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The Most Powerful Name in Corporate News

World's Largest Contact Center Metrics Database



Bruce L. Belfiore
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“We have twenty years of experience leveraging metrics from the world’s largest database to improve contact center performance. That’s our distinctive characteristic [and] it has a positive impact on our consulting, training and certification.”
- Bruce L. Belfiore

BenchmarkPortal, LLC

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CEOCFO: Mr. Belfiore, would you tell us the idea behind BenchmarkPortal?

Mr. Belfiore: Our mission is to provide contact center professionals with the information they need to do a really great job – and enjoy themselves in the process. We launched the world’s first call center benchmarking initiative at Purdue University as a student project in 1995, which was an amazing success. Three things have happened since then. First, we have grown the largest database in the world of contact center metrics, which allows us to provide managers and consultants with both individual reports as well as industry reports. Second, we moved off campus and acquired an international following. Third, we expanded our product offerings to include consulting, certification, training and original research.

CEOCFO: Why do call centers look to you as opposed to doing this benchmarking in-house?

Mr. Belfiore: Whether they have in-house operations, or oversee outsourced operations, managers are looking for comparative data so that they can see how they stack up next to their competitive peers. There is nothing like seeing your metrics side-by-side with the average for your industry. That is where our magic comes in because we have the most robust and respected database in the world. We also have

SMEs (subject matter experts) with the expertise to advise managers on how to turn that benchmarking business intelligence into competitive strength by implementing appropriate best practices.

CEOCFO: *What are some of the areas that you are comparing?*

Mr. Belfiore: Performance metrics include things like average speed of answer, average handle time, first call resolution, satisfaction metrics and many others. We divide these into cost-related metrics, which relate to efficiency, and quality-related metrics, which are the one's customers perceive - - things like how quickly their call is answered and whether they have to be transferred or put on hold. We have a balanced score card of quality metrics and cost metrics so that we can make sure clients are improving on both sides of the ledger. This way they improve customer satisfaction while also saving dollars.

CEOCFO: *How are you able to help companies get into the more finite areas?*

Mr. Belfiore: We have over forty industry sectors that we follow on an ongoing basis, so our benchmarking is very apples to apples. For instance, we do not just have "financial services" as an industry vertical; we actually have separate verticals for commercial banking, brokerage, annuities, etc. In addition, we can do customized peer group analyses upon request. These show the benchmarking metrics for a selected subset of our industry vertical data. Some clients want to be compared with the best of the best, even outside of their industry vertical. We can give them what they want.

CEOCFO: *How do you come up with all of your statistics?*

Mr. Belfiore: Participants come to our Website and they input their information into our online survey. Our survey actually asks for more metrics than we need. We use those metrics to do cross checks on the key metrics - to make sure that the data entered is good. If there is any metric that does not pass our acceptance standards, we reach out to the participant and get clarification, otherwise we reject the data. This keeps our database clean and reliable.

That is how we get the data today. We have an exciting *new* product coming out this year called iBenchmark that automates the process of data transfer from the client's systems to our database - - and eliminates the possibility of human error. This new offering, which is covered by a patent we own, is a clean, quick and painless way of benchmarking. It will allow benchmarking to become an even more valuable management tool for guiding contact center improvement.

CEOCFO: *Are companies surprised at what they find when they benchmark?*

Mr. Belfiore: Sometimes yes! We see a lot of companies that have some sense of where they are overall, but they don't have a good idea of where they need to focus their improvement initiatives to become more competitive. That is where we are really helpful. We bring clarity to what the benchmarking results mean, and where they should focus going forward.

CEOCFO: *You have other services. What are you offering in addition to benchmarking?*

Mr. Belfiore: In addition to the benchmarking we offer training services, assessments and certification.

Our training curriculum was originally developed for AT&T and is known as the College of Call Center Excellence. We have courses for managers, supervisors and agents which have an excellent reputation and bring a lot of value to our clients. We have clients coming back to us year after year.

Our assessments are unique in that they start with our benchmarking, which gives us a huge amount of insight into performance even before we set foot on the client's site. We map metrics to people, processes and technology issues, and are able to provide clients a roadmap of improvements that will increase their performance and competitive position. The roadmap includes specific actions which will lead them toward measurably better results. It is a superb managerial approach and leads to more value for your customers and your company.

BenchmarkPortal's Center of Excellence certification program has become very popular and respected over the past decade. Attaining certification means that you are statistically among the best in your industry. Because we have the database, we are able to determine the best centers in an objective way that nobody else can.

CEOCFO: Why would it be important to a company to have their in-house call center certified?

Mr. Belfiore: It is super important because service has been identified as a major differentiator for competing in all kinds of markets. We hear continually that products and services are becoming more commoditized. What causes customers to stay loyal to a company and recommend a company to others is the quality of the service that is delivered. Therefore, if you have good customer service across all contact channels, and you are able to deliver it at a reasonable cost to your company, then you are adding huge value to your enterprise. Certification as a Center of Excellence shows you are adding that value. This is obviously true in the for-profit sector, but is also important in the nonprofit and government sectors as well. We work with clients in all sectors.

CEOCFO: Are you able to spot trends, new technologies, new ways of approaching customers? How do you put that together so that when you are consulting with a company you can get them ahead of the curve?

Mr. Belfiore: We have spotted many trends over the years; it's one of the things we are good at. Whether it's new process approaches or technologies, we try to stay on the leading edge. Customer Experience (or CX) has joined Net Promoter and Customer Effort analysis among the things people are talking about. We take a critical view, which helps clients put things in perspective and avoid mistakes.

We are also working on innovative approaches to inbound sales success, much of which focuses on the individual agent. I love that, because, although we are big on metrics, we are also big on the people factor. This combination helps us steer our clients toward the solutions that will help them out.

We are vendor neutral so we do not recommend specific products, but we do recommend that our clients look into specific technologies and specific ways of hiring and developing people so that they can come up with the best solutions for themselves. We will help them as far along with that as they would like.

CEOCFO: *Do many of your clients take advantage of the full range of your services?*

Mr. Belfiore: Yes many of them do. What often happens is they will begin as students in our courses and they will see how bright and capable our instructors are - - and from that starts a trust relationship that leads to assessment and certification.

Our long-term clients often encourage us to develop new offerings - - some of which we have in the pipeline now.

CEOCFO: *What has changed from your original concept regarding the way you approach the call center space?*

Mr. Belfiore: The biggest change is that it is no longer the “call center space” but is now the “contact center space”. It is a multi-channel world that goes beyond the voice channel. We now also address email, chat and social media. The multi-channel aspect and technological innovations have changed our approach.

CEOCFO: *Are there other services you plan on offering?*

Mr. Belfiore: I already mentioned i-Benchmark, which is our new automated benchmarking. This will help people monitor their competitive position much more easily on a continual basis. This makes benchmarking more of an ongoing management tool instead of a once a year report card - - which currently it is for many people.

We are also launching inbound sales optimization, which is a big area for many centers. There is a high ROI that goes along with this because of the fact that it is in the sales arena.

Finally, we are working on additional courses and professional certification initiatives.

CEOCFO: *Do you know if the majority of your clients follow through and make changes?*

Mr. Belfiore: Most of them do follow through. The reason is because they know they are going to be benchmarking again in the future! It is a wonderful accountability tool and a way of making sure that there is improvement going forward. This is a big change; in the past, people often received their benchmark report, put it up on the shelf and forgot about it. However, when it is embedded into a continuous improvement process for the center, then it becomes part of a virtuous cycle. You do make changes and you do measure your improvements and then you celebrate with the people in your center. It becomes part of the DNA of managing the center. We feel we are catalysts in the improvement process and that is immensely satisfying for us.

CEOCFO: *Are call centers reaching out to you at this point?*

Mr. Belfiore: Yes, they sure are! It's a combination of factors: loyal clients, word of mouth, research that we publish and speeches that we are invited to give. We are also pretty good at SEO. In addition, we have some non-commercial outreach that we provide as a service to our community. For example, I have a monthly online radio program, *CallTalk™*. I interview a different industry expert every month on a hot topic that is of importance to contact center managers. It is a half-hour format that managers like, and the shows are archived for easy retrieval. We get right to the heart of the matter and have had a lot of lively shows. We have had professors from Harvard Business School and Northeastern University, as well as managers who are thirty-year

veterans of the industry sharing their ideas and expertise. The response from our community has been heartwarming.

We also have an annual conference called Call Center Campus, which goes back to our Purdue roots. The next one is going to be in April 2016, in New Orleans, which we expect will be very well attended. There is a heavy emphasis on the latest in research and new approaches.

We also do a lot of writing: articles, white papers, books. I write a column called Call Center Economics 101 that brings finance and customer service together. We do case studies and research papers. We published a groundbreaking report called *Agent Voices*, which was an analysis of five thousand surveys taken by call center agents.

By making these things available to the industry, it helps to raise our profile and bring people to us.

CEOCFO: *Why choose Benchmark Portal?*

Mr. Belfiore: We have twenty years of experience and really understand how to leverage benchmark metrics to improve contact center performance. That's our distinctive characteristic that no one else has. It has a positive impact on our consulting, training and our certification. All of those things benefit from the fact that we have a rigorous and successful benchmarking-based approach to call center improvement. Also, I'm blessed to be working with the brightest and best professionals in the industry. We love what we do, and have a lot of fun doing it – which makes it fun for our clients as well.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine
