

NACC News Note



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Summary

Last month FurstPerson, of Chicago, IL introduced a new product that directly addresses the ongoing problem of personnel turnover in the contact center. This product, called CC Audition® Talk & Note, uses speech recognition technology to create a highly realistic contact center simulation environment for the purpose of conducting a pre-hire candidate assessment.

Talk & Note is part of a larger suite of contact center pre-hire assessment tools available from FurstPerson. These tools are designed to smooth the hiring process while offering a means to better determine if a candidate will be successful in the contact center or not. There are numerous case studies available that demonstrate the proven return on investment (ROI) that these hiring tools bring to the contact center employment process.

This product announcement caught our attention because it addresses the problem of contact center turnover, which has plagued the industry for as long as the industry has been in existence.

The NACC Perspective

In the 21 years that I've been following the contact center industry as an analyst I've seen many technology solutions fall in and out of favor, many strategies rise and fall in popularity, and many industry problems arise and eventually be solved. There is one industry problem, though, that is as prevalent today as it was 21 years ago – the problem of agent turnover in the contact center.

Turnover isn't a problem unique to the contact center industry but contact center turnover is unique in that the industry has yet to fully embrace any sort of long-term solution to the problem, choosing instead to ensure that a steady stream of warm bodies comes through the front door to replace those who are departing the contact center through the back door. Other industries have long ago turned to hiring technologies to help them ensure that not only the best qualified candidates are taken into the interview process, but that only the candidates with the best chance for success are hired.

I'm not sure what the cause of the reluctance to embrace hiring technology solutions in the contact center industry is. Perhaps the "We've always done it this way" mentality prevails, thereby preventing the consideration of alternative hiring strategies. When I've asked contact center professionals outright why they don't use hiring technologies, answers vary from questions about the ROI to unrealistic expectations about guarantees, which are next to impossible anytime human nature is involved.

When I saw the announcement from FurstPerson, I saw a product that the hiring managers in the industry will undoubtedly relate to. FurstPerson Talk & Note uses speech recognition technology to create a highly realistic contact center simulation environment in which the agent candidate must respond to animated customers with the spoken word, as they would in the actual job. This gives managers the opportunity to assess a candidate's ability to read responses from a screen and communicate those responses to customers in a conversational manner. I believe this is a unique capability in the industry at present.

In this year's NACC user survey we asked readers about their hiring plans for the next year. 34.2 percent of you responded that you would be adding new agent headcount while 60.8 percent of you responded that you would be hiring agents only to replace those agents who leave the contact center due to attrition. Based on some of the attrition studies I've seen, which puts the average turnover rate at around 80 percent per year, that's still a lot of hiring that will be done. Only 5.1 percent of respondents stated that they expected to be under a hiring freeze or reducing headcount in 2011.

In a recent proof-of-concept study that FurstPerson conducted with an operational contact center, researchers took the center's top performing agents as well as the poorest performing agents and had them undergo the CC Audition Talk & Note pre-selection evaluation. Not surprisingly, the majority of top performers; i.e., those meeting their average handle time (AHT) and customer satisfaction (CSAT) goals passed the Talk & Note evaluation. The majority of performers not meeting their AHT and CSAT goals failed the Talk & Note evaluation. These results not only provide proof of a statistical correlation between Talk & Note evaluations and agent performance, they provide a powerful motivator for contact center human resources managers to consider the impact hiring technologies could make on their employment strategy.

If this isn't enough to make you want to beat a path to FurstPerson's front door, then I suggest you take a look at www.furstperson.com for a more comprehensive overview of pre-selection evaluation solutions specifically designed for the contact center industry. I believe the time has come for the contact center industry to seriously confront the problem of agent attrition and turnover. Efficiency, cost savings and ROI have helped pre-employment hiring assessments earn their way into nearly every major industry today. It's time the contact center industry joined these other industries in reaping the benefits of using technology to reduce agent turnover and attrition.