

CHALLENGE, SOLUTION, PLANTRONICS

SPEECH IMPACT AND THE CONTACT CENTER

MAKE THE DIFFERENCE CLEAR

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RAISE YOUR VOICE POWER

The most powerful tool available to the contact center is an agent's voice

How do customers know they're important to your organization? According to one study, 87 percent of them say that their sense of importance is communicated in your agents' tone of voice.

When customers are on the phone it might be their first direct interaction with your company, whether it be an inbound or outbound call. They have something on their minds and want to feel that your agents know what it is, quickly and with empathy. They expect to hear, loud and clear, the voice of a smart, helpful person on the other end. For the modern contact center, this is a challenge — and an opportunity.

While leading-edge technology helps to maximize the clarity of the spoken word, technology is only part of the equation. By being conscientious about the sound of their voice, your agents can build trust with customers, inspire and inform, and create long-term relationships.

On the following pages, we pose four key questions regarding your agents' customer interactions — and offer recommendations on how to maximize the impact of speech.

How ineffective can phone conversations be?

Research on US conference calls has shown that, of participants:



SPEECH CLASS

QUESTION #1:

How can you help agents maintain customer interest?

Do customers typically want to know more — or seek to cut calls short? It's not what your agents say — it's how they say it. Here are four methods for increasing customer service agents' speech impact:

POWER

Have agents vary the power, or loudness, of their voices. Speaking softly can add emphasis and authority when used to give instructions. Then, switching to a louder voice for one or two words can grab attention. Doing this selectively helps keep customers interested.

PACE

Here's the rule: If you think you're speaking too slowly, you're speaking at the right pace. Managers should try to eliminate the pressure on agents to achieve a set call rate and encourage them to speak at a rate that enables optimal comprehension.

PITCH

Change the pitch, or tone, of your voice for emphasis. Adding subtle variations to the pitch — such as raising the tone at the end of a sentence — helps agents indicate that they've posed a question and are looking for an answer. And when needed, lowering the tone adds a level of seriousness.

PAUSE

Nothing gets someone's attention better than a break in the conversation. If the customer is following your speaking cadence and expecting you to continue speaking, try pausing, and then continuing. This enables you to add emphasis to what follows. This tactic should be used selectively, such as when summarizing the call.



MEMORABLE SPEECH

Simple tips on making every call count

For peak efficiency, ask your agents to practice the aforementioned “Power-Pitch-Pace-Pause.” Here’s an exercise: Have two agents call each other from separate rooms, each one speaking for two to three minutes as the other person notes what was good and what could be improved. Soon, your agents will master the art of keeping customers’ interest. Other simple tips:

EMPATHIZE

For inbound or support work, using an empathetic tone with customers helps them feel as if your brand doesn’t simply want their business, but a relationship.

STAND UP

Vocal cords are among our hardest-working body parts. When we stand up, vocal cords function optimally because they’re fully stretched out. This posture also allows agents to fill their lungs with more air, and to control their diaphragm for better control over power.

TAKE CHARGE

For outbound or sales work, a confident tone enables agents to lead the conversation, moving customers towards a desired outcome.

STAY HYDRATED

Provide easy access to water so that agents can stay hydrated. Drinking water also keeps the throat moist, allowing it to function correctly. Note: Drinking milk can produce a film that covers the vocal cords, limiting their movement and vibration, and hence the clarity of speech.



GOING OFF SCRIPT



QUESTION #2:

Do your agents know the difference between reading a script, and delivering a message?

With online information about your products and services so easily available, customers are often knowledgeable and empowered when they call. Customers will get frustrated when agents try to take them through a stiff, overly scripted conversation. Do your agents have the flexibility — and the depth of knowledge — to go off the script?

It starts at hiring: conduct initial screening interviews by phone so you can gauge a prospective agent's inherent voice power and ability to handle free conversation with someone they don't know — in this case you!

Scripts are appropriate in certain scenarios, such as basic first-line support, but other solutions are required for high-value conversations. So engage agents in role-play in various call scenarios. Customers will appreciate your agents' intelligent, open approach and value both your contact center and your organization more highly.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

QUESTION #3:

Are you optimizing the hours of your contact center?

Customers call your contact center at their convenience, not yours. Are you geared toward taking calls at the times that suit customers? If not, customers can already be frustrated and distracted when they do reach you.

If this is an issue, consider offering a service that allows customers to book a specific time for an agent to call them. This can help ensure that you have the customer's full attention. If this service leads to peaks in requested availability, and the need for split shifts, consider using home-based agents for greater flexibility.

Second, are your agents fully engaged during calls? Do they understand how to get the most out of your CRM system? Regularly monitor how easily agents are moving through the information needed, while staying customer focused. And review how smoothly agents can use the software you have. If switching between too many overlapping windows is creating frustration and inefficiency, consider second monitors.



SAVING JUST A FEW MINUTES A DAY
RAPIDLY RECOUPS THE COST OF A
SECOND MONITOR

WHAT YOU DON'T HEAR CAN STILL BE HEARD

QUESTION #4:

How do you measure and reduce background noise?

The most persuasive speech techniques won't work if your agents can't be heard properly. Are they speaking at the right volume, and is their equipment free from interference and background noise? Asking agents to speak louder doesn't help; it only raises the background noise for everybody else.

Here's a solution: Take a background-noise measurement. If your company doesn't own a noise-level meter, they're easily rented. Look for a model that has long-term averaging and logging, for the most accurate results. Or, for just a quick check, there are a number of smartphone apps that offer a simple, quick measurement.

If the background noise average is more than 60 dBA, we recommend noise-canceling microphones. In particularly high noise environments, investigate the use of advanced cloaking techniques such as white noise.

Did you know that the single most common cause of customer complaints about call clarity is simply poorly worn equipment, particularly mic boom placement? To reinforce basics and best practices for using equipment effectively, use the concise, downloadable Agent Training videos at plantronics.com/contactcenter.



MAKE EVERY CALL IMPACTFUL

These simple speech techniques, along with good voice technology, will enable your agents to maximize the impact of speech. With increased engagement from your customers — and from your own teams — your contact center can achieve shorter, more effective calls, powerfully reinforcing your brand.

Find out more at Plantronics.com/ContactCenter

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