

A framework for Amazing Customer Experience

Discover how the Quality Assurance (QA) team gave a competitive edge at Affinion International, with ACE, reducing service related complaints, saving money and raising the number of gold standard calls by a third.

Summary

An assessment framework that engages the entire business has made it possible for QA to provide actionable insight and work with Operations to drive real change for clients & their 'customers'. By involving front-line agents, building a QA team with accredited, professional skills & using The Forum's network to learn from external organisations, the Customer Experience & QA team created & implemented new service standards that underpinned an Amazing Customer Experience (ACE). Deliberately moving away from a tick-box approach, this was integrally linked with a change programme that is building a new culture, with Power of Tone training, Coach the Coach & an ACE Academy for new recruits. This consistent, 360 degree approach raised standards, creating efficiencies & process improvements that saved c£50,000 in the first year.

Key initiatives

Making an impact: identify the problem, research the solution

Growing regulation, a request from a major client to demonstrate innovation and an internal appetite for change, prompted the development of a new approach to QA. Until 2014, a laborious tick-box framework had limited the opportunities for agents to have natural conversations with clients' customers. The new approach placed quality assessment within a wider framework for improvement, coaching and development that was focussed on customer experience and outcomes. A critical early step was developing the QA team; this was the first QA team to be 100% accredited as professionals by The Forum. QA led a cross-functional team, involving team leaders and agent focus groups. A graduate was employed to prepare a report, it was piloted with one client, holding calibration calls with them every other day, and it took six months to be ready to launch. A lot of time was spent getting the ACE standards right, aiming for simplicity so that agents didn't focus on what they could remember, but on a customer's needs and feeling. The team looked at what other organisations were doing, what was in the marketplace and piloted different approaches, including agents' ability to adapt to customers' personalities. "Meaningful measures" "Encourage the right behaviours" "No ambiguity means no rework" "Our groundwork was vital".

Going for gold: ACE service standards link to core values

The new standards are based on impact for customers. Compliance requirements are rated green (met) or red (failed). ACE standards are rated bronze (development), silver (good journey) or gold (an aspirational standard of excellence). At every assessment agents are asked questions like: what does gold look like on this call? What is my commitment to gold? Standards cover every customer touchpoint, across all channels, and can be tailored to specific client requirements. They sit clear & proud in acrylic triangles on every agent pod and are clearly communicated, alongside regulatory compliance principles and a list of customer identification (ID&V) checkpoints. ACE standards are each linked to one of the seven company values: Trust, Integrity, Teamwork, Passion, Communication, Customer Focus, Total Performance. For the purposes of assessment, standards are translated into clear, unambiguous questions,



Affinion
INTERNATIONAL



"Quality has given us a competitive edge, we dedicate a whole page to it in our tenders. Our model is very adaptable. What our clients want to add value on this month might be different next month."

Nicola Venton,
Operations Manager

"If we're not delivering quality, there's a problem. We stopped applying the same approach on every call. We're out on the contact centre floor: accessible, approachable, involved."

Claire Scott,
Customer Experience Manager

"Power of Tone was great. We called other companies, listened to what they were saying, how they were saying it. It made us think about our own tone of voice, our level of positivity. There's definitely been a shift."

Sam Harding,
Customer Service Agent

"It's about putting quality front of mind for every call, every agent."

Karen Harris, Team Coach

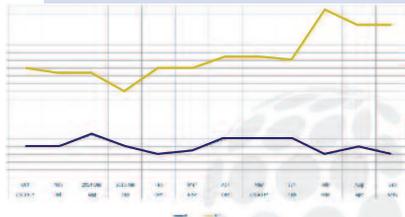


The Forum

Raising Standards in
Customer Operations

Results

- 33% more gold standard calls
- Service related complaints down 38% year-on-year
- QA time per call down 4 mins, productivity up 20%
- Almost £50,000 saved by process improvements in year one



“We spent a lot of time getting our ACE standards right, looking at what was in the marketplace, working with a trial group, holding calibration, making relevant tweaks.”

Gemma Martin,
Process Improvement
Specialist

“Calls sound more natural and customer-focussed. The best endorsement of how successful this has been is when you look at our business reviews.”

John Ball
Client Development Executive

“Coaching becomes a brainstorming session, agents actively take the lead. We empower them.”

Debbie Slade, International
Contact Centre Manager

such as: ‘Have customer needs been identified?’ (trust), ‘Has value been added through tailored conversation?’ (communication). “Easy to understand” “Very adaptable” “If it’s not on the triangle, it’s not part of the process” “Focussed on the customer journey and how customer feel” “I want to go for gold every time”.

Sustaining improvement: part of a wider change programme

ACE standards are an integral part of an entire programme to develop the culture and give agents tools so they can convey confidence, interest and enthusiasm in every customer interaction. This includes:

- **Power of Tone**, a highly interactive, fun, 4-hour workshop delivered by the training team, about empathy, understanding and great listening skills.
- **The ACE Academy**, to help new recruits understand how standards and Power of Tone can drive amazing customer experiences, using call listening, coaching and interactive workshops.
- **Coach the coach**, supporting team leaders to deliver targeted frontline coaching and performance management.
- **4 floor coaches**, new roles providing extra support for agents struggling to meet their service standards.
- **Location of the QA team**, onto the contact centre floor, resulting in better engagement with both agents and team leaders.
- **QA open day**, to secure buy-in across the business, including the back office. “We think how to make it easier for customers and add value” “I can coach with confidence” “No way of monitoring how Power of Tone is working without ACE”.

Quality Assurance: efficient, valued, accessible & involved

A new QA team structure is making sure that resources and skills are aligned to demand and, in so doing, has helped cut the average time per assessment by 4 minutes and raised productivity by 20%. A new process improvement specialist is identifying waste through call listening and data mining. Almost £50,000 has been saved through these activities in year one, £16,000+ saved for one client through a single process improvement to their process for lost credit cards. Combined with a 33% increase in gold standard calls, this new focus on process improvement has contributed to a 38% centre-wide drop in service related complaints. “We’re reducing waste AND increasing quality” “Prevent unnecessary customer effort” “QA is seen in a whole new light”.

“It becomes instinctive. I don’t feel I have to remember everything to get a silver or gold. If you’ve done security, listened to the customer and go the extra mile, you hit those grades naturally.”

Sharmin Alom, Customer Service Agent

“Before, we were a faceless team who just talked about non-compliance. Now, we’re helping to win business. Talking face-to-face with agents makes a big difference, [even] just five seconds of chat, here and there.”

Magdalena Wickenhauser-Brain,
Quality Assurance Analyst

“Having the right tone is critical in claims, we need our people to be empathetic and understand what they’re hearing. Power of Tone gives people the skills to ensure that a customer doesn’t relive a mugging experience. That’s really important.”

Steve Robertson, Claims Manager

“Agents think a lot more about how they can make it easier for customer & add value. If they have a bronze, they actively think how they could turn that into a silver or a gold.”

Jo Buckley
Contact Centre Team Leader



Affinion International works with banks, telcos, card providers & other businesses, offering protection, lifestyle & travel products to their customer in 16 countries across Europe, Africa & South America. As of 31st December 2015, Affinion employed approximately 3,150 people, of which approximately 55% are located in North America and the remaining 45% are in our international offices, the 141 FTE contact centre in Portsmouth uses technology including: IEX Totalview, Verint call recording, Rostrvm dialler, Avaya CMS, Service Now & KANA.