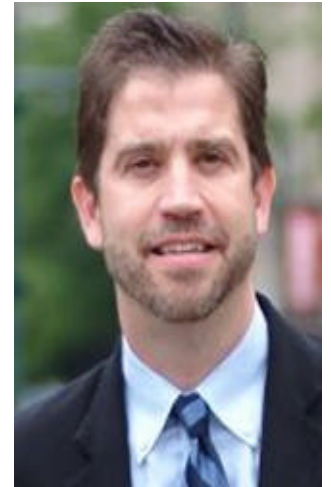


Reviews On 2004/2005 From Bob Furniss Of Touchpoint Associates

What has been the greatest challenge the contact center industry has faced in the last 12 months and why?

The biggest challenge has been a combination of industry complacency and company expectations. The industry seems to be in a "lull" in finding the "next big thing." We have come out of a decade of expected improvements due to CRM implementations. There were high expectations that agents would get better and systems would take over more of the work. While this has happened in many cases, there has not always been an improvement in live interactions. A research study published this year (don't recall the firm) identified that customers who called customer service with a problem were even more unhappy than those customers who had a problem but never called - not what a company wants to hear. I believe that the core issue is the continued lack of focus on the employee that answers the phone. We continue to pay too little, train too little and hire based on wrong expectations. Yet, company executives continue to expect more for less.



Bob Furniss
President
Touchpoint Associates

In 2005 what do you think will be the top priorities for: Contact Center Managers

The top priority for managers will be to motivate agents to provide great service to customers. This isn't done with food or contests. The key is to build real relationships between front-line managers and front-line employees. Commitment from corporate management to provide advanced training for contact managers on how to coach effectively is a key element in success.

Company Executives

Company Executives will continue to try to find ways to reduce live interactions and uncover ways to cross-sell customers. As CRM systems continue to evolve, the customer information will allow agents to be better at providing customers what they want and need. Contact centers that have not begun the transition to VoIP will begin to investigate how they can use the technology.

What do you believe will have the biggest impact on the industry over the next 12 months _ how and why?

VoIP will continue to be part of the technology change. As the technology becomes easier to implement, it will become a key to reducing costs over the long-haul.

Smart contact center executives will begin to understand the impact of agent retention and I believe the focus will shift to how to keep agents happy to reduce turnover.

What impact have external events had on your company, and how have you adapted your business, if at all?

The economy continues to drive the need to reduce costs. Companies are competing in a market where cost is one of the main market drivers. As they reduce the cost of the product, support costs must also be reduced. This has a real impact on the call center organization. Although outsourcing has taken a real rap in the media during an election year, it will continue to shape the future of the contact center organization.

In order to be successful, companies must take a clear, hard look at what can be outsourced effectively. Choose calls that have clear process maps in place and can be trained easily. While outsourcing the entire organization is not a smart move, pinpoint outsourcing is a good idea.

Do you feel the service you personally get as a customer is better or worse than it was a year ago and why do you think its so?

The service that I receive today is much better than in the past - quicker, more channels, and better employees. However, just like other customers, my expectations are MUCH higher than in the past. So, I often complain of poor service. I have high expectations that the agent or employee will be empowered to deal with my specific needs and will make decisions on what is best for me - not necessarily what was good for other customers. As a result, companies must not just teach employees how to convey policies, but how to make decisions that are beneficial for the customer and the company.

About Touchpoint

Touchpoint Associates, Inc. is a central source for contact center executives, providing simple and relevant approaches to a wide array of contact center issues, including changing the culture, managing employees, understanding and improving metrics, reducing costs and implementing new technology. TPA also offers professional speaking, writing and consultation services born from more than 25 years of customer relationship management (CRM) and customer service experience.

About Bob Furniss

As President of Touchpoint Associates, Inc., Bob Furniss has more than 25 years of experience in the customer service field. When he is not sharing his own motivational and CRM tips on the speaking circuit or consulting for contact centers of Fortune 500 companies, Furniss is busy putting the finishing touches on his book "Powerful Ideas to Transform Your Center."

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Date and Time Posted : 1/4/2005 12:43:48 PM

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