

Apropos Technology

Success Story

3COM Uses Apropos Technology to Put the Help Back in Helpdesk

As the leading manufacturer of modems fueling the Internet age, 3Com Corporation's client access division, also manufactures, sells, and supports remote access servers, enterprise communications systems and desktop/mobile products, all of which enable customers to manage and share data, fax, and voice information. When this communications giant needed an advanced communications system of its own, who got the call? Apropos Technology!

Some companies turn to a new call distribution system because their agents are overloaded. Not us, says Lael Miller, 3Com's support programs manager. Instead, we looked at the situation and said, We're a high tech company and we have to go with the best technology.

Like any company selling a wide line of complicated products, 3Com gets over 3 million calls a year. Prior to Apropos solution, 60 agents were handling up to 1,000 calls a day, using a Rolm Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) system with Octel Voice Mail to provide the auto attendant function and prerecorded tech support messages answering most asked questions. The average customer waited 12 minutes for expert advice. How many customers got tired of waiting and hung up? That was hard to tell, capturing information such as call abandonment rates was not the strong point of the current system.

Useful real-time information would include: who was on hold, the purpose of each call and which agents were talking to which customers. The reports generated by the company's ACD system needed to be improved to provide management with the information needed to distribute the workload properly. In addition, the old ACD system wouldn't map agent skill sets, allowing agents to be put in line for all the calls they were qualified to answer. An expert in the Sportster modem, for example, might get only Sportster calls, when he or she was also qualified to handle Courier modem calls.

Providing Call Center Solutions That Build Valued Relationships

Those changes weren't all 3Com wanted in a new system. The wish list was lengthy. The new process also had to work with any PBX switch and be compatible with OS2/Windows, Win 95 and NT operating systems. It had to incorporate Automatic Number Identification (ANI), Dialed Number Information Service (DNIS) and touch-tone services from phone carriers. The company also wanted a visual queue, enabling agents and supervisors to pick and choose between incoming customers. Apropos offered that. Other major requirements appearing on 3Com's wish list included: interactive voice response (IVR), auto attendant, screen pops with customer data, holdtime announcements, live drag and drop agents, voicemail, abandoned call capture, closed call capture, work@home for remote agents and e-mail so agents could fax or e-mail promised material instantly. We shopped this list to about 40 companies, recalls Miller. Apropos Technology was the only company which could provide 100 percent of this list. The second closest could only offer 70 percent and cost six times as much.

We needed a system that was just reliable, but more flexible, and one which would provide better and more accurate statistics as well as real time information, says Lael Miller, support programs manager for 3Com.

How The Apropos Solution Works

Apropos interfaces with the company's existing network databases and telephone switches. With Apropos customers are prompted for an identifier, such as a warranty number, telephone number, or repair number. The first service offered is the IVR portion of the system, providing 24-hour, seven-days-a-week access to recorded status reports on repair orders. Without speaking to a live agent, customers can also determine what files to download to upgrade particular software. Forty percent of the customers, Miller says, get their answers and don't need to speak to an agent. This is a remarkable percentage.



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However, if the IVR system cannot meet a customer's needs and the call continues on to a live agent, the customer's identifier is passed to the 3Com network server and the customer's record is instantly accessible to the agent in the form of a screen pop before the agent even lifts the receiver. You can see what the customer wants before you even say hello, Miller says. The agent can answer with, Hi, John, this is Marty, are you still having a problem setting switches? This is where time savings really come into play, Miller says. We can save as much as 45 seconds a call because we don't have to ask who it is or why they are calling, he estimates.

Additionally, Apropos' caller preview function (or Q-view) allows agents to preview caller information. That way, the most qualified agent can pick up and assist the customer. Agents know at a glance how many customers are in queue and how long each has been waiting and supervisors also have direct visibility into the call center and its activities.

According to Miller, customers, management and agents all benefit from Apropos. Notably, 40 percent of the customers can be helped by using the IVR system and do not have to wait for a live agent. This helps individuals and businesses get support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Miller explains. Because so many customers are using the self-service option customers that must speak to an agent wait less time and there is no need to repeat identifiers and the problem over and over. Not only does this save an enormous amount of time (45 seconds on the average 8-minute call), but one of the best ways it helps is on repeat or escalated calls. Although Apropos has slashed customer wait time from 12 minutes to two minutes, an almost 85 percent improvement, 3Com, like every call center, experiences some call abandonment.

About 90 percent of those hang up less than a minute after being put on hold, so they were going to hang up anyway, observes Miller. Apropos, however, allows us to capture the numbers of everyone calling in, so we can call those back who, for some reason, were kept waiting a length of time. This improves customer service. We have a customer satisfaction team that calls people, he adds.

We know our customers appreciate this system.

From management's viewpoint, the advantages of Apropos are many. Number one is the increased speed of call handling, which translates a need to hire fewer agents.

We went from 1,000 to 12,000 calls a day since 1995, a 1200 percent increase, Miller says, but we only needed to increase the number of our agents by 360 percent. That way, we save over \$6 million a year in headcount costs.

We're in growth mode, Miller says. Another good thing about Apropos is that it's very flexible and readily expandable. We've been able to change direction rapidly. We've increased capacity from 48 ports to 72 to 225, from one server to six. Apropos is modular, you can add as many agents as needed. The NT platform is really cool.

On Apropos, Miller adds: There have been times when I've run into a brick wall with other companies over software leasing and so on, but with Apropos if I need software written, it's on my desk the next morning. No matter how fast we grow, we know Apropos can keep up.

Benefits:

- Apropos IVR component allows 40 percent of its inbound customers to track repairs and get commonly answered questions answered automatically, without the use of a live agent.
- Apropos saves 45 seconds on the average 8-minute call, requiring the hiring of fewer agents. This has resulted in an estimated savings of \$6 million in agent headcount costs.
- Average wait time cut from 12 minutes to 2 minutes, an 85 percent improvement.
- Apropos' visual queue allows agents to preview calls and always routes calls to the best available agent, thus increasing both agent and customer satisfaction.
- Customers do not have to repeat information and agents can save hundreds of keystrokes and repetitions on repeat calls and escalations by having customer records at their fingertips.
- Skill-based routing allows agents with multiple skillsets to sit in multiple queues.
- Supervisors can monitor the call center from their desktops, including call load, call disposition and the activity of individual agents, and can allocate agents between queues in real-time.
- Geographically separated call center sites operate off the same database but different telephone switches, saving money and space, yet all are managed from the Chicago location. Agents even can work at home.
- Call and product data captured by the system is analyzed to improve 3Com operations and product base.



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