

# SA yet to fully appreciate the value of the call centre

The South African call centre market is growing at an estimated 10%-15% per annum and this growth is being driven by a number of factors including the increase in remote contact.

Paul Fick, MD at Jasco Enterprise, says, for example, a few short years ago most bank customers had to go to a bank branch so they could resolve their queries or transact business with their bank.

"Today, we are geared towards electronic banking or online banking and contact centres to transact or resolve queries without having to make a trip to the local branch.

"Therefore, more people call, e-mail or otherwise remotely contact the organisation instead of walking in through the front door."

Another major driver is the high cost associated with staff as resources and contact centres provide cost efficient alternatives through "self help" options that are offered through a contact centre, reducing the headcount requirement and thus reducing payroll costs.

"Contact centres also provide an attractive value proposition to organisations through proactive outreach functionality, which in turn further reduces the requirement for an increased headcount," says Fick.

"For example, a sales campaign could drive promotions through the contact centre via social media, e-mail, fax and instant messaging. Another example is if a utility company is planning downtime or an outage due to repairs or maintenance. The organisation can also use this proactive multichannel approach by sending out a notification which will reduce the incoming calls to the contact centre when the outage actually occurs."

He says companies are increasingly using expert back-end systems to handle queries more efficiently.

"This allows for the review of client histories and associated information which is ideal for resolving queries through the contact centre."

Roz Broome, managing executive: In-Touch Contact Centre at Innovation Group SA, says there has been some downscaling in the outbound telemarketing area of the financial services sector. However, this may have been countered in the collections sector which appears to have seen rapid growth.

"No doubt the National Credit Act and the global downturn have played major roles in this shift," she says.

Broome says barriers to entry into the contact centre arena have been lowered due the availability of "cloud" solutions versus the need to make substantial in-house capital investments.

Instead of acting as a barrier between companies and their customers call centres have given organisations another tool which, when used properly, can help improve customer relations and understanding of clients' needs.

"Instead of creating disintermediation, call volumes help call centre management pick up trends and issues far faster than, for example, a sales team out in the field.

"The key is whether or not this market intelligence is being escalated within the organisation or to the client that outsources the function.

"Close interaction between client and outsource provider is essential," says Broome.

She notes that given the volumes of interactions with customers call centres are far more cost effective than face-to-face communication. In addition, accessibility is much easier. However, each company needs to incorporate the contact centre into the company strategy to identify the business drivers.

"This in turn leads to what role the contact centre could play in driving down costs or increasing revenue," she says.

"There is a growing awareness of the value of the contact centre but really acknowledging the role it could, or does, play has not yet been fully appreciated by South African companies."

Deon Scheepers, regional business development manager of Interactive Intelligence Africa, says a key trend in the model call or contact centre environment is that centres are under increasing pressure from businesses to drive revenue, and thus are being forced to identify an appropriate balance between cost saving and improved efficiency.

"This can sometimes lead to contact centres compromising on certain elements, be it in terms of staffing or technological processes.

"However, in order to ensure efficiency and productivity, it's vital that contact centres never compromise on staff training; unified systems that provide a single view of the customer; and measurement and monitoring tools."

Source: *Business Day*

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>