



Offshore Call Center Services-Analyzing Best Practices



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Positioning Statement

Over the last two decades, businesses, both large and small, have benefited immensely by outsourcing a wide variety of call center functions that include everything from customer support to telemarketing, medical records retrieval, market research, and many more. Even in today's recessionary times, critical benefits such as cost savings, optimal efficiency and improved customer satisfaction levels are readily available to businesses through call center services outsourcing. Such phenomenal success of call center services outsourcing firms speaks volumes about their effectiveness and competitiveness and it begets that their managerial aptitude and operational skills be analyzed in order to define and setup an industry best practices framework. Such a framework will help standardize call center services and provide the right platform for implementing new customizations and process value-additions as required by the client. All this and a lot more is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Introduction

Based on their domain expertise, scale of operations and market reputation, call center services outsourcing firms can be broadly classified into three different classes, Class A, Class B and Class C, wherein Class A represents the best that the industry has to offer. The classification has been done merely for narrowing the research work that is required for identifying and highlighting industry best practices and in no way does it try to determine the quality of services provided by each of these call center services outsourcing firms. For the purpose of this paper, the focus has been limited to Class A call center services outsourcing firms. Here are some of the main commonalities that we found were shared by most of the Class A firms, as deduced from the research. We believe these are the main factors that help these firms provide the best quality call center services to clients.

1. Being Proactive Comes Naturally To Reputable Call Center Services Outsourcing Firms

Being proactive is one thing that has always paid rich dividends to all, be it an individual, a business entity, or a non-profit organization. Being proactive, in respect to a business organization such as a call center services outsourcing firm, covers everything from keeping tab of emerging competition to identifying new market potential, predicting and managing change and deploying the latest technological tools and systems.

Being proactive is no longer an option for call center services outsourcing firms, apparently because the pace of change in the immediate business environment has increased manifold over the years. Rising competition, prevailing recessionary trends, and rapid technological advancements are affecting the decision making process and that's why being proactive has become a necessity for call center services outsourcing firms.

Mere knee-jerk reactions and fire-fighting measures cannot be categorized as being proactive. What call center services outsourcing firms need to do is allocate a certain number of hours every week to evaluate their current position and identify proactive measures that can be deployed. Based on that, an effective roadmap can then be created and implemented alongside the existing service delivery framework.

A good example of proactive measures deployed by call center outsourcing firms in recent times is the deployment of new technology tools such as the IVR (Interactive Voice Response), OCR (Optical Character Recognition), and a wide variety of automated software tools. All these were deployed keeping in view the rising demand for call center services outsourcing. Outsourcing firms that were proactive towards advanced technology deployments are now reaping the benefits in terms of greater client satisfaction and increased project leads.

2. Never Lose Sight Of The Main Objective

Very often, it has been noticed that businesses get deeply involved with implementation plans and strategies even when the primary goals and objectives may not have been properly defined. When call center services outsourcing firms commit the same mistake, it creates a conflicting situation wherein it becomes increasingly difficult for the stakeholders to satisfy client needs and expectations. Such mistakes occur mostly when call center services outsourcing firms focus more on making assumptions instead of adhering to ground realities.

In a recent case involving a Class B call center services outsourcing firm, it was noticed that the firm had wrongly assumed that the main objective of the client was to reduce operational costs. That in itself may not have proved disastrous for the outsourcing project, but since the call center outsourcing firm had started compromising on quality in an effort to increase cost savings, it adversely affected customer satisfaction levels and the client had to terminate the project before the actual end-date as stipulated in the contract agreement.

To ensure that call center outsourcing projects always remain on the right track, it is necessary that both the outsourcing firm and the client spend some time on identifying common goals and objectives and defining an appropriate roadmap based on that. It will also help ensure success if proper communications are made to all the involved stakeholders such as the client representative, delivery heads, functional managers, team leads and call center professionals. Only when everyone from top to bottom clearly understands their duties and responsibilities, will it become possible for call center services outsourcing firms to deliver best quality call center services to clients.

3. Set Priorities – Focus On Critical Processes First

Most clients prefer call center services outsourcing firms that can provide a quick start and on-time delivery without compromising on the quality of offered call center services. For this to become a reality it is necessary that call center services outsourcing firms set priorities and assign jobs and tasks accordingly. Here it is necessary to understand that focusing on critical processes first does not imply that other processes need to be ignored. Overlooking non-critical tasks can also backfire and that's why outsourcing firms need to achieve a balance that helps allocate the most appropriate time and effort for all the different processes.

While setting priorities, the main focus should be on ensuring basic services such as uninterrupted connectivity over different delivery channels such as phone systems, online chat, ticket systems and email support systems. Unavailability of the required number of human resources can also affect call center operations and that's why this area should also be given priority over other processes. Processes that can be deferred to a later date when adequate time and resources may not be available would include process value-additions, customization, specialized call center training, and customer satisfaction surveys. All of these are important too, but it would create problems if these are given priority over basic call center services mentioned above.

4. Always Try Creating A Win-Win For All

Business partnerships prosper when all the involved parties come together to share common goals and business interests. The same theory applies to the formal business association between a client company and a call center services outsourcing firm. So, if call center services outsourcing firms want to ensure their long-term success, it is necessary that they consistently focus on creating a win-win for all. Not that it would be easy, but since the rewards are just too valuable to ignore, it is advisable that call center services outsourcing firms do not ignore this huge potential.

For creating a win-win for all, call center services outsourcing firms first need to understand the precise needs and requirements of their respective clients. Next, they need to identify similar interests in their own organizational setup and try to integrate both in the existing service delivery model. For this, small tweaks and changes are allowed, but carrying out a complete overhaul of existing processes, until absolutely necessary, is not the recommended thing to do. Something like that is bound to increase operational risks and also lead to the unproductive diversion of organizational resources.

For example, clients often require their outsourcing partners to reduce the average time it takes to resolve a customer support call. This is something that naturally clashes with the quality of call center services and may adversely affect customer satisfaction levels. In this particular case, a call center services outsourcing firm can still create a win-win by using statistical tools and available data to get the best possible measure of average call resolution rates. Proof of the same can be provided to the client, who will then most likely set more realistic goals.

5. Understand Basic Needs Of End Users

Most of the call center services outsourcing firms use a wide variety of graphs and charts for showcasing their achievements. That in itself is an entirely harmless activity, but problems can surface if outsourcing firms start believing too much in graphical displays and ignoring things that really matter. For example, in a recent case, it was noticed that the office walls of a call center services outsourcing firm were adorned with all types of graphs and charts, displaying cost and efficiency improvements achieved by the firm.

Not that the charts and the information contained in them were wrong, but when further inquiry was done, it brought out the fact that this particular outsourcing firm had a dismal record vis-a-vis customer satisfaction. It appears that the firm and the people managing it chose to overlook customer satisfaction levels and focused all their efforts in reducing operational costs. The fact that it was still doing business also puts a question mark on the client's intention to provide high quality support services to its customers.

Whatever be the reasons, it is advisable that call center services outsourcing firms do not overlook critical factors such as customer satisfaction levels. Efforts should be made to standardize call center services so that all end users get the same quality and attention when they dial up a customer support number. If possible, a customer survey can also be carried out, where registered customers can be called back to provide appropriate feedback. Such feedback will be the real indicators of the quality and effectiveness of offered call center services.

6. Keep Adding To Existing Strengths

That change is the only constant is the one thing that call center services outsourcing firms should never forget. To ensure their long-term success, it is necessary that call center services outsourcing firms consistently keep adding to their existing strengths. Consistently sharpening the saw should be the main objective, something that can be achieved through a variety of means that include everything from providing regular training to call center agents to advanced technology implementations, acquisition or merger of competing business entities, and rolling out effective advertising and marketing campaigns.

However, there is a word of caution in that overdoing things can easily backfire, especially if efforts to increase competitiveness clash with existing call center services being provided by the outsourcing firm. This is why call center services outsourcing firms should avoid making hasty decisions, even when the promise of rewards may be too valuable to ignore. These firms need to realize that adding new strengths and competencies will always take time and it would not be wise to risk losing existing strengths in an attempt to gain new ones.

Conclusion

Call center services outsourcing is a dynamic field where guaranteeing success of outsourced call center functions is certainly difficult, but not impossible. However, it is necessary that both past and ongoing call center projects be studied in detail so as to identify and avoid potential pitfalls, basically learn from the mistakes of others. Successful call center projects also need to be analyzed in an effort to uncover critical details that might have made all the difference between success and failure. All this will help call center services outsourcing firms to create an implementation plan having more potential to emerge a winner.

About Telegenisys Inc.

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Contacts:

TELEGENISYS INC.,

5055 Business Center Drive,

Suite 108-223, Fairfield,

CA - 94534

Phone: (800)510-9053

Fax: (866) 624-6520

<http://www.telegenisys.com>

Email: sales@telegenisys.com