Think back to when you had to contact a call center to resolve an issue. Did you just cringe or smile at the recollection of what happened? Most people typically have negative experiences with call centers, but who's to blame? The truth is, everything is not as black and white as we initially think. The problem with call centers stems from a number of smaller issues which build upon one another to create one large headache. See how the future of call centers can avoid issues like this altogether, and even save the company money while building customer loyalty.

Let's take a moment and talk about the typical call center experience. You call a designated number and go through a series of options that are supposed to route you to the appropriate department, when the agent finally picks up, you tell them your situation and they work to resolve the issue. Sometimes things are done at this stage, but there are instances where the agent is unable to provide a satisfactory solution. Perhaps they don't have the necessary information to move forward or they need to work on the issue for a longer period of time. During these instances, you have to sit and wait for another agent or someone to call you back. When you do finally reach someone, you have to re-explain everything to another person who has no prior knowledge of what happened before. Sound about right?

It's a frustrating process, but for people on both ends. The agent must catch-up and not only learn what went wrong, but think of another solution. When both the agent and the caller are frustrated, it's not a good sign. Companies are losing large amounts of money simply by having to call back customers and not resolving the solution the first time around. Each time an issue isn't solved in a quick and satisfactory manner, a business could lose that customer to a competitor.

Ok, so we all know what the problem is; we've experienced it. The crucial aspect is solving the problem and preventing it from happening at all. When you boil everything down to the core, there are two reasons why call centers suffer; they don't have enough information and lack the necessary communication. If a company gave all employees the necessary tools to succeed, they wouldn't have to scramble for a solution for transfer people from department to department. When communication is clear and concise, the agent that is following up on the issue knows exactly where the last person left off and the customer doesn't have to talk about the same things over and over.

The idea of contacting a call center and having an issue resolved in a matter of minutes no headaches sounds like something out of a fantasy novel, but it's what every call center is working hard to accomplish. There are new advancements in technology that help connect customers and agents, but only when they are used properly. Many fantastic resources, like social media, are left to the wayside because people don't know how to properly utilize them. Customers expect a fast response, and get frustrated when they learn that these "speedier" options take longer than waiting on the phone.

Information is power, and knowing how to use each tool properly to communicate with people can be a tremendous game-changer. If an agent knows how to use all of the tools at their disposal, they don't need to be all-knowing in order to solve a problem, they'll know where to go to get the information that they need. Technology is moving forward and advancing, but business practices have remained stagnant. It is possible to have a smooth call center experience, but it won't happen on its own. By understanding where the sticking points are and how to fix them, a company will be able to obtain the sought-after goal of having a pain-free call center.

What Can We Expect from the Future?

Now that we understand what the ultimate goal is for call centers, it's time to consider what steps need to be taken in order to get there. Technology has advanced in leaps and bounds over the past few years, and that has allowed us to walk into a gateway to the future. However, the future is a very fickle concept that no one can truly grasp. It's one thing to have a set goal of what you want to achieve, but another to determine the best path to get there. Given the current industry and business standards, here is what you can expect from call centers of the future.

A lot of people worry that customer service agents will be replaced by automated or mechanical counterparts, but the chances of that happening are very slim. While the option to avoid people will be a very real choice, too many people prefer talking to an actual human being for them to completely eliminate agents. Just like customers have the option to check themselves out or line up for a cashier at the grocery store, the main goal is to have the option available so that customers are the ones that have the power to choose. One of the biggest draws of customer service is the interaction between employees and customers, and there is no way that companies will run the risk of losing that connection.

While the option to speak with people verbally will always exist, other methods of contact (such as chat and e-mail) will continue to grow and evolve. There are many instances where people simply don't have the time to wait on the phone for someone to talk to them, human or otherwise. Companies will continue to offer various alternatives for customers, who typically prefer whatever method is the fastest. Having these options opens up a whole new door for call centers as well, because they can keep track of digital information each time a person must contact the call center. As technology becomes more advanced, agents will be able to determine who is contacting them and their call history before they even enter a chat room with them. This would be tremendously beneficial because agents can focus on why they are getting the call and keep the customer from repeating the same story too often.

Many people have heard of the cloud and the power that is has, but call centers haven't really taken advantage of the capabilities it contains yet. The cloud will become a foundation for almost every feature a call center offers, providing users with a way to access information quickly and seamlessly. Regardless of what platform they are using, customer service agents will be able to utilize the options that the cloud has to obtain the information they need to resolve customer issues the first time around. There will be fewer calls that need to be re-routed to different departments because the information needed will be right there at their fingertips. At the same time, calls that need to be transferred will only

be moved once (and to the correct department) because agents will be able to communicate with one another and find the solution quickly for the caller.

Lastly, technology allows us to obtain a broad range of data, and expect more of that in the future. There will be many more ways to obtain metrics to determine what areas need refinement and see what customer usage habits are. Companies won't be using the data to track customers specifically, but to find out trending methods as well as sticking points that are ruining the call center experience. This data will give call centers the power to prevent headaches from happening before they turn into nightmares.

These are just some of the ways that the future of call centers will change and evolve. By knowing what is expected of the future, companies and customers are able to better prepare themselves for what is to come.

Leave the Competition in the Past by Leaping into the Future

All of this talk about the future can be disheartening because it doesn't provide solutions right now. How can a company take what they know and leap into the future? Does the future have to be so far away, or can the biggest steps be taken now? Change takes time and most people won't see the effects of what is happening until much further down the road, but that doesn't mean that you can't be in the future right now. In fact, there is no better time than now.

We've looked at all of the different options that people have at their fingertips when they want to contact a call center. They can pick up the phone and speak to an agent, go online and enter a chatroom, or send off an e-mail to the appropriate department. Some may even turn to social media to get a direct and quick response from the company itself. What's important is thinking about customer needs and demands and taking the necessary steps to make each method satisfactory. If you have a call center, educate your agents on the benefits and pitfalls of each medium and how to properly master them. Too many companies are focused on what has worked, and not what will work. Social media is a grossly underused medium, and businesses that adopt these techniques now will have smaller growing pains in the future.

As stated earlier, one of the biggest problems with call centers is information and how it is handled. It's tough to educate a large group of people at the same time, but giving them the knowledge to do their job (or find out where to get the desired information) can be an indispensable tool. One of the best ways to train your employees and step into the future is to use a digital guidance tool, such as WalkMe. WalkMe is a program that works like a digital GPS system, providing "destinations" for where to go next. It's a great way to train new employees and let seasoned veterans learn new concepts without taking time away from the effectiveness of the workforce.

WalkMe isn't just for employees, though. It can be integrated into a website's design so that customers can get the same helpful information. This is great for customers that want to look for solutions themselves without ever contacting a call center. By using a tool like WalkMe, companies are able to provide customer service to people who aren't even contacting a call center. Information is power, and

that goes either way. Whether you are training your employees on the job or educating customers on how to troubleshoot their issue, programs like WalkMe can provide them with the answer that they are looking for.

It's difficult to know exactly what's coming in the future, especially since technology can change overnight. That being said, nothing is better than being prepared for what is to come. When you own a company or business and are planning for an increase in cloud computing or social media, you have one leg up over the competition. If you create a solid foundation now, you'll have fewer hurdles to overcome when compared to your competition. Customers only know that they want something when they need it, and addressing the fact beforehand can lead to a higher rate of customers coming to your company to suit their needs.

Right now, call centers are on the brink of a big evolution. Companies know what they want to accomplish, and customers know what they expect. It's only a matter of time before we step into the future and accomplish what we all want. The important thing is knowing where the industry is headed and making the appropriate plans now so that the transition is smoother. By providing agents and customers with the proper information and training, you'll be able to accomplish much more and have a higher customer satisfaction rate.