



Effective Email Communications & Management for the Contact Center :

10 Tips to Help You Improve Customer Service, Build Sales & Promote Your Brand



What Can an **Email ACD** Do for Your Contact Center?

- ∴ Differentiate Your Company
- ∴ Improve Efficiency
- ∴ Build the Customer Relationship
- ∴ Grow Your Business

Are You Giving Email Communication the Attention it Deserves?

Email is now a mainstream form of customer service communications. Over 56% of Americans use email on a regular basis¹. According to Carlson Marketing, corporate communications success all depends upon engaging effectively with the customer at his or her own level. "Engagement is about two-way dialog; it's about giving prospects and customers the ability to interact with you and their peers when and where they choose to; it's about relevant communication on their terms, and not the company's terms. With its qualities of being channel independent (i.e. delivery to PC's, mobile phones and PDAs) and enabling two way dialog, email will play a key role in cultivating leads, cross-sells and up-sells, and post purchase service interactions."²



"Contact us" type email addresses are now printed on practically every brochure or enabled on many corporate websites, making email a wide-open communication channel. However, most companies don't implement the same consistent metrics for email measurement and response as they typically provide for other channels, such as the phone. It's no wonder that customer satisfaction relating to email response remains extremely low.

Affordable technologies are now available to help companies meet the growing email challenge. Personal email technologies such as Outlook®, just aren't the right fit for a contact center's needs. This paper provides 10 tips on how to increase your email performance, reduce transaction time, and increase the overall quality and brand of your company.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James K. Noble, Jr." in a cursive style.

James K. Noble, Jr.
President & CEO
Noble Systems

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Tips for Effective Email Communications

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Tip 1: Use Email to Differentiate Your Company

In a recent report, Contact Babel³ discussed several emerging contact center trends. A 24/7 culture is becoming more prevalent along with expectations of service and response. “Customers do not particularly want to do business with other people – most lead increasingly busy lives, and see interacting with businesses just as a task to get through. As such, customers will choose the means and time to communicate with businesses that offer them the greatest chance of a swift and successful resolution.⁴ This includes email. However, the reality of email service is another story. A recent Contact Babel survey⁵ showed that more than 37% of respondents did not respond to email within 24 hours or did not know what their average response time.

TIP: Set up expectations for email performance that will differentiate your company. Provide auto-response for all email inquiries stating that the email has been received and is being processed. Offer an estimated response time and track performance. These concepts are easily achievable and cost effective with new technologies.

Tip 2: Set Email Metrics and Manage to Expectations

Establish email metrics in a similar manner as you do with voice contacts. While email is not real-time like phone contacts, reasonable response times can be set and managed without adding resources in an integrated contact center. While most contact centers are experts at setting expectations and measurements for phone contacts, metrics for email are often not established or measured.

TIP: Unified contact center software manages multiple channels including inbound and outbound voice and email simultaneously. While the inbound voice channel is given priority, emails are delivered to specified agent groups when they are not talking on the phone. Unified contact center software allows organizations to establish performance metrics in a similar manner as they currently do with voice contacts.

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Tip 3: Integrate Email with other Contact Channels

Customers should have the confidence that email, web and voice interactions are coordinated within your organization. Your customer service representatives should have visibility to any current and past interactions that have taken place regardless of the communications channel.

TIP: Unified contact center software operates with a common database structure that allows you to manage all types of interactions cohesively. Your representatives can see these interactions along with notes and results. Managers can also analyze categories of interactions and their results to plan appropriate follow-up actions such as a proactive voice calls to check on customer satisfaction.

Tip 4: Route Emails Intelligently

The successful handling of issues or sales opportunities depends on routing the contact to the appropriate agent team with the right skills and knowledge in an amount of time that meets customer expectations.

TIP: Emails should be routed to agent groups based on their knowledge, language and skill level. With unified contact center software, agents can be members of multiple email and voice groups. Groups can be created based on subject and language. While voice calls take precedence over email, emails are delivered to agents based on knowledge and skill when ever agents are not taking voice calls. For example, service emails for printers are delivered to the printer support group, with the most skilled agents receiving the majority of contacts.

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Tip 5: Use Proactive Contact to Provide Better Service

Good customer service can be generated through proactive communications. If you become aware that an issue will affect a group of customers, contact them first and give them information now, rather than dealing with high volumes of inbound contacts later.

TIP: Unified contact center software allows managers to spot trends through reporting, since all contact channels are integrated into a common database platform – making it easy to analyze data and to coordinate contacts based on the results of previous interactions. For example, if you identify a trend or issue, you can select records to contact proactively, helping avoid a deluge of calls and emails that would occur if information is not communicated ahead of time. You can also create opportunities for up-selling/cross-selling using customer preferences.

Tip 6: Provide Visibility for Agents to Customer History Across All Channels

In order to provide good service, customer information from all channels including voice, web and email must be made available to the agent.

TIP: Select agent desktop software that provides easy-to-read customer history displays to see all interactions and notes so that agents can trace the path of an issue or sales opportunity. Also, provide access to product information, CRM systems, and back office applications.

The screenshot shows a software window titled "Noble Systems Corporation - Account Screen". The main content area is titled "Account Screen" and contains several input fields and buttons. On the left, there are four input fields with the following values: "0-404-851-1331", "0-404-689-5478", "0-813-755-4124", and "0-770-455-6574". To the right of these fields are labels: "Debtor Home", "Debtor Work", "Co-Debtor Home", and "Co-Debtor Work". Further right, there are four more input fields with the values: "4048511331", "4045895478", "8137554124", and "7704556574". To the right of these fields is a text area labeled "Notes field for free form information" with the text "What would go here? anything you can type." Below the input fields are two buttons: a green "Terminate" button and a yellow "Research" button.

Access to Customer data helps agents view customer history for better service.

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Tip 7: Track, Monitor and Manage

As your organization strengthens its focus on email management, it is vital to be able to monitor your resources, understand performance against metrics and adjust programs accordingly.

TIP: Unified contact center software helps you manage the performance of all contact channels in a comprehensive manner. Managers can see via real-time statistics (text and graphical) what agents are doing at all times where ever they are located. A wide variety of statistics and interaction data are captured for use in historical reports for selected time periods so that performance can be analyzed.



Real-time statistics icons help you manage your agent resources assigned to email projects by showing if an agent is on a voice call, reading an email, writing an email or in wrap up mode.

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Tip 8: Evaluate the Performance of Promotions and Marketing Campaigns

When your organization runs a promotion, they typically run via multiple outlets such as email blasts, website ads, banner ads, online or print publications, etc. It is often difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of specific channels which is necessary to evaluate the marketing performance of these channels.

TIP: Key elements of unified contact center systems allow you to create media categories for tracking of email and phone sources so you can evaluate the effectiveness of channels.

Tip 9: When is the Right Time to Upgrade Email Best Practices?

Many organizations continue to use personal email programs such as Outlook or Lotus Notes to handle general (non-personal) corporate email. While these email programs are beneficial for individuals, they are not capable of handling, routing and reporting on general non-personal email. For example, when surges of emails occur during a promotion or when an issue arises, personal email programs do not easily scale. Nor do these personal systems manage emails as part of a comprehensive communications program that include voice and other contact channels. They also do not have the tracking and reporting needed for effectiveness.

TIP: Use the following criteria to determine if it is time to look at automating email in your contact center:

1. You do not have adequate auto response mechanisms.
2. Your center receives 50-75 emails a day or 1500-3000 a month.
3. Your representatives spend time daily sorting and routing emails.
4. It is difficult routing emails to the appropriately skilled agents.
5. You have to reroute emails when representatives are sick or there are times when emails go unanswered.
6. It is difficult to handle spikes in emails during promotions or busy periods without adding and training new staff.
7. You have to review emails to spot trends and create reports.
8. You can not adequately track response times and performance.

If you can spot one or more of these trends in your organization, then it is time to look at a email program designed for contact centers.

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Tip 10: Make Sure it is Easy-to-use

Technology should work together to simplify people's lives. For those on the operational side, managers and representatives, the technology should allow them to do more work with fewer resources in less time. The same technology should deliver better and faster service for customers to improve satisfaction and company brand.

TIP: Unified contact center systems bring all the contact channels together allowing managers to accomplish more each day with easy-to-use, intuitive interfaces that manage phone, email and web contacts. Resource management and reporting are all consolidated. A common database allows managers and representatives to view all contact channels as part of a comprehensive customer history. The result is better productivity, efficiency and customer satisfaction along with the ability to adapt to fast changing conditions.

Footnotes

1 & 2: 2006, *Busting out of the Inbox: Five New Rules of 1to1® Marketing*, RightNow Technologies and Peppers&RogersGroups

3: 2006, *North American Contact Centers: State of the Industry*, Contact Babel

4 & 5: 2007, *The U.S. Contact Center Operational Review*, Contact Babel

Get to Know Noble Systems

Are you ready to start managing your email communications more effectively with an **Email ACD**?

Contact us for your **FREE Business Assessment** and let Noble Systems help you **grow your business!**

1.888.866.2538
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