Compliance & Close Customer Communications

Why Speech Analytics Drives Collections Success

BY JEREMY PAYNE, INTERNATIONAL GROUP MARKETING DIRECTOR, ENGHOUSE INTERACTIVE

ARTICLE - Why Speech Analytics Drives Collections Success

New market and regulatory forces are having a major impact on the UK debt collections sector. The industry is going through a transitionary phase and as a result, businesses are having to shift their operational focus and adapt their business models..

One of the biggest changes has been in the nature of the regulatory environment. Modifications to data protection regulations and to the Consumer Credit Act have had an impact on debt collection agencies. Calls for greater transparency around the treatment of vulnerable customers have grown ever louder over the years. Perhaps the most significant change, however, has been the shift in industry oversight. Historically, the debt collection industry has been regulated by the Office of Fair Trading but in recent years there has been a transition to the Financial Conduct Authority, and in line with that an even stronger focus on the need to treat customers fairly.

As Dougie McManus, CEO of UK-based credit control, recoveries management, and business process outsourcing company, The Zinc Group, puts it: "Today, there are compliance requirements around incoming expenditure, finding out the financial circumstances of the client and ensuring that the arrangement that the provider makes with the client meets their financial affordability model."

All of this has made debt collection businesses more aware not just of staying compliant with the latest regulations but also of the need to treat customers sensitively and empathetically at all times. So how can they best meet this twin challenge?

From Hard Foundations to Soft Interaction

The latest technology, and in particular state-of-the-art real time speech analytics solutions, hold the key here, helping ensure debt collection agencies can monitor conversations in real time. This also enables them to evaluate call recordings after the fact, in turn allowing them to stay compliant in all their dealings with customers while proactively address any issues that might arise.

The 'hard evaluators' built into any real time speech analytics solution are critically important in ensuring compliance, of course, but they are just one element of the key focus on treating customers fairly. The latest 'soft evaluator' real time speech analytics tools take things up a level by enabling agencies to assess the emotional level of any interaction, a critical requirement within the collections industry.

The Zinc Group is making active use of Enghouse Interactive's very own Real Time Speech Analytics soft evaluator tool to assess cross-talk, conversational tone, the volume of speech and the level of stress demonstrated by the participants.

According to McManus, "Using the soft evaluators we were able to identify which questions caused the highest stress levels on a live call. From this we changed the way that we asked the question, ensuring that we treated the customer fairly and were sensitive to their needs. For example, one of the regulatory requirements in this area involves finding out directly from the customer about the root causes of their problem. This needs careful handling as it is typically the issue about which the customer feels most vulnerable. Yet it needs to be broached.

"The soft evaluators built into the back of tools like the Enghouse Interactive speech analytics solution can help us to understand how the customer may feel and react to certain situations. The solution guides you through to a final statement which asks the customer – are you satisfied with the outcome of our discussion today? So, effectively we have a mechanism for helping ensure that the customer is happy and that we are being sensitive to their needs and treating them fairly. We believe this is a major step forward for the collections industry."

Flexibility is Key

They may be operating in the same broad industry sector but it is nevertheless true that no two debt collection agencies are exactly the same, or even have exactly the same customer challenges to address. Each and every client will have slightly different regulatory requirements to meet, for example. The best real time speech analytics tools are bespoke and can be easily be tweaked by their debt collection agency customers to meet specific customer requirements.

This innate flexibility coupled with the time savings that come from evaluating calls in real-time as opposed to after the fact also enables agencies to evaluate a much greater volume of calls much more quickly than if they were using a more traditional or even a manual approach. Again, Zinc Group is a case in point.

Previously, because of the inherent limitations of the technology and the processes that Zinc Group employed, the company had been able to only take a very small proportion, approximately 1-2% of every agent's calls to sample, review and score. With the Enghouse Interactive Real Time Speech Analytics solution, however, it is able to grow that figure significantly to almost 100%. This provides an audit call process that is effectively able to cover the vast majority of calls rather than just a small sample.

Achieving Collections Success

Technology has historically had a key role to play in the collections industry but today, it's increasingly about more than just helping to ensure compliance, important though that is. It is also about delivering the best possible customer service in an industry where customer interaction can be difficult and stressful and where keeping emotions under control and treating the customer fairly at all times is increasingly key.

Real-time speech analytics can deliver on both of these critical requirements, helping to meet compliance by prompting the agent to include mandatory information on the call, and monitor stress-levels, cross talking, etc., allowing the agent to minimise the stress levels of every interaction and enabling the agency to move beyond pure compliance to create a closer more empathetic engagement with the customer.

About Enghouse Interactive

Enghouse Interactive is the union of products and expertise from leading solution providers including: AndTek, Arc, CosmoCom, Datapulse, IAT, IT Sonix, Presence Technology, Reitek, Safeharbor, Syntellect, Telrex, Trio, Voxtron and Zeacom. Now a single, global organization, Enghouse Interactive delivers flexible and scalable solutions that will meet a company's communications needs across their organization, including: global communications management, contact center solutions, attendant consoles, IVR or self-service solutions and call recording and quality management tools.

Enghouse Interactive

Learn more at www.enghouseinteractive.com