

# MANAGEMENT

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## MANAGEMENT

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**Application of customer  
service phone systems  
in the functioning of travel  
agencies**

**1. Introduction**

In the contemporary reality, when offers provided by travel agencies are similar to one another and easily available, but clients' expectations keep growing, the implementation of a customer service phone centre provides an opportunity for servicing a large number of visiting clients, while preserving an individual nature of each phone contact and creating conditions, owing to which the calling client can easily obtain the proper connection or an information searched for. The objective of the hereby study is to present the concept of customer service phone centres, the advantages resulting from their application by travel agencies and the popularity of such customer service system among travel agencies functioning at Polish market.

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## 2. Call/Contact Centre as the module of company management supporting systems representing CRM standard

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) represents the recent tendency in integrating systems for company management support<sup>1</sup>, in which the following communication channels are most frequently used (A. Piętera 2003p. 15):

- stationary phone<sup>2</sup>, fax, mobile phone – CRM systems module Call/Contact Centre; it allows for the identification of the caller, obtaining information regarding the history of cooperation or contacts with a particular client, as well as enables transferring calls to the due employees, responsible for given tasks,
- e-mail – facilitates automatic registration of an in-coming or out-going e-mail, including its content, allows for sending a series of e-mails for marketing purposes and also helps in automatic redistribution of e-mails arriving at particular units of company structure,
- www – allows for registering average time and map of visiting the service by a client, in order to define preferences and needs of the visiting Internet user – a potential client,
- text message – development of the Internet applications helped in combining the functioning of text messages with electronic mail (by informing a client using a text message about the received e-mails), sending information to clients about current offers, products, competitions, information about payment deadlines, as well as providing travel agency field employees (residents, tour operators, tour guides) with information about a client.

## 3. Call/Contact Centre application opportunities in the functioning of travel agencies

Call Centre facilitates automatic dialling and connecting a travel agency employee with a client, automatic recording of the conversation and including



<sup>1</sup> CRM class system is the one including most of the following modules: 1. Sales – management of contracts; 2. Sales management; 3. Time and area management; 4. Correspondence; 5. Marketing; 6. Trade orders servicing; 7. Telemarketing; 8. After-sales client servicing and support; 9. Information; 10. Integration with ERP systems; 11. Data synchronization; 12. E-commerce; 13. Call/Contact Centre.

<sup>2</sup> A telephone represents, at present, one of the most popular media used in marketing. Its application allows for: presentations and sales of services, obtaining information for data base, providing clients with due information, establishing and continuing contacts with customers.



information in the data base, eg. whether a client wishes to be contacted again, what is his/her major interest, what attitude towards the travel agency he/she represents. In its simplest form Call Centre represents just a duly configurated telephone operator centre and a group of operators (agents), who carry out manually all operations connected with servicing customers.

Call Centre is regarded an important facility representing CRM standard, both active, resulting from a travel agency initiative, and passive, related to clients' initiative (clients contact a travel agency in order to make reservations of services, ask questions, make remarks, file complaints or obtain information about an offer).

What is important for clients, is the fact that it is enough to know just one Call Centre number and have an opportunity to deal with most issues by calling this particular number. These are usually toll free numbers, or almost free ones. Additional technological simplifications of Call Centre are the following functions (A. Dejnaka 2002, p.123-125):

1. Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) is the function consisting in automatic transfer of in-coming calls to the due operator. It assumes an excessive number of phone lines as compared to the number of employees servicing clients, which imposes the necessity of putting clients on hold. It may result from different reasons, both independent from a client (eg. directing him/her to the first free operator), or depending on data introduced by a client (eg. the selected type of service, client's number, contacts with a given client which have occurred so far).
2. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) represents an automatic, impersonalized servicing a client (A. Mazur, D. Mazur, W. Bełz, G. Dorenda, A. Parylak 2004, p. 95). On the basis of the introduced data (eg. number dialled on the keyboard, voice orders) there occurs an identification of client's needs and eg. a phone connection with the due travel agency employee - Call Centre operator, or obtaining an answer to a standard question. The frequent component of IVR systems is clients' identification<sup>3</sup> performed by using clients' data base at the disposal of the due travel agency.
3. Computer Telephony Integration (CTI) represents more advanced,

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<sup>3</sup> Feasible modes of client's identification are: caller identification on the basis of Call Centre phone number which a client calls, caller identification based on the PIN number entered by a client, identification of a caller based on the phone number he/she is calling from, identification of a caller based on data resulting from information provided by a client by means of voice menu.

- previously mentioned functions, allowing for computer systems integration with a phone system, as the result of which a user is immediately transferred from an automatic interface to an operator.
4. Voice mail is a computer phone system allowing for voice recording, in order for it to be later played to a suitable person. Voice mail may be used for supplying detailed information about a travel agency, or its offer, providing the latest information (every day the system of voice mail may be loaded with information for recipients about such issues as one day lasting, before unannounced price reduction, or a last minute offer about launching a new service or opening a new unit), collecting information for data base about clients (owing to direct connection between the system of voice mail and data base, a travel agency may collect additional information), providing answers to technical problems, spreading the opinion of clients most satisfied with travel agency services, providing clients with a possibility to place orders by means of phone dialling keyboard (B. Bishop 2001, p. 108-109).
  5. Voice Recognition is the process of presenting human voice in an automatic, electronic form. For this purpose advanced algorithms are applied which use the elements of artificial intelligence.
  6. Speaker Verification is the service consisting in confirming client's identity based on the tone of his/her voice. In standard applications a client thinks up a code, utters it a few times "teaching" the system, in this way, his/her pronunciation and next identifies him/herself by saying the code. The condition for successful identification is a significantly high similarity of the uttered voice sample and the recorded pattern. Speaker verification usually represents an additional form of authorization, supplementary to providing Personal Identification Number (PIN).
  7. Outbound Call is a service in which a phone connection becomes initiated by an automated telephone system, and not by a client. After initiating the connection the system presents due recording or transfers the call.
- In practice the systems of servicing the client by phone – Call Centre type become more and more frequently substituted by more useful interaction Contact Centre systems<sup>4</sup>. Contact Centre represents a team of workers, equipment and technology facilitating contacts between a supplier and a client by means of all possible means of communication which, apart from a telephone, also

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<sup>4</sup> Polish translation used in professional literature reads: centrum obsługi klientów, centrum kontaktów z klientami.

take advantage of other ways of spreading information, such as: e-mail, voice mail, fax, the Internet, WAP protocol, or transmission of pictures.

In case of most advanced solutions Contact Centres may also include (A. Dejnaka 2002, p. 123)

1. Fax servers facilitating automatic distribution (sending and receiving) of a large number of fax messages aimed at a large number of senders and recipients, or received from them.
2. Internet servers allowing for making contact via the Internet and e-mail. The Internet server represents a computer system which regulates access to the Internet, provides other users some information resources, as well as coordinated data transfer between other servers. Fax may play diversified functions in a Contact Centre. Its basic role is to receive information from a client and send different information to him/her. The most frequently received faxes are stored in an electronic, not paper, form and are referred to data about a client. Owing to the above, a person servicing a client may, at any time, bring up on the screen all faxes sent to and received from him/her. A more advanced option is represented by a, so called, "requested fax". This function consists in client's calling a selected Contact Centre number, sends an e-mail or fills in the Internet form, quoting what information (eg. folders, price lists, latest bulletins or special offers) and at which fax number should be sent to him/her. By means of the Internet a travel agency may, in many different ways, communicate with its targeted auditorium, which may be the type of communication requiring from a targeted client to be active, or the one during which a travel agency itself initiates the contact. Among most important ones, which may be applied while establishing Contact Centre one should mention, among others: www sites, e-mail, direct e-mail, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), Call Back<sup>5</sup>, VoIP<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>5</sup> Call Back represents the service provided, very frequently, to clients by the Internet servers, it consist in calling the client back. A client, browsing through the Internet sites would like, at a certain moment, to obtain additional information about eg. the searched product. He/she presses the button Call Back, fills in a form in which he/she states at which phone number and at what time he/she is available for an agent representing a Contact Centre. The agent, ready to provide all indispensable information, calls at the required time and answers client's queries or uncertainties.

<sup>6</sup> VoIP represents the function similar to Call Back, but the conversation is conducted not via the telephone connection, but via the Internet.

Web-collaboration (Web co-browsing)<sup>7</sup>.

3. GSM gates which facilitate contact by text messages and WAP protocol, so sending text messages by means of the Internet and transmitting data together with initiating the Internet applications by means of a mobile phone.
4. WAP allows access to the same information as typical www sites offered in the Internet. Text message may be used for asking questions, making payments and orders by clients and informing a client about anything which may be of importance to him/her, such as eg. price changes. From the point of view of a mobile phone user this form of communication seems most effective, since this device is at his/her disposal for the most part of the day.

#### 4. The application of client service phone systems in travel agencies in Poland

The studied subjects<sup>8</sup> were asked to list different forms of communication with a client and the frequency of their application, used in their business activity. The research results point to the fact that travel agencies in Poland apply tools related to making phone contact with a client relatively rarely. As few as 6,23% of respondents declare that they have established a Call Centre, 13,44% confess

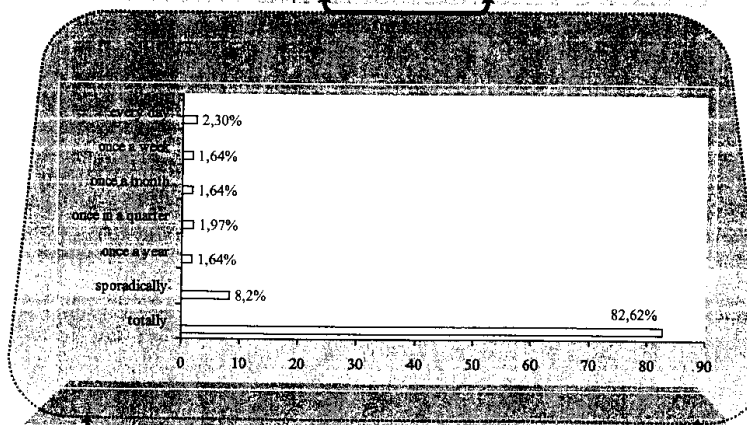
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<sup>7</sup> Web-collaboration represents the most advanced form of www service consisting in the fact that while surfing the Internet sites and conducting a conversation with a Contact Centre agent at the same time, the agent may send up the Internet sites which the client wishes to see. Let's assume that the client - Internet user looks for information (site) about a specific tourist product. Unfortunately, despite intensive attempts he/she is unsuccessful in finding the product's description. Therefore, he/she presses the Call Back button and obtains a connection with the Contact Centre agent, presents the problem to him/her and the agent sends him the respective www site, which can be seen at the client's display. There are also other options available (text messages and WAP), however, they are not as popular as the mentioned above techniques of contacting clients. Despite the small size of mobile phones' displays they do play an important role, since a mobile phone is a portable device and helps a client to enjoy independence.

<sup>8</sup> The study covered the sample of 305 travel agencies and took part in their units all over Poland, but also during more important tourist events, such as fairs or exhibitions. For the size of studied population  $N = 2629$ , trust coefficient  $(1-\alpha) = 0,9$  (i.e. 90%) and the acceptable statistical error ( $d$ ) at the level of 3,5% the sample size should amount to  $n = 305$  units, in the range from 200 to 500 enterprises, indicated by the method applying historical facts.

to having an info-line and 5,25% say they conduct telemarketing activities<sup>9</sup>.

Figure 1. The frequency of using a phone to establish contacts with clients



82,62% of respondents do not use a telephone for the purposes of direct sales and for encouraging clients to purchase services, while 8,20% take advantage of this form of communication only sporadically (figure 1).

Establishing a Call/Contact Center may help travel agencies in creating clients' loyalty and generating new opportunities for gaining profit (W. Popiołek 2000, p. 12). This may take place owing to:

1. Possibility of an individual approach towards each client, supporting the preparation of new offers or promotions for a client based

<sup>9</sup>Telemarketing consists in establishing contact made by a salesman with a potential client by means of a phone. There are two forms of telemarketing: active and passive one. Active telemarketing takes place when a salesman calls potential clients in order to encourage them to make a purchase, evaluate their interest in the offer by providing catalogues, folders or other advertising materials, to perform market research or pave the way for personal phone contact about the sales. Passive telemarketing is applied as a parallel strategy together with other carriers and frequently consists in an opportunity to place orders by phone.

- on information about purchases made so far, and providing a client with direct access to data collected about him/her by the travel agency,
2. Opportunity for obtaining automated mechanisms of information flow and tasks for passing on problems, as well as contacts or enquiries made by clients between different departments, or within one, given department between Call Center agents (employees of the first contact line) and higher level staff,
  3. Integration of all departments dealing with clients and allowing for a free flow of information among the office units, which facilitates its concise image outside,
  4. Full integration with the Internet, which allows for using it as a two-way, interactive communication channel on the line: travel agency - client,
  5. Supporting the evaluation of client's satisfaction level with products offered by the company and with Call Center services,
  6. Opportunities for generating sales: depending on the client's profile the system prompts the agent new sales options. By taking advantage of scenarios in the system an agent evaluates and classifies a client and next performs the sales, or passes the information on to the sales department.

## 5. Conclusions

Call/Contact Centre should play a crucial role in establishing the perception of a given travel agency by its clients, but also serve as the strategic tool for keeping the already captured clients and for entering into contacts with the potential recipients of tourist services. The presented possibilities of modules responsible for client service phone systems facilitate the significant increase of travel agencies effectiveness since an interactive Call/Contact Centre not only creates the image of a travel agency sensitive to client's needs, but also takes care in establishing new relations with him/her and obtains new advantages resulting from the increasing value of loyal clients in the future, as well as generates profits from growing sales. Besides Call/Contact Centre performs numerous additional functions starting from taking orders, passing on information, catalogues distribution, or answering simple questions from clients, to solving problems which require voice contact with the due travel agency staff member. Even though the Call/Contact Centre primary objective is servicing the biggest number of calling clients, it may also be used by a travel agency in an active way for making out-going telephone calls in order to perform market research, to persuade potential clients to become interested in the offered services, or in case of clients - institutions, obtaining new projects to be carried out and having considered, in every single

case, the optimal time for contacting the particular client (time of the day, or day of a week).

#### Summary

##### **Application of customer service phone systems in the functioning of travel agencies**

The hereby article presents the idea of functioning and major advantages resulting from the implementation of Call/Contact Centres for servicing clients, as well as survey results referring to the application of this tool by travel agencies during the communication process with their clients.

#### Streszczenie

##### **Wykorzystanie systemów telefonicznej obsługi klienta w działalności biur podróży**

W niniejszym artykule zaprezentowano ideę funkcjonowania oraz główne korzyści z wdrożenia telefonicznych centrów obsługi klienta, a także przedstawiono wyniki badań ankietowych dotyczących wykorzystania tego narzędzia przez biura podróży z procesie komunikacji z klientami.

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