

In the years since the article *Knowledge management for call centres* was published, call centres have come to play a critical role in many organisations, but the needs and challenges remain the same. Intranets have matured and grown in this time, and more than ever have the capacity to help call centre staff connect with customers in a richer and more effective way.

### Understand the call centre environment

The best way to understand the call centre work environment is spend a day there. Sit with the staff as they take customer inquiries and evaluate how easy it is for them to delight the customer. (A technique covered in the previous article *Conducting intranet needs analysis*).

These workers have different needs from the corporate colleagues because they are:

- furthest from corporate information sources, but responsible for its dissemination
- in constant and direct contact with customers, who invariably have a problem or information need to be solved immediately
- measured by the time taken to resolve customer issues
- and simultaneously navigating multiple enterprise systems and related applications

### Intranet support

Call centre staff are likely to spend the majority of their time in one or two central enterprise systems which are invariably outside the remit of the intranet team, however all of the peripheral support they require is within intranet scope.

To do their jobs well they need finger-tip access to:

- numerous enterprise systems, supporting applications and other tools
- guidelines that support all enterprise system and related activities
- team structure and member details for consultation, escalation or customer transfer
- definitive, unambiguous information sources such as detailed product and service offerings

The call centre teams also need effective communications, provided in a way that minimises information ambiguity. Messages that potentially conflict with reference material can be particularly frustrating. To promote more effective information exchange:

- ensure that change notifications and new release information are fully aligned with reference material
- tailor solutions since 'call centre' staff are not one single audience
- align website content (which the customer relies on) with what is available internally
- question the appropriateness of corporate focused information, for those working in environments far removed from head office
- provide real-time peer support and collaboration within and between teams to leverage each others' experience
- consider extending this connectivity back to head office teams

### Leveraging call centre intelligence

It would be a mistake to consider call centre staff as simply at end of a long communications line. What is happening in a call centre can be a litmus test for how the organisation is faring.

Any issues of significance will be flagged at call centre level first but the strong hierarchical structure that often surrounds the call centre worker, distances these rich information sources from those who can make best use of them. The intranet can be used to close the gap but requires a commitment of support at the corporate end.

Whether this is about short term 'flare ups' or longer term measures of customer sentiment, it is crucial to close the feedback loop. Responding to the feedback from remote workers will send the message it is welcome and valued. Ignoring it will demoralise the contributors and engender cynicism.

For many organisations, call centres are out-of-sight, but for intranet teams they should be very much front of mind.