



## The Power of T-Metrics, Inc. **Skills-Based Routing & Intelligent Queuing**

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### INTRODUCTION

Organizations that strive to provide top-quality customer service know that callers must be handled in a timely manner (short hold time) and be connected to the resource that will most effectively meet their objectives. The most appropriate resource is determined by utilizing information about ‘who’ is calling and ‘why’ to ascertain which of the available agents has the best skill level to address the caller’s needs.

In many call centers these goals are found to be in conflict. A large, single queue provides maximum timeliness, but the resulting pools of universal agents are not specifically matched to callers’ specific needs. Therefore callers’ objectives are often not met during contact with the universal agent and they are often ultimately transferred to a more qualified agent for problem resolution. In addition to the delay of service, being transferred to various agents often requires callers to restate the call objective to each agent. Frustrating delays while holding for an agent and/or frustrating delays after being connected to an agent is perceived as an unpleasant call experience by callers.

### SKILLS-BASED ROUTING

**Skills-Based Routing** provides the breakthrough that resolves the tension between timeliness and quality of caller-agent match. By allowing agents to serve multiple call types, the economies of a large pool can be achieved during busy times, while also utilizing specific information about callers to deliver them to the agents most qualified to efficiently respond to their requests.

Compared to the traditional large queue ACD, **Skills-Based Routing** offers some compelling benefits:

- **Call resolution improves.** Callers are directed to the most appropriately skilled agent the first time.
- **Call processing time is faster.** Hand-offs and wait time are minimized, so cost per call is reduced. The customer receives more knowledgeable and efficient service.
- **Call duration is shortened.** The number of calls agents can handle increases, which in turn enables the contact center to grow in call volume without hiring additional agents. This also reduces the number of calls abandoned by frustrated callers on hold.
- **Reduce agent training and cost.** The ability to route and prioritize calls based on the skill reduces agent training time and saves on training costs.
- **Increases in agent morale.** Recognizing agents as individuals with unique skills increases agent morale and sense of personal investment, which is often reflected in lower turnover, enhanced job satisfaction and improved service to callers.
- **Increase agent productivity.** Agent productivity can be increased by more than 25 percent.
- **Reduced hold time.** Using specific numbers or DNIS, hold times can be drastically reduced.
- **Reduce abandoned call rates.** Connecting directly to the agents best able to satisfy callers’ requirements rather than having callers sit in lengthy, single queues will reduce the number of hang-ups.
- **Balanced agent workloads.** The ability to dynamically route calls to agents based on more sophisticated considerations than “first-in, first-out” ensures equitably balanced agent workloads.

However, even implementing **Skills-Based Routing** cannot compensate for unplanned increases in demand. Predicting when peak demand will occur and having the correct number of agents available can challenge even the most experienced scheduler. All call centers experience spikes in call volume. These spikes can be caused by a specific time of day (e.g. the lunch hour), a specific day of the week (e.g. Monday mornings for scheduling a doctor’s appointment), a specific planned or unplanned event (e.g. a televised news story or promotion) or seasonal (e.g. flu season).

There are numerous costs associated with long queue times generated during call peak volume times. These costs include physical resources such as trunks to hold the callers, toll costs to hold 800 calls, and additional staffing to handle the number of calls.

No one likes to remain in a queue. Queues are a waste of your call center's resources and the callers' precious time. During high queue times, callers can become angry and frustrated with your organization. Callers who are forced to wait on hold may resent your organization for not valuing their time. If you are lucky, callers will vent their frustration on your agents rather than just leaving you for another service provider. Also, while they are spending a precious few minutes voicing their displeasure about their long wait time, they are adding to your average call handling time!

## INTELLIGENT QUEUING

We at T-Metrics have analyzed the queue and discovered there are essentially three types, each one providing a different set of advantages. These queues may be identified as:

- **Blind Queue**
- **Informed Queue**
- **Intelligent Queue**

The **Blind Queue** does not inform callers of expected agent time-to-answer information. As a result, the longer callers sit in queue without knowing how long they have to wait, the greater their frustration level increases. This frustration level may even be compounded if the reason for the call to begin with is to address a problem. Their displeasure and discouragement grows the longer they remain on hold in queue and will not dissipate once connected to an agent. Once connected, callers may then waste precious time complaining about their wait time experiences and may fear experiencing the same results the next time they call. Callers may even ask agents additional questions to feel validated that their time was spent wisely and to prevent necessitating another call.

This may also lead to increased call abandonment. The lack of time-to-answer information may cause callers to abandon the queue before reaching an agent and retry the call later if at all. The increase in abandoned calls is directly proportional to amount of wait time.

Most call center managers try to identify the 'threshold of pain' that holding callers will endure and try to staff the call center so that callers will only be queued to some point below that threshold. What call center managers cannot staff for are unexpected spikes in call volume. The caller that waits in queue and eventually hangs up has wasted trunk resources and in many cases, toll dollars. Additionally, the caller has not been served. They will call again once they realize they ultimately must speak with an agent to arrive at a resolution to their problem! This retry then skews the reports based on the total number of calls received because new calls cannot be differentiated from retries. The **Blind Queue** is what most ACD's offer today and often does not really resolve many of the call center's initial problems.

The **Informed Queue** informs callers of expected agent time-to-answer information. We have often heard that information is power and by informing callers of their expected wait time, they have been empowered to make their own decision as to whether the wait time is worth the relative importance of their call resolution, or if it would be advantageous for them to call back at a different time. Unlike the Blind Queue, Informed Queue callers that choose to hold are less likely to be irritated when they finally get to an agent since they were informed of the hold time and empowered to manage their own time.

The **Intelligent Queue** not only informs callers of the expected agent time-to-answer information but also offers them choices. One such choice is to remain in queue or to leave a message for a callback. Once callback messages are recorded, callers may hang up. Callback messages may be assigned the capability to retain the caller's position

in queue. Therefore, callback messages may be handled within the same time frame that the caller would have been handled had he/she remained on hold. Once the agent receives the callback message, the agent may call the individual back based on the Caller ID obtained from the call or contact the caller at an alternative number left in the callback message.

The **Intelligent Queue** respects callers' time and empowers them to make decisions about where their time is best spent. Therefore, callers do not measure the **Intelligent Queue** time as "hold time" and appreciate the ability to pursue other activities rather than being stuck listening to music and announcements in hold queue.

By implementing **Intelligent Queue** and eliminating wasted queue time, your call center will:

- **Reduce Average Speed of Answer (ASA).** Callback messages do not go to queue until an agent is available.
- **Reduce abandons.** Customers have an alternative to waiting on hold for service.
- **Increased labor efficiency.** Calls have shorter handle times.
- **Reduce toll costs.** Toll charges or switch resources (trunks, announcements, etc.) are not incurred.
- **Increase caller satisfaction.** Show respect for your callers' valuable time.

You should be aware that while the **Intelligent Queuing** application can add significant value to your call center during heavy peak times, it does not mean that it can solve problems of poor planning or scheduling of agents and other resources. What it does mean, though, is if you planned correctly but do experience unexpected spikes in call volume, it will offer a greater level of customer care and thereby increase caller satisfaction

You may expect to see some of these savings in your call center by using **Intelligent Queuing**:

- **Average handle times for answered calls can decrease by 10%.**
- **Talk time reduction of up to 15 seconds per call.**
- **Toll costs for calls waiting in queue can be decreased by up to 90%.**
- **Trunk minutes saved up to 25%.**
- **Abandons can be decreased by more than 50%.**
- **Increase agent efficiency by over 20%.**
- **Caller satisfaction increase to 30%**

## CONCLUSION

Your call center is often the front door to your organization. How you treat your callers will be reflected in their level of satisfaction and, thus, their loyalty to your organization. If your call center is infected with "the long-hold-time disease", it will result in negative caller impression. Your only other current choice for reducing long queues is to add more agents to meet caller demand. This increases staffing costs and still may not help with unexpected call spikes. When you increase your queue management capabilities with **Skills-Based Routing** and **Intelligent Queuing**, you will increase caller satisfaction, reduce cost, and impart a favorable impression on your callers.