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Ways to maximize your contact center



Introduction

Over the years, hospital contact centers have greatly expanded the responsibilities of their traditional agents. Once charged solely with fielding calls and directing phone inquiries, today's contact center staff serve as a multi-functioning communications hub that is mission critical for the operation of a hospital or healthcare facility. Contact center agents play vital roles in helping busy clinicians provide well-coordinated care.

Contact center agents are often expected to develop advanced skills in customer service, emergency dispatch, and messaging to support a multitude of organizational functions. They must not only be nimble enough to field, manage, and route a wide array of incoming calls, but also perform many diverse tasks. These often include:

- **Providing answering services**
- **Coordinating emergency code responses**
- **Scheduling appointments and making reminder calls**
- **Providing bed assignments/tracking assistance**
- **Taking patient room service requests**
- **Cross-referencing callers to additional programs and services**
- **Coordinating patient transfers to and from other facilities**

The following three tips will give you ideas on how you can help your contact center support its ever-expanding role within your organization.



1

Simplify the everyday

With all of the responsibilities on an agent's plate, technology that can help them be more efficient is a must. One of the biggest time-saving opportunities for many hospitals is to provide the contact center with an integrated, intuitive communications hub. Beyond a console to help answer calls, a truly unified solution brings together all the information and applications an agent needs to access on one screen. In addition, tools such as speech recognition and online directories can help reduce caller traffic to the contact center, giving your staff more time for other duties.

Console

The ability to process phone calls through computer systems revolutionized contact centers when it was introduced. Since then, consoles have become so much more than just call-answering software. A comprehensive console solution is one that integrates with all of the resources agents need to access for their duties, from staff directories and paging systems, to bed tracking and room service. With everything available at their fingertips using a few clicks, including detail down to the type of mobile device each provider prefers to be contacted on, agents can save a significant amount of time that was previously spent referring to rotary card files, paper binders, white boards, and sticky notes.



Case study:

VCU Health moved 48% of their paging traffic to the web, and reduced operator training time from five days to 20 minutes.

[Learn how](#)

"Our... solutions have allowed us to provide a much better patient experience by decreasing call-handling times and streamlining scheduling and clinical communication."

Don Smith
Operations Manager
VCU Health





"We've built a unified contact center that allows our operators to do more than just answer and forward calls—we're streamlining processes and responding faster."

Jim Weeks
Vice President of Information Services
Yale New Haven Health

[Discover how](#)

Speech recognition

Speech recognition software can be used to cut costs, improve customer satisfaction, and increase productivity in the contact center. Waiting in a queue to connect with an agent or, worse still, finally being put through to the wrong person, can be very frustrating to your callers. With speech recognition there is no waiting time—callers speak their request and the system is able to direct most calls without the need to involve an agent. Healthcare systems are using this technology to make contact centers more efficient, giving agents the ability to manage rising call volumes easily and professionally with more time to devote to handling special requests and supporting alternate services.

Online directories

Online directories are a valuable tool for hospitals because they increase staff productivity while improving contact center efficiency, employee satisfaction, and cost savings. Providing staff with access to a reliable, up-to-date source for contact information and on-call schedules eliminates the need for contact center agents to be in the middle and transfer calls between employees. The reduction in internal call traffic gives agents more time to devote to other activities. Online access also means staff members have the freedom to log on anywhere, anytime to search the directory, verify that their own information is correct, update on-call schedules, and send important messages.

"We've taken a lot of pressure off our operators...Code initiation and clinical communications have been simplified. Fewer paper copies means more efficient communications and fewer pages sent to the wrong person."

Mac Stanford
Biomedical/Communication Services
North Mississippi Medical Center

Case study:
Speech recognition and online directories helped North Mississippi Medical Center save time, increase contact center efficiency, and improve physician satisfaction.

[See how](#)



Online on-call schedules

The benefits of online contact information extend beyond just reducing caller traffic. Web availability eliminates the need for costly (and quickly outdated) printed directories. With online on-call information, updates are immediately available, helping make sure the right people are being contacted around the clock. Accessing information is faster than flipping through paper binders. Web-based information also enables individual departments to take ownership of entering schedule information, removing this time-consuming task from the contact center's growing list of responsibilities. No longer needing printed materials saves money and can significantly reduce the amount of time spent on administrative tasks, giving your staff more time to focus on what they do best: coordinating communications and delivering excellent customer service.

"It was important for us to transfer responsibility of schedules to individual departments and reduce the number of paper copies floating around the hospital. With the web directory and on-call scheduling solution, we have been able to do just that."

Heidi Lueck
Switchboard Supervisor
UnityPoint Health-Meriter

[Read how](#)

2

Streamline communications during emergencies and time-sensitive situations

There are many situations when you urgently need to alert a specific group of people. Contact centers initiate code calls for everything from patient resuscitation and fires to infant abductions, dangerous weather, and local disasters resulting in an unexpected influx of patients. Coordinating emergency response and alerting staff to time-sensitive situations requires fast, accurate announcements and are crucial to patient and campus safety.

“We used to have someone texting on a cell phone to reach Emergency Department staff; they used to spend hours on the phone. Now one single message goes out to everybody.... First responders en route to the hospital can now trigger a code STEMI, and the OR is already set up and ready when the patient hits the door.”

Mary Klein
IT Customer Support Manager
Munson Medical Center



Case study: Munson Medical Center handles emergency notifications across a nine-hospital network.

[Learn how](#)

Code calls

Initiating code calls means a lot more than performing an overhead announcement. Responses must be tracked, and escalated if necessary, to ensure enough people answer the call for help. Mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, smart watches, pagers, etc.) offer opportunities beyond overhead pages to notify responders, but they can also make reaching the right people more complicated. Mobilizing your staff depends on fast, accurate dissemination of critical information to the right devices. Today’s technology solves both of these challenges—reaching the right people quickly, and tracking their availability.

A good emergency notification and incident management system provides instant messaging options, including pre-programmed templates to

response teams, on their mobile devices. These pre-written, automated messages save critical time in emergencies—where every second counts—by eliminating the need for calling trees. Innovative technology can help improve communication effectiveness by automatically delivering messages, tracking responses, and escalating to additional staff if necessary. Agents oversee the process and can intervene if necessary. However, having technology with pre-configured templates and information about the correct escalation path based on a provider’s availability and preferred device removes time-consuming tasks such as typing pages, manually tracking responses, and locating additional providers when primary contacts fail to respond on time.



Case study video: Banner health maximized their contact center and improved communications throughout the system

[Watch now](#)

Assure superior call quality

Call recording technology is another valuable feature in the changing landscape of contact centers. Recording phone calls and concurrent screen activities helps identify opportunities for improving protocols, and enhancing call quality and professionalism. Particularly in complex areas such as emergency coordination, call recording also lets centers document the handling of code

calls and other emergencies. This audit trail allows hospitals to retrace a situation in case there are later disputes about how the response was handled. The appropriate technology for recording and evaluating how all calls are handled gives contact center management and agents the tools and training they need to continually deliver top-notch customer service for every call.

Contact centers are more important than ever

Healthcare organizations rely on them to deliver exceptional customer service while supporting exemplary patient care. Technology helps contact centers streamline their operational efficiencies, enhance the patient experience, and reinforce a positive brand image.

3

Support cost saving and patient loyalty initiatives

Hospitals and healthcare systems continually strive to reduce costs while maximizing patient care. Contact centers are generally viewed as a necessary expense for running a facility. However, contact center communication technology is evolving to support greater efficiencies and expanded capabilities. This is important in an increasingly competitive landscape as the healthcare industry looks for innovative ways to engage with existing and potential customers.

For example, appointment reminder calls can reduce lost revenue from missed appointments. In addition, providing after-hours answering services for affiliated physician practices can generate revenue and give more control over the full customer service experience.

A well-run contact center supports improved patient care by helping to coordinate clinical communications. This can ultimately help boost patient satisfaction scores.

Strengthen patient engagement and loyalty

The contact center is often the first point of contact for healthcare consumers. Good first impressions are essential and can influence a caller's decision to become your patient, so it is important not to overlook agents as ambassadors of your hospital's brand. Successful organizations recognize that efficient and courteous service is a highly valued asset, and they support contact centers with the right tools to reduce call volumes and assure professional, individualized caller experiences.

Up-to-date, online directory information and on-call schedules available right from the console can significantly reduce the amount of time agents spend searching for contact information, and speech recognition can provide fast transfers for routine calls. Excellent service makes the contact center a cost-effective way to increase customer loyalty and boost patient revenue through referrals and increased participation in hospital programs.

Finding the right technology

In a continually evolving environment, how do you assess whether your contact center is using best practices and the most appropriate technology to maximize its potential? Before you start evaluating your existing software or new platforms, the first step is to make a list of what functions your contact center currently performs, the internal systems that need to interface with the contact center, and what functions you would like to offer in the future. Remember to consider your organization's vision and mission, and seek input from staff members at every level of the hospital. You may get valuable insight about your strengths, weaknesses, and the direction to move forward.

The benefits of incorporating or upgrading new technology into your existing contact center will enable you to improve efficiencies and trim costs.





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Spok, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Spok Holdings, Inc. (NASDAQ: SPOK), headquartered in Springfield, Virginia, is proud to be a global leader in healthcare communications. We deliver clinical information to care teams when and where it matters most to improve patient outcomes. Top hospitals rely on the Spok Care Connect® platform to enhance workflows for clinicians, support administrative compliance, and provide a better experience for patients. Our customers send over 100 million messages each month through their Spok® solutions. Spok is making care collaboration easier.

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