



Patrick Coleman

Can managers afford the Business Intelligence tools they so badly need?

Contact Centre managers who want to progress from coping with their complex daily environments to genuinely mastering them should consider Business Intelligence (BI) tools, such as Workforce Management, Quality Management and Customer Experience Management, argues Patrick Coleman, CEO of Customer Service Engineering (CSE, formerly PAYG CSE).

Contact Centre managers are under constant pressure to both control costs and protect levels of customer service. Given the highly complex nature of their environment, this presents them with an ongoing challenge: how to achieve the precise operational control necessary to balance these objectives?

Most managers have learnt to cope with the considerable demands of their daily environments using the tools they have to hand, such as spreadsheet-based planning and quality assessment tools and the statistics produced by their ACD. Most also appreciate that these manual methods are very time-consuming, which, in turn, limits their use. After all, if it takes days to work out what's really going on, that information can come when it's too late to do anything about it.

Managers remain wary of IT solutions that demand hefty investments of money and time while also threatening significant disruption of their environment. There is also the challenge of convincing directors to make an investment requiring a large capital outlay with no guarantee that it will deliver on its promises. Furthermore, directors often think that their infrastructure already provides managers with the Business Intelligence they need to do their jobs. It doesn't.

Making the right tools affordable

The straightforward answer is to provide

managers with the BI tools they need in an affordable and risk-free manner. Most operations don't actually need any more data since they already have a lot available to them from their infrastructure. The problem is that this data only describes symptoms of operational issues, without assisting in determining the solution. What management needs is to link these symptoms to their underlying causes, a task that, typically, requires the insight provided by BI tools.

This is where tools such as Workforce Management (WFM) systems, Quality Management (QM) systems and Customer Experience Measurement (CEM) systems come into their own.

Even though managers appreciate that relevant BI will enable them to 'keep their fingers on the pulse' at all times and to make swift, informed business decisions, many managers remain cautious because such tools have traditionally proved expensive and of limited usefulness. So how to make these tools as affordable and efficient as possible?

The first step is to tackle affordability by providing the solution on a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) basis. The applications are provided 'on demand' and are bought using a 'pay as you go' subscription model. This approach eliminates the need for capital outlays and removes the financial risk from the adoption of sophisticated contact centre tools since they can simply be cancelled or

switched off at any time if they fail to deliver the expected results.

Joining the dots

The next step is to make sure the BI toolset is accurately tailored to meet the specific needs of each manager. This can only be achieved by having the necessary expertise and support available nearby. The critical BI benefits of linking the symptoms to causes and prescribing effective solutions can only be achieved if an engineer refines the tools and processes: 'joins the dots' between them. Organising the results into effective plans is one of the biggest challenges in BI and requires extensive engineering support to get right, support that should be built into the upfront cost and not excluded as a hidden expensive extra.

Guaranteeing success

By delivering real-decision support within a clearly defined range of options, Business Intelligence in the call centre offers managers an effective way to achieve the operational control and depth of insight they require.

So yes, Business Intelligence is an affordable, risk-free option if you work with a provider that has the necessary engineering expertise available and that is willing to guarantee your success. Maybe the question should be: "Can contact centre managers afford NOT to get the BI tools they need?"