# gameffective

# Using Gamified Performance and Learning to Drive Call Center Agents

## How Microsoft used GamEffective

### About

Microsoft is a leading global technology platform and productivity company headquartered in Redmond, Washington.

The company's B2C customers are served by Microsoft's Consumer Support Services, which has a network of global support centers (provided by Business Process Outsourcing Companies) located in many regions and countries, including North America, Europe, Latin America, India, and Philippines. These centers employ thousands of agents, providing customer assistance in many languages.

### The challenge

Taking the agents' point of view, working at a contact center for a Business Process Outsourcer (BPO) is hard. Although calls are monitored, not all are. Only a small percentage is actually recorded and reviewed. Agents act accordingly and don't do their best on each and every call, counting on the fact that some calls won't be reviewed.

Incentive programs drive the same behavior. Since the incentive programs run over a longer period of time (a month) they don't drive daily behaviors.

**❝We wanted to find a solution that would help engage our agents at a deeper and more meaningful level. One way to motivate people is to present them with practical challenges, encourage them, and to get them emotionally engaged to achieve their very best❞**

says Dee Nilles, who led the gamification program.

+ Productivity increased by 10%

+ Attach Rate doubled for non-sales agents

+ Reduced Absenteeism by 12%

+ 89% of the agents acknowledged new information and could apply it

+ Improved Customer Satisfaction

Microsoft staff discussed new ways to recognize and reward agents while increasing their productivity. The focus was to change behaviors, develop skills and encourage sales in a fun and interactive manner.

Microsoft identified gamification as a solution to these needs. The company believed it could be more successful at encouraging and recognizing agents for positive outcomes through each customer interaction. Microsoft set out clear goals for the program. The company wanted a gamification solution to enable and improve agent engagement, satisfaction, and retention. The product also had to increase speed to proficiency, heighten agent knowledge and skills, and sustain excellence. Microsoft also set additional overall goals for sales, customer satisfaction and loyalty, and greater operational efficiency and cost savings. Finally, gamification would have to bolster real-time internal communication.

## Microsoft

# The approach

Microsoft chose gamification as part of a larger initiative called "Making Agents Great", one segment of which was "rewards and recognition". Microsoft decided to look for a solution that was more than a "scorecard" or "measuring stick" for agents.

At its core, Gamification is about engaging people on an emotional level and motivating them to achieve their goals. Studies show the more emotionally engaged people are, the better they perform and that there is a correlation between high levels of engagement and increased productivity, profits, retention, and quality, among other benefits.

Unfortunately, the majority of BPO workers are not engaged or, worse, they are actively disengaged. BPO work from the point of view of agents is transactional, leading employees to strive to only meet minimum requirements. What gamification can do is create an emotional engagement that is driven by a desire on the part of the employees to do more than is normally expected and in return to receive more in terms of a greater and more fulfilling connection with their job, customers, and employer.

"We found that many of our agents struggled with achieving their goals not because the goals were uninspiring but because the path to achieving the goal is too hard, takes too long, or they don't know where to start. The goals were not the problem; it was the path to achieving the goal or the emotional engagement was missing. Outlining that path was one way gamification could help. It helps break a goal into a series of manageable steps and encouraging people along the way" says Nilles.

Despite the power of existing Rewards & Recognition programs, they were designed around monthly awards and tangible gifts. These programs usually focus on top performers, i.e. the top 1-10% of all agents. Yet gamification can reward all agents that engage in learning and work beyond the minimum requirements of the job. Completing weekly challenges and daily accomplishments aligns with each and every employee and can drive greater performance increases compared to just focusing on the top 10%.

Using digital motivation, or gamification, drives employees to engage with their performance or learning goals. In return, Employees receive recognition, status and acknowledgement. You can create a social environment and encourage motivation (and even a little competition) by using challenges, recognition and leaderboards. Turning regular work processes into fun, engaging activities drives employees to be more engaged and more devoted to their jobs and assignments.

# Learning in the contact center

Learning in the contact center is important. Products and processes change constantly and employees should be aware of them, onboarding is costly (the result of employee churn) and all learning can immediately translate into better business results. As part of its gamification initiative, Microsoft wanted to drive learning and more retention of product or process changes.

There are three big buckets of learning in the contact center:
- Onboarding of new employees– this is typically the most expensive for a business as onboarding a new employee is not just about getting the basics of the job down, but the time it takes to get an employee to the level of competency in meeting the proper KPI targets.

- Continuous learning: Once an employee meets a certain level of competency, the learning should continue to improve specific skills and knowledge gaps, updates and changes, and keep employees engaged.

- Tenure: Once an employee has been doing the role for a period of time, they are very competent with completing the tasks. However, to keep them engaged, you begin to focus on mastery of knowledge so it can be shared and help others through the first two phases of learning.

Gamification is an excellent option to support all three phases of learning; as it can accommodate different learning levels, be deployed to a large number of employees and can be followed up with practical exercises to ensure proper knowledge transfer and usage. Given the flexibility of gamification, content can be catered to support the different levels of learning.

- Onboarding: offering basic conceptual information such as top call drivers and call handling skills. Utilizing simulations and activities that will focus on the majority of the call issues. For BPOs, accelerating time to competency is closely linked with accelerating time to ROI; competency affects user productivity, organizational efficiency, and project success.

- Continuous learning: in a world where technology and processes change, time counts. Additionally, single event training tends to be forgotten. Employees need to be up to speed with regards to the latest technologies, standards, or procedures. Employees need to use what they have learned and occasionally revise or update training.

- Learning for tenured employees: employees that have been in the role for a long time can use learning to become masters and stop working in "autopilot". Keeping the excitement about learning going, will keep them motivated to still continue learning and become experts.

# Focus areas

"Working on the gamification deployment led me to the realization that agents have little control over their daily routine, that they are constantly being told what to do. They are told when to arrive, when to take a call, how long that call should be, how much documentation they have to do, the call flow requirements, the call greeting and closings are dictated, etc. Gamification puts some control in agents' hands. It gives them some power over the standard call and daily requirements. The value exchange was more than being about the task, it was about actually being part of something bigger. In a very real way, this program enabled agents by motivating them at a personal level to do more, do better, make changes, and grow" says Nilles.

"Gamification must put player motivation and goals first and make them the primary design objective. Business or manager goals aren't the primary objective – agent happiness is. The solution must build a series of challenges that engages the players at an emotional level and motivates them to achieve a goal that is meaningful to them.

## "Many of these goals are designed to be accomplishments that allow them to move forward in the game with more badges, points, levels, and then followed up with broader recognition. If the program is player centric and designed to focus on motivating players and enabling them to be successful in their goals, success will follow"

Microsoft focused on five core behavior changes:

1. Productivity: driving better team utilization

2. Increase Average Order Value: driving agents to sell more to customers and not just complete the task at hand

3. Reduced Absenteeism: absenteeism increases over time, as the job becomes transactional and less important to agents

4. Agent Knowledge: There are always changes and new information available for agents. Processes change, sale promotions, new products, new emerging issues, etc. These changes are typically sent in email or in pre and post shift huddles, and this knowledge is often forgotten

5. Improved Customer Satisfaction: early on Microsoft understood that getting agents to self-reflect on performance during the call delivered better results. Gamification was a way of doing so.

# Results

Almost immediately, it became clear that that social recognition is a powerful motivator. As Microsoft deployed leaderboards throughout sites, on the production floor, in the breakrooms, and in the elevator waiting areas, teams and agents became engaged.

Results were impressive, reflecting an annual return on investment in the millions.

- Productivity: Instead of trying to make that last call of the day drag out or avoid taking another call, agents began trying to squeeze in a couple more calls to receive more points for the day increasing productivity by 10%.

- Average Order Value: Agents started offered additional products that would align with what the customer intended to originally purchase. The game provided challenges and activities to educate agents on product relationships, bundles, etc. The dedicated sales team saw a slight improvement, but in the attach rate for paid support services was doubled!

- Reduced Absenteeism: There was a 12% improvement. Actively engaged agents did not want to miss a day of earning points and badges.

- Agent Knowledge: Microsoft compared a notification sent through the standard method (sent to leadership) and measured on agent acknowledgement. It found that only 23% of the agents had the awareness needed. Then sent the message through an activity within "GamEffective" followed up with a simulation which agents received points for completion. 89% of the agents not only showed acknowledgement of the information, but were also able to show how that information was to be used.

- Improved Customer Satisfaction: encouraging agents to reflect drove a slight increase in customer satisfaction.