



RESEARCH UPDATE

FurstPerson Addresses Contact Center Hiring Challenges with the Introduction of Interactive Simulations

Summary

On October 5, 2010, FurstPerson, of Chicago, IL, introduced a new product that offer a comprehensive solution for the ongoing challenge of agent turnover in the contact center. FurstPerson is well known for its CC Audition® product line, which is an interactive simulation used to evaluate contact center job candidates across various key performance indicators (KPIs) for work in challenging contact center roles. CC Audition works to ensure that only the best qualified candidates advance to the pool of candidates for continued consideration. The CC Audition portfolio has been expanded by the addition of this new product.

The new product, CC Audition® Talk & Note, leverages speech technology to create a highly realistic contact center simulation environment. By using speech input and advanced call documentation, CC Audition Talk & Note produces a candidate assessment that closely resembles performance in the actual work environment.

CC Audition Talk & Note is available for immediate delivery.

The View From The Saddle

Saddletree Research has been a vocal advocate of utilizing technology solutions to address one of the industry's most pressing problems – the problem of agent turnover – for more than a decade. Despite the use of candidate assessment technologies in nearly every other industry today, the contact center industry has yet to fully embrace the proven benefits and return on investment (ROI) that candidate assessment solutions bring to virtually any business.

FurstPerson has taken seriously its leadership role in bringing the contact center into the 21st century when it comes to the use of technology to support traditional industry hiring practices that date back to the Industrial Revolution. With the introduction of this new product, FurstPerson continues to establish itself as a thought leader and product innovator among suppliers of pre-employment hiring solutions.

The problem of agent turnover is as old as the contact center industry itself. In 2009, the National Association of Call Centers (NACC), an offshoot of the Call Center Lab at The University of Southern Mississippi (www.nationalcallcenters.org) conducted a survey of 110 contact center professionals to determine the industry's attitudes toward certain technologies and issues. In this survey, respondents were asked how important the issue of agent or new hire attrition was in their contact center. Responses were as follows:

Not an issue	15.7%
Moderately important	25.0%
Very important	55.6%
It is our most critical issue	3.7%

The survey results are representative of the industry as a whole with a 95 percent confidence factor and a confidence interval of 10. As noted above, survey responses revealed that 84.3 percent of the industry considers turnover and attrition an important issue to varying degrees, but an important issue nonetheless.

This year's version of the end-user survey asks respondents what their hiring intentions are for the next year. 34.2 percent of respondents plan on adding additional agent headcount while 60.8 percent plan to hire agents only to replace those agents who leave the contact center due to attrition. Only 5.1 percent of respondents intend to freeze hiring in order to reduce headcount. Not surprisingly, hiring activity will continue to be heavy over the next year.

The purpose of pre-employment hiring solutions is to ensure that only those candidates with the greatest potential for success enter the evaluation and hiring process. As marginal or weaker candidates are weeded out of the process before management time and training dollars are spent on them, the greater the return on investment (ROI) of the hiring solution becomes. It is a fairly simple equation that seems to be well-understood in other industries. Saddletree Research believes the time has come for the contact center industry as a whole to embrace this understanding and share in the ROI of a precisely defined and well-managed hiring process.

FurstPerson's highly interactive CC Audition suite of products brings a significant degree of precision and objectivity to what is otherwise a typically haphazard and subjective process. The contact center simulation delivered by the FurstPerson solution also allows agent candidates to gain a better understanding of the job requirements beyond the written description and hiring managers can evaluate candidates' performance before they invest in sending them to training.

FurstPerson CC Audition Talk & Note brings an even greater degree of realism to the screening process in that it not only asks candidates to respond to customers in the spoken word, as they would in the actual job, it also provides managers the opportunity to evaluate a candidate's ability to read responses from a screen and communicate those responses to customers in a conversational manner. Saddletree Research believes this unique capability gives FurstPerson CC Audition a significant leadership advantage over any other pre-employment hiring solutions in the market at this point.

In a recent proof-of-concept study conducted with a contact center organization, FurstPerson found that agents with poor performance ratings tended to fail the CC Audition Talk & Note pre-selection evaluation while high performing agents tended to pass the evaluation. Specifically, the majority of the contact center's highest performing agents; i.e., the ones meeting their average handle time (AHT) and customer satisfaction (CSAT) goals, passed the Talk & Note evaluation. On the other hand, the majority of agents not meeting their AHT and CSAT goals failed the Talk & Note evaluation. The result of the study was proof of a statistical correlation between Talk & Note evaluation scores and agents who performed well and met their performance goals. By extension, this study further demonstrates the undeniable ROI of pre-employment hiring solutions.

FurstPerson's assessment solutions are utilized by the client on an as-needed basis. They are delivered over the Internet and can be taken from any computer at any location, although CC Audition Talk & Note should be administered at a location where the hiring manager can observe the candidate interacting with the assessment software. Any FurstPerson CC Audition assessment typically takes between 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Given the amount of time, money and frustration that a pre-employment hiring solution can save any employer, we believe the value of the investment in this type of solution is glaringly obvious.

The time has come for the contact center industry to seriously confront the problem of agent attrition and turnover. The best way to start the confrontation is with the implementation of a pre-employment hiring solution. Saddletree Research believes FurstPerson's CC Audition suite represents the cutting edge of assessment solutions for the contact center industry.

Efficiency, cost savings, and ROI have helped pre-employment hiring assessments earn their way into nearly every industry today. Saddletree Research believes it is time for the contact center industry to embrace hiring solutions and join these other industries in reaping the benefits. The contact center industry is fortunate in that there are solutions available specifically designed for the unique pressures and challenges of the customer service profession. In Saddletree's opinion, pre-employment hiring assessments such as FurstPerson's CC Audition represent the future of the hiring process in the contemporary contact center industry.

