



Skills-Based Routing and Virtual Queuing: *Using Complementary Technologies to Increase Service Levels*

When you implement skills-based routing, you are putting your best foot forward in helping your customers. The idea is to precisely match your customer's needs with an agent or representative who has the specialized skills necessary to effectively and efficiently resolve the issue or handle the inquiry. First call resolution (FCR) is a metric that many contact centers use in order to gauge customer satisfaction as well as operational efficiency. When a customer is passed around to different specialists before ultimately reaching a resolution, not only does it lower first call resolution, but it causes customer frustration and it wastes precious resources. Training and staffing specialists are expensive endeavors, and each time a specialist handles a customer and does not resolve the issue, that time and expense is wasted. Also, training agents to become specialists is resource intensive; it may take months or years before you have enough specialists in order to handle customer demand.

An unfortunate reality for contact centers is that there are rarely enough specialists to meet incoming caller demand and as a result, queues form. When this happens, management normally takes the attitude that it is better to answer calls more quickly with less skilled agents than to have calls wait for many minutes before being greeted by a specialist. When put in this predicament, it is no wonder that the focus changes from first call resolution (FCR) to the average speed of answer (ASA) and service level attainment (SLA) metrics to measure overall performance. But what about the customer? Think about how you would react to each of the two situations: my call is answered quickly, but the agent cannot resolve my issue; or, my issue is quickly resolved, but only after wasting a lot of time on hold. The better of these two situations is debatable, but it would not be a stretch to say that customers find both situations equally frustrating.

This problem is a common occurrence in contact centers: trying to manage queues to maintain performance metrics and achieve customer loyalty initiatives, while at the same time trying to control the costs of hiring and training specialists. Is there a solution?

The answer is, yes. There is a technology that some contact centers have been using successfully for years, but is just now starting to become well-known: it's called virtual queuing. A virtual queuing solution interfaces with the PBX/ACD and the skills-based routing solutions. When a new call arrives, virtual queuing evaluates the estimated wait time (EWT) for a specialist. If there is no specialist available for a few minutes, the system quotes the estimated wait time and allows the caller to hang up while the system saves his place in line. When it is the caller's turn, he will receive a callback within the time quoted. Additionally, the caller may schedule an appointment to speak with a specialist at a more convenient time. While waiting in the virtual queue, the caller is free to go about his business. When his phone rings he is connected with a specialist who has the right skills to handle the call.

Virtual queuing has been shown to:

1. **Increase Agent Efficiency And First Call Resolution** – With a virtual queuing solution in place, you achieve a greater return from your skills-based routing investment. This is true because you send fewer calls to agents who do not have the skills to handle the request. Agents are, therefore, not wasting time on calls



they cannot properly handle. With virtual queuing, you are, in essence, reserving a specialist for your customer and increasing the likelihood of first call resolution.

2. **Reduce Abandons** – When there are peak conditions in your contact center, virtual queuing immediately educates your callers with the EWT and with options for managing the wait time. Customers who reserve their place in queue and request a callback cannot hang up out of frustration since they are not actually on the line. Additionally, reducing abandons increases first call resolution and decreases the number of repeat calls.
3. **Increase Customer Satisfaction and Service Level** – By offering callers options, you are demonstrating respect for their valuable time and elevating the level of service you offer. In addition, it is truly remarkable how the perception of time changes with virtual queuing. To people waiting on hold, ten minutes can seem like an eternity. With virtual queuing, however, people are not tied to a phone listening to hold music. They can continue to be productive, engage in a conversation with a coworker, get that second cup of coffee, or attend to their hungry baby, all the while knowing their place in line is secure. Ten minutes is gone before they know it. When you call them back in the time promised, you take customer trust and loyalty to an unprecedented level. It is quite rare that a company calls back in the time promised, so when you do, you make an outstanding impression.
4. **Improve Agent Morale** – Happy callers mean happy specialists. When callers utilize virtual queuing rather than waiting on hold for extended periods of time, they are much happier when they speak to specialists. This removes the scolding that specialists tend to get by callers who had to wait on hold, and in turn maintains specialists' morale.
5. **Reduce Toll And Labor Expenses** – For every call that enters the virtual queue, the contact center is saving toll costs because it is not using telecom resources. In addition, because virtual queuing is activated when there are peaks in call volume, it is not always necessary to staff extra agents to accommodate for these peaks. This saves hiring and training expenses.

What to Look For

When choosing your virtual queuing solution, it is important to solidify your return on investment by making sure virtual queuing is actually taking place, not just simple callbacks after a timer has expired. Virtual queuing is fully integrated into your existing queuing strategies to ensure that skills-based routing is maintained. Callback products may appear on the surface to provide the same capability as virtual queuing, but without the ability to secure and maintain the customer's position in the queue, you run the risk of creating a "stall" or "chase" condition within the queue; this can lead to a significant loss in agent productivity, stranded calls and unhappy customers. Of the virtual queuing products on the market today, there is really only one solution that stands out: Virtual Hold by Virtual Hold Technology.

Owning many patents on the technology that makes virtual queuing so viable, Virtual Hold Technology has been able to engineer a suite of products that are conducive to skills-based routing and are able to improve contact center performance as well as increase customer satisfaction.

An independent study was conducted by Forrester Consulting to measure the return on investment of deploying Virtual Hold virtual queuing in contact centers. To read this study, visit www.VirtualHold.com.