

Outsourced Contact Center Solution Testing: *You Can't Afford **NOT** To Do It*



During hard economic times, you can't afford to miss or mess up a customer call or interaction. Whether your team has been downsized or you're struggling through a decrease in demand, you need to make sure the self-service and contact center technologies that sit in front of your contact center are doing the job. If these costly solutions don't perform, you won't get the benefits you expected and worse yet, you may lose a sale or even a customer.

Technology Matters

We all know one bad experience can send a customer packing. A poll by the Opinion Research Group indicates that 69% of Americans are less likely to do business with a company after one bad call center experienceⁱ. But the flip side of this finding is exciting and presents a real opportunity for contact center managers and IT teams alike. According to a 2007 Aspect Index report, customers are 33% more likely to do more business with a company after a positive customer experienceⁱⁱ. In addition, the report shows that although customers who reported exceptional experiences were 15% more likely to start with a live agent, customers who use automation are 27% more likely to report a very or extremely positive experience.

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If your contact center solution/technologies can fully or partially address customer needs, you have taken a huge step toward creating a positive customer experience as well as reducing overall costs. A contact center solution that drops, misleads or misroutes customers will inevitably cause confusion and frustration for your customers and your contact center representatives. Even if a savvy contact center representative is able to smooth things over, your customer will be left with a negative impression regarding your contact center solution. If the customer attempts to interact with you again, how likely is it that he/she will attempt to use self-service versus opting out to a customer service representative? How has the solution helped you minimize costs and maximize efficiencies if it can't handle customer interactions in the manner that you designed and expected?

Testing Matters: Failure is **NOT** an Option

One customer focus expert recently observed, "Focusing on getting the customer experience right is critical. Making sure that your customers choose you over your competition is essential. If you get it right when times are tough you will certainly reap the benefits and rewards of unleashing the power of customer focus as conditions improveⁱⁱⁱ."

Testing should never be just one more piece of red tape.

When times are tough, failure is not an option. You need to ensure that every customer has the experience you expected. All companies use internal monitoring processes to see if the technologies and components that make up their contact center solution are performing as expected. But if an issue shows up via internal monitoring, there is often no insight or evidence regarding the customer experience during the issue.

Testing and monitoring conducted from the customer perspective is one of the most efficient and cost-effective ways to make the most of your contact center solution. Despite the bad rap, testing should never be just one more piece of red tape. Remote testing and monitoring provide actionable and repeatable results so you can really understand what your customers are experiencing and can focus resources on delivering the best experience possible through your contact center solutions. Remote testing conducted before you put a new or upgraded solution into production lets you work out the bugs before your customers have at it. Remote testing and monitoring conducted after you have gone into production help ensure the solution continues to perform as expected despite day to day changes. You will be confident that you know how your solution is performing and what kind of experience it is delivering to your customers and employees.

When to outsource?

When times are tough, it is more important than ever to protect the customer experience and to make sure revenue-generating and other mission critical solutions are performing. For many companies, it makes a great deal of sense to outsource remote contact center testing and monitoring rather than to purchase expensive equipment or to utilize in-house resources only. Omitting or eliminating testing and monitoring from a company's communication strategy are not viable options.

There are a number of factors that should influence your decision to outsource testing and monitoring for contact center solutions:

- **Focus internal resources on core business** – if your team is over-extended or needed for other activities, a testing partner can easily fill-in the gaps and free up your in-house teams to focus on your company's core competencies.
- **Expertise** – a testing partner will bring years of testing and monitoring experience to a single engagement/project or to a comprehensive testing and monitoring strategy.
- **Life-Cycle Cost Reduction** – when faced with a make/buy decision, it helps to take life-cycle cost into account. The initial equipment purchase may look appealing, but ongoing licensing, upgrades and training costs could easily exceed the cost of testing services utilized on an as needed basis. Companies without the inclination, budget or personnel resources required to support in-house test equipment may find a testing partner to be a cost-effective option.
- **Additional Cost Reduction** – a services-oriented testing partner will work with you to understand your existing quality programs and resources and suggest ways to reduce costs while maintaining or increasing scope of risk mitigation.
- **Current testing technologies and methods** – by outsourcing your needs to a testing partner, you will have access to the latest testing and monitoring technologies and methods.
- **Flexibility** – requirements can change rapidly once testing and monitoring get started. With an outsourced service, you're not saddled with testing solutions that addressed outdated requirements.
- **Scalability** – is there a broad range in the size of systems you plan to test? Do you have to buy a lot more than you need most of the time to accommodate what you need some of the time? Services are always available in a package that fits your current requirements.
- **Completeness** – if your requirement is to perform end-to-end surveillance from the customer perspective, you will require outbound facilities to gain access to the PSTN so you can truly sample the customer experience.
- **Convenience** – outsourced services are available when you want them. You don't have to wait in line to gain access to either test equipment or scarce testing expertise.

Flexibility and Actionable Data to Address Your Concerns

Remote testing and monitoring for contact center solutions addresses many of the concerns held by contact center managers and IT teams alike:

- Customer satisfaction concerns:
 - ◆ Are we being responsive to customers?
 - ◆ Are customers staying connected throughout the interaction?
 - ◆ Are customers directed to correct application state or person?
- Productivity and employee satisfaction concerns:
 - ◆ Are front-end technologies working properly so customer service representatives can work at maximum productivity?
 - ◆ Are front-end technologies not working so that representatives are receiving calls from frustrated or confused customers?
- Technology performance concerns:
 - ◆ Is the solution performing as expected 24 x 7?
 - ◆ Is the solution responding appropriately and in a timely fashion?



If you are working with a testing partner like IQ Services, you should be presented with both comprehensive and incremental alternatives for addressing these concerns. Whether your concerns can be addressed during a limited testing engagement or through an on-going contract, your partner should help you balance best testing practices with your unique requirements and business practices. A cookie-cutter best practice test approach is not well suited to many of today's complex and dynamic contact center solutions.

Whether your requirements are short-term or on-going, your testing partner must provide outside-in, accurate, measured and substantiated data that helps address your concerns about solution performance. The results should play a pivotal role as any company evolves its contact center solutions and technologies to support customer satisfaction goals and cost savings objectives.

The Basics: IQ Services Remote Testing and Monitoring from the Customer Perspective

IQ Services exercises contact center technologies from the critical customer perspective with real telephone calls, Web browser transactions, e-mail messages, and fax/modem calls. By testing the technologies that support the contact center, IQ Services helps you ensure the entire customer experience is as positive as possible. All of these outsourced services allow you and your team to observe, tune, and verify end-to-end performance of advanced, complex and integrated technologies including: TDM, VoIP, ACD, PBX, IVR, auto attendant, voicemail system, NLSR, MPLS, SIP, TTS, VXML, middleware, management reporting, call routing, screen pop, agent routing, and CTI.

Although there are many variations of remote testing and monitoring available, there are two basic types that focus on contact center solution performance from the customer perspective:

Load Handling Assessment - StressTest™

At a pre-arranged time, your test partner launches real test transactions at a rate of hundreds or thousands of transactions per hour to your contact center solutions and technologies. These telephone calls, browser transactions, e-mail messages and/or fax/modem calls perform regular customer activities to measure the responsiveness of self-service and contact center applications under high load conditions. Examples of regular customer activities might include: a telephone call to a specific application routed to a particular location that attempts to access customer account information; a browser transaction to a Web site that attempts to access product support information from a menu of choices; or an e-mail transaction that sends a message with specific content. Regardless of the activity or form of communication, the partner measures and reports step-by-step response times and results obtained under various traffic conditions and eventually under sustained, peak-level traffic. Error conditions and unexpected delays should be further punctuated with complete telephone call recordings, HTML page details or email text, as appropriate. Based on the test results, you and your team of in-house experts can address any issues or concerns and re-test as necessary until a satisfactory result is achieved.

At IQ Services, the load handling assessment service is called StressTest™ performance and load testing.

The StressTest™ service helps answer the following questions/concerns and more:

- Are all the pre-paid telco facilities provisioned?
- Do rollover and hunting plans really work as expected?
- Are the transactions in your unified queue handled according to business rules?
- Are there enough speech recognition licenses available when all callers are uttering inputs rather than using DTMF?
- Does host response time over the WAN degrade when load is maxed?
- Does screen pop data follow the proper call and arrive at the agent workstation at the same time as the call?
- Does the fax back server send the information requested to the proper calling party?
- Are VoIP calls and the recordings for agent monitoring and coaching intelligible at full load?
- Can the hot standby system handle a sharp wave of incoming traffic that fills all channels in 10 seconds?
- Are we ready to accept this new or upgraded business solution and go into production?

Service Level and Availability Assessment - HeartBeat™

Over some pre-defined period of time, your test partner launches real test transactions at a rate of 1 to 12+ transactions per hour to exercise your self-service or contact center applications. These real telephone calls, browser transactions, e-mail messages, and fax/modem calls perform regular customer activities to measure the availability and responsiveness of user-facing services. The data gathered during these test transactions provides a reliable, measured and repeatable sampling of real customer experience. The transaction results and response time data as well as information about any

error conditions or delays are compiled into a detailed view of performance. Immediate notifications to appropriate contacts are provided to make sure you have as much time as possible to address any problems. The assessment data is punctuated with audio recordings of selected telephone calls, HTML page details of selected web responses, and email text content of selected messages, as appropriate. Based on the results this service level assessment, you and your team of in-house experts can take action to optimize the performance of your contact center solutions to ensure the best customer experience possible. At IQ Services, the service level assessment service is called HeartBeat™ availability and performance monitoring.

The HeartBeat™ service helps answer the following questions/concerns and more:

- Do customer calls successfully get through the public telephone network?
- Are the calls being properly handled by your contact center solution?
- Are your customers hearing the expected announcements at each step of the calling process?
- Do response times at key steps in the calling process meet your requirements for end-user customer experience?
- Does your contact center solution perform the same at all times of the day?
- Has something changed in the solution or production environment that has not been communicated or evaluated for impact on your customers?
- Do any trends in system performance indicate it is time to tune the system configuration or upgrade capacity?

Beyond Basics

We have all heard it before – “change” is the only constant. The complexity and evolution of today’s contact center solution require testing partners to find ways to adjust testing technologies and methodologies to address the latest business solution advancements. So in addition to testing a laundry list of technologies and components, an experienced testing partner can help optimize the customer experience and performance of a variety of business solutions including but not limited to the following:

- Unified Communications
- Unified Queuing
- Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery
- Customer Care and CRM
- Presence
- Self-Service
- Online Services
- Security Dial Plan
- Voice Authentication
- Intelligent Call Routing/Multi-Location Routing
- SOA
- IP and Enterprise Telephony



Conclusion

You have heard it many times before...it is much more expensive to attract a new customer than it is to retain an existing one. In hard economic times, it is as important as ever to focus on customer service and the customer experience. Contact center solutions and technologies are a critical factor in delivering good customer service and remote testing for contact center solutions is one of the most cost-effective ways to stay on top of solution performance and to ensure the best possible experience. For many companies, outsourcing these services is a practical and financially sound way to invest in ensuring customer satisfaction. Turn today's economic uncertainty into tomorrow's opportunity by focusing your solution testing and monitoring strategies on the customer experience.

About

IQ Services empowers companies to deliver the best possible experience to their customers through flexible and responsive testing services. As the industry's first managed load test service provider, IQ Services extends a full spectrum of expert quality assurance testing services to the and contact center industry including: test planning; feature function testing; load and performance testing; and post-cutover availability monitoring. These testing services offer true end-to-end testing to give customers confidence their business solutions deliver the customer experience required. Test transactions are configured to perform just like real customers to allow companies to actually observe, manage and verify integrated performance and customer experience. Whether cutting over a new or upgraded solution, benchmarking a legacy system, or periodically checking the performance of a production system, IQ Services can help customers by providing cost-effective testing solutions that facilitate the management of technical, schedule and financial risks.

IQ Services' commitment to customer service and quality testing services is key to helping customers successfully integrate complex business solutions, maintain required service levels, and achieve desired ROI. Since 1996, IQ Services has been the testing partner of choice for businesses who demand high solution efficiency and high customer satisfaction.

IQ Services — because your customers are important.

ⁱ "Figuratively Speaking." Minneapolis Start Tribune, 14 June 2006, business section.

ⁱⁱ "The Aspect Contact Center Satisfaction Index™ North America Executive Report."

http://www.aspectindex.com/index_na/ Aspect Software, Inc. 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ Miller, Ray. (2008) Customer Focus in a Slow Economy. Retrieve December 8, 2008 from

<http://www.returnonbehaviormagazine.com/articles-of-interest/customer-focus-in-a-slow-economy.html>



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