

4 *QUICK*
ways to solve
AGENT
disengagement

Stephen Pace

About Stephen Pace, CEO of SJS Solutions Ltd.



Stephen is a true industry expert with over twenty years' experience in customer service and contact centre technology.

Stephen first learnt about customer care and the importance of providing the right technology to contact centre owners when he worked as Customer Care Quality Manager for TNT Express at their HQ in Amsterdam, Holland. Stephen had global responsibilities and developed TNT's first Mystery Shopper Program, analysed CS quality across 40 countries, identified best practice and audited customer care centres across the globe.

After leaving TNT Stephen worked as Service Delivery Manager for EDS and successfully ran some smaller contact centres in the UK.

In 2001 Stephen decided to create a company capable of developing technology specifically designed to support contact centre agents in the delivery of Customer Excellence and SJS Solutions was born.

Since inception Stephen and the SJS team have successfully developed several products with the most recent, Optymyse, receiving global recognition as an integral piece of the contact centre optimisation and agent engagement puzzle.



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What's Troubling John?...

Meet John.

John is a contact centre agent at your business.



He's 24, college educated and right now, he's single. He lives in a shared house with two friends he met at college (one of whom also works at your contact centre) and a guy who has a night job delivering pizzas on a clanky moped while studying to be a Dentist.

When he started at your call centre a year ago, John had plans to clear off his debts, buy a car and work towards team leader, then prove his worth and move into management (oh, and to find a girlfriend).

Smart, articulate, hardworking and reliable, John was just the kind of talent your company needs to ensure a smooth running contact centre, and things started well. He learned fast, did John.

But, after a year, John is still clocking in, sitting at his desk and ploughing through call after call. Things are moving slowly.

He's giving it his best, he's good with customers, his team like him, but to date, no-one has mentioned moving up the ladder. Career prospects seem far away and now John is getting frustrated. He sometimes feels like the moment he sits down at his desk, he disappears.

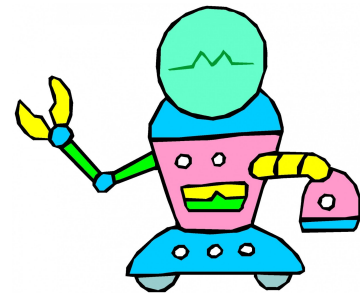
In other contact centres jobs he's looked at (and you can be sure, he has looked) they all pay roughly the same salary. Same hours, similar benefits, comparable perks... not much to choose from.

So when your job offer stacks up. When you have put so much effort into bringing John into the business and giving him the skills he needs. When you make sure your job package is equally as attractive as competitors, **what is troubling John..?**

It's this. - He struggles to keep up with the constant changes in your business. Not the big changes, he's reads those emails. No, it's the small changes that affect his day to day, his experience as an employee, his energy and demeanor. And of course, what he says to customers when they call in.

“John is always struggling to sound confident, because... well... he's not”

He is frustrated, disaffected and disengaged. Of course, John knows your business. The training he had is as good as it gets. But the challenge is that in a fast paced contact centre, he feels a bit like a robot.



Sure, there are updates sent by email, the occasional positive feedback (three days after the client gave it) and staff notices. But things change faster than emails can be read, and often, he is behind the curve because he's busy on calls, so he misses those emails. He starts to disconnect.

John answers 27 calls that day and, truth be told, he didn't feel like he was giving his best on any of them. The information he needed *there and then* wasn't available. He didn't know pricing without putting the customer on hold, he didn't know stock levels or service conditions... without putting the customer on hold again. And when he got back to the call, he could tell that the rapport he had started the conversation with, ***the part of the conversation that builds customer confidence and brand loyalty***, had evaporated once again.

John got the job done. No complaints, but no positive feedback and no job satisfaction either. Yes, he had achieved what he was there to do;

But he wasn't feeling fulfilled. He was frustrated and bored. So, understandably, he starts to flick through the job websites again.

Here's the thing...

John had good intentions when he started at your company. He didn't start out wanting to leave. Something happened, something got broken along the way.

John wants to feel like a part of your business. He wants responsibility to deal with customers properly, to take his time to respond to questions, to feel empathy with the caller and confident that he has the answers right there in front of him.

John wants to look up from the screen now and then and feel connected to the people working around him.

But time pressures, staff morale, never feeling in control of his day and that robot thing... He's not getting that where he is right now, so it's time to move on.

After all, he has a year of experience, he's fully trained in product knowledge, business ethos, up selling, down-selling and cross selling. He understands the psychology of an angry caller and he can calm them down using the ideas and response strategies your company has spent a fortune in developing, testing and refining.

He's reliable, punctual and responsible, who wouldn't hire John?

So he applies to a competitor. and your company has to start the wheels (and the costs) of recruiting Johns replacement.

Over 2 Billion pound is spent on stories just like John, every year. By you, your competitors and the industry.

Sound familiar?

Well, there's something else about John you should know...

When he clears his desk, John won't go empty handed.

I don't mean a pocketful of pencils and a fiver's worth of 'post it' pads.

If that was all he took, happy days.

No. What John takes with him is a whole new level of 'expensive'.

He takes the cost of recruiting, onboarding, training, managing and developing him. And worse, he takes with him the experience and knowledge of your company. The second he leaves, all that is gone. Wasted.

Of course, to you, it means that when you fill John's place, you start again, right from the beginning. It's a costly business, losing a member of your team, demoralising for those left behind and those missing 'post it' notes... well that just tops it.

Also;

When John had made the decision to leave months ago, he started to pull back on the way he responded to callers.

It's natural really, he had no long term commitment and therefore no short term reason to give it his best. He loses interest because, in his mind, one foot is out the door.

And he's the guy (or girl of course) who is representing your business, day in, day out, until he leaves his desk for the last time.

John made waves too. When he told his housemate and colleagues of *his* dissatisfaction at the job, they focused on theirs. They made a mental note to ask John where the new job was, the money, the hours, the set up. And maybe they start their own journey out the door. Thanks John.

So what makes John's story so familiar and what can we do about it?...

Well, assuming that your rates of pay are standard, your general working practice is much the same as your competitors, then there are four key areas of John's day we should take a look at.

First though, we need to consider the situation from two angles. The impact on the agent, the team leaders and the managers; and secondly, the money.

It can sometimes get missed in a big corporation, especially if finances are not your job role, but *every time* John's story plays out in your call centre, money, big money, is lost straight from the bottom line.

The obvious is the cost of replacing John. But what about the customer loyalty that was damaged when John lost interest in really helping a caller, when his half hearted attempt to deal efficiently with an enquiry did nothing to build on the client relationship with your brand and as a result they went somewhere else, maybe after posting their thoughts on Facebook or Twitter?

Money for investment, research, upgrades, profit share, computers, phone systems, shareholders, salary increases... all going instead, to replace John.

Think of it this way. With an estimated 30% annual staff attrition rate, in just less than four years, you will have turned over your entire workforce of agents.

There's a problem in our industry and it's growing.

So, to help guide us through it, here are the four key factors that make up the disengagement issue and also how Optymyse are working with some of the busiest contact centres around the world to address the challenge of re-engaging agents and helping them to feel connected (and loyal) to your contact centre.

Let's go through them quickly...

1: Negative Use of Company Metrics

Imagine turning up at work and seeing your line manager standing by your desk...

“Good morning, just dropped by to tell you how lacking you were at your job yesterday and now it’s up there on the board, everyone knows it. Have a great day byeeee...”

That’s what metrics such as ‘Longest Wait’ do. Contact Centres putting this kind of info out to their team, are demoralising staff day in day out and it’s happening in hundreds of contact centres.

An hour later the same managers drop by again...

“Hi, it’s me again. Just to let you know that there are 45 calls in the queue which means there are 45 calls to answer because there were 60 calls but 15 were answered, leaving 45 calls to be answered... seeeeya!”

Saying the same thing in different ways is still saying the same thing. It’s demotivating, condescending and impractical.

When a contact centre uses centre-wide display wallboards to give negative feedback like they do with ‘Longest wait’ metrics, how can that be anything but embarrassing?

And displaying metrics that say the same thing but in 5 different ways, that’s a great way to switch the agent off from even looking at the screen.

The thing is, agents very quickly know what is required of them, your training takes care of that. So meaningless metrics on their screen or TV screens on the wall just to fill the pixels, fails to add value to their job, especially if you are bringing them down, not pushing them higher.

So...

At Optymyse, we have been working with major contact centres across all verticals. Household names like Sunlife, DBS, Fedex, South Wales Police, Central Minnesota Credit Union, Thames Water, Mercury Marine Insurance and many more to reimagine the way useful data is displayed. Data that adds value to every agent.

Calls waiting metrics *are* needed. But add in updates on (eg) weather conditions that affect service, road accidents for delivery companies, incidents for emergency services, international news for shipping companies, financial alerts for banks and insurance contact centres and your agent has an immediate response to questions from their caller.

No paper shuffling. No 'please hold while I get that information for you'. No calling the shift supervisor... critical information displayed in real time means every call is more efficient and to you, that means more calls are answered creating a direct positive impact on your bottom line.

Done right displaying information on a TV screen will impact agent behaviour in a deeper way than single computer screen displays because agents collectively see what their colleagues are achieving, and this creates a community where teams are not isolated behind a desk but interacting creating a physiological response known as Social Proof.

Social proof works by sharing, so consider the use of the metrics you already have. Are you actively encouraging your staff or subconsciously undermining them and the work they do?

2: Customer feedback. After Call Survey. Social feedback.

John was doing a great job (at least at first), his customers would give positive feedback and in reviews John was told all about them. But the 'great job John!' feedback positively affects *everyone* on the team. Keeping it between John and his line manager is a waste. ***Share it. Share the love.***

With Optymyse you can share the positive news from customers feedback, surveys, posts on Facebook and Twitter right across your team. Everyone gets to hear about John's great job because it pops up on the screen in real time.

For you...

You have recognised a job well done, John is a star for a few minutes (it might help him find that elusive girlfriend, poor guy) and your contact centre starts to go from workplace to community.

What information would help your team do their job better?

Not just work stuff.



You can display YouTube channels too, that helps with downtime. Training videos, company news videos, some cute kittens, your choice.

If you have a busy Twitter feed or Facebook page, add that to the screen and connect your agents directly to your customers. Not just the hello's and 'where's my order?' - Social commentary on your business helps your agents

lift their head once in awhile and see what the world really thinks of your company.

And not just inside the contact centre. If you are out and about you can still log in to the system and read the feedback yourself, anywhere you are connected and on any web enabled device.

So, look for ways to add value to the displays you are using. Refocus away from the obvious and consider what your agents need to connect to the business.

Next, community...

3: Community

Where online do all (more or less) your agents spend a *lot* of time?

Facebook.

Twitter too.

Here's the thing. Social is community. That means communities are important to your people, so it makes sense to build a community within the business too.



Welcome messages, birthdays, positive feedback, photos of the new baby or the wedding, notice of Friday evening drinks... all these things help to create a community within the business.

You might be doing it by email of course, but think how much more powerful it is right there on the screen, seen at the same time by every agent. That sense of community means a lot to them. **Think of ways to make it happen.**

Gamification is growing too, and a great way to use a fun approach to downtime, learning and brand building.

With Optymyse, building the community means creating a visual environment that mixes critical business information with engaging, fun and memorable sections of the screen. We've found that mixing it up like this encourages agents to continually look at the screen for updates on both the business and community level.

And number 4...

4: Your Brand as a Team Builder

Customer facing businesses, fast food shops and football teams wear uniforms to develop team cohesiveness. In some sectors, usually public sector, so do call handlers and agents.

Uniforms can help build brands instantly, while creating brand loyalty is challenging in a call centre where uniforms are not the norm. Branding has to come from somewhere else. It has to be clear, visible and constant. Repetition builds brands. So the point stands that however you do it, by creating a sense of belonging you help build loyalty in your agents. Not having the branding in place won't be an obvious negative, but when it's so easy to do and so valuable to have, it's worth considering how you can make it happen in your contact centre.

And it's not just agents.

When a potential client comes by to see how you run things, or a company executive comes to a meeting and asks for a tour, are you confident that they are witnessing brand awareness on the agent's' floor?

First impressions last and that goes for potential recruits as they see your contact centre in action.

Some contact centres place charts and graphs on wall mounted TV screens that are hard to see and understand. That has the added negative effect of potential new recruits seeing the screen and deciding it all looks too complicated or unprofessional.

The whole experience that your brand wraps up in its colours and logo should be positive.



We've built into Optymyse the ability to completely brand the experience. Every time your agent checks the screen (for the fun stuff, business stuff or both) your brand is reinforced. Your logo, corporate brand colours, even your product images.

Optymyse Employee Engagement & Visual Communications Software helps you build highly effective call and contact centres. Designed to ensure employees are committed to your organisation's goals and values. Motivating call centre agents to contribute towards organisational success.

Optymyse is much more than a wall board showing call metrics. It's an *'information hub'* that pulls in the data your team needs as well as the social, community information that helps the day become less stressful.

Here are the seven areas we have focused on:

1. *Empower your Agents*

2. *Build a Happy Team*
3. *Create Engaging Environments*
4. *Easy Deployment*
5. *Customer Engagement*
6. *Enhanced Environment*
7. *Maximise Performance*

Empower Agents

Empower your agents. Create powerful screen designs capable of displaying any content on any device. Don't stop at call centre metrics. Empower contact centre agents with live customer feedback, enlighten with operational messages and motivate with successes, team events, news and anniversaries.

Build a Happy Team

Increase employee satisfaction by reducing stress and encouraging employee engagement. Support internal branding and improve knowledge transfer with engaging visuals focused on inspiring, supporting and educating contact centre agents and employees.

Create Engaging Environments

Quickly create branded displays which enhance environments and support employees. Avoid boring, single system, data only wallboards and dashboards.

Easy Deployment

Get a flying start by using ready-made templates, choose from a selection of data connectors or use our free API to create your own, and take control of your contact centre visuals. Instantly transfer knowledge, performance metrics, employee communications, customer feedback, internal branding, multi-media (including live TV) and company values to agents and employees.

Customer Engagement

It is no longer enough to publish *Calls Waiting, Abandoned Rates and Time to Answer* metrics on contact centre wallboards and agent desktops. A cross system, cross channel, multi-layer approach to visual communications gives agents a true picture of customer engagement.



Enhanced Environment

A professional, efficient environment reduces cost through lower staff attrition rates and by attracting the best personnel. Knowledge transfer and brand reinforcement supports training, releases management time and builds a confident, motivated team.

Maximise Performance

Great communication is key to the effectiveness of any team. Digital Displays are a powerful, affordable way to transfer information, strengthen your brand and encourage confidence in personnel and agents.

Interested in learning more about Optymyse and the work we are doing at contact centres around the world?

We can take you through a demo of Optymyse and show you how it is re-engaging contact centre staff around the globe. Call us today on +44 (0)203 642 1842 or +1-866-412-5265 (Toll Free) for an online demonstration. Or visit www.optymyse.com

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