

Frontier Communications

Thinking Out of the Box with Powerful Tools; Using Aspect to Increase Availability and Improve Service Levels

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Vivian Tejada

*Workforce Administrator
Frontier Communications*

The Company

Frontier, a Citizens Communications Company, is the seventh largest local exchange telecommunications provider in the United States, with 2.4 million customers in 24 states. Frontier is a single source for telecommunications, offering Internet, high-speed data, long distance, teleconferencing, advanced calling features, and basic telephone service.

The Business Challenge

- Improve collections without investing in additional contact center technology or staffing
- Reduce busy signal notifications

The Solution

More efficient use of the functionality present in Aspect® CallCenter® ACD, a high-volume call routing solution; and Aspect® eBusiness Architect™, a complete development environment for building, debugging, and analyzing process flows that is included with the Aspect® Enterprise Contact Server™, a business communications platform.

The Results

- Reduced busy signals
- Increased availability and improved service levels
- Reduced queue time
- Higher employee morale



"We have to be creative and find solutions that work with what we have. The fact that the Aspect CallCenter ACD gave us the flexibility to control our procedures the way we wanted to control them allowed us to do that. If whoever manages your Aspect CallCenter ACD gets in there and looks at the possibilities, they'll see it gives them powerful tools for thinking out of the box."

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The Players

Vivian Tejada and Lance Birk are problem solvers, innovators, and occasional office heroes at Frontier Communications' Middleton, New York collections center where they are workforce administrators.

The two manage 85 agents, analyze and report call statistics and create schedules. But what they enjoy most about their jobs is using their Aspect® CallCenter® ACD to meet daily challenges.

"The Aspect CallCenter ACD is truly one of my passions," says Tejada, who started as a collections agent and was promoted to workforce administrator in 1999. "I enjoy the thrill of troubleshooting and creating solutions that seem unattainable."

The Busyback Attack Plan

The Middleton contact center collects revenue from customers in 22 states and receives an average of 70,000 calls each month. Keeping this operation running smoothly isn't easy and that's where problem-solving skills come into play.

For instance, a few years ago, a restructuring inadvertently increased the number of "busybacks," or busy signals returned to callers. The queue was full all day, every day. "It seemed like every call started with 'Thank you for calling Frontier. Yes, I apologize for the wait—we're extremely busy today,'" says Birk.

The collections center was caught in a crossfire of complaints—from the agents, from the customers, from Frontier's other contact centers. "Customers were trying to reach us by any means necessary," says Birk. "They were even using other departments to try to reach us."

Tejada and Birk sprang into action. "Between the easy-to-use Aspect management tools and what we've learned in Aspect training classes, we can usually come up with a solution quickly," says Birk. "That's a really big plus about Aspect solutions—it's pretty easy to make changes and see what you need to do or test things out."

Using the software's intuitive graphical interface and their own analytical expertise, the two launched what they called the "busyback attack plan."

"We were allowing 15 calls in queue before returning a busy signal on our main line," explains Birk. "But if the call was transferred from another contact center, there was no limit. So we were seeing as many as 50 calls in queue and we had to find out why this was happening."

With Aspect® eBusiness Architect™, a complete development environment for building, debugging, and analyzing process flows that is included with Aspect® Enterprise Contact Server™, a business communications platform, they analyzed the call flows and determined that they needed to increase the number of calls allowed into the queue and play an announcement to callers transferred from other contact centers, informing them that the lines were busy and telling them to use the collections number.

"These relatively simple changes were not rocket science," admits Birk, "The results speak for themselves." Busy signals plunged from peaks as high as 30,000 a day to fewer than 100.

When asked how long it took to implement the change, Tejada says, "We sat down and brainstormed for probably three hours and came up with the plan and then we implemented it overnight and saw the changes the next day - literally."

Questioning the Reasoning Behind “Idle with Reason”

Another challenge involved the class-of-service codes provided by Aspect for tracking agent activity. The Middleton contact center agents had been using the “Idle with Reason” codes to identify offline tasks. There were more than 40 codes, for everything from making adjustments to helping co-workers.

“We were seeing a lot of time when the reps were not available to take phone calls,” says Birk. Worse yet, subject-matter experts who perform mission-critical offline activities, such as recording payments and investigating fraud, had to pitch in and help the phone force.

“While they were answering calls, we were not completing our collection processes,” points out Birk. “So we did some testing with different classes of service and had feedback sessions with the agents.” This resulted in a new procedure where agents would simply go into wrap-up mode after each call rather than using the “Idle with Reason” codes.

“There was some resistance and plenty of uncertainty,” says Birk. “Remember, we had been using ‘Idle’ for seven years. We trained half the office one day and our service levels soared. Then the next day, the entire office trained on the new class of service and our service level went up to something like 99 percent.”

“99.8,” corrects Tejada. “I’d never seen anything like that. Not only did it make our customers happy, but it also improved the morale in our office because the agents felt as if they could breathe after every call.”

Availability went up as well. “Instead of seeing 30-plus calls in queue, we saw agents sitting available,” says Tejada, “Thanks to Aspect solutions and the ability to make changes, and make them pretty quickly, we were able to free up our subject-matter experts and start using our online folks to help out the subject-matter experts. In fact, we improved our accounts receivable by eight percent, which amounts to \$1.4 million per quarter. We were the office heroes for a while.”

The contact center also diverted agents to the task of restoring features that were cancelled when customers couldn’t pay their bills. “If a customer can’t pay their bill, we take away the features,” says Tejada. “But when you take away the features, you’re taking away revenue. So our ‘Save Team’, which is now assisted by agents that we freed up through our efficiency improvements, contacts delinquent customers who have finally paid up and asks them if they want to restore the features. It not only makes the customers happy, but also gets the revenue back in.”

The Flexibility to be Creative

Tejada notes that in the current economic climate, the flexibility that the Aspect gives the collections center is extremely valuable. “We don’t have the budget to buy new systems to solve problems like this,” she says. “We have to be creative and find solutions that work with what we have. The fact that the Aspect® CallCenter® ACD gave us the flexibility to control our procedures the way we wanted to control them allowed us to do that. If whoever manages your Aspect CallCenter ACD gets in there and looks at the possibilities, they’ll see it gives them powerful tools for thinking out of the box.”

About Aspect

Aspect provides software and consulting services that turn the potential of unified communications into real business results across the enterprise and in the contact center. Applying 35 years of insight and experience, Aspect helps two-thirds of the FORTUNE Global 100, as well as small and medium enterprises, power their business processes with communications. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

Aspect Software
Corporate Headquarters
300 Apollo Drive
Chelmsford, MA 01824

+1 978 250 7900 office
+1 978 244 7420 fax
www.aspect.com

