

**Customer
Success
Story**

Vertex

Vertex Answers the Call for Improved Customer Satisfaction

“Inference software allows our call centre agents to concentrate on solving problems more effectively. They can now spend more time talking to each customer and less time in 'wrap', which is when they are unavailable for any customer contact.”

- Yvonne Laramee, Vertex

vertex



Background

Vertex is one of the UK's leading business process outsourcers, with a turnover of £200 million and a workforce of over 4,000. From its head office in Manchester, as well as its offices in Warrington, Knowsley and Bolton, the company provides expertise in a wide range of business support activities, specialising in the area of customer relationship management (CRM). This includes customer contact management, billing and payment services, technology and training.

The Problem

Vertex provides CRM services for a variety of clients. One such client is North West Water, whose Service Enquiries division deals with queries from customers in the North West of England - that's about 7 million people. Vertex was in need of shorter training times and more efficient resolutions for its customer care procedure. On average, even after an extensive 8-week training course, it took six to nine months for customer service representatives (CSRs) to become proficient in their jobs.

Yvonne Laramee, call centre project leader at Vertex, attributes this to the complexity of a typical customer scenario, "When a customer phones to report a water leak, the CSR needs to ask a complete series of questions. Failure to collect the right information can lead to unnecessary and expensive network controller visits to the site of the reported problem."

In addition, it was often difficult to understand previous comments logged during earlier customer dealings. There were no guidelines to enable CSRs to type concise and detailed customer conversation summaries.

The Solution

Vertex realised that customer satisfaction requires consistent service delivered by confident, knowledgeable CSRs. They needed a means of integrating new knowledge with established knowledge, improving problem resolution and simplifying agent training. Their search led them to an Inference solution. According to Laramée, "Inference was already supplying software solutions to other companies within the utilities market, so we saw their proven success as the best way forward for us as well."

Inference software incorporates the experiences of Vertex's best agents and experts into a common, conversationally-accessed knowledge base - one that stores previous customer query scenarios and outcomes. The knowledge base can be authored, tailored and constantly updated - in effect becoming "smarter" with every enquiry. In addition, the knowledge base can 'fire up' relevant questions for CSRs to ask during a customer call, to further refine the search and reach the desired result.

Vertex worked with Inference professional services to produce a knowledge base consisting of 2,800 cases, covering all possible customer queries. Roll out of the Inference software started in January of 1998 and was completed in just 2 months after an intensive training programme for all Service Enquiries staff.

Currently, the Inference system assists 180 fully trained CSRs within the Vertex call centre. The number of calls handled per agent has increased. Business practice compliance also has risen. "The Inference knowledge base ensures that new policies and procedures are adhered to immediately," states Laramée. "Previously, changes were really difficult to accomplish in an efficient manner."

Since installing the Inference system, Vertex has experienced a dramatic 25 per cent reduction in training time - at savings of £500 per trainee. Best of all, Laramée says that while the cost of training went down, the level of customer satisfaction went up. "During the first month of the roll-out, customer satisfaction increased from 59 per cent to 75 per cent. And it continues to improve. Our customer feedback reports indicate CSRs are more helpful, knowledgeable and willing to rectify problems as quickly as possible."

The Future

The results within just a few months of roll-out have been sufficiently impressive to lay foundation plans for future expansion. One plan is to set up a centralised team of expert users to develop and expand the Vertex knowledge base. They are also looking into using Inference technology for other outsourcing clients, such as Norweb, Littlewoods and Independent Energy.

Thanks to Inference software and professional services, Vertex now gives its clients the ability to concentrate their own resources on areas that are core to their business. "Inference has allowed us to strengthen our relationship with North West Water and provide an assured quality of service." summarises Laramée. In short, Vertex understands what it takes to thrive in a competitive utilities market - when your clients' customers call, you'd better have the answers. And with Inference they get the answers they need, when they need them.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO LEVERAGE K-COMMERCE IN YOUR CONTACT CENTRE

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