delay Or Queue Time. The time callers remain in queue waiting for an agent to become free. May include the time listening to the delay announcements, but does not include the time spent going through an automated attendant menu system selecting choices that result in direction of the call to a specific resource or agent group. This statistic is calculated by the ACD system and may vary among vendor products.

Delay Announcements. Recorded announcements played to holding callers containing information and requesting their patience in waiting for an agent.

Desktop Application. Computer software programs used to accomplish a variety of tasks. Word processors, spreadsheets, database, contact management and graphics programs are all examples of desktop applications

DNIS (Dialed Number Identification Service). DNIS is a feature of 800 and 900 lines that provides the number the caller dialed to the receiving switch. Using DNIS capabilities, one trunk group can be used to serve multiple applications. The DNIS number can be provided in a number of ways, in-band or out-of-band, ISDN or via a separate data channel. Generally, a DNIS number will be used to identify to the answering telephone system the "application" the caller dialed.

Double Jack. The act of plugging two headsets into one telephone set or workstation for the purpose of two persons listening to the same contact.

DTMF (Dual-Tone Multi Frequency). A method of signaling a desired telephone number by sending tones on a telephone line. Often referred to as touch-tone.

Economies Of Scale. The principle of gaining better efficiencies through larger group sizes. For example, twice as many calls does not require twice as many staff or trunks to handle because of inherent efficiencies of larger offered call loads and larger groups.

E-Mail (Electronic Mail). The transmission, electronically, of letters, memos and messages from one computer to another.

Erlang. A measurement of telecommunication traffic usage. One Erlang equals 3600 seconds of usage in a one hour period of time.

Erlang Models. A set of traffic engineering techniques utilized to determine numbers of facilities required in various telecommunications scenarios. Developed by Danish mathematician A.K.Erlang in early 1900s. Erlang B is used to determine required facilities in an "all calls cleared" situation such as automatic route selection in a PBX. Extended Erlang B is a modified technique used when there is measurable retry of calls taking place when calls are blocked. Erlang C assumes blocked calls will wait in queue and is therefore the Erlang technique used to determine staffing needs in a typical "hold for the next agent" contact center scenario.

Fax / Fax On Demand. Facsimile transmission is the process through which documents are scanned, digitally encoded, transmitted, and decoded for printing on the other end. Fax on demand is a system by which callers can request documents or information through use of a touch-tone telephone pad, and documents are faxed to numbers indicated by caller.

FTE (Full-Time Equivalent). Full-time equivalent person, equal to the number of total scheduled person hours divided by the number of hours per week which constitute a full-time person (e.g., 40 hours, or 35 hours). FTE may consist of several part-time individuals whose combined work hours in a week equal the full-time person, but may not incur benefits expenses.

Gate. An ACD routing division that allows contacts arriving on specific telephone trunks or certain transaction types to be answered by specific groups of employees. Also referred to as split or group.

Grade Of Service. The definition of service on telecommunications transmission facilities. Grade of service is typically defined as a "P" factor - the probability of encountering a busy signal on a trunk or group of trunks. For example, a P01 grade of service means that one percent of calls will encounter a busy signal.

Handled Call. A call that is answered by an employee as opposed to being blocked or abandoned.

Handle Time. The combination of conversation time and after call work time.

Help Desk. A call center typically set up to handle calls in support of a product or service. Used most often to describe the customer support operation of computer software or hardware suppliers.

Hit Rate. The number of connected contacts as a percentage of the number of attempts.

Home Agent. An agent that works from home or someplace else other than the actual contact center location.

Integrated Voice Response (IVR). See Voice Response.

Interflow. Calls that flow out of the ACD to another site, a voice mail system, or telephone number that is not part of the ACD environment. When an ACD group cannot handle all the calls coming in, the call can be manually or automatically inter-flowed to another site. This feature allows calls to be rerouted to a predefined destination

Intraflow/Overflow. Calls that flow between agent groups within an ACD. Typically, it is based in an effort to balance workload and minimize caller delay.

Invisible Queue. A situation in which callers are waiting and have no way of knowing how long the waiting line is.

IVR (Interactive Voice Response). A device which automates retrieval and processing of information by phone using touch tone signaling or voice recognition to access information residing on a server to give a response. The response may be given by a recorded human voice or a synthesized (computerized) voice. IVRs are used in applications such as "bank by phone" or "check on my order" which not only distributes information but collects transaction information as well.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI). The most critical measures of performance in any organization, typically productivity measures.

Key Telephone System. An arrangement of key telephone sets and associated circuitry located on a customer's premise that permits more than one telephone line to be terminated on one telephone instrument

KSA. Knowledge, skills, and attributes. The overall make-up of an employee from an educational/life experience background, specific skills and capabilities, and personality traits and attributes that may indicate potential success in a particular position or role.

LDQ (Longest Delay In Queue). The longest time a caller waited in queue prior to being handled. Represents the worst case during the measurement period. Longest delay to abandon measures the worst case for a caller who was not handled

Load Balancing. The process of balancing contacts between multiple sites, queues, or agent groups.

Look Ahead Routing/Queuing. The capability of a system to "look ahead" to evaluate the availability/condition of a trunk group or agent group before routing or overflowing a contact there.

Make Busy. The process of setting a trunk or trunk grup to return a busy tone to callers or make other communication paths or equipment unavailable. This technique can be used to downsize the number of incoming contacts to understaffed groups.

MBWA (Management By Walking Around). The common practice in contact centers of supervisors/managers physically walking through the center to observe contact handling and overall performance.

Monitoring. The practice of listening to agents' telephone calls to assess the quality with which the call is handled. Also called service observation. May be silent, announced, side-by-side, or recorded for later review.

Next Available Agent. The practice of routing the first contact in queue to the first available agent, maintaining an equitable workload among agents. If no queue exists, contacts are routing the agent idle the longest.

Non-Contact. An attempted contact that results in something other than a live answer (busy signal, no answer, automated answer, etc.)

Nuisance Call. The situation that occurs when a live contact is made with a potential customer, but no live agent is available to match up with the call, resulting in dead air space to the customer.

Occupancy. Generally a percent of logged in time that an agent spends in active contact handling (i.e., on incoming calls, in wrap up, on outbound calls).

Offered Call. A call that is received by the ACD. Offered calls are then either answered by a resource (handled) or abandoned.

Off-Peak. Periods of time other than the call center's busiest periods. Off-peak times are used to accomplish non-phone work in most centers. Term also used to refer to discount time periods by telecommunications carriers.

Outsourcing. Contracting with an outside company to handle some or all contacts with customers.

Overflow. Contacts that route from one place to another group or site. Intraflow is the term used to describe the routing of contacts to another group within the same ACD, while interflow refers to routing a contact from one ACD to another site.

Pacing Algorithm. A set of instructions used by an automated outbound dialer to determine when to initiate a call attempt. System can speed up the dialing speed when too many idle agents are detected, or slow down the pace if too many live answers are unable to be matched up with a live agent.

PBX. Private branch exchange. A private telephone exchange located on the user's premises and connected to the public network via trunks. (Sometimes called PABX where the A stands for "automatic.")

Peak Traffic. The highest volume load of traffic offered to a telecommunications system.

Percent Allocation. A contact routing strategy used by multi-site call center operations. Contacts in the network are routed to various sites based on user-defined percentages.

Predictive Dialer. A device used to automate the method of making outbound calls and directing them to an agent when a live person answers. Predictive dialing screens out other responses such as answering machines, busy signals or operator intercepts and records the results. Using mathematical algorithms, the dialer takes into account the number of available agents, the number of lines, talk time and the probability of call results to determine how many calls need to be made to increase agent productivity. Example applications of predictive dialing include collections and telemarketing.

Predictive Hang-Up. A call attempt initiated at a time when no agent will be available if a call is connected. The call attempt is aborted during the progress and before the customer answers.

Preview Dialer. A device that presents the account information and phone number on the screen to allow the agent to "preview" the information before instructing the dialer to dial (or not dial) the call.

Progressive Dialer. A device that presents the account information and phone number on the screen after the number is dialed. This dialer is more automated than a preview dialer but less automated than a predictive dialer.

PSN (Public Switched Network). The public telephone network which provides the capability of connecting any two telephones.

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Queue. The "waiting line" for delayed calls. A queue holds the call until an agent is available.

Random Call Arrivals. The normal way in which calls arrive in a call center. In statistical terms, the Variance to Mean Ration equals 1.

Real-Time Adherence. Measurement of how closely agents stick to their planned work schedule. Real-time statistics are available from the ACD to show the current state of any agent; these states can be compared to agent's schedule to determine adherence at any point in time.

Recorded Announcement. An announcement heard by callers while waiting in queue. May provide general information about products or services, remind callers what information to have ready, or provide estimate of wait time and a better time to call back.

ReDial. The act of dialing a telephone number for a second, third, etc. time after the initial attempt.

Remote Agent. An agent physically located outside the contact center. These agents are usually connected to the center on an as-needed or scheduled basis to supply additional answering capability. The agent's equipment is connected to the center using telecommunications links providing the voice and data pathways.

Response Time. In a data system, the elapsed time between the end of transmission of an inquiry message and the beginning of the receipt of the response message measured at the inquiry originating station.

Ring Delay (Delay Before Answer). A setting that can be made on the ACD-PBX that adjusts the number of rings before the system automatically answers the call. When calculating trunk-holding time this delay time must be included for a true total trunk holding time.

Schedule. A record that specifies when an employee is supposed be on duty to handle contacts. The complete definition of a schedule is the days of week worked, start time, break times and durations (as well as paid/unpaid status), and stop time.

Schedule Exception. Any activity not planned in an employee's work schedule, including meetings, training sessions, unscheduled breaks, absenteeism.

Scheduled Callback. A redial established for a specific time in the future

Screen Monitoring. An automated monitoring system capability that allows a supervisor/manager to simultaneously see an agent's screen activity.

Screen Pop. Any technology, including IVR, ANI, or CTI, that presents corresponding data on the computer screen simultaneously with the incoming call.

Script. The written words and logic to be followed in the handling of a contact that will assist the agent in maintaining focus on the content of the contact

Service Level. Speed of answer goals that are often expressed as the speed of answer to be attained or as some percentage of calls to be answered within some number of seconds (e.g., 80 percent of call answered within 30 seconds).

Service Quality. A measure of how well a call is handled, including such measures as consistency and friendliness of greeting, and ability to handle call to completion.

Silent Monitoring. A process that permits a supervisor to listen to both sides of a conversation including an agent and a caller. Used for determining training needs and performance quality. Neither agent nor caller is aware that the monitoring is taking place.

Skill Based Routing. A method of routing calls in which the call is routed to the person best able to meet that caller's needs, rather than simply routing to the first available or longest idle agent.

Speech Recognition. The capability of a voice processing system to recognize and translate human voice signals into digital signals a computer system can understand. Includes both speaker dependent and speaker independent systems, and may work through discrete syllable recognition (most basic) or continuous speech recognition (most advanced).

Split. An ACD routing division that allows calls arriving on specific trunks or calls of certain transaction types to be answered by specific groups of employees. (Also referred to as gate or group).

Supervisor. Usually, the person who has first-line responsibility for the management of a group of agents. Often has a special telephone or computer terminal for monitoring agents and the system performance.

Talk Time. The elapsed time from when an agent answers a call until the agent disconnects.

Telecommuting. Use of a telephone and/or computer system in the home that allows an employee perform job duties and to communicate with the office without actually traveling to and from work.

Teleconferencing. A conference between persons remote from one another but linked by a telecommunications system.

Toll Free. A service that enables customers to place calls to an organization without incurring a long-distance charge. Numbers include 800 and 888 dialing codes.

Touch Tone. See Dual-Tone Multi-Frequency (DTMF).

Traffic Engineering. The art and science of designing facilities and resources to meet user requirements

Traffic Study. A study to determine the levels of traffic that a system is presently handling. It consists of a count of contacts classified by types (incoming, outgoing, local, long distance,). The data obtained is used to forecast future traffic, which, in turn, is used in determining new system requirements.

Trunk. A single transmission channel between two points, both of which are either switching centers or nodes, or both.

Trunk Group. Several trunks provided as a group by the local telephone company or other carrier. Generally, all trunks in the group will be in use before a busy signal is returned to the caller.

Trunk Hold Time. The total length of time that a trunk is occupied by a particular call, from the moment the ringing is detected by the ACD to the moment the call is disconnected.

TSF (Telephone Service Factor). The Telephone Service Factor is the percent of calls answered in a defined number of seconds. The calculation for TSF may vary depending on equipment manufacturer. The TSF can be compared to the desired service level to determine if goals have been met.

UCD (Uniform Call Distributor). A device for distributing many incoming calls uniformly among a group of agents. Generally less intelligent and less costly than an ACD. A UCD will distribute calls following a predetermined logic, for example "top down" or "round robin." It is typically unable to route calls based on real-time traffic load, or which agent has been busiest or idle the longest.

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Unavailable Time. The amount of time the agent is not ready to accept inbound or place outbound contacts. Unavailable time may include breaks, lunches, auxiliary time for processing administrative work, etc.

Universal Agent. An agent that can handle multiple types of contacts.

Virtual Call Center. The concept of having network and agent resources that are located at multiple physical sites perform as if all resources were located at a single site.

Voice Identification. A technology used to verify the identity of a person accessing a system by comparing spoken passwords with prerecorded computerized voice patterns.

Voice Processing. The technology that allows computers to speak, store human voices, and react to human speech.

Voice Recognition System. A telephone system using speech recognition to activate equipment that dials telephone numbers automatically. May be speaker-dependent or independent.

(VRU) Voice Response Unit. Also referred to as IVR (Interactive Voice Response Unit). A device which automates retrieval and processing of information by phone using touch tone signaling or voice recognition to access information residing on a computer to give a response. The response may be given by a recorded human voice or a synthesized (computerized) voice.

Workforce Management. The art and science of having the right number of agents, at the right times, to answer an accurately forecasted volume of incoming calls at the service level standard set by the call center.

Workforce Management System. A software system that automates the tasks of forecasting calls, determining staff requirements, creating staff schedules, and tracking performance of agents and overall call center.

Workload. For agents, the combination of total conversation (talk) time and after-call work time. For trunks, the combination of ring time, delay time, and conversation time.

Wrap-Up Time. The time required by an ACD agent after a conversation is ended, to complete work that is directly associated with the calls just completed. Does not include time for any other activities such as meetings, breaks, correspondence, etc.

Zip Tone. A tone heard before a call arrives, also called a zip tone. Beep tones are sometimes used to announce that a call is being monitored.

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