



Case Study

Call Centers Decrease Time, Increase Productivity

The Opportunity

A large mid-western insurance company employs 4,000 customer service reps who handle incoming calls from insureds and agents. Sales growth was creating pressures either to add new call centers or greatly improve the productivity of the existing ones.

The Approach

The first step was to generate ideas among a large and diverse collection of reps, managers, and agents. This company even began asking some customers, at the conclusion of the call, "What could I have done differently to make this call shorter and still provide you with excellent customer service?" Enormous effort was invested in the idea generation phase, which involved over a hundred people and generated well over a hundred ideas.

The Test

It was decided that the first and largest test would be run in the call center nearest to company headquarters and that subsequent testing would occur in call centers in two other states. The initial MVT[®] experiment tested 31 ideas, all that were practical, fast and cost free from the original brainstorming. Ninety customer service reps participated in the three-week test, which discovered seven ideas that significantly reduced "average handle time" (time lapsed from the termination of one call to the termination of the next).

In the refining tests that followed in other states, five of the factors proved that they would work across all the call centers. Following are examples of the ideas tested.

<i>Idea</i>	<i>Old</i>	<i>New</i>
Remind Agents They Can Access Info Via the Automated System	Don't mention	Mention on every call
Utilize Simplified Form	Old form	New
Interruptions of Co-Workers During Client Call	Allowed	Not allowed
Call Scripts	Use verbatim	Don't use
Only Supervisor Makes Exceptions on Late Charges	Yes	Rep's discretion
Begin to Terminate Call After X Minutes	No	Yes
Additional Computer Training	No	Yes
Communications from Supervisor	Use internal e-mail	Verbal only

The Results

The five helpful factors brought average handle time down an average of 17% across the company. Not only has the idea of new centers been shelved, the existing centers have managed to handle impressive growth in sales and call volume without adding new customer rep positions. The financial value of these accomplishments exceeded \$15 million!

The keys to success here were extensive efforts to generate ideas and management's willingness to test some unusual departures from conventional wisdom.