

Apropos Technology

Success Story

Seagate Software, Inc. Empowers Agents with the Apropos Solution

Seagate Software, Inc., of Vancouver, B.C., a subsidiary of Seagate Technology, Inc., in Scotts Valley, California, develops software that provides business intelligence tools and applications. In strategic relationships with such companies as Microsoft, Novell and IBM, Seagate Software has shipped more than three million copies of its flagship product.

When using the company's products, customers rely on timely and accurate technical support. Often, customer inquiries are complex, protracted and concern large business information systems. Prior to the implementation of the Apropos solution, customers calling the Information Management Group encountered a six-queue ACD system that stacked the calls until an appropriate technical support representative became available. To direct people to the right queue, the company employed as many as 11 pre-call processors, (PCPs). Although qualified as agents and earning agent salaries, these employees were basically acting as operators - just answering phones and transferring the calls to the appropriate agent.

We had a high wait time, admits Galloway. It took two to three minutes to get to the PCP, and an average of 20 minutes, or sometimes as much as an hour, to reach the appropriate support team member. Often, customers had to explain the problem twice. Also customers weren't getting any information while on hold about what their wait time was or the process of handling the call. Our call abandonment rate was very high.

eCommerce+, an Apropos value-added reseller, told Seagate about call center management software from Apropos Technology. First, according to Galloway, eCommerce+ opened his eyes to agent empowerment. Apropos solution provides the ability to display all calls and enables agents to select those calls that are priority, had been waiting longest, or fell into a specialty area. Knowing what the caller wants in advance helps agents be more psychologically prepared, Galloway adds. More importantly, the Apropos system substituted the costly system of pre-call processing with a one-and-one-half minute Interactive Voice Response (IVR) routine.

Customers could even choose the music and information they want to hear when on hold. We knew we should be able to automate this, and with Apropos we could, Galloway says.

The number one issue we faced was eliminating the need for the PCPs and moving those individuals from operator status to tech support agent, Galloway says. (People were being hired as agents and relegated to an operator.) They were not adding a lot of value, Galloway says.

After you do that job for a day, it gets boring.

People were getting stuck there.

In addition, the supervisors were hampered by the lack of real-time information on the status of the call center. To switch an agent from one queue to another involved reprogramming the PBX system; work that took days or weeks. As for assessing incoming calls, the closest thing the company had to real-time information was a periodic recycling of the message reader board. With 14 queues (seven priority and seven regular), this meant 14 message boards downloaded to the network and flashed every minute. It worked, but it was kludgy, Galloway says.

For a company that takes service seriously, the welfare of waiting customers was also an issue. We really didn't know how long a caller had been waiting, Galloway says. We could see a wait time on the next caller only. Both those who had purchased our regular service and those who had contracted for premium service were fed into the queues, with the priority customers being put ahead. The first person might only have been waiting two minutes, and even though we might want to take a caller with regular service who had been waiting 40 minutes next, we didn't know about that person. We couldn't see

Apropos gave us more capability, flexibility and greater ease of use for less money [than its competitors]. It had a very fast payback time. Within 12 months the system had paid for itself, said David Galloway, Seagate's director of technical support.

Providing Call Center Solutions That Build Valued Relationships



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what was going on and meanwhile people were sitting in queue. (Making the wait as pleasant as possible was also a priority.) A 40 minute wait is a long wait, Galloway says.

Having compiled a varied wish list of functionalities, Seagate Software looked at a half dozen vendors ranging from low-end voice recognition options to Apropos competitors. Apropos was chosen. One significant factor was that Apropos would enhance the functionality of our basic PBX, Galloway says. Because of the ACD functionality, Apropos allowed Galloway to pay only for a plain vanilla PBX connection. The fact that Apropos, through eCommerce+, offered local support, service and training sealed the deal. We didn't want to wait for someone to come from Chicago and we didn't have to, Galloway says. Apropos and eCommerce+ have done a superb job.

How The Solution Works

When customers call, a short IVR routine is executed with the option of reaching a live person by dialing 0 for operator. Instead of waiting several minutes to tell their problem to a PCP (which, in all likelihood, customers would have had to repeat later to the tech support agent), customers answer a couple of questions using the telephone keypad, such as registration number and type of service for which they are licensed (regular or priority). Prompts then allow customers to change answers, if need be. Once in the queue, customers are advised of their position in the queue. Apropos allows for lots of real-time queue information. We found that telling customers their position in the queue worked best for us, Galloway says.

The Apropos solution paid for itself by just eliminating the PCP function, Galloway says. Customers used to wait a couple of minutes to even talk to one of the PCPs, now they wait 45 seconds or less. We would likely have had to hire 10 more people if we had not put in Apropos solution, Galloway says. We are using our reps more effectively and productively. The system paid for itself in less than a year. And, by moving these employees into tech support, the company was able to cut wait time after the IVR phase of the call.

Galloway also praises the flexibility Apropos provides the agents. Agents can take the calls they want, when they are

ready, he explains. The voluntary nature has been quite positive. Some would argue that agent empowerment could mean that agents simply to not answer certain calls, but we've found just the opposite to be true. Being empowered has lowered stress and encouraged agents to handle calls.

Apropos application is easy to work with, he adds. We have had a lot of changes as we've grown. We can move agents from one queue to another in seconds. We can also put agents in more than one queue. Try doing that with most ACDs. This enables supervisors more flexibility to make agents with various specialties available to more customers. This is a pretty big deal and most people don't realize how helpful it is.

In addition, Seagate Software uses the database look-up functions to check entitlement for its 7 x 24 Priority Support Program. If the customer is not registered for 7 x 24 support, they are advised by the system allowing customers to be sent directly to a group of agents which can offer the support from the Priority Support Program. Any unexpected pluses? Yes! Galloway exclaims. After our purchase, we discovered how well Apropos runs over the Internet. Our offices and outsource partners in Vancouver, Florida, California and England can all look at the queues at the same time and pick up calls. It's pretty amazing.

Benefits:

- Reduced costs by using Apropos IVR functionality, Seagate Software was able to move at least 10 agents from operator to tech support status, saving the salaries of those positions and eliminating boring jobs. ROI in one year.
- Increase customer satisfaction through music choice, position in queue and key informational messages to customers while on hold.
- Increased productivity through enabling agents to see all customers at a glance and select those who have been waiting longest or have licensed premium service.
- Increased service levels through real-time load balancing. Supervisors can switch agents from one queue to another in less than a minute or put agents in multiple queues.
- Customer segmentation allowing certain agents to specialize in trouble calls has cut the time of those calls in half.



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