

Massood Zarrabian - CEO, OutStart On Knowledge Management

What are the key benefits of knowledge management in the contact centre industry?

When the right KM technology is implemented within a contact centre, it enables the capture and reuse of knowledge within the contact centre and by customers in self-service mode. KM technologies bring efficiencies, and scalability to contact centres while improving responsiveness and decreasing costs. Within any contact centre, quick access to the right information is essential. An effective knowledge sharing/management system will dramatically improve the efficiency and productivity of any contact/call centre.

A good knowledge sharing system should:

- In addition to allowing power user contribution of knowledge for reuse, it should allow for organic growth of knowledge by extending knowledge contribution beyond the few experts within a contact centre to other employees, partners and even customers
- Enable the reuse of knowledge embedded within databases, CRM systems, training modules, files and documents
- Enable CSRs to search for answers in the easiest, most efficient way possible - eliminating the unproductive search for answers to questions that have already been answered
- Capture all interactions between customers and subject matter experts for re-use and help identify the best exchanges for the knowledge bank
- Allow creation of communities, and enable the capture and deployment of interactions within communities, as a way of organically populating the knowledge bank, which then should help individuals find correct answers to their inquiries. This will also extend the contact centre to take advantage of their best customers and advocates to grow the knowledge bank
- The solution needs to include expertise management. This should permit automatic routing of specialist questions to pre-determined experts within the contact centre, scanning and analysing their contributions and updating the knowledge repository – helping grow the knowledge base organically on a daily basis
- The KM technology should help consolidate knowledge throughout the organisation – bringing together both tacit knowledge that resides in expert's heads and explicit knowledge already captured in databases, CRM systems, files, documents and training modules as well as key sources of information outside of the organisation, into one knowledge repository.

How has knowledge management evolved over the past few years?

Existing or first generation knowledge management (KM) systems have realised significant benefits for businesses across the globe and already play a pivotal role in most contact centre environments. However, such systems provide a limited framework with which to capture knowledge and make it available to those who really need it.

First generation systems were developed with the power user in mind. A CSR engaging with the system would either need previous knowledge of how to author content for that particular system and/or would need to be trained in order to contribute to it effectively. These systems, often focused on a contact centre as an island and focused on improving their efficiencies. Whilst these

systems do a good job in capturing knowledge at the front line – they currently fail to bring together all the useful knowledge and information that resides throughout the Enterprise and subsequently can leave CSRs without vital information at point of customer contact. In addition, these systems do not provide a mechanism with which to capture knowledge from valuable resources outside of the organisation, such as partners or customers – leaving noticeable gaps in the knowledge repository.

New KM systems have evolved to solve this very problem. Businesses need ways of capturing information from a growing number of key sources, be that customers, partners, subject matter experts, training modules/programmes, the Internet, employee feedback mechanisms, existing and future documentation, MS office applications and emails. KM systems now make it possible for companies to dramatically grow their knowledge centres through easy intuitive knowledge contribution using popular tools such as email, MS Word and MS PowerPoint, organic capture of knowledge shared via email threads and community interaction, and by connecting to knowledge sources, such as database systems, document repositories, and the Internet and by leveraging the expertise not just of employees, but of partners and customers, alike.

This has given businesses the means to capture and grow their knowledge base more comprehensively – providing CSRs, partners, and customers the knowledge they need, when they need it to perform their roles more effectively and efficiently.

What advice would you give to a contact centre considering a knowledge management solution?

For a knowledge network to work, knowledge must be captured organically, with no special expertise or effort required. Contact centres need to consider using technologies that enable them to empower all employees in all organisations to contribute to the growth of their knowledge bank. They also need to acknowledge that their customers and the organisation's partners are often the best source of know how and therefore should be enabled to contribute. Of course the contact centre should be able to define the approval workflow and make the final decision as to what gets deployed.

Knowledge management should look to expand their knowledge scope beyond the call centre to incorporate the rest of the enterprise including partners and customers. Partners and customers are often power users and can help to answer questions, deflecting calls, whilst contribute new knowledge.

Knowledge management should have a process for answering all questions, not just the ones previously authored into the knowledge base. A closed loop process should automatically identify experts relevant to the question, notify the experts of the question, using common tools such as email so that the process fits within the experts normal workflow, escalate questions that aren't answered promptly, all while organically capturing the new knowledge from the email threads.

What are the most effective applications for knowledge management in the contact centre?

Self-service knowledge deployment, and creation of virtual communities for self-service and brand building are two effective applications.

Self-service applications are those that enable any individual (customers, partners and employees) to get assistance online, from online self-help solutions and customer support communities. This can dramatically reduce customer service costs and improve responsiveness. The combination of self-help and customer support communities is mutually reinforcing; customer support communities efficiently provide high quality answers to new questions that can then be added to existing knowledge banks to improve self-help, thereby increasing total call avoidance.

When front-line people "touch" customers on a daily basis, it's critical that they properly represent, support, and service a company's products. Their knowledge, professionalism, and understanding of a company's products will drive sales and customer satisfaction.

Effective KM applications will enable you to train and continuously monitor the ability of CSRs to support products. It will ensure that CSR teams have the proper knowledge to succeed, deliver results, and keep customers happy. It will also help identify representatives who lack the required level of knowledge and get them up to speed quickly.

In 5 years time where do you see knowledge management technology?

In 5 years KM technologies will be used as collaborative solutions connecting people to people independent of the organisational structure and independent of the business relationships. These solutions will enable creation of virtual communities in support of product brands, and individual areas of interest. The communities will help and support each other, which should result in increased efficiencies within contact centres, and also help build brand loyalty for products and services offered. Organisations will take advantage of experts and expertise that exists outside their organisation to increase support for their products and services, whilst they use the same strategy to increase visibility for their solution. These knowledge capturing and sharing solutions will become a seamless part of the business – bringing together all valuable information into a virtual knowledge bank capable of providing all individuals (customers, partners and employees) with the knowledge they need to get the job done.

Capturing information will be so intuitive, so natural and so ingrained into every aspect of the business that it will be taken for granted – like all things that work well in an organisation.

How does knowledge management impact contact centre employees?

Effective KM systems help contact centre employees in a number of important ways:

- For new employees it will increase their time to effectiveness
- For existing employees, it should allow them to be more efficient in responding to customers and enable them to grow into new areas of expertise
- Enables customer and customer communities to help themselves, to answer commonly asked questions through standard self-service, but also hard one-off, non-repetitive questions through leveraging the expertise of the partner and user community
- Fast access to information and effective sharing of knowledge throughout the organisation makes any CSRs job measurably easier
- Businesses can monitor the training requirements of CSRs, based on the knowledge they have – ensuring employees are quickly brought up to speed, or receive additional training when required
- Effective KM systems noticeably improve customer satisfaction and thus contribute to internal KPI.

About Massood Zarrabian :

Massood joined OutStart as President and CEO in March of 2001 with more than twenty-five years of technology and management experience. During his short tenure with OutStart he has overseen three successful acquisitions, most recently of Trainersoft Corporation. Prior to OutStart, he was President of the eService Division of Broadbase Software, a provider of eCRM solutions.

About OutStart :

OutStart provides learning and knowledge-sharing software applications to mid-market, government, and organizations. OutStart is focused on making customers, employees, and

partners more knowledgeable and better trained through content development, management, and delivery.

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