



**North American
Contact Center Applications
Service of the Year Award**

Award Description

The Frost & Sullivan Award for Service of the Year is presented each year to the company that has demonstrated excellence in services development and launch within its industry. The recipient company has shown innovation by launching a successful line of emerging service offerings and technologies.

Research Methodology

To choose the recipient of this Award, the analyst team tracks all new service launches, R&D spending, products/services in development, and new features and modifications. This is accomplished through interviews with market participants, and extensive secondary and technology research. All new service launches and new services in development in each company are compared and evaluated based on degree of innovation and customer satisfaction. Frost & Sullivan then presents the Award to the company ranked number one in overall success of its service offerings.

Measurement Criteria

In addition to the methodology described below, there are specific criteria used to determine final competitor rankings in this industry. The recipient of this Award has excelled based on one or more of the following criteria:

- Significance of new service(s) in its industry
- Competitive advantage of new service(s) in its industry
- Service innovation in terms of unique or revolutionary technology
- Service acceptance in the marketplace
- Value-added services provided to customers
- Number of competitors with similar service(s)

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Hearing the Voice of the Customer

“Voice of the customer” programs at companies represent a critical step in gathering knowledge about customer preferences and managing the experience for a positive outcome. But what happens when those listening to the “voice” hear a garbled, unclear or incomprehensible message?

External Quality Monitoring, or eQM, is a service from Customer Relationship Metrics that assures companies of making the best strategic and tactical moves in that critical step. eQM provides the means to measure and engineer the customer perception of the service.

CRM's eQM is used in measuring the customer experience by companies like Assurant, Bank of America, Black & Decker, CompuCredit, HP, and SCE&G. CRM is also an audit partner of J.D. Power and Associates: the company's tool provides the "Voice of the Customer" for the J.D. Power and Associates Call Center Certification Program. CRM's breakthrough is in understanding that agent behavior is the key to engineering the customer experience.

That's the argument underlying the important services offered to contact centers by Customer Relationship Metrics. For a variety of reasons, end user customer surveys that should be used to present a picture of the quality of the customer experience often do not tell a complete story. Customers can make mistakes, and the data gathered needs to be calibrated. This process prevents noise, distortion and distrust from undermining the program. And, it puts the VOC program on a sounder footing by basing its conclusions on scientific data with fair accountability.

Contact centers have always maintained tight control over the mechanisms of internal, agent quality. Through ongoing calibration and evaluation of performance, standards have been created that assure an accurate picture of agent performance. But externally, when it comes to assessing call center performance from the customer's point of view, efforts have lagged. Many efforts are critically flawed, due to the absence of scientific research expertise. The real danger lies with those who are unskilled and unaware.

At Customer Relationship Metrics, a thorough and rigorous effort has been made to put a scientific underpinning of collecting and interpreting accurate information to the task of understanding customer evaluations. And CRM has taken that scientific foundation and rolled it out as a service offering that is affordable for centers of all sizes. This is not new - it has been part of CRM's portfolio for fifteen years. More recently, however, a major advancement in their VoCPM™ (Voice of the Customer Performance Manager) reporting platform allows the data to be easily disseminated throughout the enterprise. Companies have the option to pull in other pieces of performance data to correlate with the customer voice, like sales information, customer demographic data, or call performance statistics.

The company's founder, Dr. Jodie Monger, is a pre-eminent research scientist with long experience at applying customer experience measurement statistical modeling to customer survey data. For several years she has been publicly arguing (persuasively) that inattention to applying best practice research principles in call centers amounts to nothing less than "survey malpractice." CRM's important contribution to solving that problem is a suite of integrated managed services collectively known as External Quality Monitoring, or eQM.

eQM In Context

eQM consists of a series of designing, implementing, reporting and interpreting services that combine to provide an accurate picture of the customer's voice. It gathers input from traditional calls, and from web and email interactions. From the contact center's point of view, no hardware or software is necessary, because eQM operates as a managed service with hosted data collection. This makes the solution fully compatible with any existing contact center environment, and puts responsibility for the operation and administration of the system in the hands of CRM.

Survey Calibration is a process where the Metrics Survey Calibration team transcribes and reviews every customer comment, for every survey they collect as a first step in the calibration process. A survey may pass through three additional steps on its way to be validated. Regardless of how clear instructions may be, people will accidentally interpret or defy them. Research scientists categorize this as response errors. On average, 6%-20% of all of the surveys collected contain response errors of some type. Calibration is included in the basic service offering and is executed for every single client. The Survey Calibration process is what defines the difference between eQM and surveying.

CRM has had key insight into the way call centers regularly abuse surveying and customer feedback data. An obvious error relates to the effectiveness of uncovering and notifying of dissatisfaction. You cannot respond to someone's terrible phone call after a month's delay, for example, and expect that person to be grateful (or even pleased) by your attentions. Likewise, learning weeks after the fact that someone was interested in a cross-promotion is similarly useless. Feedback information is only really useful if it is generated in real time (or close to it).

Users of eQM can set up alert parameters that begin a rapid-response process when customers indicate a certain level of dissatisfaction with an encounter, or express that follow-up is desired. At that point, an immediate email alert is sent to the person responsible for addressing the customer's poor experience. The Survey Calibration process also identifies service recovery opportunities for customers who were not offered a follow up or had declined the offer when the parameter was met. Survey comments capture verbal requests that are forwarded for action. This comprehensive service recovery process can save or protect as much as 15% of the customer base over time.

The Significance of eQM

eQM is worth singling out because it shatters an enduring myth about the reliability of traditional feedback gathered from the customer experience. CRM has shown that the type and quality of much of what passes for survey data in the industry is substandard and actually harmful to effective decision-making. It is counterproductive to use unreliable data in the creation of accountability systems, like agent scorecards.

CRM has turned that problem around and made it into a significant competitive advantage for companies that are willing to tackle the customer experience head on. And CRM has made it easier, and less expensive, for companies to do that by offering them a services package that addresses all the weak links in the program execution.

The advantages to a managed services offering are strong. There is no capital expense, no in-house technical support requirement, a demonstrably quick deployment and a scalable environment. It's no longer excusable to ignore or evade warning signs of poor performance. The information about the real-world external effects of contact center operations are starkly visible.

eQM brings in information at several levels of detail, from down at the individual agent up through teams, units, and ultimately, rolling it up to where users can see the experiential feedback affecting the entire company. The data that you gather can be exported to and used in traditional quality monitoring tools, performance tools, and even as the basis for Six Sigma projects.

CRM, which began as a consultancy in 1993, also performs a quarterly benchmarking service for eQM. This free service measures companies in the eQM universe and gathers comparative data. Their consulting expertise and statistical rigor ensure that comparisons of customer satisfaction across different companies are fair, with clear definitions and measures and sound data. They have ten years of comparative data, built out of the tens of thousands of surveys collected each week.

Most customer service operations take great pains (and go to great expense) to assure *internal* quality on the part of agents. They do that through call monitoring and evaluation tools that have been rigorously tested and improved over decades. But those same centers that pay close attention to internal measures neglect (or misunderstand) the external measurements of customer satisfaction. And when not neglected, they are often provided too late to be of much use in the real world.

What distinguishes CRM's service offering is the ease of deployment and the demonstrably superior technical underpinnings of their modeling. For this reason, and for their consistent efforts to deliver their clients a better hold on the customer experience, Frost & Sullivan is very pleased to recognize Customer Relationship Metrics' eQM with the Service of the Year Award.

About Best Practices

Frost & Sullivan Best Practices Awards recognize companies in a variety of regional and global markets for demonstrating outstanding achievement and superior performance in areas such as leadership, technological innovation, customer service, and strategic product development. Industry analysts compare market participants and measure performance through in-depth interviews, analysis, and extensive secondary research in order to identify best practices in the industry.

About Frost & Sullivan

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