



Editorial Perspective:  
*Mission Impossible: Will Your Contact Center Accept?*



## Mission Impossible: Will Your Contact Center Accept?

by Frank A. Kovach

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Today's credit union contact centers must be all things to all people, and as if that weren't pressure enough, they must make that formidable task look easy and effortless. Like NASA managing a vital space mission, the modern contact center must track a number of complex metrics in order to pair responsive, compassionate member service with relentless attention to efficiency and the bottom line.

### The Central Engine for Member Experience

Credit union contact centers undertake this "mission impossible" all day every day because the stakes are exceptionally high. In any given month, a typical contact center will handle calls equal to 20 percent or more of a credit union's membership, making it the principal direct touch point with members. With the contact center also being one of the largest direct expense centers for a credit union, it's critical for it to constantly run on all cylinders.

The challenge of blending the contact center's role as the organization's warm, beating heart with the coldhearted realities of staffing and expense control demands experience and a keen eye to understand what truly drives performance and high standards of service. From a thoroughly involved senior management team down to the newest agent, everyone needs to be on the same strategic page to deliver exceptional service.

### What Is Wrong with This Picture?

That professional pride is one reason why I was puzzled to see how much press a recent comparison of bank and credit union contact centers received. The survey, conducted by economic research firm, Moeb's Services, reached the sweeping conclusion that banks provide better service than credit unions based solely on a mystery shopping exercise in which they counted the number of rings it took banks and credit unions to answer the phone and the average hold times.

Without getting lost in the weeds of the survey's methodology, what struck me was how simplistic and misleading the survey results were. There are many moving parts that need to come together, not just wait times, to effectively manage a contact center. And today, it's critical for credit union senior management to be engaged and understand those drivers more than ever. The member experience is not just about how long the member waits on hold.



## Contact Center Science 101

Anyone with a contact center background understands there are multiple factors that contribute to a customer's perception of quality service. Using a singular metric, like wait times, and then making broad assumptions across providers distorts what really drives customer and member satisfaction.

That's why contact center professionals use First Call Resolution (FCR) as the true measure of service quality. Are callers' questions completely resolved the first time or must they call back a week later with the same problem? Ultimately, it's what your agents do after they answer the phone that really matters.

Along with FCR, we believe the real key to providing excellent service is to manage your call center on a consistent basis, day in and day out. Member service perception will not degrade on a short wait, but if those wait times significantly fluctuate from call to call it will ultimately shade their opinion.

The real challenge that credit union contact centers face isn't answering the call on the first ring; it's answering the caller's questions correctly and thoroughly. And with the added complexity that online and mobile banking innovations have created, contact center questions have morphed from simple informational inquiries like *"What's my balance?"* to sophisticated—and lengthy—technical problem-solving sessions that deal with questions like *"Why am I getting this error message and how can you fix it so I can pay my bills?"*

## The Deeper Dive

The brave new worlds of online and mobile with their complexity and recurring upgrades have spiked call volumes and extended talk times in today's contact center. These new dynamics make it even more essential for management to look beyond base metrics to understand what is really going on and rule out nonexistent problems.

A prime example of this happened at a credit union we recently reviewed. Their reported abandon rate was 12%, which was clearly much higher than the common industry target of 5%. Taking that metric at face value might have caused management to hire unnecessary staff, alter schedules, or modify break times, any of which could have negative impacts on the contact center.

Looking deeper, we uncovered that 64% of their abandons occurred within 10 seconds! In today's cell phone world, callers are more likely to hang up if they are not quickly connected, and in this case *very* quickly. Due to this growing behavior we now recommend calls abandoned within 20-30 seconds should not count toward the reported abandon rate. In this credit union's situation, discounting the calls abandoned within 20 seconds brought their rate down to an acceptable 4%.

## **Having the Right Conversation**

By taking a deep dive into a contact center's operations that includes analyzing staff levels, ACD call routing, training, employee engagement, incentive plans, mystery shopping and other factors that drive both member satisfaction and operating efficiency, Advisors **Plus** gives senior management the clear view and common sense recommendations they need to understand how the contact center can strategically fit into their operating and growth plans.

We think it's the quality of those answers—not whether it takes one or two rings to answer a call—that will ring a bell in members' minds when they remember your credit union's great service.

## **For More Information**

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## About Advisors Plus Consulting Services Contact Center Consulting

Advisors **Plus** Consulting Services Contact Center Consulting uses best practices methodology and a proprietary database of benchmarks to help your credit union's contact center operate more efficiently and profitably.

Our team helps credit unions with:

- Contact Center Start Up
- ACD Routing & Scripting
- Key Metric Benchmarking
- Contact Center Optimization
- Staffing Analysis w/ERLANG C
- Organizational Structure
- Mystery Shopping
- Outsourcing Analysis
- Incentive Plans

Our average Net Promoter Score in 2012 was 91 as measured by client surveys.

## About Advisors Plus

Advisors **Plus** was established in 2005 to provide consulting and marketing services to credit unions. Our range of services covers the key areas of strategy, credit cards, debit and checking, marketing, contact center, operations, and branch sales.

The experienced consultants at Advisors **Plus** work with a credit union's staff through the entire process from project analysis to implementation and management. Our goal is to ensure that each credit union client achieves sustainable business growth, exceptional member experiences and operational efficiencies.

As of December 31, 2012, Advisors **Plus** has superior NPS Scores of: 79 – Credit; 84 – Debit and Checking; 91 – Contact Center. For more information, please visit [AdvisorsPlus.com](http://AdvisorsPlus.com).