Executive Overview

Every company that starts a knowledge management initiative expects real benefits—but these results are not guaranteed. This paper offers five proven strategies that can help ensure that your knowledge management initiative delivers improved customer experiences and a significant return on investment.

Introduction

A well-designed and -implemented knowledge management initiative can result in higher agent productivity as well as shorter call times, greater self-service customer satisfaction, and reduced costs thanks to call deflection. In contrast, a poorly designed and implemented knowledge management system can drive up call time, annoy customers (leading them to abandon self-service), and increase agent frustration (due to the distraction of too many tools on agents’ desktops).

To succeed, knowledge management initiatives require well-thought-out strategies that align closely with the needs of contact center agents and self-service customers. This paper discusses a series of best practices that can help you design and deploy a successful knowledge management solution. By adopting the following practices, you can deliver an outstanding customer experience and gain significant return on your knowledge management investment:

- **Start with a clear definition.** Set realistic, precisely defined goals and objectives for the initiative. Avoid “big bang” implementation in favor of a phased approach that enables knowledge management to be fine-tuned before wider application.

- **Take a “less is more” approach.** Rather than bludgeoning customers with results lists containing hundreds of possible answers, provide a relevant, focused, and structured response that targets the intent of your customers’ inquiries.
• **Foster collaborative knowledge creation.** By embracing social networking as a part of your knowledge management strategy, you can rapidly develop useful content at a lower cost.

• **Recognize the value of what you don’t know.** Leverage analytics to identify gaps in your implementation. By gathering intelligence on what you don’t know, you can react faster to growing customer needs, continuously improve in areas you have yet to tap for efficiencies, and create a better service experience.

• **Think globally.** Although you may start small with your initiative, do not limit your thinking about the uses and value of knowledge management in your business division or geography. It can have broad advantages across the enterprise and should be treated as a corporate initiative, not just a divisional solution.
Best Practice 1: Clearly Define Your Initiative

Successful knowledge management projects start with a realistic scope and precisely defined goals and objectives. Although the ultimate goal of your initiative may be to deploy knowledge management for agents as well as self-service customers, it’s best to avoid “big bang” implementation in favor of a phased approach. There’s no right or wrong place to initiate a knowledge project, but organizations expose themselves to the least risk when the first implementation occurs in the contact center, because

- You gain the opportunity to test and improve the guidance techniques and content in an internal environment—so you won’t subject customers to a poorly executed self-service experience. By fine-tuning knowledge management in the contact center, you enable customers to experience a more mature solution that can lead to faster adoption, long-term usage, and increased online service satisfaction.

- The cost savings achieved from a contact center deployment—which can include higher agent productivity, shorter call times, and fewer escalations—can be used to fund subsequent rollouts.

### KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE: TYPICAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CONTACT CENTER GOAL: REDUCED OPERATIONAL COSTS</th>
<th>WEB SELF-SERVICE GOAL: HIGHER CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND WEB CONVERSIONS</th>
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<td>Improve agent productivity</td>
<td>Increase call deflection</td>
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<td>Increase first-call resolutions</td>
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Don’t Forget the Law of Unintended Consequences

As you start to look at potential knowledge management solutions, keep in mind the law of unintended consequences and the possible adverse results. For example, if you implement a solution in the contact center that provides broad search results with little contextual filtering, you’ll likely only increase the time agents required to answer questions. As a result, average handle time (AHT) will go up—and you’ll have achieved the opposite of the effect you intended. However, if a major objective is to increase first-call resolution rates—even if the AHT slightly increases—giving first-line agents more research capability might be the right choice.
The Consequences of Technology

One of the most important considerations for knowledge management technology is how well it’s integrated with the agent desktop. A solution that’s not fully integrated will require additional navigation to get to useful answers—wasting precious seconds that can add up to substantial increases in AHT.

An integrated desktop, in contrast, can use CRM and case data to contextually drive the discovery process. Queries can be automatically linked to case fields such as case type, summary, and product. And you can create links that automatically capture the solutions that shorten call wrap-up time and create a historical record of all solutions used on the case.

A single integrated desktop can improve multiple contact center metrics—reducing time to proficiency for new hires, decreasing AHT, minimizing training impacts, and improving agent morale by making access to knowledge part of the natural flow of managing customer inquiries.

Similarly, a Web self-service implementation that yields thousands of answers for site visitors to wade through may seem like a good idea—after all, you’re giving customers greater access to useful information—but it can have the reverse effect, annoying customers who have to search and sift through daunting amounts of information. Here, the likely result is more e-mails and phone calls instead of the projected substantial reduction.

To recognize and respond to unexpected results, you will want to ascertain current-level metrics for key areas, establishing baselines for measuring the success of your initiative. Before beginning your implementation, make sure you have at least six months of data, and then use that as a benchmark to measure what happens in the first 30 to 60 days after implementation. This comparative data will provide early indicators for immediate corrective action. As you collect this data over multiple deployments, it can also demonstrate that adverse consequences are temporary and that expected improvements will begin to manifest themselves after the changes have taken hold in the organization.

Exposing vast quantities of information to your customers (or your agents) won’t improve their ability to find a useful answer.

Best Practice 2: Remember That Less Is More

The decision to expose content to customers and prospects who visit your Website can lead to information overload. This stems from the well-meaning—but misguided—belief that the more content you provide, the better off the customer will be.

One of the primary goals of any self-service implementation should be to provide a better overall customer experience. When it comes to finding information, customers measure the experience primarily by how quickly and effectively the site delivers relevant and useful answers. Think about a customer who initiates a search for the price of a new product on your site: is bombarding them with a
Google-like results list the experience you want to deliver? With the amount of information available to users growing at an astounding rate, exposing vast quantities of information to customers (or agents) won’t improve their ability to find a useful answer.

The old 80/20 rule—80 percent of inquiries can be answered by 20 percent of content—is highly relevant to a knowledge management implementation. The key to delivering a high-quality experience is to deploy a rich subset of relevant content, focus, and structure for handling the most frequent and common questions.

The best way to illustrate this “less is more” principle is to look at some existing Websites—beginning with one that follows the opposite (“more is better”) approach. When searching for an answer to the question “What is the price of the new BlackBerry Curve,” the site in Figure 1 delivers the following experience.

![Image of a website search results page with too many unfiltered results, no offers, pricing information, or interactivity]

**Figure 1.** Too many unfiltered results and zero offers, pricing information, or interactivity detract from the usability of this site’s search results.

Providing hundreds of results to sift through and zero at-a-glance pricing information, this Website delivers an unsatisfying experience—making the customer expend additional time and effort (and likely do more searches) to find the desired pricing information. This kind of experience can frustrate the customer—leading to a costly phone call or, worse, abandonment of the site in favor of a competitor with a more customer-friendly approach to information delivery.

Now let’s look at the same inquiry and customer experience handled by the Website of a large telecommunications company, which adheres to the principle of relevant content, focus, and structure.
A large business equipment provider reduced call research time by an average of 50 percent and achieved more than 75 percent initial resolution of Web self-service inquiries after deploying an Oracle knowledge management solution.

**Figure 2.** This Website demonstrates a better way of providing results for the same search.

In this Website experience, the knowledge platform structures the results to tie them directly to the customer's intent. Prominently displayed pricing information is enriched with related content and activities that can help prod the customer to click the **Add to Basket** button. The integration between content and inquiry also enables the customer to provide feedback about the effectiveness of the inquiry response, which helps the company refine and improve the experience on its site.

This level of intentional service can have profound effects on the overall customer experience and the efficiency of support organizations. Oracle customers have achieved significant improvements in their customer satisfaction ratings and substantially reduced costs by implementing these methodologies.

For example, a leading business equipment company set a strategic management directive to lower service costs by reducing the call time for billing and technical assistance calls while providing customers with better self-service. The company replaced multiple homegrown intranet systems used by 1,100 agents with Oracle Knowledge for Contact Center. As a result, call research time was reduced by 50 percent on average, Web self-service inquiries achieved better than 75 percent initial resolution, and the company experienced a nearly 80 percent reduction in e-mail during comparable periods in which postal rate hikes would have been expected to create large spikes in inquiries.
Embracing the social network as part of your knowledge management strategy can provide a means of rapidly developing useful content at a lower cost.

**Best Practice 3: Foster Unstructured Knowledge Creation**

The knowledge-centered support (KCS) methodology is well accepted in many customer service organizations—especially when it comes to creating and managing content. These principles foster unstructured creation of knowledge, designed to develop useful information “organically.” KCS promotes creating content as a byproduct of solving problems; evolving content based on demand and usage; developing a knowledgebase of collective experience; and rewarding collaboration, sharing, and improving content.

Social networking can serve as a valuable tool in encouraging unstructured knowledge development. By embracing the social network as part of your knowledge management strategy, you can facilitate rapid, low-cost content development through customer communities that support themselves while contributing content that can be incorporated into your knowledgebase.

The following are some simple ways you can encourage social contributions from contact center agents as well as customers:

- Provide a simple way to recommend content through social channels such as company-sponsored forums and communities or online feedback forms. Be sure to use this feedback to rework content to bring it in line with user needs and expectations.
- Enable users to comment on the value of contributions, and begin building social reputation ratings for content contributors. This motivates people to contribute quality posts, care about peer reviews, and enhance their reputation ratings as designated expert contributors.
- Offer subscriptions to help communities stay up to date on what matters most to them.
- Monitor the quality of social media by actively monitoring channels and conducting regular surveys.
- Tightly embed social channels into the self-service search process, so that customers are aware of discussion topics in their areas of interest.

**Best Practice 4: Focus on What You Don’t Know**

As we’ve all learned the hard way, ignorance is not bliss. Monitoring the success of your knowledge management initiative in terms of your goals and objectives is important. But of even greater value is discovering when and why inquiries fail, because these failures provide the greatest opportunity for improving the overall experience.

Using analytics to identify where users do not succeed enables you to continuously refine and improve the quality of searching and content. Analytics can help you

- Discover where the search process broke down and determine why you may not have understood the true intent of the user’s initial inquiry
• Identify where your online solutions are helpful, incomplete, or out of date
• Understand new question trends and identify gaps in your solutions to those questions
• Ascertain user behavior pertaining to common inquiries (for example, what they do next and what additional questions they ask)

By understanding successes, failures, and trends, you can continuously create more-relevant and intentional experiences that will optimize contact center operations as well as improve online customer self-service.

One important response to the discovery of a new trend or that knowledge is missing is to push content into the hands of those that desperately need it as quickly as possible—even if that content is not perfect. This is crucial when new products are launched, causing a spike in calls and e-mails for assistance. In such situations, less can be dangerous: it’s better to put ideas and trial answers into users’ hands as soon as the need arises—a process social networking facilitates by enabling you to leverage the user community to develop information and answers. Just make sure users have a mechanism for rating these new solutions, and then review your progress daily to refine and improve your answers.

Knowledge management can have broad application across the enterprise. As such, it should be treated as a corporate initiative, not just a departmental point solution.

Best Practice 5: Think Globally

We’ve stressed the importance of starting with a reasonable scope for your knowledge management initiative and not trying to implement everywhere all at once. But this does not mean that knowledge management is just a departmental or discrete solution useful only to the call center or Web self-service. Knowledge management can have broad application across the enterprise. As such, it should be treated as a corporate initiative, not just a departmental point solution. Knowledge management can

• Improve employee productivity with intranets for human resources, product development, and professional services
• Boost the performance of your sales force automation operations with sales intelligence portals
• Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of relationships with partners and vendors

Even when you’re starting with a classic customer service implementation, it’s important to enlist the support and participation of groups outside the customer care organization by illustrating the value to be gained from knowledge management. For example, the marketing department will want to help develop and monitor content when you can show that relevant offers on the self-service support site generate higher commerce spending.

Thinking globally also requires planning for the use of knowledge management across multiple channels. This is important, because how solutions need to be structured can vary considerably, depending on the channel in which they’re used. For example, the answer to a question delivered via e-mail can be lengthy and detailed, because the customer can spend time reviewing the response. However, a lengthy response is not appropriate for a chat interaction and some content simply may
not work for a given channel. For example, technical solutions that require some level of expertise typically serve only to frustrate self-service customers. In such cases, the answers are better delivered by phone agents who understand how to walk the customer through the resolution process.

It’s also important to structure knowledge for multilingual deployment. Here are some high-level guidelines for content translation:

- **Apply the 80/20 rule to the content designated for translation.** Focusing on mature products with stabilized content enables more-affordable translations and improves resolution rates.

- **Adhere to document standards and specifications.** Use global editing and authoring specifications to ensure consistent terminology and make maximum use of common phrases.

- **Leverage industry-standard translation tools.** Take advantage of available tools to minimize customizations and keep translations affordable.

**Conclusion**

It’s clear that customer-facing organizations can gain enormous benefits from knowledge management systems. But for them to reap those benefits, these systems need to be well designed, well implemented, and seamlessly integrated with the agent’s desktop. By following the best practices outlined in this white paper, you should be able to achieve these results—while delivering an outstanding customer experience and gaining a significant return on your knowledge management investment.