

## Defining Priorities for Inbound Call Centers

Unlike outbound call centers, inbound centers are there to field calls from existing and potential clients. This means that their quality of communication is, perhaps, even more important than that of outbound call centers, where agents initiate contact with potential clients. If a client is the one to phone the call center, one thing is certain from the very outset: that client needs help or information that the agent must be able to supply. Ideally, the client's query can be answered by the first agent who takes the call. That way, there is no lag time or waiting time, and the client is reassured that the company he has selected has the answers he needs. Because of the sheer volume of inbound calls that a typical call center receives, however, it is not possible or even desirable to have an 'expert' answer every single call. That is why most inbound centers depend on the tier system to deal with incoming calls.

The tier system - also called multi-tier support - is a mainstay of call centers dealing with inbound calls. Within any industry, a certain predictable percentage of incoming calls will inevitably be quite simple in nature. For example, clients might phone a company to check business hours or store locations. This is true despite the fact that this type of information is available on company websites; there are still many people who find making a simple phone call quicker, easier and more convenient than searching for needed information online. Obviously, employing technical experts to deal with this type of call would be a misuse of human resources, so in a tier system, every inbound call is answered by a first tier agent. This agent greets the client and ascertains the type of query to be answered. If it is a simple question, the first tier agent answers it himself, often referring to a script. However, if the inbound call is more involved - for example, if the client has a specific question or complaint about a product he or she has purchased from the company, the first tier agent can transfer the call to a technical support specialist.

It doesn't stop there. Most inbound centers that use multi-tier support have a total of three tiers, the third tier consisting of engineers or developers of the product or technology. In this way, the vast majority of customer requests and queries can be dealt with quickly and effectively. Basically, if the clients who call are satisfied with the responses they receive, and if the responses are delivered with a maximum efficiency and minimum lag time, the call center is doing its job well. No organization should underestimate the importance of satisfactory communication, especially in this day and age - it almost seems as though advances in technology sharpen people's desire for effective human communication, rather than doing the opposite!

Of course, technology also has a role to play in facilitating how the company deals with inbound calls. Data from inbound calls can be recorded and reported, so that the call center can effectively predict the type of information - and the number of agents in each tier - that will be needed. The rate at which calls are transferred between agents continues to improve. Calls can be answered faster - in fact, this is one of the major concerns of clients phoning call centers. They do not want to have to spend time on hold. Technology that minimizes 'on hold' time and answers and transfers calls quickly leads directly to increased client satisfaction.

There are also systems available that are able to stream calls automatically. An interactive voice response or IVR asks the inbound caller what he is calling about, and transfers him directly to the appropriate agent. In the past, this type of automated service required the caller to do the work, so to speak - to punch in numbers and codes. For some callers, this presents a problem. The new IVR systems, on the other hand, allow the inbound caller to 'converse' verbally with the software. Though this technology is still being perfected, it is very promising.

Technology will always be a support rather than a substitute for human interaction, however. Agents are still the backbone of inbound call centers, and quality communication is the only way to ensure client satisfaction and retention.

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### About the Author

Prodialing strives to provide concise information concerning the high tech arena of callcenters, including predictive dialers, inbound call centers (<http://www.prodialing.com/inbound-call-centers.html>), outbound callcenters, IVR and much, much more. Come and see our website at ProDialing.com(<http://www.prodialing.com>).