

Creating Competitive Edge through Customer Service

Cisco IP contact center helps Hamburg Wasser improve customer service and compete in emerging market for clean energy.

Customer Name: Hamburg Wasser

Industry: Utility

Location: Germany

Number of Employees: 2200

Cisco Partner: NextiraOne

Business Impact

- Brand differentiation through excellent customer service
- Agent efficiency increased by access to customer information
- Low agent turnover due to increased job satisfaction
- Platform for future service innovation



Case Study

Challenge

For over 160 years, Hamburg Wasser has played an integral role in the life of the city by providing it with clean drinking water and managing its wastewater. The publically-owned company's 2200 employees serve some 2 million customers, and with an annual turnover of €455.5 million, it is one of Europe's largest public water utilities.

In 2009, the City created Hamburg Energie as part of Hamburg Senate's drive to reduce the city's carbon footprint by 40 percent by 2020 (compared to 1990). A subsidiary of Hamburg Wasser, the company's mission is to promote and sell clean solar, wind, and gas energy to the city's citizens and businesses.

Impeccable green credentials, however, would not be enough to win new business in the fiercely competitive energy market where suppliers typically compete on price, especially as the production of clean energy currently costs more than traditional sources. Hamburg Wasser, therefore, decided that it would differentiate itself by delivering excellent customer service.

Both companies realized, however, that Hamburg Wasser's existing call center technology platform at its customer service center was a major barrier to fulfilling this strategy. Installed some 13 years before, the center's support contract was about to expire, and the center was already proving to be increasingly unreliable.

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Timor Buchhorn

Contact Center Leader, Hamburg Wasser.

The system was also unable to provide the information needed to help ensure calls were being managed well and answered promptly. For example, abandoned calls, a good indicator of callers listening too long to ringing tone, were logged only once by the caller's telephone number. This arrangement meant that repeated attempts by a person to get through were invisible.

"The lack of comprehensive reporting affected all our management information," says Timor Buchhorn, the former customer service leader at Hamburg Wasser. "At times, we felt as if we were blind to what was actually going on, because we didn't have clear visibility of our traffic flows. We felt we were delivering a good service, but our customers' feedback said the opposite."

Another major problem was that the call center could not be integrated into Hamburg Wasser's SAP-based customer relationship management system. This problem meant that agents never knew who was calling and what the status of a particular issue was. Most callers had to be transferred to back-office staff, who could access the system and, therefore, answer queries. It was not only inefficient and frustrating for callers, it effectively meant that the majority of customer requests could only be resolved during office hours when the back-office staff were at work.

The platform's inability to provide callers with relevant, up-to-date, recorded information meant that every enquiry had to be handled by an agent. This situation resulted in the call center being unable to cope with the huge peak of calls that occur whenever there is a water-related issue, such as a mains water pipe bursting.

Solution and Results

In seeking a solution, Hamburg Wasser turned to its trusted advisor, NextiraOne, which had previously designed and built the company's data network infrastructure and subsequently deployed IP telephony throughout the organization. NextiraOne carried out a series of workshops to help ensure that it understood what its customer was seeking to achieve.

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Case Study

Hamburg Wasser also sought proposals from other leading contact center vendors, but after a careful evaluation, chose the Cisco® Unified Contact Center Enterprise solution recommended by NextiraOne, which is a Cisco Authorized Technology Partner (ATP).

“We trust NextiraOne and have always been able to rely on Cisco’s solutions,” says Joachim Knoop, IT manager for Hamburg Wasser, “and we felt, therefore, that the close integration between Cisco Unified Communications Manager and the contact center solution was the way forward.”

NextiraOne’s design for the contact center was validated by Cisco and installed in the summer of 2010. The solution has been designed to be highly available, with twin data centers hosting the call center software and dual redundancy throughout the network infrastructure.

The platform supports four teams of agents, each handling a different range of activities. About 100 agents take calls for Hamburg Wasser, including emergency fault reporting, and another 15 answer customer enquiries and help win new business for Hamburg Energie. A third team manages enquiries about the water leisure parks that are run by another company (a former subsidiary still using Hamburg Wasser’s infrastructure), while an IT Helpdesk, serving the entire organization, also uses the new platform.

The service center manages 2500 calls a day. Typically, about 40 to 50 agents are at work during the day, but that number can grow to 80 or so during peak times. The management information now available is helping to improve customer service. The visibility of traffic patterns, in real-time, enables the center to make best use of agents, if necessary by overflowing calls between the Hamburg Wasser and Energie teams. A major advantage is also being able to route calls through to agents working from home when necessary.

“The overall culture within the service center has improved significantly. Being able to see customer information has enabled staff to manage calls faster and to give a much more responsive, accurate, and informed service.”

Timor Buchhorn

Contact Center Leader, Hamburg Wasser.

Agents have been quick to see the benefits of the new platform, not just in terms of reliability and call quality, but also because NextiraOne used its extensive knowledge of the Cisco technology to configure it to match existing processes and ways of working.

The Cisco Agent Desktop has a web-based window built into it and makes it possible for agents to see the information held in the SAP database. Customers are asked to enter their contract numbers when they call the center, so that agents already have their details as they begin to speak. This arrangement not only helps shorten calls, because time is not spent asking for basic information such as a person’s name and the correct spelling, but also improves the quality of the interactions. For example, when a customer calls the emergency helpline, the agent can often tell from the caller’s address if a problem such as a nearby burst pipe is already being fixed. Hamburg Wasser’s IT team also uses the web browser feature to provide access to a Supervisor Desktop interface and a management report portal that it has developed.


“The overall culture within the service center has improved significantly,” says Buchhorn. “Being able to see customer information has enabled staff to manage calls faster and to give

a much more responsive, accurate, and informed service. Job satisfaction has improved, and staff churn is very, very low. Everyone is now looking forward to integrating the center to the SAP system, so that agents can enter information directly into it.”

Full SAP integration is one enhancement that is currently being worked on; another is the introduction of a sophisticated interactive voice response (IVR) platform from Nuance, a Cisco and NextiraOne technology partner. When this platform is integrated into the contact center, customers will be able to provide their meter readings directly to the system via speech, instead of filling in a card and posting it. The platform will also enable information and updates to be provided day or night, so that people can be kept informed of emergency repairs and the like.

“We operate in very challenging markets,” says Waldemar Schütza, contact center consultant at Hamburg Wasser, “and the ability to integrate new features such as IVR is a very important part of our customer service strategy. It enables us to interact with customers in a more meaningful way, at times that are convenient to them. And by offering customers the opportunity to give and receive information for themselves, we can make best use of our agents and concentrate on adding real value to our interactions with customers.”

For More Information

More information about NextiraOne’s contact center solutions can be found [here](#) 

For more information about Cisco’s contact center solutions, click [here](#) 