Reducing Wrap-up Time
The Last Frontier of Agent Productivity

*C*all center agents are among the most carefully observed, tracked, monitored and measured employees in business today. It seems we measure everything. But there is one part of an agent's job that's like the weather… we all tend to talk about it, yet nobody does anything about it. That is, wrap-up time.

Wrap-up time may well be the last frontier in which we can explore opportunities for increasing agent productivity.

Why do we tend to ignore the causes of extended wrap-up time? First of all, it's easy to blame things on the "system," as in "the system is slow." This line of reasoning points us to MIS for a solution, which we sometimes need. Often, though, the real cause of lengthy wrap-up times is non-technical. It lies in the arena of agents' skills or lack of skills in two specific areas: keyboarding and keyboarding while listening.

Look at the statistics of your most productive agents and contrast their stats with those who are less productive. Chances are that your top agents have substantially shorter wrap-up times than the others. If that's the case, then the issue is not your system; it's your people.

Here's another test. Walking through your center, do you see your reps taking notes using pen and paper while talking with customers? Then, when the call is over, do they log themselves in "wrap-up" to enter information via the keyboard? Wherever this is happening, you've got huge opportunities to improve efficiency.

How? That leads us to the second reason that we've tended to ignore this component of productivity. Until recently, we haven't had cost effective tools to do anything about it. It is simply too expensive to bring reps offline and into the classroom for lengthy instruction in basic skills such as keyboarding and listening while keyboarding. Who can afford that?

Here is where technology can come once again to our rescue. Keyboarding, numerical entry, listening while keyboarding and even spelling are developmental issues that lend themselves perfectly to computer-based training, known for short as CBT.

With the proper software, your agents can develop proficiency in these areas without ever leaving their workstations. Inbound call centers in the United Kingdom that have pioneered this concept report increases in overall productivity of as much as 10 percent, with concurrent improvements in accuracy and higher morale among agents.

Here's how CBT allows you to provide necessary skills training with no time lost from work and no diminution in service levels. On average, you can take as many as 5 percent of your agents off of the primary queue per day with no reduction in service levels. Have them log into a secondary queue while they pursue CBT. Should your call volume unexpectedly spike, they are available to take calls immediately with the toggle of a few keys. On average, reps in the secondary queue can put in four hours of answering calls and gain as much as four hours of CBT skill development in an eight-hour workday. This system is designed so agents are put on the secondary queue once every month.
This means that a full-time rep can undertake an av-

erage of four hours of computer-based skills training per month with no reduction in service levels, no time away from the workstation, no additional time on the clock, and no costs of instructors or classroom training space. As your reps steadily gain proficiency in keyboarding, numerical entry, and listening while keyboarding, their wrap-up times gradually decrease. As they become more proficient and productive on the job, their morale improves, they feel more competent and they tend to stay longer with the job.

Combine this with a learning management system that shows the manager how has mastered what levels of proficiency in the skills that you want to develop, and you have a win-win situation. You will have conquered the last frontier of agent productivity.

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About the author

Cliff Hurst is president of Career Impact, Inc. located in Wells, Maine. Career Impact provides training and consulting services to call centers. His company is the North American representative of ISV, Ltd.'s computer-based training system for call centers.

Cliff is also author of *A Career for the 21st Century: A Handbook for Call Center Agents*. You can order this book through his web site:

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Avoid Workplace Injury, Too

In this article, I addressed the benefits that result from proper keying in terms of reduced wrap-up time and improved accuracy of data entry.

Here's an even greater benefit Proper keying can reduce instances of workplace injury and lost-time due to repetitive motions.

These injuries are usually known as Repetitive Stress Injuries or RSIs, and sometimes as Muscular Skeletal Disorders or MSDs. By whatever name they are called, they present a growing concern to call centers.

These injuries can be—and often are—caused by improper keying techniques. The more time that your call center reps spend keying data, responding to email, or manipulating a mouse and keyboard to look up information, the more attention you should pay to this subject. I encourage you to be proactively concerned for your people's health and productivity.

The statistics are alarming. A recent document prepared by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHP) reported the following:

"MSDs may start as minor aches and pains. But left untreated, they can result in serious injuries that can be permanently disabling. It often takes a long time to recover. The median days away from work for serious injuries is 4, but the median for MSDs is 7. Carpal tunnel syndrome cases result in a median of 25 days away from work for recuperation—more than time off for amputations or fractures."

You can prevent or minimize the likelihood of MSDs in your call center by providing your people with proper training.

Cliff's book, A Career for the 21st Century, devotes an entire chapter to ergonomics in the call center. Our web-based training program on *Ergonomics* provides even more specifics. And our computer-based training system will teach your reps how to use proper QWERTY keying techniques for increased speed, accuracy, and reduced chance of injury.

Visit Career Impact's web site for details.