

Leading Practice in Medical Center Call Centers: Enchanting Patients



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Executive Overview

Medical Centers are increasingly accessed through consolidated contact centers that focus on pre-access information, appointment scheduling and general information. More and more the contact center is becoming the hub of hospital interaction with patients, referring physicians and other network providers. As an integral part of the marketing team, the contact center sets expectation of care through its interaction with callers.

Effective contact centers reflect the brand attributes of the medical center through each interaction with a caller. Developing and maintaining a highly successful contact center demands focusing on a select few critical factors to ensure each interaction enchants callers to schedule appointments, participate in fund raising events and refer patients.

6 Leading Practices for Medical Contact Centers

1. **One Call Does It All:** Complex medical centers with multiple specialty clinics are initiating caller contact with those clinics through a consolidated contact center. Enchanting experiences standardize first contact protocols and transfer the data gathered with the specialty clinic to avoid asking for the same information multiple times.
2. **Product Awareness and Knowledge Development:** As the initial point of contact at the Medical Center each agent should have a robust working knowledge of the services provided, marketing promotions and key messages provided by the marketing team. Medical contact center agents handle calls ranging from locating a patient in the facility to scheduling appointments for specialized service clinics within the medical center. Ensure that contact center staffs are informed of ongoing activities, trained in proper protocols and highly aware of clinical service offerings.
3. **Clear Behavior Expectations:** Contact center staffs are often the first face of the medical center. Establishing a well-defined set of expected behaviors among agents that reflect the medical center's patient experience guidelines provide a basis for performance monitoring and improvement. Executing the behaviors is facilitated by developing a call model versus a script, which allows for efficient call handling while empowering staff to modify their approach to each caller while providing a consistent controlled experience.
4. **Productive Physical Space:** Provide productive physical space for the contact center, these professionals are the face of the medical center to many callers. Medical call centers historically dwell in the dark recesses of the facility in poorly lit spaces with reclaimed office furniture. Making a strategic investment in providing contact center

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space that is well lit with comfortable, ergonomic office furniture lifts the perception of the contact center in the esteem of medical staff and offers the agent a space to be proud of while interacting with callers.

5. **Contemporary Technology Supports:** Knowledge Management tools, Customer Relationship Management software, digital phone lines and call monitoring capability are essential components of every commercial contact center and should be in medical contact centers as well. Giving agents the tools they need to quickly resolve caller inquiries with the highest level of accuracy and transfer callers flawlessly shows a positive face of a hospital that cares about patient satisfaction and optimal outcomes.
6. **Metrics Matter:** Caller satisfaction should be measured routinely. Using Voice of the Patient data allows both the contact center and hospital have actionable insights so changes can be made in service based on customer input. Implementing real-time feedback systems in the form of a dashboard, in tandem with the caller satisfaction metrics offers immediate service recovery when warranted.

Today's medical contact centers reflect the evolving needs of callers and the increased demands on medical centers to offer the highest level of care from initial contact through post-treatment support.

Epicenter of Patient Experience

Patients, families and physicians often experience your brand for the first time through telephone contact. At the core of the initial impression is an interaction that may take only a few seconds. Those first few seconds can make an indelible mark on how a caller feels about your ability to meet or exceed their expectations. For decades healthcare facility switchboards have been responsible for that first contact. In today's environment a few folks managing a cold transfer from the main number to specific units or individuals just isn't enough.

As consumers we all blend our expectations of what an outstanding customer service should feel like when contacting a service provider. From the delightfully engaging experience of a vacation resort to the low expectations of clearing an error on the utility bill we all bring a level of expectation of service. Exceeding that expectation upon initial contact builds the foundation for an enchanted customer or partner. In most hospitals we visit the contact center is a hidden operation handling mundane tasks disconnected from the operations of the facility. Truly a back office, facilities management function.

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As the Affordable Care Act (ACA) becomes a reality for healthcare providers the advent of consolidating operations for greater efficiency is a priority. Consolidation and process improvement activities focus on leveraging every aspect of the brand to increase productivity reduce costs and maintain or improve patient satisfaction. Implementing a strategic contact center strategy is a critical component of success.

Strategic Contact Center Components

Strategic Intent

Establishing the mission of the contact center as the hub for all communication activities sets the tone for how to position, organize, staff and fund the operation. Conscious placement of contact center leadership within the office of Patient Experience marks the high value placed on communication.

Patient and physicians interacting with your brand have expectations that **One Call Does It All**.

Consumers expect that when making telephonic contact with a service provider a single call will do it all. Multiple cold transfers or widely varying experiences will instantly turn a potential advocate to a detractor. Whether you're part of a 1000 bed facility with multiple specialty clinics or a local 50-bed hospital the relationship with your community should be reliable and professional.

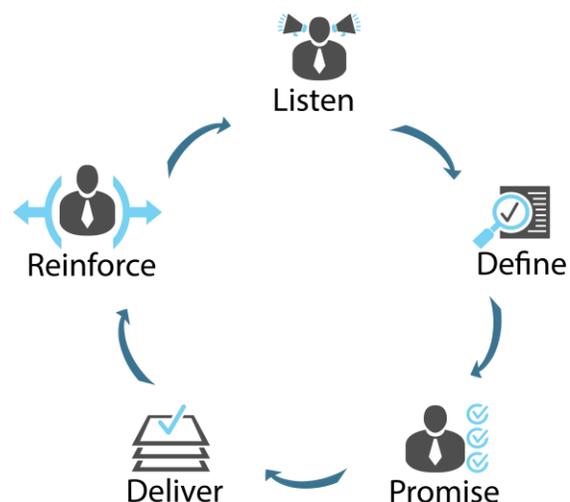
Delivering on the experience that truly represents your brands consider these 9 Dimensions in establishing or evaluating your contact center.

9 Dimensions of Contact Center Strategy

1. **Voice of the Customer:** Ensure that the voices of your primary constituents are heard and integrated into every aspect of the contact center's strategy. Patients, physicians, affiliates, service providers, partners and members of the community should all be routinely pulsed for feedback.
2. **Process Standardization:** Trust builds from reliability. Reliability is a result of low variation in the processes within the contact center. Although each contact is unique demanding a tailored response enchanting experiences standardize first contact protocols and avoid asking for the same information multiple times.

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- Performance Management:** Consciously managing the performance of contact center operations through a clear set of established metrics sets expectations for personal and departmental excellence. Using historical data and forecasted demand supports the development of achievable performance levels. Establish clear behavioral expectations based on established processes and performance metrics.
- Agent Empowerment:** Inquiry escalation should be by exception versus the norm. Empowering your first line of communication to make informed decisions with the contact increases satisfaction and build confidence in both the caller and the agent. Establish appropriate levels of empowerment for the contact center agent to resolve inquire within the first contact.
- Learning and Development:** Healthcare provider operations are increasingly complex. Understanding everything that goes on within the facility/network is a daunting task for anyone. Providing ample opportunities for your contact center staff to learn about the intricacies of the brand they represent is a basic requirement. Additionally personal development opportunities for each staff member build confidence in their ability to manage communication both internally and externally.
- Change Leadership:** Leading in an environment where changes occur regularly requires the skills and tools to effectively recognize and implement change within the contact center. From taking on new mission elements to proactively preparing for crisis management situations a deep understanding of leading in a dynamic environment must be fostered within the contact center.
- Agent Tools:** Paper lists, hospital directories, and hard-line telephony aren't enough to meet today's demands. Tools for the contact center must include an integrated contact, case and knowledge management solution to optimize productivity and first contact resolution.



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8. **Web Integration:** Today's consumer demands an environment where all channels of access are integrated from on-line data and services to in-person interactions. Implementing an *Omni-channel* strategy for your contact center greatly improve efficiency, consistency and satisfaction with medical center services.
9. **Business Reporting:** It's all about turning data into insights for action. Contact centers demand reporting vehicles that allow your organization to measure everything from contact volume to service complaints. Building a dashboard for easy review of metrics and a near-real-time alert process for negative feedback is crucial to operational efficiencies.

Knowing Where You Stand

Understanding just where your contact center excels or can enhance its capabilities is an important step. Evaluate each of the 9 Key Dimensions necessary for success through the lens of both patients and internal stakeholders by asking these key questions.

- Are you effectively listening to your customers, their influencers and internal stakeholders to determine their wants, needs, perceptions and expectations of your contact center?
- Has the medical center defined clearly how the understood requirements of patients, physicians and other staff will be met or exceeded?
- How well have you communicated the promise of your contact center experience to the organization and the marketplace?
- Do the metrics in place to measure performance against your promise provide the best information available to determine how well the operation is performing?
- How well do all your stakeholders understand the successes of the center in delivering your designed experience?

Making an impact on first contact is crucially important to the foundation of an outstanding patient experience. Take the time to plan, execute and trumpet the success of your medical center contact center, the Epicenter of Customer Experience.

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About Endeavor

Endeavor Management, is an international management consulting firm that collaboratively works with their clients to achieve greater value from their transformational business initiatives. Endeavor serves as a catalyst by providing pragmatic methodologies and industry expertise in Transformational Strategies, Operational Excellence, Organizational Effectiveness, and Transformational Leadership.

Our clients include those responsible for:

- Business Strategy
- Marketing and Brand Strategy
- Operations
- Technology Deployment
- Strategic Human Capital
- Corporate Finance

The firm's 40 year heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, deep operational insight and broad industry experience. This experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets. Endeavor's clients span the globe and are typically leaders in their industry.

Gelb Consulting, a wholly owned subsidiary, monitors organizational performance and designs winning marketing strategies. Gelb helps organizations focus their marketing initiatives by fully understanding customer needs through proven strategic frameworks to guide marketing strategies, build trusted brands, deliver exceptional experiences and launch new products.

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