

Profiting from Communications

A short guide by New Media Software Ltd

NMS Adaptive



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Introduction

If you address a group of people and ask them how they communicate you will get some interesting responses.

Ask who uses a mobile phone and most people raise their hands. Who sends emails? Who does business online? Who has ever sent a text, or used chat?

Ask a business person and they will most likely respond, "Well, I use the mobile phone, the land line and I send and receive email". How do children communicate? Well with their parents they don't but amongst their friends they use MSN or chat.

If you look at all parts of the community and how they communicate the current trend is that kids use text, mobiles, chat and internet, their parents are using most forms of communications except maybe chat and their grandparents are using the internet – especially to make on line purchases for cheap airline tickets.

Today there are lots of drivers and motivators to get people to use all these channels and if that is what people want to do, then it is our duty as a business to be open for business in as many of those channels as possible.

We are not saying you should stop doing business over the phone and only use text messaging. A colleague recently attended an event in Gloucester and the day before went on the web to find a hotel for an overnight stay. He called them to check availability following which they sent him a text to provide his reservation number.

The point is, as a business, you need to look at the ways you do business, see how your customers want to do business with you and look at how as a business you can gain advantage by changing or adapting your business processes.

Each different type of communication comes with its own set of attributes.

Communications Method	Attributes
<i>Inbound Calls</i>	Call volumes fluctuate Revenue generating? Staffing levels need to be predicted to match call volumes
<i>Outbound calls</i>	You decide when to call You pay the cost of the calls May require multiple calls to reach a customer
<i>Emails</i>	"Free" to send and receive Many can be sent at the same time – bulk sending Customers perceive email as "slow"
<i>SMS Messages</i>	Instant communication Many can be sent at the same time - bulk sending You pay per message (but it is cheaper than calling a mobile phone)
<i>Web Call-backs</i>	Customers tell you when they want to be called You pay the cost of the calls May require multiple calls to reach a customer
<i>Web Chat</i>	Instant communication Customer is already looking at your online presence You have to staff up to meet volume

A Dilemma

If you look at an inbound phone call; the customer is calling you and you may be generating revenue but you have to staff up to the level required to handle the calls – and you don't know how many and when these calls are going to arrive. In an outbound calling scenario you have to pay for the cost of the call but you know how many calls you are likely to make as you have the staff in place. On the other hand you may have to make several calls to get through to a customer.

Looking at all the channels available, if you can blend the sort of work you do and use the appropriate communication channel for each part of your business process you can reduce costs and provide a better service.

Call Centres

There are over 6,000 formal Customer Contact Centres – Call Centres - located in the UK, almost half the total number in Europe. More than 30 million calls are handled every week with nearly 40 per cent of the centres undertaking international telebusiness.

Consider where call centres originated. In the 1990's the cost of landline calls fell and the penetration of mobile phones went up to the point where, for example, customers would rather ring their bank than go to the high street and queue up at the counter. Enter the call centre. Banks realised customers would rather do it this way and that it was cheaper for them to provide service this way. Now customers want more than this.

Britain's Customer Contact Centres are responding to changing consumer and business demands, as new channels of communications, including SMS, e-mail and internet services are being introduced. Customer service is the primary application, but telesales and direct response advertising are also common.

This Guide

With all these different types of communication available, business today could be excused for thinking they have a problem on their hands. However, the reality is that business today has an opportunity to secure new revenue streams from new customer groups by being 'open for business' using the form of communication that each of these groups prefer.

This guide seeks to provide a quick and easy reference point for each type of communication by explaining the basic principles and then illustrating the benefits of deploying the application via a mini case study drawn from actual customer experiences.

We aim to show you how different ways of communication and technology has been used to increase business sales and profits and reduce costs.

These companies could be your company... Or they could be your competitors.

SMS – doing business by TXT

Short Message Service: available on mobile digital GSM networks allowing text messages of up to 160 characters to be sent and received via the network operator's message centre to your mobile phone, or from the Internet, using an SMS gateway. If the phone is powered off or out of range, messages are stored in the network and are delivered at the next opportunity.

Benefits: - SMS messages are often more convenient to receive than a phone call. They can also be faster to type and send than making a call. The same text messages can also be sent to groups of people and can be used, for example, for internal company communication as well as dealing with suppliers and customers.

Changing a business process to use SMS updates to keep people informed can increase customer satisfaction and also reduce costs - because the customers don't need to call in to find out what is going on.

SMS in Action: A perishable goods wholesaler can send a text message to all local grocers advising them that there are special deals on offer as stocks reach sell by dates. They reply yes and receive a phone call from the wholesaler to take their order immediately. Stock that would otherwise have been destroyed is suddenly generating revenue!

The process of selling houses is often long and fraught for both buyers and sellers alike. In the middle of the transaction is the solicitor who spends too long on the phone giving clients updates of the progress of their sale/purchase. Instead of taking or making all these calls why not send out a weekly text message to clients advising them of progress?

From the outset the buyer/seller knows they will be kept up to date with progress and the solicitor can focus on the business in hand – Conveyancing. Productivity is enhanced at the same time as customer service is improved and costs reduced as text messages are cheaper than phone calls.

Call Recording

Call Recording: The ability to record telephone conversations for later playback and analysis. This encompasses the recording of both ends of a telephone call for incoming, outgoing and conference calls. Conversations are recorded to a storage medium, often a hard disc on a local PC, or network device. Key features would include a fast search facility to track down recordings for playback.

Benefits: Call recording delivers peace of mind for users. The information recorded is valuable and may be used for training purposes as well as in dispute resolution of false claims. Not all users need full blown and sophisticated call recording systems. There is a case for more cost effective systems that archive calls for a set period of time.

Call Recording in Action: A kitchen and bathroom equipment trade supplier was dogged with problems of getting suites and fittings to building sites at the right time. Site foremen at regular customers phoned in to the supplier to schedule the orders and this resulted in many deliveries being turned away as the builders were either not ready to accept them or they claimed the wrong goods were delivered. By installing a call recording system the supplier was able to record all orders placed by phone and their agreed delivery times. Overnight disputes such as these virtually stopped as the supplier was able to prove they had delivered what was ordered at the time requested. The supplier increased productivity by reducing the number of deliveries per order. Because short term, 90 days retention of recording was suitable for this application, the user also saved money on their call recording system.

Automatic Diallers

A high-speed telephone dialling system that dials telephone numbers in rapid succession. Some systems also monitor the length of each call and develop an average call length. Once the system knows the average call length, a predictive dialler can make the next call and "hand it off" to an agent as soon as the first call has ended. This system maximises the on-phone time of each agent, and the overall result is, more people are contacted in a shorter period of time.

Benefits: Diallers increase sales and productivity. They benefit users by automatically selecting and dialling calls. Less dialling mistakes are made and telesales boredom is reduced. They provide a rapid return on investment. Diallers help SME business to compete with larger rivals. Anyone doing telesales, or using a CRM system to keep in contact with customers or prospects should consider using a dialler as they are effective from as small as one person working just a few hours a day.

Diallers in Action: Changing a business process and using a dialler had a dramatic impact upon an online cars sales company, where potential customers visit the company's website to see available vehicles. However, customers are wary of buying a used car online and do not like to order a new car without personal contact, resulting in a high percentage of enquiries not being converted into sales.

The company decided to change its business process so that when a website visitor made an enquiry, they were automatically scheduled to be called. Inbound and outbound calls were blended and this helped to keep all their sales advisors busy.

Today the company finds that customers that are called within 15 minutes of making an online enquiry are twice as likely to buy, sales have increased by 140% and staff morale has increased because they sell more and earn more commission!

Managed Email

Many customers and suppliers prefer to use email as a communications medium and while most companies use email they don't necessarily have processes and systems in place to measure and monitor their performance in responding to email enquiries.

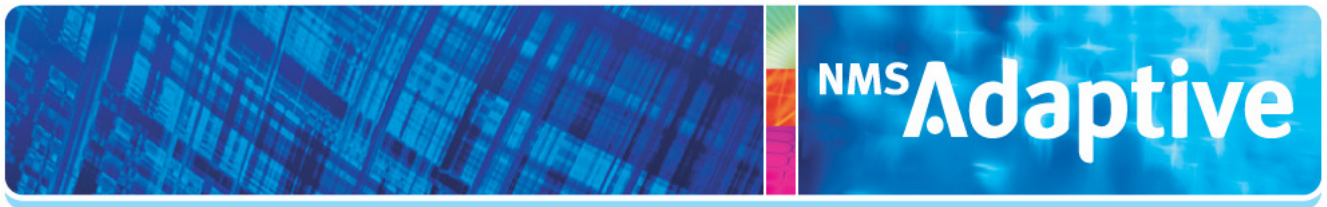
The old adage, "If you can't measure it you can't manage it" is apt for these companies. It's relatively straightforward to have systems in place that keep track of messages, manage service levels and report on user productivity.

Benefits: A managed email system will enable users to treat emails in the same way that phone calls are handled in a call centre. If messages are not responded to quickly, the sender will probably call so you then have to deal with both the email and the call.

Systems today can "steal" a message from the queue if you get an inbound phone call from the same customer. Using message rules and single click to insert standard paragraphs can reduce the work that a user needs to do. This increases productivity – sometime by as much as 50%. Standardising responses also increases quality and customer service levels.

Managed Email NOT in Action: Companies of all sizes that are affected as a September 2007 report shows: Research has revealed that the majority of leading NASDAQ and almost half of FTSE 100 companies are neglecting their online capabilities with limited responses to investor relations email enquiries.

The alarming results reveal that on average only 38 out of 100 NASDAQ companies responded to staged emailed investor enquiry with the appropriate answers, while just 53 FTSE 100 companies responded within a three week period. Those companies that did respond had wildly varying results ranging from under three minutes to more than two weeks, according to Rainier PR, the UK technology public relations company which carried out the study.



Managed Email in Action: A Five star hotel reservation team receive 500+ emails a day and were having problems using Microsoft Outlook as they had difficulty in tracking service levels, it was hard to find sent messages and impossible to track user productivity. The Reservations Manager wanted to find new ways to increase customer service. The hotel decided to change their business process so that they blended telephone and email work and dinner and room reservations are now confirmed by SMS.

The result is that time taken to respond to customer emails has been reduced by 50%, the centralisation of messages has made it easier to handle customer complaints and user productivity has increased by 100%. Additionally management information has lead to better resource planning and confirmation by SMS message has increased customer satisfaction.

Web Call Backs & Web Chat

Web call back allows a web site visitor to click an icon or link requesting the company whose website they are visiting to call them, now, in 15 minutes or in an hour etc. Web chat is another interactive web site browsing tool that opens up an on screen, two way, dialog box whereby an agent at the web site company can 'converse' with the web site visitor .

Benefits: These applications are all about getting more sales and capturing more value from website visitors. This is about striking while the iron is hot.

Web Call Backs & Web Chat in Action: An on-line fashion mail order company found that whilst many visitors to their web site got to the point of ordering, the sales process often ceased at the point where the customer had to decide upon the size they required.

They installed both a Web Call Back and Web Chat buttons on their web site to offer the customer the option of discussing any aspect of their purchase (colours, sizes, delivery times and postage charges etc) with an experienced sales agent.

The results were a dramatic increase in the ratio of web site visitors to sales orders received as well as an equally impressive reduction in goods returned because they were the wrong size or colour. The company increased productivity and profitability whilst at the same time gaining many new customers who were referred on to them by satisfied users.

Media Blending

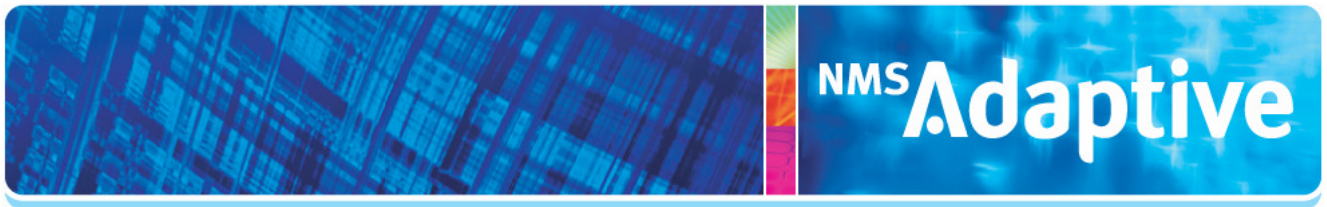
In today's modern multi-medium communications age the ability to measure and manage all forms of interaction is known as media blending. Here, voice calls, emails, text messages, and even web call-backs and chat enquiries are received at a single point and distributed to the right people capable of handling the enquiry.

Benefits: Forecasting inbound calls and messages is not an easy task. Customers call and email when they want to ... not when you want them too. This inevitably leads to fluctuating workloads and organisations then have to decide how to have enough people to deal with the peaks - which means that in troughs you have people sitting idle - or accept that at peak times you will keep customers waiting.

Blending lets you automatically manage the work. If you mix inbound calls, outbound calls, emails, SMS text, call-backs and chats you can keep everyone busy all of the time and still meet all your service levels.

Media Blending in Action: Increasingly as their customers turned more to the Internet, a leading metal processing firm got more and more customer enquiries through e-mail or other media, than just through normal voice calls. It was becoming obvious that although their agents were still busy on calls, e-mails were being left unattended in the Sales Team mailbox, and customers were not getting dealt with promptly. The day they lost a new customer because of this, they knew they had to do something fast.

The answer was to blend together the phone calls and e-mails, so that e-mails were dealt with promptly, while not keeping callers waiting. When customers call the call centre they don't want to be kept waiting, so it was decided that e-mails would only be distributed to agents when the number of calls fell below an agreed number.



The results were dramatic. Because agents were now automatically routed e-mails when e-mails were available, response times improved, and agents became more efficient as they had a more consistent workload. Additionally, when a customer sent an e-mail to the Sales Team mailbox, an auto response would be sent to the customer straight away to let them know that their message had been received, and would be dealt with shortly.