
Chapter 5 – Quality Assurance

A quality assurance system provides oversight over One-Call/One-Click Center activities. It is not enough to have written standards and protocols. There must be mechanisms in place to ensure that they are being followed and that by following them, the result or impact on the customer is what was intended. The quality assurance system should contain a written quality assurance plan, call monitoring activities, and tools for evaluating customer satisfaction. The quality assurance tools should be independent of the staff performing the functions, but the types of tools may vary depending upon the size and complexity of the center.

Quality Assurance Plan

A quality assurance plan describes the activities and tools that will be used to evaluate how the standards and protocols are being performed and the methods used to evaluate customer satisfaction.

A quality assurance plan should specify who will be responsible for conducting the quality assurance activities. If possible, it is important to have a staff member outside of the call center to provide all or a portion of the quality assurance activities. Some organizations may have separate quality assurance staff that provides quality assurance for all of the departments within the organization, but many organizations will rely on call center management to perform most of the quality assurance activities.

Critical to any quality assurance plan is the involvement of senior management and partner organizations. Quality assurance reports should be provided to senior management to provide appropriate oversight outside of call center management. Having senior management involved also demonstrates organizational commitment to the effective and efficient functioning of the call center.

Call Monitoring

Routine monitoring can include listening to staff calls as they are being made based upon a pre-determined schedule. For example, the manager could listen to the first ten calls of new agents, and then the manager could listen to one call per week for all existing agents. Or, if calls are recorded, the manager may listen to a percentage of calls for each agent during a specified period, with the percentage determined based upon the results of previous reviews. If an agent received unfavorable call

Basics – Quality Assurance System

- Written Plan
- Involvement of senior management
- Different activities/tools to measure performance at different times and points
- Assess staff performance against standards and protocols
- Evaluate customer satisfaction
- Independent of staff performing functions

reviews previously, the manager may increase the percentage and number of calls for that agent for a period of time until improvement is noted.

If the center provides outbound calls, it is important to include adherence to the standards and protocols set for these calls in the quality assurance plan. It is particularly important if these outbound calls are made by partner or collaborative organizations. The communication with customers should be consistent among the collaborating organizations.

Both formal and informal call monitoring reviews should be documented so that the results can be included in individual and group trainings.

 Sample Call Monitoring Form for Inbound Calls *Adapted from http://www.callcentrehelper.com/free-call-monitoring-form-3507.htm		
Agent Name _____		Date _____
Monitored By _____		
Greeting	Yes	No
1 Did the agent greet the customer according to the protocol?	x	
2 Understanding the Caller's Need		
Did the agent use probing questions to understand the caller's need?	x	
3 Solution information		
Did the agent offer the most appropriate solution to meet the caller's needs?		x
Did the agent answer customer questions correctly?	x	
Did the agent provide options to caller?	x	
Did the agent provide 3 resources?		x
4 Customer Service		
Did the agent follow the correct procedures for transferring a call?	x	
Did the agent use empathetic listening skills?	x	
Did the agent display a professional manner throughout the call?	x	
Did the agent complete the call within the optimum call time while ensuring a positive experience for caller? (Note: Although call not completed within optimum time, time could be appropriate to ensure positive customer experience.)		x
5 End call		
Did the agent offer further assistance at the end of the call?		x
Did the agent close the call in an appropriate manner?	x	
Total	8	4

See the sample of what a Call Monitoring Form might include in the adjacent highlight. This is just one example; the monitoring form should be drafted to fit the individual call center's needs.

Staff Participation and Evaluations

Staff performance can be assessed by reviewing the call monitoring reports, but more importantly, these reports provide the opportunity to include additional training on the standards and protocols almost immediately after uncovering an area that needs to be improved. For example, if the protocol states the agent should stay

on the line and do a warm transfer when it appears the caller needs additional support but the call monitoring report indicates that the agent failed to stay on the line, this behavior can be discussed and the protocol reinforced with the agent immediately. A one-on-one training session provides the opportunity to hear what was unclear from the agent and to clarify the correct procedure to follow.

Some call centers review the call monitoring reports and use them to engage staff as a whole in weekly meetings. This provides an excellent opportunity to reinforce the standards and protocols but also to hear from staff if there are situations that do not readily fit into established protocols. This provides an opportunity for the group to suggest solutions and makes staff input an important part of the on-going development and enhancement of the quality assurance system.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

A customer satisfaction survey is a good way to measure customer satisfaction at the time the call is made. The surveys are often automated as part of the call center software application, but the surveys can be taken by a staff member (who was not involved in the call) or by asking if the customer would mind staying on the line after the call is made to take a short survey. The call can then be transferred to the designated staff member, an automated system, or outside vendor. The satisfaction surveys should be short and generally should have no more than six to ten questions. The surveys can also be mailed. An alternative to a survey is conducting targeted focus groups, and if focus groups are utilized, the cost for them should be considered in the budget. Whether a survey or focus group, the types of questions asked should be formulated to assess the customer's satisfaction with his/her experience with the call center staff and to determine if the information the customer was seeking was provided. One question that provides insight into the customer's satisfaction that many surveys include is, "Would you use the service again and would you recommend the service to others?"

The surveys generally run for a set period of time or until a target number of surveys are completed. Since the survey could affect the capacity of the traffic on the phone lines, appropriate timing for conducting the satisfaction survey should be determined, and the center may choose to conduct the survey during non-peak call time. Although the number of satisfaction surveys can vary, often they are conducted quarterly or semi-annually.

The results of the surveys should be reported and provided to senior management and to call center staff as part of their on-going training.

Customer Complaints

Adherence to the standards and protocols for handling customer complaints should be included in the Quality Assurance Plan. Although complaints may not be a result of the call center staff not following protocols and standards, but a result of a customer not being satisfied with gaps in service, these complaints should be elevated to the attention of management and partners. The quality assurance oversight can provide confirmation that this was done and that the partners are working together to find solutions.

Independent Reviews

A comprehensive quality assurance system should include an independent review of the overall system. These reviews can be done annually or at less frequent intervals based upon the results of the other quality assurance activities. Since independent reviews are frequently conducted by outside agencies, they should be considered and budgeted in the planning process. It may be that the call center has a method to conduct these independent reviews by another department within their organization or by one of their partner organizations.

The scope of independent reviews should be included in the quality assurance plan and could include a percentage of audits of the staff calls and a percentage of follow-up calls with customers. If follow-up calls with the customers will be part of this review, customers should be asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview at a future time.

The results of the independent reviews should be presented to senior management and to call center staff for on-going training and performance improvement.

