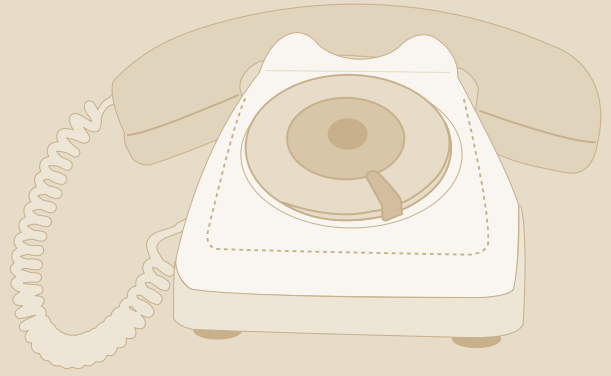


# Hoya Lens UK Ltd

## Call Centre Process Improvement



### *From Possibility...*

Hoya Lens UK is a leading provider of lenses and framed spectacles to opticians, high-street stores and supermarkets. They provide products with leading edge optical technology which are then ground and edged to meet the requirements of each individual customer based on their prescription and choice of frame.

Based in North Wales, they provide a next-day service for standard lenses that will be ground and edged by an optician. There is a lead time of four to ten days for the more complex customised lenses or glasses that the optician can supply straight to their customer.

Orders can arrive from opticians via 'phone, fax or EDI service. Orders are technically complex and Hoya systems have to check that what an optician has asked for in terms of power and thickness is possible and will be robust enough for day-to-day use.

Sales have been growing rapidly over the last few years, with a need for increases in both manufacturing capacity and the administrative support at the front and back ends of the process. Many opticians prefer to 'phone orders into the Hoya call centre because they can discuss options with the staff and also get immediate feedback on a likely delivery date. Call centre staff have to understand the complexities of ophthalmic lenses and the constraints on each different lens type (of which there are over 15 variations). Training a member of the call centre staff from scratch takes over four months, and even then, they are restricted as to the types of calls that they can handle.

Ad Esse Consulting Ltd were called in by Hoya due to the high level of abandoned calls to the call centre. The manufacturing facility had experienced a high level of unanticipated demand and this led to a massive increase in the number of 'chase' calls coming in from customers to check expected delivery dates. At it's peak, the average rate of abandoned calls had increased up to 33%, against a target of 3%. Some days this figure was over 50%. There was recognition that a shortage of call centre operators was contributing to the problem and that the call handling software was ineffective and needing replacing.



The brief to Ad Esse was to find process improvements that would reduce abandoned calls down to an acceptable level, produce some measures that managers could use on an ongoing basis and to prepare systems and processes so that when a new call management tool was bought, staff would already be working to best practice. We had to do all of this with minimal use of the call centre resource, minimising further disruption, and we had to do it very quickly.



This was clearly an instance where our consultants had to go in and do most of the data collection, analysis and improvement with only minimal use of Hoya resource.

## OUR APPROACH

Our approach was led by two main themes.

- Firstly, the standard of measurement had to improve dramatically. Little data was available about calls except the abandonment rate. We had to have a much better idea of when calls arrived, what resource was available to answer the calls and what the rate of abandoned calls was, all in much smaller time intervals than a day at a time. We also had to understand where the time of each staff member was spent.
- The second main theme was that of applying the Lean principles. There was little in the way of visual management of the process. The physical layout of the office was not conducive to either effective supervision or reduction of waste. There was a lot of movement waste, little obvious prioritisation of tasks 'on the fly' and little regular analysis and communication of performance.

To gather the data we needed, we activity sampled what each call centre staff member was doing and we extracted all the data from the very 'creaky' call management software to see what we could glean in terms of call patterns and abandonment rates.

We looked at every single task in the office and assessed if it was essential, and if not, whether it could be done in another area of the business that had less direct impact on customer satisfaction. We also assessed which tasks could be 'time-shifted' to less busy periods in the day and which ones had to be done at fixed times.

We talked to the staff to see whether they understood either the perceived problem or could identify some of the causes. Some staff were not clear on the objective, nor on what would be deemed an acceptable level of abandoned calls by senior management.

We looked at the process of capturing and processing either 'phone or fax orders to see if steps could be simplified or removed in order to reduce the time required to complete them. We found that about 40% of fax orders were not being entered into the system on the date of receipt. Much of this was due to the fact that some faxes had queries that involved 'phoning the customer back to clarify their requirement rather than just being pure data entry.

## *To Actuality...*

### CHANGING SOME OF THE BASICS

Some of the first changes we made were based on the analysis of data we collected.

- We conducted an analysis of the patterns of calls across a week and mapped this against the number of call centre staff on the 'phones. This identified a number of basic errors. Part-time staff came in at times which were not busy, with no extra cover provided when it would be really needed. Non time-critical tasks were being done at the busiest times of the day. Staff rotas were adjusted accordingly.
- There was a peak of unanswered calls around break times and lunch times and it was identified that this was due to some staff returning from breaks at the same time as others left for theirs. We resolved this by putting a 5 minute gap between the end of one break and the start of the next one.

- Some tasks, such as opening the mail (including all the frames sent by opticians to be glazed) were opened by call centre staff. This was passed to another part of Hoya.
- Many fax orders required some clarification with the customer. A step was introduced to separate all these faxes out so that simple orders could be inputted quickly by less trained staff and the more complex orders dealt with by more qualified staff at a time when 'phone calls were reduced.

## PUTTING IN THE CONTROL MECHANISM

Although the existing call management system was flawed, what capability it did have was not being fully utilised.

- We instigated a visual monitor on the supervisors' desks of the number of calls waiting and maximum length of wait together with visual indicators of which staff were answering calls. This allowed supervisors actually to manage their resource and move people from one task to another in real time, as call volumes varied.
- We also produced a clear procedure for extracting reliable data from the call management system that, on a daily basis, would provide a picture of calls received and answered in every 15 minute period. This allowed supervisors to monitor the patterns of incoming calls and assess whether the trends in call volumes that we had identified were still applicable.
- Staff were regularly briefed on performance and any ideas for continuous improvement used to improve the processes.

### TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

The first step in the introduction of the new processes was to resolve the issue of whether there was enough resource to answer calls with an acceptable level of abandoned calls and that it was just being badly applied, or whether resource was just too low to enable calls to be answered in time.

We also wanted to persuade staff that improvement was possible without the injection of masses of new operators. They were briefed on our findings so far and were provided with a picture of how we expected the section to operate in the future. We sold them the pilot day as a means of testing many of our assumptions on the causes of, and solution to, abandoned calls.

We ran the one pilot day with a rule that every activity except answering the 'phone was to be dropped if calls were waiting. This meant that post-opening, fax entry, framing orders and other queries were all parked if the call volume increased. If call volumes fell, people could go back to their previous task.

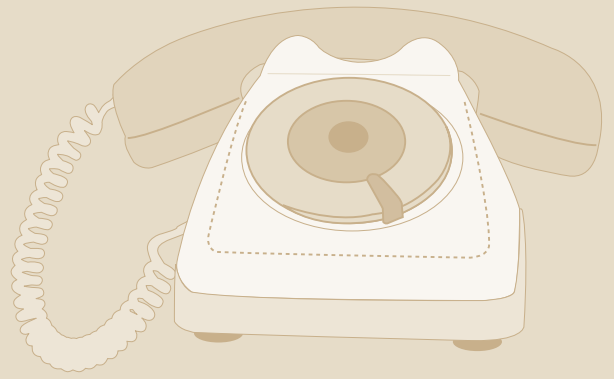
The pilot day was a tremendous success, with abandoned calls dropping below 5%. It showed that we could reduce abandoned call rates without extra resource. We also found that other activities had not suffered unduly due to the interruptions. The resource was sufficient; it was a question of organising and marshalling it effectively.

## IMPLEMENTING THE NEW PROCESSES

Once the monitoring system was in place we were able to give each member of staff personal objectives with respect to how they would respond to an increase in the number of calls waiting. Each person had a different threshold for action and they were also passed calls in a different order. We kept some operators very busy with calls to allow others to focus on other data-entry issues, only taking calls when volumes were very high.

The desks in the office we also rearranged to make sharing of information simpler and the monitoring of activity easier. We introduced more effective message-taking so that people would respond to queries quickly enough to avoid another chase call. Although some proactive calls were made to





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warn customers of problems, this was formalised and done at times when call volumes were low.

Performance was monitored daily and lessons from each day used to improve the rotas and processes.

### RESULTS

Within days, abandoned call rates dropped to an average of 4%. As new operators came on stream this dropped to an average of 2.5% and stabilised at that figure even though there was a continuous increase in the business flowing through the call centre. Customers remarked on the new-found ease of getting through to Hoya and the morale in the department increased.

Within three months a new call management tool was installed and abandoned call rates are now averaging 1%, well within Hoya's target.

**Steve Ellis, Managing Director said:**

*"Although Hoya is widely recognised for the quality of its products, our market is increasingly one in which the quality of response and degree of pro-activity makes a real difference to customers' perception of us. We realised that our ability to deliver on this level was being impaired and needed to make a radical improvement in quick time - Ad Esse were able to sort through all our existing data, understand our processes and come up with a solution that really worked with our team. Now we are looking to build on the Ad Esse experience and move towards a still higher level of customer service"*

If you have a particular process where performance is critical and performance is below expectations, ask us at Ad Esse how we can help.

**ad•esse**  
consulting

### FURTHER INFORMATION

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