

Agent Performance Optimization Market

Key Trends and Featured Vendor – VPI



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INTRODUCTION

Agent Performance Optimization (APO) is a collective term for agent-facing technologies widely used in contact centers. They are defined as a set of applications that seek to increase agent effectiveness, reduce workforce costs and improve service levels. These tools allow contact center managers to plan schedules, forecast agent requirements, measure agent performance, analyze results and improve outcomes. These systems provide tangible quantifiable results in terms of short payback periods and attractive ROI.

Call Recording/Logging and Quality Monitoring (QM) software allows users to record, retrieve, analyze and improve agent/customer interactions via PSTN, VoIP, email and web self-service channels. Customer-agent interaction recordings are being increasingly used to glean intelligence that is of interest to users at various levels both within the contact center as well as the enterprise. This intelligence provides greater insight into customer behavior and the means of improving the customer experience.

Workforce Management (WFM) is a forecasting tool used to estimate call volume based on historical patterns. It uses data from ACD and CTI statistics servers to maintain and monitor appropriate levels of customer interaction processing by optimizing staffing schedules.

KEY TRENDS

The most striking development in the APO marketplace in the last couple of years has been the growth of enhanced applications that do more than simple recording and scheduling. For a variety of reasons, traditional QM and WFM is being enhanced by fresh applications that take the wide streams of data gathered by those systems and use them as raw material for more productive forms of analysis.

Some of these enhanced tools serve to fill in operational gaps in contact center management. Someone who uses basic call recording and QM will start to need some way to distribute the quality findings and make sure that problems found are addressed: that leads to performance management, scorecards, dashboards, coaching and targeted training delivery. Many (if not most) of these functions have been added as modules to standard QM and WFM products. The move to suite-based purchasing has made that easier.

The tools that are most prominent in this category include Performance Management systems, Speech Analytics, Desktop Screen Analytics, and other kinds of Analytics for contact centers, and simulation/scenario-building tools for planning. This is an important development technologically because it has expanded the range of possibilities that contact center management has to fine-tune its resource allocation and agent performance. These tools, through a variety of usage scenarios, have also allowed management to communicate the value of the contact center (and by extension, the customer experience) to decision-makers in the executive suite. This has facilitated planning, coordination, flexibility and response to changing business conditions.

The economic climate puts a premium on customer retention, and analytics tools provide remarkable insight into the kinds of processes that can help extend customer longevity. Since performance and cost control is paramount in this environment, analytics that involve data, web and speech processing and event notification are gaining in importance across contact centers. Most of the suite vendors and niche providers have enhanced the baseline analytics products in their portfolios.

Although buyers of these Analytics tools have two choices for deployment, they have really only availed themselves of one of those choices. Incumbent APO vendors invariably offer some portion of the Analytics feature set in their suites. And smaller, niche vendors also offer contact centers standalone deployments of the Analytics components. Buyers have overwhelmingly chosen to deploy Analytics tools through the incumbent APO vendors, bypassing direct purchases from the small niche companies.

FEATURED VENDOR – VPI

Voice Print International (VPI), the winner of the 2007 Frost & Sullivan North American Customer Value Enhancement Award, has a suite with tools across the APO spectrum. In 2009, VPI rolled out VPI EMPOWER, a fully integrated suite of performance optimization applications, which makes analytics and timely, intelligent processing of structured and unstructured information accessible and affordable for any-size organization, regardless of the selection of modules they purchase.

VPI EMPOWER includes a call recording application (VPI CAPTURE PRO), with a VPI Fact Finder module for tagging calls with data and events from employee desktop screens to help automatically identify and classify their high-value interactions and ensure PCI Compliance. VPI Fact Finder also works with VPI QUALITY PRO, an application for optimizing the quality management process with analytics-driven call selection, targeted evaluation and coaching, and a wealth of actionable insights.

And with VPI PERFORMANCE, organizations can collect facts about the interactions handled, how they are classified and evaluated, coaching sessions taken, employee skills, their performance over time, and much more. VPI offers more than a hundred contact center performance metrics built-in, and includes standardized data collectors for popular PBXs, ACDs, WFM and CRM solutions.

In 2008, VPI greatly expanded its partnership network, adding Siemens and Aspect to an aggressive program that already included reselling and development-level partnerships with Cisco, Avaya and Mitel.

VPI's differentiation is that all of its products are designed as "out-of-the-box" applications that can be installed remotely on customer-provided hardware. They are implemented within days and deliver tangible value immediately after implementation. VPI emphasizes the fact that their suite does not require extensive tuning and custom development as part of the standard implementation process.

Additionally, VPI's modular suite allows for stepped implementation, where customers may implement only those modules they really need when they need them cost effectively, without being forced into implementing entire suites that include unnecessary software components and therefore require unnecessary financial outlay on the part of their customers, combined with delays in implementation.

Since improved performance control is a must under current economic circumstances, real or near-real time analytics that involve data processing and event notification are gaining in importance. VPI responded to this trend by enhancing all of its individual baseline product modules with analytics standard. This includes extended reporting, KPI monitoring, rules-based alerts/notifications, desktop tickers, and the like.

Due to its web-based integrated product suite, VPI plays especially well in the mid-market and enterprise sectors. VPI offers mid-market customers all of the product features available to its enterprise customers since they tend to face many of the same challenges and have many of the same needs these days.

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