



## Is Your Call Center a Strategic Asset or a Victim?

By Maggie Klenke  
The Call Center School

When call centers first began to emerge, the roles were fairly simple. Take care of the customer complaint calls so that they wouldn't end up in the executive office, provide basic services to customers, and take orders from prospective customers. With the advent of toll-free services in the 1970s, there was a whole new way for customers to reach us and we had to manage that influx of calling.

The emphasis in the early call centers was efficiency. Get the calls handled as inexpensively as possible while still meeting customer needs. Most of us set a fairly arbitrary speed of answer goal that was designed to balance service with cost, and we've been fighting the battle to get enough staff every since.

I'd like to suggest that we need to change the position of the call center in our organizations. It is fair to say that most call center agents talk to more customers in a day than many other employees talk to in a year. This is where customer relationships are made or broken and we need to put the emphasis on maximizing the value of the call center's contribution to the company's future.

So as a call center manager, look at the enterprise as a whole and determine how the call center can be best positioned to produce the strategic results needed. Don't think of Marketing as the enemy because they embark on campaigns that increase call center workload without warning. Instead, embrace Marketing as an important function that the call center must join with to exploit opportunities to grow the business. That will maximize the call center's ability to handle the calls and the effective utilization of marketing dollars. Help the Product Development teams to figure out ways to improve the offerings so that customers don't find that they need to call as often. Work with Billing to identify ways to make the invoices more easily understood by tracking the most frequently asked questions and discussing them in regular meeting. In other words, become part of the solution, rather than a victim.

When was the last time you analyzed your staffing needs based on the marginal cost of additional resources versus the added revenue or value that might be attributed to the added calls that would be handled? Many centers know their cost per call, but few that don't do direct sales have any real idea of the value of a handled call. Surely every call has some value or you wouldn't be answering any of them, so get consensus on a value range and take a look at the tradeoffs of various staffing levels on that value. You might find that your speed of answer goal is not the one that would provide the greatest profitability and selling management on more staff to increase profitability is sure a lot easier than based on an arbitrary speed of answer goal.

Unless your business is unusual, approximately 80% of profits come from less than 20% of the customer base, but many companies don't know which customers are the profitable ones. The call center can identify those customers who call frequently (and why) so that



the company can figure out ways to serve them more profitably. Perhaps these customers need to be up-sold to a more profitable product/service, charged differently for services, offered only self-help options, or even encouraged to take their unprofitable business to a competitor.

Get a place on the planning committees and show that the call center is the “voice of the customer” and a strategic asset to the company. It will improve your life and your agent’s lives. People will aspire to work in the call center and view your team with the respect they so richly deserve.

**About the Author....**

**Maggie Klenke** is a Founding Partner of The Call Center School, a Nashville, TN based consulting and education company. She has more than 20 years of experience in the telecommunications and call center industry, and has worked with hundreds of call centers in the area of workforce planning, technology implementation, and process improvement. She may be reached at 615-812-8411 or at [maggie.klenke@thecallcenterschool.com](mailto:maggie.klenke@thecallcenterschool.com).