How to Balance Business Goals with Avaya Business Advocate

Avaya Aura® Call Center Elite
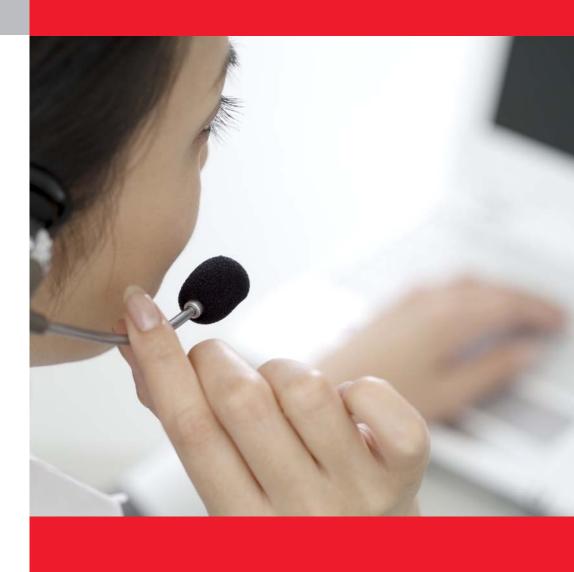
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Funambulism is the art of walking along a rope at great heights. Even after a tightrope walker has mastered the skill of balance and overcome the fear of falling, he discovers new challenges as he moves to greater high-wire feats. Shifting winds can throw the best performer off balance. And the bouncing of the wire is always working against him.

Even in the best-run contact centers, it's no mean feat to simultaneously satisfy the needs of each customer, every agent, and complex segmentation policies. Inbound contacts come not as a steady breeze, but in gusts that frequently shift directions. Volumes bounce, sometimes radically, making it difficult to consistently meet varying service levels.

This presents contact centers with the triple pressures of increasing efficiencies, satisfying customers and retaining agents — all while managing expenses.

This paper provides new ideas and solutions for contact center managers who seek to set aside the daily high-wire act and instead make a calm, balanced journey across the abyss of these pressures.

Avaya Business Advocate, now standard in Avaya Aura® Call Center Elite, can get you off the tight rope and onto solid ground. It can help to provide that calm and balance, so contact center managers can create an excellent customer experience. In the process, managers can balance agent workload based on the company's business rules, and increase contact center efficiency and revenues.

Enabling a perfectly balanced contact center, Avaya Business Advocate uses patented algorithms to:

- Manage call spikes
- Meet service levels consistently
- Assign and reassign agents automatically, as required
- Predict wait times
- Deliver customized call treatments
- Match the right agent with the right contact
- Reduce agent burn out by balancing the workload

Creating the perfectly balanced contact center

In the ideal contact center, it's a breeze to consistently match work items and resources, without harming service levels or overloading agents. In this imaginary world, high-value customers get fast service, yet no one is hung out to dry. Service and segmentation goals are met, without requiring supervisors to shuffle agents.

Reality has, until recently, been far from the ideal. Contact center applications have used historical data to achieve service levels and manage agent occupancy. The past is not always an accurate predictor of the present moment, especially in contact centers.

The leap from traditional ACD functionality to skills-based routing applications helped to acknowledge differences in agent training and proficiency, and route calls accordingly. Segmentation brought improvements in how customers of higher value were treated in the call queue.

But neither of these advancements solved the most pressing contact center problems. Contact center managers continued to use tools that forced them to walk the tight rope looking back, not forward. When the volume of calls shifted unexpectedly, higher-skilled agents could suddenly find themselves in the hot seat, leading to burnout of the best agents. Higher-value customers were placed at the front of the queue, but lower-value customers were continually pushed back. Whenever higher-priority contact volume rose, service for average customers plummeted.

Today, thanks to innovations in contact center technologies, Avaya Business Advocate offers a better way. Matching the right contact with the right resource at the right time, every time, it:

○ Uses patented technology to look ahead instead of back

○ Monitors and maintains service levels by reassigning agents – automatically

○ Gives managers control of quality of service and agent utilization

Step off your high wire for a moment and come with us on a tour of the best approaches to contact center management.

Make goal-based decisions

One downfall of priority queuing has been its myopic focus on the highest priority customers. When the tightrope starts to bounce, supervisors react to a growing number of calls in queue, or the oldest call waiting. By that time it is too late to manually manage service levels and deliver acceptable service to all customer groups. Lower-priority customers wait longer and longer in queue, and get frustrated or abandon from queue.

Taking a different approach to this problem, Avaya Business Advocate predicts the wait time for each inbound call and then — selecting the best available resource for each call — delivers it, meeting targeted service objectives. With forward-looking optimization, decisions are based on business goals rather than stale statistics describing past issues.

The advantage of this multi-level approach is the dynamic selection of agents to meet service level objectives for all calls across the

business. Avaya Business Advocate handles the complex task of balancing segmentation rules with service objectives. To strike that ideal balance, contacts are segmented into discrete queues, and each queue is assigned its own service objective.

Consider a fictitious example. Atmos Airlines segments most callers into three queues. They set 20 seconds as the target service level for the queue with elite "Atmos Sphere Club" frequent flyers, 60 seconds for the main reservations queue, and 120 seconds for passengers seeking free mileage upgrades.

Then the contact center system compares the skills of agents, as they become available, with the contact at the head of each queue. Priority goes to the call for which a longer wait will most jeopardize the targeted service level. That contact is delivered to the available agent.

This servicing method takes into consideration all logged-in agents and skill sets in the contact center. It depends on accurate, split-second calculations of expected or predicted wait times, based on always-changing variables. Neither of these is humanly possible to do manually. All of it is achievable with patented Avaya technology.

A contact center that implements this technique will route contacts based on multi-level service goals and segmentation policies, rather than on single-dimensional priority levels.

Avaya Business Advocate makes decisions in a fraction of a second for each call — by predicting which call the agent needs to take in order to meet service levels across the business, rather than by reacting to events of the past few minutes. The result is a forward-looking system that helps meet or exceed established service levels for every queue, without overloading agents.

Set situational service levels for high-value callers

Minimizing deviations from targets by manually moving agents is an outdated damage-control technique that can lead managers to over- or under-compensate. In contrast, the strategy in well-balanced contact centers is to select calls for agents based on meeting a target service level for each skill or vector directory number (VDN).

This strategy can be used to give important customers preferential treatment simply by administering a faster service objective to the skills or VDNs that handle these customers. With Business Advocate, calls are selected based on their predicted wait time as compared to the service objective.

Higher-priority calls are serviced before less important calls, at any volume. To avoid leaving less important callers hanging, Avaya Business Advocate works them in as their wait times approach targeted service levels.

Managing call selection in this way — based on each skill or VDN meeting its target service level — minimizes the deviation from each administered target. It also prevents cases where a supervisor must manually move agents to meet targets.

When the service objective is implemented at the VDN level, calls from multiple VDNs can be directed to the same skill queue — yet receive differentiated service based upon the service objectives of their respective VDNs.

Establishing equal priority for multiple skills or VDNs is reasonable under most circumstances. There are times, though, when peak call volume can cause trouble — and equal priorities mean equal trouble for those service levels.

This is where situational policies come into play. The service levels remain the same, but managers can assign levels of importance to protect each service level. Here is an example from our friends at Atmos Airlines:

> "The Frequent Flyer queue and the International Reservations queue have equal target service levels and they are equally important, when all is going well. But if today's Europe fare promotion is a success, the service level for International Reservations is more important to protect."

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° Predict wait times

° Deliver customized call treatments

° Match the right agent with the right contact

° Reduce agent burn out by balancing the workload

Establishing these situational service levels in advance makes it possible for the contact center system to react immediately, automatically reallocating resources to balance business objectives.

Manage agent pools dynamically

The business rules for managing surplus calls or agents can get complex — too complex for most contact center applications to handle well. But it is seldom sufficient to draw a line and assign more agents to a queue whenever that threshold is exceeded. A dynamic contact center environment calls for dynamic management of the agent pool.

In the well-balanced contact center the threshold is not a line, but a gradient, in which reserve agents are dynamically assigned to a skill. There are three components to this method.

First, the contact center assigns multiple thresholds for activating reserve agents. Threshold A might be 90% of calls answered in 45 seconds, well within the target. Threshold B might be 85% of calls answered in 90 seconds, the administered target for the queue. Note that once threshold B has been reached, achieving an administered target requires more aggressive activation of reserve agents.

Second, agents are designated for selected skills on two reserve levels. When the expected wait time for that skill exceeds Threshold A, an automated process starts assigning first-line reserve agents. If all first-line reserve agents are assigned and the skill nonetheless exceeds Threshold B, then second-line reserve agents are activated.

Third, the thresholds can be adjusted in real time based on an ongoing comparison between the skill's current level of service and its target service level. The thresholds are never a set-and-forget decision in a busy contact center, but supervisors should not be focused on manually adjusting them. Instead, threshold adjustments should be left to the swift and watchful eye of an advanced contact center application that can make changes in milliseconds.

By activating reserve agents only when the contact center is in danger of missing set targets, dynamic agent pooling helps supervisors meet service levels for skills, providing excellent service more consistently and reducing abandons from queue.

Optimize agent utilization rates

Speed does not always win the race. When a call is answered instantly, but by an inadequately skilled agent, the customer may lack confidence in the answer and decide to call back for a better agent. Or, worse, the customer might not call back. Achieving target service levels can still leave plenty of room for improvement in contact center performance.

Swinging the pendulum in the opposite direction, matching calls to agents based solely on skill, is a cause of imbalanced agent occupancy. Multi-skilled agents are overworked, while agents who need more experience sit idle.

The winning strategy is not a compromise. Rather, it is to evaluate overall occupancy to find the least occupied agent who is qualified to handle each call.

This technique balances workloads across qualified agents by selecting the least occupied agent instead of the idlest agent. The distinction is a crucial one. The least occupied agent is simply the staffed agent who has done the least amount of work over a period of time. The idlest agent is the logged-in agent who has gone the longest time without taking a call.

To balance overall occupancy, the next incoming contact should go to the most qualified, yet least occupied, agent available. This technique minimizes burnout (among highly specialized agents with multiple skills), can lead to enhanced revenue (through up-selling and cross-selling), and can improve first-call resolution — which typically improves customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Manage proactively: Avaya Business Advocate

Four key components make it possible to balance multiple business needs, such as meeting target service levels, caller segmentation, and managing multi-skilled agents.

Service Objective

With Service Objective, contact centers can make goal-based decisions regarding call selection for agents, based on expected wait time. This feature allows a target service objective to be administered on skills, VDNs, or both — and it works in combination with other agent and call selection features of Avaya Aura® Call Center Elite.

Service Objective manages call selection based on helping each skill or VDN meet its targeted response time. Calls are selected based on having the highest ratio of wait time divided by the targeted service objective.   This helps companies meet service level targets for every single queue.

Service Level Supervisor

Service Level Supervisor allows contact centers to dynamically invoke reserve agents as needed, based on two thresholds that are assigned to skills. These discrete thresholds can be used for inbound ACD call selection based on the skill's state relative to its thresholds.

When the skill is not over either threshold, the agent pool consists only of normally assigned agents. When the skill is over the first threshold, reserve agents are assigned to service it; even more reserve agents are added when the skill breaches its second threshold.

Service Level Supervisor is particularly powerful when there is a need to designate agents as reserve agents and to specify when they are activated to handle calls. Reserve agent functionality eliminates the need for supervisors to move agents manually because, while an agent might be assigned (as a reserve agent) to a skill or skills, the agent receives calls for those skills only when thresholds have been breached.

Percent Allocation

Business Advocate's Percent Allocation option helps optimize agent utilization. Making automatic adjustments, it maximizes the probability that service level targets will be met (based on X% of calls in skill Y). Individual agent percent allocations are automatically adjusted to meet their original targets.

With Percent Allocation, agents are auto-reserved — put on standby — in skills where their work time percentage is above the administered allocated percentage

Auto-reserve can be used to restrict an agent's time in a skill or to guarantee service time for uncommon skills.

In addition, Percent Allocation allows scheduling packages to control use of multi-skilled agents by dedicating a percentage of an agent's time to each administered skill.

Predicted Wait Time

With its Predicted Wait time component, Business Advocate supports goal-based decision-making, based on the total time an inbound ACD call is predicted to wait in queue for the next available agent. Avaya Business Advocate's patented Predicted Wait Time calculation considers staffing levels, average talk times, queue depth, and many other details. Predicted Wait Time can be used (instead of the current time the call has waited in queue) to determine call selection in Service Level Supervisor and Service Objective.

Predicted Wait Time can be used to reduce the maximum delay and number of abandons for skills with only a few agents, or for skills that have a longer handle time relative to other skills.

Using Predicted Wait Time, calls are not necessarily handled in the order in which they are received. An inbound ACD call with the longest queue time may wait, while a call with a longer predicted wait time in another skill is given to an agent.

Example: Atmos Airlines' contact center is busy. At the head of the International Reservations queue is a caller who has waited 10 seconds. At the head of another queue is a call whose VDN is dedicated to the Atmos Sphere Club. That caller has waited 15 seconds.

Both queues have a service objective of 20 seconds. Thus far, both calls are within their service objectives. The next available agent is one of only a few who are skilled in handling both types of calls. Avaya Business Advocate delivers the International Reservations call, not the oldest or highest-value call, to the available agent. Why?

Because with very few agents staffed on the International Reservations queue, by the time another agent with this skill becomes available, that caller would miss their targeted service level by a mile.

Using Predicted Wait Time with Service Objective to match agents with callers according to business goals, rather than simply the order in which calls arrive, helps meet service targets across the business.

Conclusion

With Avaya Business Advocate, managers can step off the tight rope and onto solid ground, look ahead, and proactively avoid problems, while achieving consistently excellent performance.

The journey to improved service and agent retention is comprised of many steps. Making goal-based decisions is one of them. Dynamically managing agent pools is essential; matching the right contact with the right resource at the right time is indispensible.

Avaya Business Advocate helps companies increase efficiencies, satisfy customers, and retain agents — all while managing expenses. The advanced management techniques described

in this white paper fit together to enable a strategy that is as unique as your business needs.

The result is a forward-looking management approach and a well-balanced contact center.

Learn More

For more information on how Avaya can take your enterprise from the high wire to solid ground where it needs to be, contact your Avaya Client Executive or Authorized Avaya BusinessPartner, or visit us at **www.avaya.com**

About Avaya

Avaya is a global provider of business collaboration and communications solutions, providing unified communications, contact centers, data solutions and related services to companies of all sizes around the world. For more information please visit **www.avaya.com**.