

Winding down to year end means gearing up in a contact centre

 By [Bruce von Maltitz](#)

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The lead up to the holiday season can be daunting for those in the retail industry, particularly for contact centres who bear the brunt of the increased workload, and often heightened tempers.



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While managing this period might seem overwhelming to the staff and managers involved, there are some key things to bear in mind to streamline processes and ensure productivity and quality remain high, and [customer support](#) consistent.

Catch things early

Providing concise, useful information at the point of need can help alleviate significant pressure on agents. For example, for a product or service issue that an organisation is already aware of, it's possible to create short in-queue IVR messages giving callers the relevant information to answer their question before even chatting to an agent. This means that customers contacting the business about this particular issue, will find out everything they need to know from the in-queue voice message, and will likely not need to follow through with the query. Naturally, this frees up agents to engage with customers who have more complex queries.

Be proactive with information

A little proactive communication can go a long way, and with technology solutions and the rise of virtual agents, this is becoming an increasingly efficient way to contact customers. A simple automated message giving information on an order or expected delivery can eliminate the need for customers to contact a business, which then reduces call volumes.

Build strength in numbers

At first glance, it might make sense to have designated teams within a contact centre to deal with specific business areas. But this silo approach can also result in queue blockages if one area is particularly busy while others have unused capacity. Consider the one-queue scenario that is adopted in Woolworths stores - the queue might seem long initially, but there is constant movement because even if one cashier experiences a problem, the rest are able to keep the queue

moving. The same applies in a contact centre where one agent might be dealing with a complex or time-consuming issue, or where one team is swamped with calls - with a single queue approach where possible, other agents or teams can step in to help move things along.

Share the knowledge

Not only can it be frustrating to a customer to get through to an agent, only to be passed on to someone else more equipped to deal with the query, but this is also costly in terms of resources and time. Queries can be efficiently dealt with if there is increased cross-skilling in contact centre teams. Of course, there might still be a need for a group of specialists, but this will be for only a few and very complex situations that can't be managed elsewhere.

Contract home agents for added support

The advantage of how easy it is to work remotely means contact centre agents are not bound to their desks. For businesses, this brings the possibility of increasing the size of the contact centre team, even if temporarily to manage a predicted busy patch, without additional infrastructure requirements. Employing contract home agents over the busy holiday season takes the pressure off existing staff and can help provide the same high quality service despite the increase in workload.

Manage processes from the cloud

Making sure that all agents are working productively, that all channels are being managed effectively and that the selected queueing system is providing the most efficient service is best done through [cloud-based contact centre technology](#). A cloud-based solution, while providing a cost-effective option, provides the most comprehensive answer for an [omni-channel](#) contact centre along with the benefits of full reporting services to help enhance processes.

ABOUT BRUCE VON MALTITZ

Bruce von Maltitz is currently the MD of 1Stream, a cloud-based contact centre technology provider. He has over 20 years experience in the service industry focusing specifically on contact centres for the last twelve years. He has a detailed understanding of how to design, build and operate contact centres having worked in the industry in SA, Africa and abroad.

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